

# Opinion: Spend some time in Redding

By Joe Mathews

If you love California and don't know where to go for summer vacation, here's a suggestion: Go north!

Start in Redding. Sure, the city of 92,000 at the northern end of the Sacramento Valley might not be on your list of preferred destinations, but its region, the North State, is crucial to understanding California.



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And as a vacation spot, it has practical advantages—cheaper and less crowded than the coast, and cooler than the deserts.

Is there really anything to do in Redding? You bet. For starters, you can visit California's greatest 21st-century structure, the Sundial Bridge.

Sure, the Golden Gate Bridge is more beautiful, but the Sundial, which opened in 2004, combines a stunning look with technological magic. Part of the 710-foot-long span's appeal lies in the "goose-in-flight" design by the world's leading architect of bridges, the Spaniard Santiago Calatrava. The glass-decked bridge has a 217-foot-tall pylon that, via cables, holds up the structure while also casting a shadow that make it a sundial.

Another dimension of its power comes from its setting: It spans California's grandest and most important river, the Sacramento, at a spot 300 miles upriver from where its waters reach San Pablo Bay. Tight-fisted locals still grumble over the \$24 million price tag. But the span is already an icon, connecting Redding's robust network of trails and providing another amenity for Turtle Bay, Redding's 300-acre, education-oriented park.

The bridge has another virtue: proximity, via a short drive or longer bike ride along the Sacramento River Trail, to California's most beautiful waterwork.

The Shasta Dam makes news for the controversy over whether to raise it to store even more water in California's largest reservoir. But the dam itself is also a place of unsurpassed beauty, especially at sunset. People gather on top of the dam to walk, bike, or just admire the magisterial view of the valley.

One recent evening, I was greeted by the graduating class of U-Prep, or University Preparatory School, a top Redding charter school. They were flirting, reminiscing, and saying their goodbyes before beginning their adult lives. The dam, holding the water upon which the state relies, feels like a door, the front gate where California really begins.

Since Redding is very hot in summer, it's best to head from the dam into the mountains (provided there are no fires in your path) and visit the state's most mystical peak, Mount Shasta. This 14,180-foot volcano is a true California emblem—volatile, stunning, rising so dramatically that it doesn't quite seem to fit the landscape, or the earth.

"When I first caught sight of it (Mount Shasta) over the braided folds of the Sacramento Valley," John Muir famously wrote in 1874, "I was fifty miles away and afoot, alone and weary. Yet all my blood turned to wine, and I have not been

weary since.”

While it's possible to put crampons on your hiking boots to visit Shasta's glaciers or—if you have money —take a helicopter flight around it, I prefer to commune with the mountain from Lake Siskiyou. You can even rent chalets there from the Mount Shasta Resort, a decidedly unpretentious place. Its developer, John Fryer, is also an inventor. He introduced me to a new alternative form of golf he dreamed up—Whing Golf, where instead of having to use a set of golf clubs, you can throw all your shots using a patented club, inspired by a jai-alai cesta. A round of Whing Golf at the resort is \$16, cart included.

“The power of the mountain is you can see it from everywhere,” Fryer told me as we admired Mt. Shasta on the course. “It's spiritual.”

From there, head north into Yreka, population 7,600, the unofficial capital of the quixotic decades-long effort to turn this part of California into its own state, to be called Jefferson.

In Yreka's downtown, you'll understand the nod to separation. State cars and trucks are common here. Many people I met work for state agencies, and thus know better than city slickers our state government's many failings. Familiarity breeds contempt.

But the region is effectively subsidized by the rest of the state, so breaking away would be fiscally disastrous.

Still, if you folks in the North State really want to secede, I'm OK with it, on three conditions. First, that you don't take all our water with you. Second, that you agree to link your statehood bid with Puerto Rico's own campaign for statehood, to give the disaster-decimated island more power and to preserve political balance (given Jefferson's Republican proclivities and the island's Democratic nature).

Third, and most important, that you don't put up any barriers to prevent Californians from visiting as often as we like.

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