

Calistoga, U.S.A.

Napa Valley's northern anchor offers spas, dining and wine.

At the northern end of the Napa Valley, Calistoga is where people often point when they wish to conjure the “olden” days of the region, before it became “Wine Country” in capital letters. Its main street, perfect for parades, has always been a draw, as has been Calistoga's refuge of mud baths and healing hot springs. These attractions still exist, but so do world-class resorts, restaurants and wineries. As an appellation, it's both warm and hospitable to grapes thanks to its geologically uniform, well-drained volcanic soils. Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel and Petite Sirah all do well here. —*Virginie Boone*

WHERE TO DINE

Recent years have been kind to the town's dining scene. **Solbar**, the restaurant within the Solage resort, is proud owner of a Michelin star. It's an airy, spacious stop to enjoy cuisine touted as “California soul” or to sip cocktails by the pool. Newer spots include **Sam's Social Club**, next to Indian Springs. It's another all-day dining spot with a seasonal menu, outdoor seating and a fantastic bar: a perfect weekday happy hour destination. **Evangeline** marries French bistro with Creole fare.

WHERE TO STAY

Calistoga abounds in fancy digs. **Solage** is the most sprawling along the Silverado Trail, with its Michelin-starred restaurant, full-service spa and oversize swimming pool. It also provides bicycles for trips into town. **Calistoga Ranch** is equally posh, located in a secluded hillside nook that offers plenty of privacy and wandering hiking trails. Closer to town, at **Indian Springs**, the feel is relaxed and the luxury refreshingly understated.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Calistoga remains a retreat for mud and mineral baths. It's not uncommon for people bedecked in robes to spend the day relaxing by one of the spa pools. In addition to Solage and Indian Springs, **Golden Haven Hot Springs Spa & Resort** and **Dr. Wilkinson's Hot Springs Resort** are other popular day-guest options. **Calistoga Balloons** takes off at sunrise from multiple launch sites.

BUDGET TIP

Nearby **Robert Louis Stevenson State Park** is a vast wilderness of free entertainment. The summit of Mount St. Helena looms above at 4,343 feet, and a hike to its peak along the Stevenson Memorial Trail is 10-mile round trip.

WHEN TO GO

For an authentic hometown feel, go in December for the **Lighted Tractor Parade**.

WHERE TO TASTE

Tasting rooms are scattered along the main street and on the outskirts of town. Downtown, **Maldonado Vineyards** is a small grower-turned-producer. It makes big, bold Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel and Pinot Gris. Also downtown is newcomer **Picayune Cellars**, a project borne of two friends that focuses on small-lot, affordable wines. Out of town, **Hourglass** conducts tastings of its estate bottlings by appointment. **Venge Vineyards**, which can be visited by appointment, focuses on single-vineyard Cabernet, among other wines. South of town, **T-Vine Winery** makes less acclaimed varietals like Grenache, Carignane and Charbono. Along Dunaweal Lane, visit **Twomey**, Silver Oak's sister property, where Merlot, Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc are a focus. Farther south is **Larkmead Vineyards**, a stellar place for small-production wines; try the Tocai Fruilano. Neighboring **Frank Family Vineyards** is in the original Larkmead winery across the road, the third-oldest in the Napa Valley.

CALIFORNIA

Calistoga



PROMINENT WINES

Calistoga abounds in historic wines, none more famous than **Chateau Montelena** and its 1973 Chardonnay, which won best white at the historic 1976 “Judgment of Paris.” **Schramsberg** is another important name, among the first in Napa Valley to devote itself to sparkling wines made in the *méthode traditionnelle*. It also focuses on what the appellation may make best: mountain-grown Cabernet, under the Davies Vineyards brand, located on Diamond Mountain. The appellation is home to **Diamond Creek Vineyards**, where Al and Boots Brounstein were among the first to designate its Cabernet from three specific sites. Calistoga grows Zinfandel, Petite Sirah and Charbono well, and Merlot is represented at Three Palms Vineyard.



Calistoga Ranch



Diamond Creek



LOCAL IN THE KNOW

Kirk Venge, winemaker at Venge Vineyards, is a Calistoga native. "I love this part of the valley for its dramatic views of Mount St. Helena and the Palisades," he says. "The sight from those two trails casting out over Sonoma and Napa Valley is even more breathtaking." Favorite places to relax include the bar at **Sam's Social Club** and lunch under the trees of **Solbar**. "Calistoga has always been a warm and welcoming place."

