Calistoga, California

BY LISÉ STERN

STAY

Calistoga Spa Hot Springs
1006 Washington Street
707-942-6269, calistogaspa.com
Calistoga Spa Hot Springs is right in the center of town, walking distance from everything. From the outside, it looks like a motel, but inside the rooms are elegant and recently renovated. They include kitchenettes and beautifully appointed bathrooms. A highlight of the property is the hot springs, which look like swimming pools, and there are several, including a giant Jacuzzi, a hot lap pool, and a cool lap pool, all with water that makes your skin feel soft and refreshed.

Calistoga Ranch
580 Lommel Road
855-942-4220, calistogaranch.com
Calistoga Ranch is the ultra-luxurious place to stay when you want a true getaway a few miles from downtown. It consists of a series of individual redwood lodgings with living space and kitchens, discreetly built into the hills, blending with the surrounding trees. Leave your car at reception; a golf cart will take you to your lodging. Larger options have indoor and outdoor living rooms with a fireplace and private hot tub. Amenities include biking tours of vineyards, pools, yoga, cooking classes, on-property hiking trails, as well as restaurants and spa treatments.

DO

Calistoga Balloons
1458 Lincoln Avenue
707-942-5758, calistogaballoons.com
Up, up, and away is easy, beautiful, and safe under the expert hands of Calistoga Balloons. Yes, you’re waking before the crack of dawn, but the 360-degree sunrise is breathtaking. You’ll see everything you’ll have done and will do during a visit to Calistoga: there’s Solbar, where you’ll have brunch at the end of your flight, there’s the hot springs, the wineries, downtown... It’s a gently awe-inspiring experience.

Sharpsteen Museum
1311 Washington Street
707-942-5911, sharpsteenmuseum.org
This small but thorough museum chronicles the history of Calistoga in charming detail and includes a restored cottage owned by 19th-century Calistoga founder Sam Brannan. Local residents Bernice and Ben Sharpsteen created the museum. Ben was an Oscar-winning Disney director, and there are also exhibits about his life and experience. Extensive miniature dioramas depict the town from a bygone era. There’s also a bookstore featuring an impressive collection of local literature.

Mud Bath
Calistoga Spa Hot Springs
1006 Washington Street
707-942-6269, calistogaspa.com
Calistoga’s original claim to fame is the curative hot springs, and they’re still a main attraction, thanks to the potent combination of geothermal waters and volcanic ash. A mud bath is a soak-your-troubles-away experience. At Calistoga Spa Hot Springs, an attendant will help you into a giant bathtub filled with thick, muddy peat infused with the mineral waters, reputed to be great for your skin and body. A mudless mineral bath follows, then time to lay back and cool to room temperature. The effect is immensely relaxing and also rejuvenating.
Napa Valley’s Calistoga is a wonderfully charming small town, population 5,261, with a downtown that’s about two long blocks. In the 19th century, the area’s natural hot springs, like those of Saratoga Springs, New York, attracted San Francisco businessman and Maine native Samuel Brannan. Legend has it that, in 1866, he drunkenly declared that he would make the town the “Calistoga of Sarafornia.” Today it’s home to a baker’s dozen spas and five dozen plus wineries (see “Wine Buzz: Volcanic Bounty” on page 40) and is filled with excellent restaurants and accommodations ranging from cozy to total lap of luxury. For more information, see VisitCalistoga.com.

**EAT**

**BREAKFAST**

**Cafe Sarafornia**
1413 Lincoln Avenue
707-942-0555
cafesarafornia.com
All your breakfast needs can be found (all day) at this bright, diner-style cafe in the center of town. There are tables inside and along the sidewalk outside, plus a countertop with high stools. Notable options include “The Best” Huevos Rancheros with sliced avocado and shredded hash browns, stick-to-your-ribs Biscuits and Gravy, and Spinach-Portobello Benedict with citrus bechamel.

**LUNCH**

**Solbar, Solage**
755 Silverado Trail
877-684-6146
solage.aubergeresorts.com
I dream of lunches like those offered by Solbar, the restaurant at the Solage resort. The ambience is fresh and airy, both inside and out, and there’s a great selection of hyperlocal wines. Try a flight of Calistoga wines to go with your meal. The menu is color-coded to indicate lighter, healthier dishes like Petrale Sole Tacos and heartier options like a Duck Banh Mi Sandwich. The very seasonal menu changes frequently and might include a beautifully presented Roasted Peach Salad. No color coding on the “Eat this First” dessert menu with heady treats like Butterscotch Rum Pudding.

**DINNER**

**Brannan’s Grill**
1374 Lincoln Street
707-942-2233, branannsgrill.com
The atmosphere is casual here (note the bar with a TV and the stag head mounted on one wall), but the menu is far from it. Great starters include Delta Asparagus Salad with maitake mushrooms or Shrimp Cocktail. Steakhouse Classics include flat iron, porterhouse, prime rib eye, and filet mignon, accompanied by grilled broccolini and a starch of choice (mac and cheese, twice-baked potato, or fries.) There are also fish options like Seared Ahi Tuna with parsnip puree and soy vinaigrette.

**Sam’s Social Club, Indian Springs Resort**
1712 Lincoln Avenue
707-942-4969, samssocialclub.com
Helmed by Executive Chef Shaun McGrath, a Massachusetts native, Sam’s is a restaurant and then some. Then some being a brewery—yes, there’s more than wine being produced in this Napa Valley town. Accompany a refreshing Sink or Swim IPA (made with local hops) with small plates like Fried Brussels Sprouts or House-Made Ricotta Crostini. Not to miss: the Market Ceviche with avocado and lime. The menu changes frequently, and might include Rib Eye Steak Frites or Grilled Seabass with Fennel Salad. Save room for the very generous (must share) Candy Cap Churros, made with secret ingredient earthy sweet candy cap mushrooms.

**PHOTOGRAPHS:** LISË STERN