

TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE

A gal's getaway in Calistoga

By Beverly Mann
Copley News Service

CALISTOGA, Calif. - What do two working women, one a mom of a 2-year-old, have in mind when traveling through Napa Valley's wine country to the healing city of Calistoga? Pampering, relaxation and more pampering.

My daughter Jordana and I set out with one purpose in mind: to experience a stress-free weekend away from daily responsibilities, lavish in spa treatments, enjoy quality cuisine and surround ourselves with greenery and the pungent, floral aromas of vineyards combing the countryside.

Under a crystal-clear sky, we passed rolling pastures and endless wineries bordered by a splash of yellow wildflowers as we drove north from San Francisco on Route 101 listening to Michael Buble's "Feelin' Good." The words added further inspiration for what was to be the perfect getaway for two hard-working gals: "It's a new dawn. It's a new day, and it's a new life. I'm feelin' good."

Within an hour and a half, we arrived at the pint-size, friendly town of Calistoga just off Highway 29 to the newly renovated Chanric Inn, a sleek, stylish B&B run by two handsome innkeepers, Ric and Channing, whose warmth and personalities charmed us instantly. Unlike any B&B that I've encountered, the Chanric Inn has a pristine, open kitchen, and gourmet breakfasts are artfully prepared by Ric, a former chef, in his professionally starched white coat. Our following day's breakfast was already displayed on a standing menu: a delicately prepared polenta with Parmesan cheese topped with a poached egg and served with a colorful cup of fresh berries and slices of homemade bread. There was also complimentary beer and wine offered throughout the day and evening. The inn is conveniently located off Highway 29, just north of downtown Calistoga.

My daughter and I slept well under down bedding after a fabulous two-hour pampering at the nearby Lavender Hill Spa, one of my favorite places to enjoy a luxurious soak in a lavender salt bath enhanced by flower petals and soothing music. We enjoyed the bath in twin tubs adjacent to each other before we were called upstairs individually for our Salt Glow Scrub, which was followed by a 60-minute massage in the main building.

When we were finished being bathed, polished and oiled down, we could hardly speak, but we managed to get our limp bodies ready for what was to be an eight-course wine and plate paring at Calistoga's All Season's Bistro. Chef Daniel Holt prepared an array of small dishes, from wild mushroom ragout and creamy risotto with pumpkin to seared yellowtail and a crispy brioche pear bread pudding, all accompanied by a wide range of red and white wines. Our favorite libation was the Schramsberg Blanc de Blancs, which led us to visit the winery during our stay. The next morning, we awoke to Ric's blissful breakfast of herb scrambled eggs over a mouthwatering mushroom and truffle spread, before we headed to vintner Daryl Sattui's remarkable \$30 million, 121,000-square-foot creation - Castello di Amorosa.

Set on 170 acres of forested hills, this replica of a medieval Tuscan castle was the dream of Sattui, who personally escorted my daughter and me through a labyrinth of underground cellars. The aroma of the chardonnay, Gewurztraminer and a peachy, honey-flavored Late Harvest Gewurztraminer permeated from the massive oak barrels.

According to Sattui, who has made his fantasy a reality, "I was obsessed with the concept of creating a maze where every space opened into a different adventure traveling through the building. I wanted to include all the elements of an authentic medieval castle. Every stone of the facade was placed by hand. I even built a moat and a drawbridge."

Afterward, we drove for about 10 minutes to the boutique town of St. Helena (a bit more upscale than casual Calistoga), where we lunched at the restaurant Market on a juicy hamburger smothered with flavorful sauteed onions.

Before we knew it, it was time for our facials at the newly built Solage Spa on Silverado Trail, just 15 minutes away. Our massage therapists bundled us in heated robes and led us outside from the main lobby to another building for our facials. We almost opted for their signature mudslide treatment, which includes different varieties of mud to self-coat your body while baking in a heated room, before sitting in a lounge chair with music of choice flowing through earphones.

We didn't have to go far for our dinner. At the resort's trendy SolBar restaurant, I savored a fresh beet salad adorned with hazelnuts and a finely steamed salmon with herb-seasoned chard and grilled fennel before retiring at Chanric for the evening.

On our final morning, we visited several wineries off Highway 29 and Foothill Boulevard. First stop was Chateau Montelena, a small medieval building surrounded by a lake of ducks and swans. The next vineyard venture was Schramsberg, the first Napa Valley hillside winery founded in 1862 by Jacob Schram. The winery houses two miles of caves carved from volcanic rock. I discovered during an informative tour and tasting that 2 million bottles of wine are produced here yearly and that the new Blanc de Blancs 2005 and Blanc de Noir are quite popular.

We had to bypass Sterling Vineyards, which has a tram to take visitors 325 feet up to the hillside winery, but the weather had become inclement with sheets of rain pouring down.

Before heading back to San Francisco, Jordana and I indulged in a final treat of decadent dark chocolate at the elegant Woodhouse Chocolate on Main Street in St. Helena. This was just enough of a pick-me-up to energize us for the return trip. I could see that Jordana was slipping back into her mommy mode when she called home to check on my 2-year-old grandson. Still, the evident calmness in her tone reflected our serene surroundings, a picture I hoped to retain during our return trip.

The last bit of sun peeked through the foreboding clouds - a final curtain closing in on a fun-packed but mellow mom-and-daughter getaway.

SIDEBAR

For information visit Chamber of Commerce Web site at www.calistogachamber.com.

Where to stay: Chanric Inn: 1805 Foothill Blvd., 707-942-4535, 877-281-3671, www.thechanric.com.

Spa Treatments: At Lavender Hill, there are midweek specials. Buy one and get one at half-price. A Salt Glow and 60-minute massage costs \$160. A one-hour couples massage is \$225. Visit www.lavenderhillspa.com or call 800-528-4772.

At Solage Spa, the Zen Mommy package for \$279 includes pre-natal yoga, massage and pedicure. The Sol Search package for \$315 consists of a mud treatment, bath, massage and hour-long Watsu session. The address is 755 Silverado Trail, Calistoga, phone 866-942-7442, Web site www.solagecalistoga.com.

Restaurants: All Seasons Bistro, 1400 Lincoln, Calistoga, 707-942-9111.

Brannan's Grill, 1374 Lincoln Ave., Calistoga, 707-942-2233.

Market, 1347 Main St., Saint Helena, 707-963-3799.

Wineries: Castello di Amorosa, 707-967-6272, www.castellodiamorosa.com.

Chateau Montelena Winery, 707-942-5015, www.montelena.com.

Sterling Wineries, 707-942-3344, 800-726-6136, www.sterlingvineyards.com.

Schramsberg Vineyards, 707-942-4558, www.schramsberg.com.

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