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# Escape to the Napa Valley

STARTED THINKING ABOUT YOUR 2006 TRIP TO CALIFORNIA'S PREMIER WINE COUNTRY?  
HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO.

By Anthony Head

One of the most significant events in Napa Valley history took place in 1976. And it happened in Paris. There was a tasting that matched California wines against spectacular world-class offerings from Burgundy and Bordeaux. But—and this is the significant part—this was a *blind* tasting; the judges didn't know which wines were in their glasses. When the tasting was over, the French judges, who were certain that they were praising their own country's wines, had actually chosen a Chardonnay and a Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley as the best in show. The world of wine has never been the same.

Since then the area just north of San Francisco has developed quite rapidly, with hundreds of wineries dotting the numerous towns, and acres upon acres of vineyards carpeting the gentle contours of the valleys. While some attention has

recently turned toward other California appellations (like those in Paso Robles or Santa Barbara), Napa Valley remains the place with the most recognition. There are good reasons, too. While I could go into great detail about topography, *terroir*, and tannins—not to mention microclimates, meso-climates, and an apparent unlimited number of soil types—I don't want to intimidate you from going. Wine is meant to be enjoyed, so just remember there's a real sweet spot here for Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay grapes.

This special travel section contains the kind of information you need to finally put together that wine country getaway you've been just thinking about for too long. We found some wonderful wineries to visit, restaurants to indulge in, and places to lay your head after a long and enjoyable outing. It's *805 Living's* guide to the Napa Valley. (Corkscrew not included.)



Visitors to Meadowood are never more than a few steps from the beautiful woods that surround the resort. The rooms are as cozy inside as the grounds are spacious outside.

## Where to Stay

Even though the wineries are the main draw to Napa Valley, there are many properties in the area that set the bar very high for accommodations. Since you can't taste wines in your sleep, you might as well find a great place to lay your head until the sun comes up.

### Meadowood

Meadowood is one of the best properties for wine country excursions. This prestigious estate is part of the Relais & Châteaux group, which represents luxury hotels around the world. Meadowood is their Napa Valley gem, surrounding visitors with an exclusive and sophisticated style of pampering.

After pulling off the Silverado Trail, it's just a short winding drive past vineyards to the reception area. The road allows guests to see the pool and tennis courts as well as some other features on the property, but mostly the drive just seems to initiate the decompression phase. Housed in a low-slung wood and stone lodge with a roaring fireplace and large comfortable sofas that look especially inviting after a long drive, guests can spread out and enjoy fresh coffee and tea before heading to their rooms. The lodge is also the location for regular afternoon wine tastings.

With well-manicured areas blending into the forested surroundings, Meadowood's grounds are gorgeous all year long. The New England-style cottages are hidden away in small, secluded clusters around the hilly 250-acre property, where serenity and quiet seem to just pour forth from the woods. Rooms are spacious with high, exposed-beam ceilings while large windows and French doors open out onto the trees. Most have fireplaces and large balconies and all have understated country elegance.

Meadowood's full-service spa is an indulgent destination for relaxation. There's a team of personal trainers and yoga instructors, as well as spa specialists who can lead guests through such treatments as the Cabernet Crush, with warm Cabernet grapeseed polish used to exfoliate the skin, followed by a light massage and

application of grapeseed oil; or the Cascading Stone Massage, in which a pair of therapists uses warm basalt and cool marble stones in a relaxation therapy session.

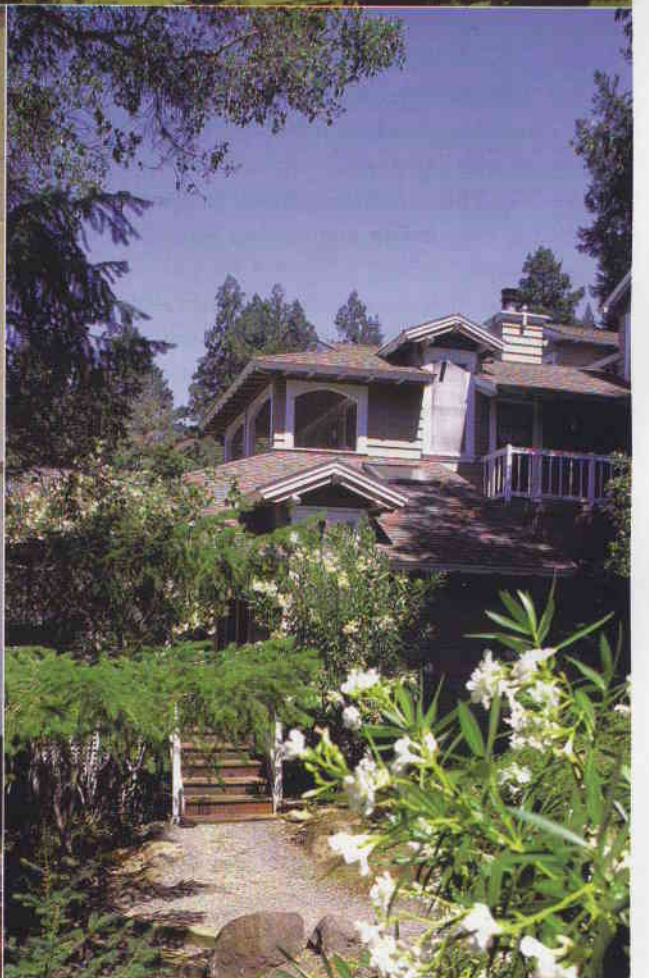
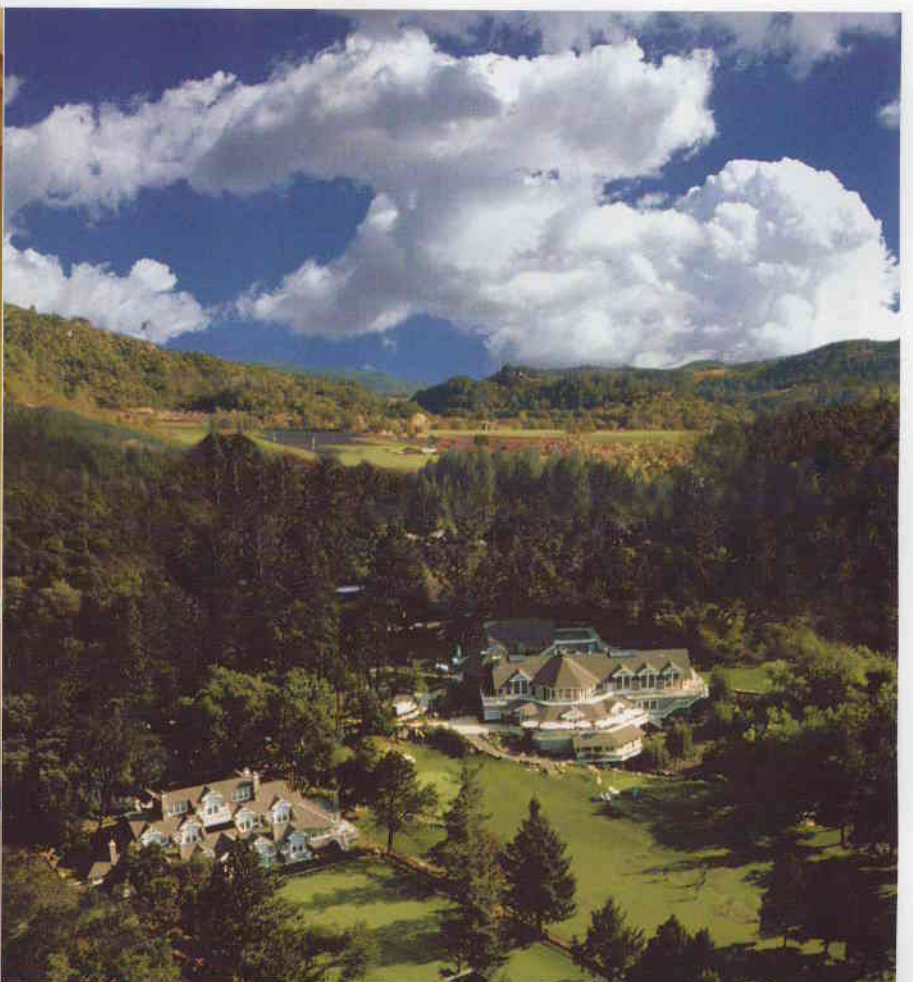
More active vacationers can hike in the surrounding forest, play a round of golf on Meadowood's nine-hole course, or take a run at the wickets on the croquet field.

Staying in step with Napa Valley's wonderful culinary reputation, there are two dining rooms on the property. While The Grill serves casual meals and a selection of entrées for room service, The Restaurant prepares more sophisticated dishes like tuna tartare, oysters on the half shell, and pan-seared prawns with citrus pearl couscous. When paired with a wine from Meadowood's very well-endowed cellar, such fare makes dressing up for dinner truly a special occasion.

If you're not careful, you might find yourself on the last day of your vacation having never left Meadowood. And yet, somehow, you will still have experienced some of the best of the Napa Valley. *Meadowood is located in St. Helena; call 800-458-8080 or visit [www.meadowood.com](http://www.meadowood.com).*

### Poetry Inn

One of the newest properties in the Napa Valley represents some of the most sublime accommodations to be found in any wine country. The Poetry Inn opened in early 2005 in the revered Stags Leap district. It boasts the only public accommodations in this area, and it is a perfect place to call home while undertaking your tasting adventures. There are only three rooms in this hillside inn, and all feature exquisite views of the vineyards below. Each is named for a famous poet—Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, and





Poet in residence (clockwise from left): Rooms at the Poetry Inn have private balconies; the Robert Frost room is eloquently appointed with some of the best views in Stags Leap; guests enjoy great breakfasts and afternoon wine in the front room.



Robert Louis Stevenson—and each is appointed with a king bed and other amenities that will excite your inner muse.

Rooms have fireplaces and flat-screen televisions as well as private terraces with lots of space to spread out your newly acquired bottled treasures. There are massive marble bathrooms that house enormous soaking tubs, indoor and outdoor showers, and full-size double vanity areas.

Perhaps most special is the service; the innkeeper will contact you before your arrival to ensure that the tiny personalized details, for example food concerns or fabric allergies, are already taken care of. In the mornings, enjoy a warming three-course breakfast, and in the afternoons, the front balcony is the place for al fresco wine and cheese. One last thing: Ask to poke around the wine room. You'll find bottles there that are only rumored to exist—and you can purchase them. *Poetry Inn is located in Napa; call 707-944-0646 or visit [www.poetryinn.com](http://www.poetryinn.com).*

### Bordeaux House

Bordeaux House is an inviting red brick inn with charming British and French influences. Conveniently located in the center of Yountville, guests have easy access to nearby wineries and restaurants. Yountville's central valley location also places visitors in a great position to easily explore any area of the surrounding wine country. There are six guest rooms in the main building featuring California king beds with down comforters, arched windows overlooking the gardens, and air conditioning. You can ask for one of the two rooms in the Water Tower for a bit more privacy. *Bordeaux House is located in Yountville; call 800-677-6370 or visit [www.bordeauxhouse.com](http://www.bordeauxhouse.com).*

### Blackbird Inn

If you love California's signature style of home, then book yourself into this century-old Craftsman. It is a rustic but elegant inn with eight rooms. (Many have gas fireplaces and spa tubs.) The Blackbird is in a great location for exploring the town of Napa and it's also close to the COPIA center for food, wine, and arts. *Blackbird Inn is located in Napa; call 888-567-9811 or visit [www.blackbirdinnnapa.com](http://www.blackbirdinnnapa.com).*

Affordable, convenient accommodations can also be found at **River Terrace Inn** (in Napa, 707-320-9000 or [www.riverterraceinn.com](http://www.riverterraceinn.com)); **EuroSpa & Inn** (in Calistoga, 707-942-6829 or [www.eurospa.com](http://www.eurospa.com)); and **Chien Blanc** (in Calistoga, 800-676-4205 or [www.chienblanc.com](http://www.chienblanc.com)).

