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Soak Away the Winter Blues in Calistoga

By Gabby Hyman

When most people dream of Napa Valley, they imagine glass after glass of intoxicating wine. But in Napa's town of Calistoga, it's all about the mud. Home to 5,000 residents and one amazing geyser, Calistoga has retained its 19th century charm with its quaint tree-lined Western streets while continuously improving and modernizing its world-renowned geothermal resorts and storybook lodgings. Located at the foot of St. Helena, Calistoga grants its visitors easy access to arguably the world's finest wine, while providing a luxurious antidote to over-the-top revelry. In short, it's the perfect place for a summer get-away.



Historically, Calistoga's native residents, the Wappo Indians, called the valley "Ta La Ha Lu Si," an "oven place" for its radiating geothermal springs. By 1868, Calistoga had its own railway depot, now second oldest in the state, as San Franciscans discovered the virtues of soaking in the healing waters that range from 80 to 106 degrees. Today, visitors travel from across the globe to sit in the hot springs, or the volcanic ash-based mud compounds that are augmented with green tea, sea kelp, eucalyptus and other healing herbs.

Many spas offer complete packages that include mud baths, mineral spring pools, massage, detoxifying blanket wraps, facials, steam rooms, tanning beds and heated swimming pools. Some spas include lodging in country settings with outdoor gardens, buzzing hummingbirds, splashing fountains and patios—all within walking distance of shopping (the Wappo Indians still sell baskets and fine arts here) and a wide range of dining pleasures.

Spa packages are fine-tuned to suit the needs of most travelers, from simple soaks to full-day treatments. **Lavender Hill Spa** is adorned with French glass doors and warm hardwood floors. It offers volcanic mud baths, seaweed baths, massage and body wraps. The bathhouses are nestled in the hillside garden.



The **Golden Haven Spa** features hot tub mineral baths, volcanic mud baths and facial treatments, some combined in packages with massage. Its rooms come with standard bed and shower, but also range up to king-size beds with kitchenettes and private Jacuzzis. Mud baths are offered for couples and finish up with a cozy blanket wrap.

Dr. Wilkinson's Resort features "The Works" package that includes a mud bath, aromatic mineral whirlpool bath, steam room, blanket wrap and a half-hour massage (one hour available for an additional fee). Accommodations are in courtyard rooms and bungalows in a wine-country, casual-spa theme.

EuroSpa and Inn presents a detoxifying wrap treatment of Dead Sea mud, a "sushi" wrap of kelp and imported French sea clay and ginger. There's an outdoor hot tub and swimming pool.

Along with its offering of mud baths and massage, **Roman Spa Hot Springs Resort** has an outdoor pool and an outdoor spa heated at 104 degrees, overlooking the Napa Valley vineyards. There's also an indoor spa at 100 degrees, and two Finnish saunas. All rooms feature gas wood stoves, one- or two-person Jacuzzi tubs, mini wet bars and fridges.

There are also bed-and-breakfast lodgings that skirt the town proper or line the lush hillsides leading up to St. Helena. Prices suit travelers from the budget-minded up to those seeking luxurious all-inclusive resort packages. There are simple but tasteful rooms in B&Bs, independent cottages amidst gardens and breathtaking private inn-style rooms with fireplaces and built-in spas and stereo systems.



The Hillcrest B&B is a historical former home to a U.S. senator from the 1870s, replete with a small bass lake and hiking trails over its 36 hilly acres. The house is filled with antique silver, china, oriental rugs, books and other early American furnishings.

Fanny's B&B is a cozy craftsman-style cottage with outdoor hammocks, an old-fashioned swing and overstuffed sitting chairs in a library with a roaring fireplace. Bedrooms have hardwood floors and down comforters, with granny windows overlooking a garden filled with jays and squirrels.

The **Calistoga Inn** provides 18 turn-of-century hotel rooms to accompany its restaurant and brewery. The European-style plan includes queen-size beds with futons for children, and shared bath and showers down the hall. Lodging includes a continental breakfast.



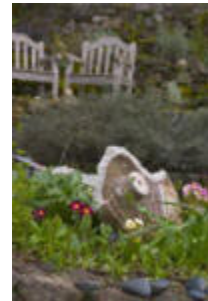
Just in the rise of the foothills is the **Calistoga Country Lodge**, a secluded six-room B&B five minutes from the heart of town. Its casual common areas feature bleached pine floors and Persian carpets throughout—and the residential rooms have private baths. Rates include evening wine and cheese, a daily paper, an outdoor spa and a full breakfast.

For luxury stays, there is **Christopher's Inn** with its Laura Ashley interiors and English country antiques. Several suites feature indoor Jacuzzis and fireplaces, with high-beamed ceilings. Others have hand-carved canopy beds and French doors that open to private gardens blooming with magnolias. Full breakfasts include fresh fruit picked from the apple, pear, fig and cherry trees on the property.

All the soaking and relaxing may make you hungry. Rest assured that Calistoga's visitors can dine all across a broad palate and checkbook. There's **Pacifico**, a local favorite featuring authentic Mexican cuisine. Specialties include Tampiqueña, a marinated top sirloin grilled with chilies, onions and tomatoes; Pollo Ajillo, chicken breast sautéed with garlic, mushrooms, chilies and lime; and Mole de Puebla, chicken breast cooked in a Mole sauce of chilies, plantain, spices, chocolate and cinnamon.

and ribs top the menu at **Brannan's Grill**. In addition to its extensive lunch, dinner and dessert fare, Brannan's pours only local microbrewed beers and offers wines from an extensive California and international list. The chef presents special entrees of pistachio crusted mahi-mahi, Liberty Duck confit and winter squash risotto and a coriander-cumin crusted pork loin sandwich.

Home-brewed wheat ale and riverside dining make for a special experience at the **Calistoga Inn**. The Inn's winter dinner menu offers Chicken Paillard with Meyer lemon-piccata sauce, Hanger steak grilled with Cabernet sauce and Pappardelle pasta and forest mushrooms. You'll also find a happy variety of salads, wings, burgers and fish on the lunch menu.



There's barbecue for meat eaters and vegetarians alike at the **Smokehouse Café**, located in Calistoga's old train depot. Portions are more than ample, and have a distinctive Southern flair. The heavy-duty breakfast pancake comes with Southern cane syrup. Dinner includes Arkansas slow pig and corn bread; grapevine smoked tofu for vegetarians.

One of Calistoga's best-known eateries is the **Catahoula Restaurant & Saloon**, located in the Mount View Hotel. Chef Jan Birnbaum learned to make gumbo in New Orleans at K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen with Chef Paul Prudhomme. Catahoula's Southern sampling includes turkey and crab gumbo and jalapeno fettuccine with sour cherries. Birnbaum's culinary expertise has been recognized by *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and he has been selected to Julia Childs' Master Chef series.

When you've soaked and supped your way to bliss, there is still more to see in Calistoga. **The Old Faithful Geyser** (located at 1299 Tubbs Lane at the north end of town) erupts four times an hour, shooting 350-degree water some 60 feet into the air for several minutes.

The **Ca'toga Galleria D'Arte**, at 1206 Cedar Street, highlights Baroque and neoclassical interpretations in masks and paintings by Italian-born Calistoga artist Carlo Marchiori.

Native American art and craftwork is celebrated at **American Trading Company**, 1407 Lincoln Avenue. Visitors can peruse or buy Native bows, chokers, pendants, earrings, sterling silver, dream catchers and kachinas.

Local wineries abound, so you can load up on fresh toxins before returning to your spa. Established in 1992, the **Dutch Henry Winery**, at 4310 Silverado Trail, shows off its Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Meritage, Merlot, Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc and Chardonnay, at its open house May 1-2. Additional tasting can be arranged by phone at (888) 224-5879.



Two miles north of Calistoga up the grade at 4855 Petrified Forest Road, you'll find the **Hans Fahden Vineyards**. The Fahden family produces about 2,000 cases of estate-grown Cabernet Sauvignon from 20 acres of vineyards located on the hillsides. For information about tasting and events, call (707) 942-6760.

From its restorative spas and baths, to its fine dining and proximity to Napa Valley's world-class wineries, Calistoga is a sweet place to warm up for summer. **Getting there from Sacramento:** Take Route 80 West to Napa, Sonoma Route 12 West exit. Follow Route 29 North to Calistoga (approx. 28 miles).

Spas:

Dr. Wilkinson's Resort
1507 Lincoln Ave.
(707) 942-4102

EuroSpa and Inn
1202 Pine Street
(707) 942-6829

Golden Haven Spa
1713 Lake St.
(707) 942-6793

Lavender Hill Spa
1015 Foothill Blvd
(800) 528-4772

Roman Spa Hot Springs Resort
1300 Washington St.
(800) 404-4772

Lodging:

Calistoga Country Lodge
2883 Foothill Blvd.
(707) 942-5555

Calistoga Inn
1250 Lincoln Ave.
(707) 942-4101

Christopher's Inn
1010 Foothill Blvd
(707) 942-5755

Fanny's B&B
1206 Spring St.
(707) 942-4810

Hillcrest B&B
3225 Lake County Hwy.
(707) 942-6334

Dining:

Brannan's Grill
1374 Lincoln Ave.
(707) 942-2235

Calistoga Inn
1250 Lincoln Ave.
(707) 942-4101

Catahoula Restaurant & Saloon
1457 Lincoln Ave.
(707) 942.2275

Pacifico
1237 Lincoln Ave.
Calistoga, CA 94515
(707) 942-4400

Smokehouse Café
1458 Lincoln Ave.
(707) 942-6060

Attractions:

American Trading Company
1407 Lincoln Ave.
(707) 942-9330

Ca'toga Galleria D'Arte
1206 Cedar St.
(707) 942-3900

Dutch Henry Winery
4310 Silverado Trail
(888) 224-5879

Hans Fahden Vineyards
4855 Petrified Forest Rd.
(707) 942-6760

Old Faithful Geyser
1299 Tubbs Lane
(707) 942-6463



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