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Ian L

Green Travel Guide to Napa

Napa Valley, 5 Days

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: Known the world over for wine making and grape growing, Napa isn't as environmentally enlightened as you might think. Growing grapes requires a great deal of water and -- unless they're organic -- quite a lot of pesticides, too. And Napa Valley culture, influenced by generations-old family farming dynasties, can be slow to change and accept new ways.

For these reasons, green travel has come late to the party in Napa. But now that it's here, the Napa Valley boasts some of the greenest hotels in the country. The three-year-old Gaia Hotel, for example, was the first LEED-certified gold property in the U.S., and newer resorts like Solage and the Silverado Resort have put in place all sorts of environmentally friendly initiatives. (At Solage, for example, room service requests are fulfilled by staff members on bicycles.)

The latest arrival on the Napa Valley scene, Bardessono Hotel, isn't so much catching up, as surpassing rival properties. One of only a handful of hotels in the U.S. reaching for platinum LEEDS status, Bardessono is green through and through, from the rammed-earth walls and recycled materials it's built from to its state-of-the-art energy system, fed by 900 solar panels and 82 geothermal wells, that produces so much energy last year they had to sell some of it back to PG&E.

Developer Phil Sherburne, who grew up on an Oregon dairy farm and was a semi-famous student organizer in the 1960s, has earned plenty of green cred for his efforts. Robert Redford was one of the first celebrity guests, and Toyota used the hotel's conference facilities to launch the new redesigned Prius. But the main reason to come to Bardessono is that it's just plain gorgeous.

Built on and taking its name from one of Yountville's prime agricultural homesteads, the ranch farmed for generations by the sprawling Bardessono family, this luxury boutique hotel and spa is laid out in such a way that guests spend almost every waking moment outdoors. The rooms, which are clustered in separate pod-like buildings, are designed for almost complete privacy; you honestly don't have to see your fellow guests if you'd prefer not to. (A lure for celebs, I'm sure.) And the gardens are laid out in an airy, pseudo-Zen fashion with rock-tiled paths meandering between stone-lined streambeds.

Among the many water features is a Stonehenge-like fountain that's eerily breathtaking at night. The restaurant, which serves a surprisingly reasonable prix-fixe four-course dinner on Sundays that's attracting locals as well as guests, does farm-to-table

cuisine with all the attention to freshness and herb-infused flavor it deserves. And the spa -- all I can say is, it's worth it to pay a little extra for the vinotherapie massage, which features light, aromatic Chardonnay grapeseed oil and leaves you limp as a rag but greaseless enough to hop straight in the pool. Which, with its enormous enclosed, pillow-strewn cabanas reminiscent of a seventies Middle Eastern-themed restaurant, is phenomenal, by the way.

Napa Valley foodie towns like Yountville have long been famous for name-brand restaurants like The French Laundry, but what's less well known is the leadership Napa Valley chefs have played in what's now being called "farm to fork" cuisine. What this means is that the heirloom tomatoes in your caprese salad were grown in the restaurant's own garden, the sheep's milk cheese that tops them is from the dairy down the road, the oysters on the grill were harvested from nearby Tomales Bay.

Bardessono's restaurant uses herbs grown in an aromatic kitchen garden right on the property, while a bigger garden producing the bulk of the produce is located on land loaned by a nearby winery. While this garden isn't open for viewing, right next to it is The French Laundry's enormous and fruitful garden (both gardens are across the street from The French Laundry on Washington street) careful labeling makes it possible to see exactly what the exotic eggplants, peppers, squash, and berries featured in Thomas Keller's iconic recipes look like while they're still on the bush.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 2 - Napa Valley



Skyline Trail

Napa singletrack

Day 2 - Napa Valley



QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: (707) 252-0481
<http://www.ncfaa.com/skyline/about.htm>

location:
2201 Imola Ave.
Napa CA 94559

1 Skyline Trail

DESCRIPTION: Semi-technical ride on 90% singletrack in Skyline Wilderness Park, this ride comes highly recommended for a medium loop. The loop includes the Skyline Trail, Chaparral Trail, Rim Rocks Trail, and Marie Creek Trail. © NileGuide



Photo courtesy of Skyline Trail

Napa Valley Snapshot

Local Info

Napa Valley attracts some 5 million visitors each year, and for good reason. Located 50 miles north of San Francisco, Napa Valley is one of the world's premier wine-growing regions, home to picturesque small towns filled with foodie-fave restaurants, wellness spas, award-winning golf courses, artisan-oriented shops, and beautiful open spaces offering hiking adventures and ridgetop views...What's not to love?

Napa

The city of Napa is the largest of Napa Valley's communities, yet downtown Napa retains the feel of a quiet country town. While quite a few mansions and large estates rest back against the hill, Napa tends to be a friendly, down-to-earth town with a refreshingly unpretentious personality. In every season, the farms and wineries dotting the valley make a glorious setting for bike rides and country drives.

Napa's history as the center of the valley's Italian heritage is reflected in a variety of top-quality Italian restaurants. The valley's Hispanic population leaves its culinary mark as well; no drive down Soscol is complete without a quick bite to eat at one of the town's famous beloved taco trucks. The Carneros area on Napa's south side, prized by aficionados for its Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays, now features a slew of hip new inns and restaurants. And the revitalized riverfront area is a mecca for hopping bars and lively galleries.

The commercial center, known as the "Old Town" district, bustles with retail stores and boutique wine shops like Bounty Hunter Rare Wine and Provisions. "Old Town" provides casual dining options like ZuZu, a popular tapas restaurant with tons of local color, literally: most of the artwork featured is from Napa Valley artists.

Yountville

Yountville is far closer to the popular Falcon Crest image of Napa Valley, retaining as it does the quaint charm a small, country town. Less populous and more gentrified than the city of Napa, there are also a lot of grapes growing here. You may see the vineyards first, strangely enough, as a bright, metallic twinkle: growers use reflective foil to scare away grape-eating birds. Yountville, however is perhaps

most famous for first-class dining: French Laundry, Bistro Jeanty, Bouchon, and Ad Hoc are clustered right here. Nationally famed, these establishments are happily embraced by San Franciscans as an integral part of the Bay Area restaurant culture, but clearly, they and Yountville stand on their own (and standing is indeed what you will do if you don't make a reservation weeks in advance). In 2007, the inaugural year of the Michelin Guide to San Francisco, Bay Area & Wine Country, several Yountville restaurants were awarded Michelin Stars.

Oakville

By this point, one has entered the heart of Napa Valley: Wine production. Robert Mondavi, one of the titans of California wine, is headquartered in Oakville. Other, smaller wineries can be seen on both sides of the valley, though the premium cellars seem to be on the west side. While tiny Oakville has a post office, it's really an unincorporated part of Napa County, best known for the Oakville Grocery, a legendary roadside delicatessen stocked with a mind-boggling array of gourmet delights from France, Italy, and their own kitchens. As with other spots throughout the valley, one is likely to be greeted in the early spring by a waving sea of yellow under sparse vineyards: growers often plant mustard underneath grapevines.

Rutherford

Microscopic Rutherford is home to Beaulieu Vineyards, Rutherford Grove, Rutherford Hill, and St. Supery Vineyards & Winery. Take in Napa's landscape with a chilled bottle of sparkling wine in Mumm's outdoor terrace. Francis Ford Coppola's Niebaum-Coppola Estate, generally mobbed with tourists, features memorabilia from his career in cinema. Rutherford is also a fine place to eat: Restaurant at Auberge du Soleil and La Toque are two exceptional Napa Valley restaurants.

St. Helena

With its rows of historic stone and beam storefronts and perfectly restored Victorians, downtown St. Helena looks much it did in the early 1900s. Off the main street, cottage gardens are tucked between elegant bed and breakfasts in historic mansions, while elegant boutique

hotels surround fountain-bedecked quiet courtyards. The Silverado Museum hosts an exhibit of Robert Louis Stevenson ephemera. Fans of ghost story writer and misanthrope Ambrose Bierce will want to stay at the Ambrose Bierce House, now a bed and breakfast. St. Helena is also home to the Beringer Vineyards, a popular tasting destination.

The Culinary Institute of America at Greystone is hidden in the vineyards of St. Helena. The CIA is a master's level training center for working, certified chefs. It's situated in the former home of the Christian Brothers winery, an awe-striking, three-story, 101-year-old building that housed generations of winemaking friars. Take a look at some of the history exhibits inside, and don't miss Brother Timothy's 1800-piece corkscrew collection. The CIA gives cooking demonstrations in their fully equipped teaching theater. Then enjoy the sights at the outdoor terrace of Wine Spectator Greystone Restaurant.

Calistoga

Calistoga is famous for the hot springs that bubble out of the geyser-studded northern end of the valley, and the mineral-infused mud that Europeans traditionally believed had healthful properties. Mud baths, along with mineral baths, saunas, hot steam treatments, whirlpools, and herbal body wraps, have all been an attraction of the area ever since San Francisco entrepreneur Sam Brannan first promoted the benefits of the area's hot springs in the mid-19th century. Dr. Wilkinson's Hot Springs Resort, Lavender Hill Spa, and Indian Springs Hotel & Spa are good spots to enjoy relaxing spa treatments.

To get a feeling for the thermal springs without getting in one, go two miles out of town on Tubbs Lane and catch Old Faithful Geyser of California. The geyser spouts boiling water 60 feet into the air every half-hour or so.

Calistoga is an engaging, health-conscious, bustling little town in every way. The Calistoga Inn Restaurant & Brewery or Wappo Bar & Bistro are all great places to replenish yourself after the ardors of a rub, steam, or scalding soak.

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