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Travel

CHECK IN/CHECK OUT

CALISTOGA, CALIF.
SOLAGE CALISTOGA

THE BASICS

Opened in mid-2007 by the operators of Auberge du Soleil, the long-reigning grande dame of Napa Valley resorts, Solage Calistoga is intended as a younger, more modern alternative. (The Verve Remixed soundtrack piped into the pool area should be enough of a hint.) It is a New Urbanist's boutique hotel, with simple cream-colored cottages that are linked by paths landscaped in tall grasses and all leading to the pool, restaurant, spa and bocce court. Each room comes with two cruiser bikes to ride around the grounds or to town or to nearby wineries — provided the tires aren't flat, as they were on ours (and those of the surrounding cottages) when we arrived for our four-night stay.

LOCATION

The so-called Saratoga of California, Calistoga is the uppermost end of the Napa Valley, settled by gold-rush millionaires who flocked to its hot springs and mud baths. The hotel is a quick bike ride to Chateau Montelena, which produced the chardonnay that famously upended the snootier French whites in a Paris taste test in 1976, and is around the corner from Clos Pegase and Sterling Vineyards, popular for their art and architecture as well as for their wines.

THE ROOMS

Each cottage, or "studio," has its own patio. Nestled into the hills, the hotel emphasizes eco — the rooms are decorated in zen greens and grays and cleaned with environment-friendly Method products. Each has an iPod docking station, and the coffee by Calistoga Roastery is almost worth the price of the room. We would have been less happy with the rooms on the perimeter, which back onto the road circling the resort, which in turn overlooks a nearby retirement community.

BATHROOMS

The pebbled floors in the showers massage your feet. The separate W.C. provides privacy, and a multitude of dimmer switches offer lighting as nonassaulting as those eco-cleaning products. The towels were wonderfully thick — alas, too thick for the towel

rack, which kept falling out of the wall.

ROOM SERVICE

You can order meals to your patio, but it's nicer (and more New Urban) to head to the restaurant, a casual bistro where you can sit outside near the pool and gaze up at the hills around you, or inside under vaulted ceilings.

AMENITIES

The hotel's signature mudslide (\$95) is less immersive and more spa-like than what you find at the mud baths with the neon signs downtown. The "mud-tender" mixes you a mud cocktail with a scented oil of your choice, then shows you to a roasting hot wet room, where you slather on the mud, then let it bake for about 15 minutes before showering. The true indulgence comes when, wrapped in a robe, you recline on a cushy version of a dentist's chair that vibrates to music you listen to on noise-canceling headphones. Don't miss a float in the thermal pool afterward.



PETER DaSILVA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Guests heading to the Solbar, the casual bistro at the Solage Calistoga resort.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The grounds of Solage Calistoga are far less lush than Auberge du Soleil's, and the experience less posh. But the posh prices make it hard to excuse the number of kinks a year after opening. The staff, though, is eager to please — the concierge called as soon as we made reservations to ask how he could assist, then made us reservations for dinner plus mudslide treatments for our first night. And poolside makes a restorative home base at the end of a long day swilling wine.

Solage Calistoga, 755 Silverado Trail, Calistoga, Calif.; (866) 942-7442; www.solagecalistoga.com. Prices start at \$450 a night.

KATE ZERNIKE