

Wine Country Towns

Calistoga

Overview

Calistoga was named a *Distinctive Destination* by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2001. It allows visitors to see the wine country as it was before freeways and fast food. Only a two-lane road leads there and fast food franchises are banned by law. As such, it lacks the polish & pretension of its busier neighbors further south in the Napa Valley.



The town is situated on top of underground reservoirs that break through the earth as hot springs supplying the town & many spa facilities. The spas are famous for their mud baths. Many spas include facilities for couples.

At over 4,000 feet, Mount St Helena dominates the mountainous backdrop to the town. Robert Louis Stevenson, perhaps generously, described Mount St Helena as "the Mont Blanc of the Californian Coast Range."

Eating & Drinking

Brannan's Grill in the center of town in an impressive building has a good wine list and delivers a consistently good but unexceptional food with its "New American cuisine." Rumored to "make the best Martini in the Napa Valley." 1374 Lincoln Ave. (707) 942-2233.

JoLe Farm to Table is a contemporary American restaurant with a focus on local, organic, and sustainable. This is a relative newcomer to Calistoga but is already getting an excellent reputation. 1457 Lincoln Ave. (707) 942-5938. Closed Tuesday & Wednesday.

The Hydro Bar & Grill 1403 Lincoln Ave serves good bar food in a bar. (707) 942-9777.

The *All Seasons Bistro's* owners Gayle Keller and Alex Dierkhising were among the first gastronomes in the valley. Their emphasis is on seasonal, regional and organic ingredients. California Cuisine. Nominal corkage fee. 1400 Lincoln Ave. (707) 942-9111.

The *Calistoga Inn Restaurant* has nice outdoor dining area though at weekends the attached brewpub can be noisy (and fun) with live music. 1250 Lincoln Avenue / (707) 942-4101.

The bar and the restaurant at *Solage* are excellent though it's nearly a mile from the center of town. Worth the walk if you want to eat in chic style. 755 Silverado Trail. (707) 226-0800.

At the other end of the scale, *Puerto Vallarata* is a good, no-frills Mexican restaurant down an alley squeezed between CalMart and the Mt View Hotel! 1473 Lincoln Ave. (707) 942-6563.

There are many other cafes, restaurants and bars along Lincoln Ave including *Café Saraforinia* at 1413 Lincoln Ave. and the *Calistoga Roastery* 1426 Lincoln Ave where we usually grab lunch when we are in town.



Things to Do

Farmer Market: every Saturday, 8:30am-noon, through October at Sharpsteen Plaza on Washington Street, across from City Hall. Includes a spa tent with chair massage. Contact the Chamber for details . see *Useful Contacts* below.

Wine Tasting: There are no fancy tasting rooms like there are in Healdsburg but you could do worse than drop by the *Wine Garage* and see what they have open. Their philosophy is simple %No wine over \$25, everything must taste great and no wine snob attitudes.+ As they say, %Have funō It's only fermented grape juice!+

Ballooning: In Calistoga: *Calistoga Balloons*. One of the smaller operators and the only company flying as far north as Calistoga. 1-888-995-7700/(707)-942-5758. In Yountville: *NapaValley Aloft* (including Above the West Ballooning, Adventures Aloft and Balloon Aviation). Probably the largest operator in the Napa Valley. 1-800-627-2759. *Napa valley Balloons*. 1-800-253-2224/(707) 944-0228. In Rutherford *Bonaventura Balloon Company* Strong reputation, but can be pricey. 1-800-359-6272. In Napa: *Balloons Above the Valley*. 1-800-464-6824 / (707) 253-2222.

Hiking & Horseback Riding: *Triple Creek Horse Outfit* offers guided horseback tours at the nearby Bothe-Napa Valley State Park. Reservation required: call 707-877-8700. The park also has some pleasant hiking trails.

Cooking Courses: The *Culinary Institute of America* offers regular public cooking demonstrations at Greystone in nearby St. Helena CA. See the St Helena section of this guidebook for more details.

Spas and Pools: Many and various.

Large pool and full spa treatments at the *Indian Springs Resort* at the north end of town: 1712 Lincoln Avenue (707) 942-4913.

A little further north on Lincoln Av. is the more basic and cheaper pool and spa facilities at the *Calistoga Village Inn and Spa* . proving you get what you pay for! 1880 Lincoln Avenue (707) 942-0991.

Closer into town with four good pools in a motel-style facility is the *Calistoga Spa Hot Springs*: 1006 Washington Street (707) 942-6269.

The Mount View Hotel has nice spa facilities (but no mud baths) at a very central 1457 Lincoln Av. (707) 942-6877/1-800-816-6877.

Dr. Wilkinson's specializes in mud baths (actually a mix of volcanic ash and hot spring water). Back in the 1940s Dr. Wilkinson would give a mud bath, mineral bath, steam room, blanket wrap and massage all for \$3.50. You can now expect to pay around \$120 for the same relaxing service. 1507 Lincoln Ave. (707) 942-4102

Golden Haven Spa has reasonably priced mud baths for couples as well as mineral pools. It is a little way outside of the center of town at 1713 Lake Street. (707) 942-8000.

The *Lavender Hill Spa* comes recommended with its pleasant setting with Asian statuary and art. The spa offers spa treatments for couples, singles and friends in %a private sanctuary of warmth, beauty and healing.+ 1015 Foothill Blvd (Hwy 29). (707) 942-4495.



Useful Contacts

Visitor Information: Calistoga Chamber of Commerce at 1133 Washington St. 707-942-6333.

Bike Shop: *Calistoga Bike Shop* at 1318 Lincoln Ave. (707) 942.9687. The owners, Susanne & Mike are a wealth of knowledge about biking in the area.

Stores: There are bookstores, antique stores and many other shops along Lincoln Avenue as well as a large *CalMart* (at Lincoln and Fair Way) which has a salad bar and a deli counter.

Taxi Company: *Valley Valet* 1421 2nd St. (707) 942-9009. *Calistoga Cab* (707) 975-7732.

History

The Upper Napa Valley was once the home of a significant population of Indigenous People, called the Wappo. With abundant oak trees providing acorns as a food staple and the natural hot springs as a healing ground, Calistoga was the site of several villages. Following Mexican Independence, mission properties were secularized and disposed of by the Mexican government with much of the Napa Valley being partitioned into large ranchos in the 1830s and 1840s. The first American settlers began arriving in the 1840s, with several taking up lands in the Calistoga area.

Incorporated as a town in 1885, Calistoga was founded by Samuel Brannan, California's first millionaire. Brannan was the leader of a settlement expedition on the ship Brooklyn landing in Yerba Buena (San Francisco) in 1846. He published San Francisco's first English language newspaper, the California Star. He was also fascinated by Calistoga's natural hot springs and purchased 2000 acres to develop a spa reminiscent of Saratoga, New York. His resort (originally located where Indian Springs Resort is today) opened to California's rich and famous in 1862.

With the completion of the railroad in 1868, Calistoga became not only a destination but the transportation hub for the upper Napa Valley. Calistoga's economy was based on mining (silver and mercury), agriculture (grapes, prunes and walnuts) and tourism (the hot springs). One of the early visitors was Robert Louis Stevenson before he had written his great novels. He met Fanny Vandegrift in France, followed her to San Francisco and, after she had obtained a divorce, married her in May, 1880. Three days later they were on their way to honeymoon at the Calistoga Hot Springs Hotel. Wanting to stay longer in the area, they moved from the hotel to an abandoned cabin at the nearby Silverado Mine on Mount Saint Helena. While working on other stories Stevenson kept a journal which became the Silverado Squatters describing many local features, residents and characters. see box below.

In 1920, Giuseppe Musante, a soda fountain and candy store owner in Calistoga, was drilling a cold water well at the Railway Exchange when he tapped into a hot water source. In 1924 he set up a bottling line and began selling Calistoga Sparkling Mineral Water. The company became a major player in the bottled water business after Elwood Springer bought the small bottling plant in 1970 known today as the *Calistoga Water Company*.

Scenes from the Disney movie "Bedtime Stories" starring Adam Sandler were filmed in Calistoga in June, 2008.

Local folklore holds that the town supposedly got its name from a garbled Spoonerism uttered by Sam Brannan. He is alleged to have said (perhaps after sampling the local vintages) that

the location would become the 'Calistoga of Sarifornia'. He had meant to say the 'Saratoga of California', comparing it to the famous hot springs of that New York town.

Silverado Squatters

Robert Louis Stevenson evokes the California's wine country beautifully in *Silverado Squatters*. The book is based on Stevenson's experiences while honeymooning with Bay Area native Frances Osbourne and her son in the summer of 1880.

The new family spent nine weeks in Calistoga and the Napa Valley, residing in a bunkhouse of an abandoned silver mine, on the shoulder of Mount St Helena. They did what visitors to the area do today; lived graciously (given the constraints of their rustic home), admiring the region's serene beauty, and sipping samples of the local wines.

Here's an extract from the work. If you've ridden the Old Toll Rd to the shoulder of Mt St Helena, you'll know exactly what Stevenson was talking about here. If you haven't ridden it, maybe this will inspire you to tackle the 6 miles of climbing! Either way, it's a nice read.

"For some two miles we rattled through the valley, skirting the eastern foothills; then we struck off to the right, through haugh-land, and presently, crossing a dry water-course, entered the Toll Road, or, to be more local, entered on "the grade." The road mounts the near shoulder of Mount Saint Helena, bound northward into Lake County. In one place it skirts along the edge of a narrow and deep canyon, filled with trees, and I was glad, indeed, not to be driven at this point by the dashing Foss. Kelmar, with his unvarying smile, jogging to the motion of the trap, drove for all the world like a good, plain, country clergyman at home; and I profess I blessed him unawares for his timidity.

"Vineyards and deep meadows, islanded and framed with thicket, gave place more and more as we ascended to woods of oak and madrona, dotted with enormous pines. It was these pines, as they shot above the lower wood that produced that penciling of single trees I had so often remarked from the valley. Thence, looking up and from however far, each fir stands separate against the sky no bigger than an eyelash; and all together lend a quaint, fringed aspect to the hills. The oak is no baby; even the madrona, upon these spurs of Mount Saint Helena, comes to a fine bulk and ranks with forest trees - but the pines look down upon the rest for underwood. As Mount Saint Helena among her foothills, so these dark giants out-top their fellow-vegetables. Alas, if they had left the redwoods, the pines, in turn, would have been dwarfed. But the redwoods, fallen from their high estate, are serving as family bedsteads, or yet more humbly as field fences, along all Napa Valley.

"A rough smack of resin was in the air, and a crystal mountain purity. It came pouring over these green slopes by the oceanful. The woods sang aloud, and gave largely of their healthful breath. Gladness seemed to inhabit these upper zones, and we had left indifference behind us in the valley. "I to the hills lift mine eyes!" There are days in a life when thus to climb out of the lowlands, seems like scaling heaven.

"As we continued to ascend, the wind fell upon us with increasing strength. It was a wonder how the two stout horses managed to pull us up that steep incline and still face the athletic opposition of the wind, or how their great eyes were able to endure the dust. Ten minutes after we went by, a tree fell, blocking the road; and even



before us leaves were thickly strewn, and boughs had fallen, large enough to make the passage difficult. But now we were hard by the summit. The road crosses the ridge, just in the nick that Kelmar showed me from below, and then, without pause, plunges down a deep, thickly wooded glen on the farther side. At the highest point a trail strikes up the main hill to the leftward; and that leads to Silverado. A hundred yards beyond, and in a kind of elbow of the glen, stands the Toll House Hotel. We came up the one side, were caught upon the summit by the whole weight of the wind as it poured over into Napa Valley, and a minute after had drawn up in shelter, but all buffeted and breathless, at the Toll House door."

