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Napa and Sonoma wineries cut tasting fees as tourism slows

A new industry report found roughly 30% of wineries in each region lowered prices in 2025, testing whether cheaper visits can revive demand.

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Wineries in Napa and Sonoma are cutting some tasting fees as tourism slows and direct sales come under pressure, according to a new industry report that points to broader price adjustments across California wine country.

The 2026 Direct-to-Consumer Wine Report, released Tuesday by Silicon Valley Bank, found that about 16% of U.S. wineries lowered tasting fees in 2025. The shift was far more common in Napa and Sonoma, where roughly 30% of wineries in each county reported reducing prices. Those two regions have long had the highest tasting fees in the country, and the changes come as the wine business faces weaker alcohol consumption in the United States, lower bottle sales and fewer visits to wine country.

The report was based on 2025 data from 450 wineries in 16 states. Most respondents were small producers making fewer than 5,000 cases a year, and most were in California. The findings suggest that wineries are starting to respond to criticism that tasting has become too expensive for many visitors, even if the cuts so far have been limited and uneven.

Rob McMillan, founder of Silicon Valley Bank’s wine division and author of the report, said the industry spent years resisting the idea that pricing and demand had become a problem. He said wineries are now more willing to test solutions as traffic weakens.

The report also showed bottle prices falling in major California regions. In Napa Valley, the average retail bottle price was $103 in 2025, down from $109 in 2024. In Sonoma County, the average bottle price fell to about $64 from $69. Santa Barbara posted the largest drop among surveyed regions, with prices down by $12 after a $13 increase the year before.

Even so, visitors should not expect a broad reset in tasting costs. In Napa Valley, where 29% of wineries said they lowered fees, the average tasting price in 2025 was $79, just $1 below the prior year. Across the United States, the standard tasting fee fell by about $3.

That gap between the number of wineries lowering fees and the small change in average prices reflects how many producers are adjusting their offers rather than simply cutting rates across the board. Some have introduced lower-cost entry experiences while keeping premium tastings intact. Others have discounted slower time slots such as weekday mornings or added promotions aimed at first-time visitors.

At Honig Vineyard & Winery in Napa Valley, for example, a shorter tasting of three wines is priced at $30. Co-owner Michael Honig said that format has helped bring in guests who might not otherwise book a visit. Other wineries in Napa Valley, including Goosecross Cellars and Whitehall Lane, have used matinee pricing or buy-one-get-one offers during slower periods. A smaller group of wineries has offered free tastings on selected days.

Some producers are also reshaping their pricing tiers instead of lowering all experiences at once. Bella Union in Napa Valley raised its standard tasting by $20 to $65 while cutting its highest-priced option by $50 to $125. That kind of strategy helps explain why regional averages can move in different directions at once.

In Sonoma County, where about 30% of wineries reported lower fees, the average standard tasting dropped by $7 to $47. But reserve tastings, which target higher-spending visitors, rose by $3 to $95. Paso Robles showed a similar pattern. There, standard tasting fees fell by $4 while reserve tastings climbed to $73 from $61, the largest year-over-year increase among surveyed regions.

The report suggests wineries are still testing whether lower prices can bring people back. Only 25% of U.S. wineries that reduced tasting fees said they saw an improvement in visitation. Another 25% said traffic stabilized. About 47% said it was too soon to know whether the changes were working.

That uncertainty matters because direct-to-consumer sales remain central to winery finances. More than 70% of winery revenue in 2025 came from direct sales, according to the report. Tasting rooms accounted for just 27% of revenue. The rest came from other direct channels such as wine clubs, online sales and off-site outreach.

McMillan argued that too many wineries remain focused on getting consumers to travel to them even though visitation has been declining since 2022. He said more producers should take their wines directly to customers through dinners, festivals and private events in other states rather than relying so heavily on tasting room traffic.

That approach remains rare. The report found that less than 2% of direct sales last year came from off-site events. For many small wineries, expanding beyond their property can be difficult because it requires staff, travel budgets and reliable salespeople in outside markets at a time when margins are already under strain.

Still, the pricing changes in Napa and Sonoma show that some wineries are beginning to adapt after years of rising fees and growing concern that wine country had become too expensive for casual visitors. Whether those experiments lead to stronger tourism or simply narrower margins is still unclear, but the report indicates that producers are no longer treating high tasting fees as untouchable.