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Ian L

The "Ten Best" Restaurants in the Napa Valley

Napa Valley, 7 Days

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: Are there really 10 restaurants in the Napa valley the rise above the rest? Honestly, no -- there's such an incredible wealth of fine food and creative cookery in Napa that this really would have to be the "Top 25" to be anywhere near fair. And I'm afraid I have to admit my picks would change every six months, depending on who's arrived, who's departed, and who's just not quite on their juice. But just to get the conversation going, here are ten truly fine restaurants that every Napa food aficionado should try. Then please, add your own!

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 2 - Napa Valley



La Toque

Contemporary seasonal cuisine with exceptional wine pairings

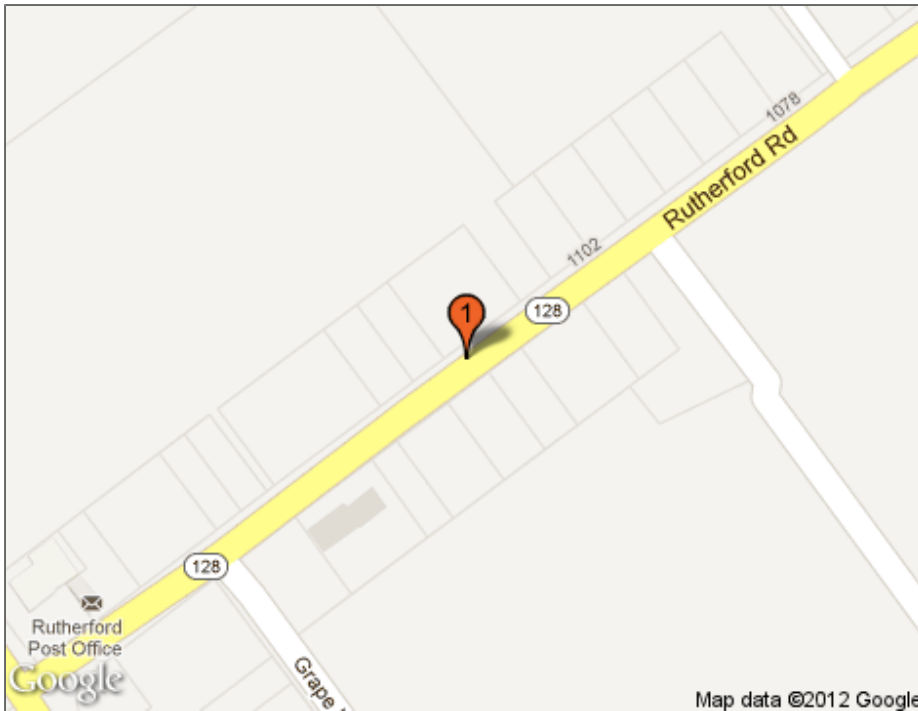
Day 6 - Napa Valley



Ubuntu Restaurant

Michelin-starred vegetarian resto, yoga studio upstairs

Day 2 - Napa Valley



QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: (707) 257-5157
fax: (707) 257-5151
<http://www.latoque.com>

location:
1140 Rutherford Road
Napa CA 94559

hours:
Daily 5:30p-9:30p

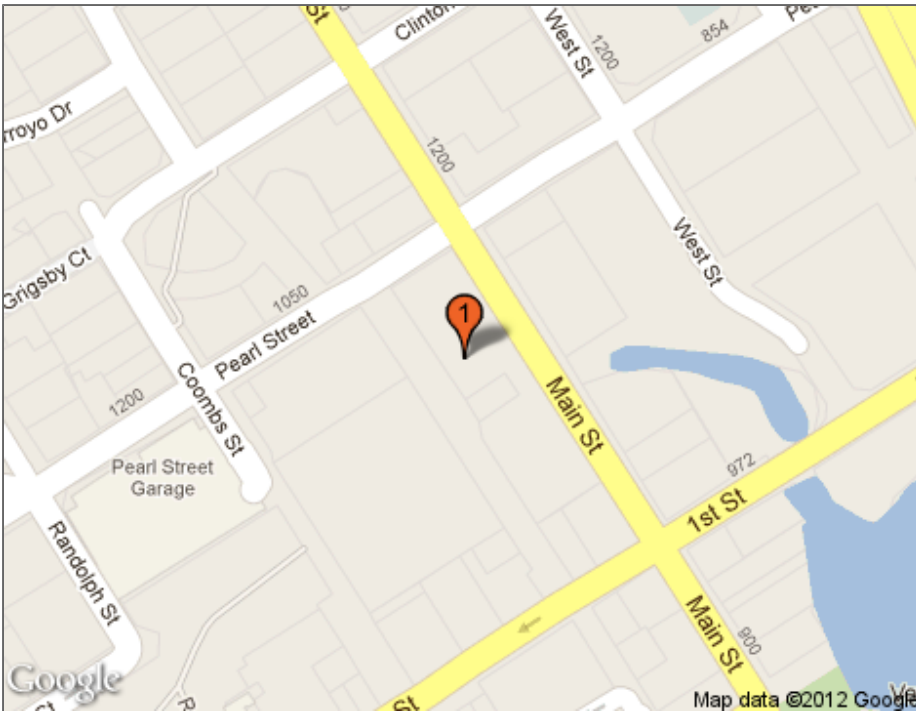
1 La Toque

DESCRIPTION: A proud recipient of one Michelin star, Ken Frank's La Toque draws raves for its contemporary seasonal cuisine and exceptional wine pairing program. The restaurant relocated in 2008, setting up house in the Westin Verasa Napa in the heart of downtown Napa. Diners choose from a nightly five-course Chef's Tasting Menu, or design their own three-course meal from the "Options" menu--think Maine lobster salad with Manila mango and lemongrass (paired with a 2007 S.A. Prüt Riesling Kabinett); ricotta and chick-pea ravioli with Parmesan and wild mushroom broth (2007 Archery Summit Pinot Noir), and lamb loin with cumin-scented carrot puree (2006 Lagier Meredith Syrah). The on-point picks wine pairing are the work of sommelier Yoon Ha and wine director Scott Tracy.
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Courtesy of La Toque

Day 6 - Napa Valley



QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 707- 251-5656
<http://ubuntunapa.com/restaurant.php>

location:
1140 Main Street
Napa CA 94559

hours:
Lunch: Sat-Sun
11:30am-2:30pm. Dinner:
Sun-Thur 5:30pm-8:30pm,
Fri-Sat 5:30pm-9pm

1 Ubuntu Restaurant

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Visit the restaurant's website from time to time to keep up on the list of what's growing in Ubuntu's garden, and you'll be up to date on the latest trendy ingredients.

DESCRIPTION: Ubuntu is an upscale vegetarian restaurant that garnered one Michelin star in 2011. Ingredients for Ubuntu's creative dishes are primarily grown in the restaurant's own gardens, following the principle of biodynamic farming. Biodynamic farmers place high emphasis on healing and supplying the earth with ingredients that encourage regeneration. Chef Aaron London and his team begin each morning at the gardens, and prepare dishes that bring out the natural flavors of the herbs and vegetables. Ubuntu restaurant is a manifestation of a dream to bring together many of the things that owner Sandy Lawrence enjoys in the hope that it may benefit others. Wines are both local and international, selected for sustainable growing and harvesting practices. After dinner if you're not too full, you can take a yoga class in the studio above.
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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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