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# wine country *3 ways*

by Liz Woodson

AUTUMN MEANS HARVEST TIME IN NAPA AND SONOMA, CALIFORNIA, prime time for visitors wanting a peek into the production process at area wineries. But the appeal of Napa and Sonoma Valleys goes way beyond vineyard tours and tasting rooms. The region's tourist industry began with another natural lure: mineral-rich mud baths. Today, wine country chefs are on the leading edge of the slow-food movement — and this farm-fresh produce is extending to the spa scene as well. From grapes to mud to straight-from-the-farm scrubs, here are three ways to tap into the region's unique brand of wellness, with picks for any budget.

## the muds

### THE WHAT

Long before Napa Valley was known for wine it was known for something else: hot springs and volcanic muds. In fact, visitors have been coming to the northern town of Calistoga, California, since 1861 (when Indian Springs, the area's first mud-bathing spa, was established) to partake in the unique brand of wellness. Packed with minerals, the geothermal waters and paste, which is made by mixing volcanic ash with hot geyser water (and sometimes peat moss), are very detoxifying and known to soothe aches and pains, boost circulation and improve skin tone and clarity. Nowadays, Calistoga's main street is still chockablock with spas offering the traditional mud/mineral water bathing ritual. Typically, guests strip down and climb into giant vats of the mud mixture. The ash in the concoction cleanses and detoxifies the skin while the peat gives the mud a thicker quality so guests don't sink down into the mixture. The firmer consistency makes the body feel almost weightless (all the better to relax and help muscles release). After kicking back in the piping-hot mixture for upwards of 15 minutes, guests rinse off and move on to soak in a tub of geyser water to re-mineralize and rehydrate the skin.

*Mud is known to soothe aches, boost circulation and improve skin tone and clarity.*

### THE STEAL

Those looking to get a little dirty in Calistoga might have plenty of options, but **Indian Springs** is the original and still one of the best. The garden-filled, 16-acre resort property (comprised of a 24-room lodge, along with several guest cottages) is home to four capped geysers (if they were uncapped, they'd blow water 80 feet into the air all day long), which feed the resort's spa and naturally heated pool with water from 4,000 feet below. In other words, this is the real deal.

Don't expect much by way of looks — in fact, the whole mud-bathing operation goes down in a rather utilitarian building. But when you're luxuriating neck-deep in the beneficial black goo with cool cucumbers on your eyes, who cares? The bathing

procedure follows a simple routine. After soaking in the muds and waters, guests move to a eucalyptus-infused steam room for a spell and are finally wrapped in flannel blankets as they kick back on loungers overlooking a peaceful pond to let it all soak in. You can also add on a treatment such as a massage or facial.

The whole experience is incredibly soothing, and that's the vibe Indian Springs has going throughout. The property might label itself between two and three stars, with rates less than \$200 per night (mere pennies by Napa standards), but guest rooms kitted out with two-poster beds, Frette linens and flat-screen TVs are more deluxe than dumpy. *60 minutes, \$85; rooms from \$185, indianspringscalistoga.com*

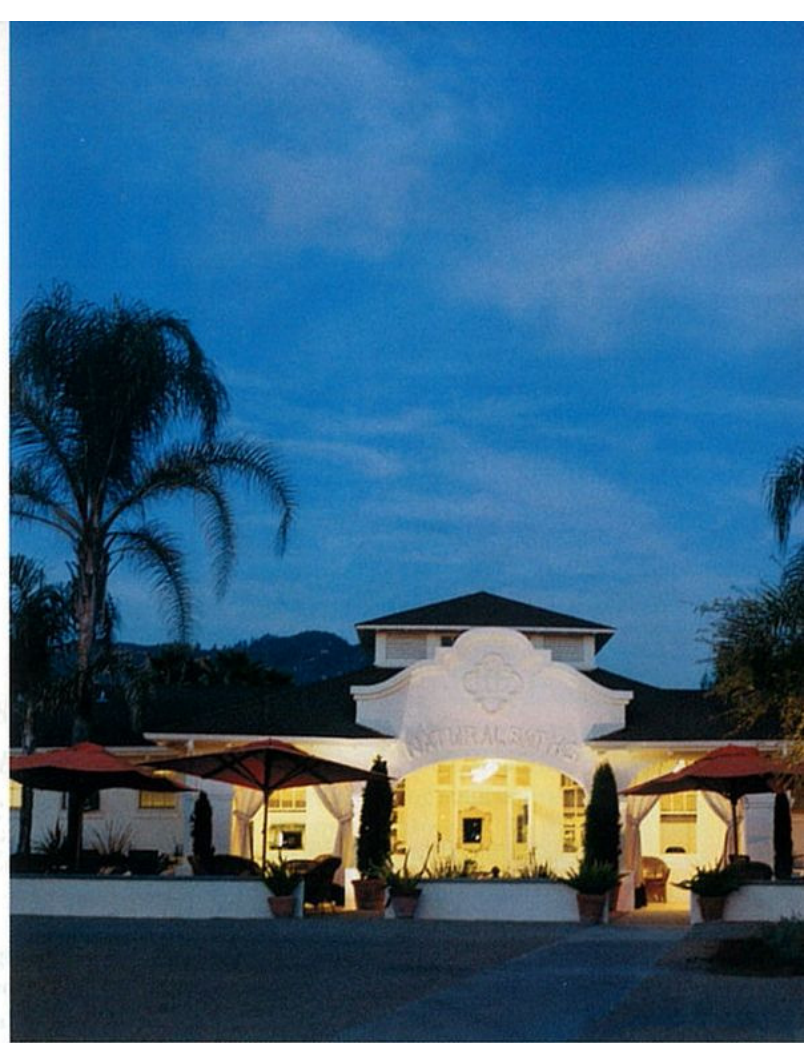
### THE SPLURGE

With all the fine wines and fine eats, Napa can sometimes take itself a little too seriously. But when you're dealing with mud, there's only so much pretention that can be involved. Enter **Solage Calistoga**, a resort known for its luxe pedigree (it's the sister to such venerable area properties as Auberge du Soleil and Calistoga Ranch) but unbuttoned style. (Think of it as an adult summer camp, complete with rooms housed in clapboard cottages that come complete with bikes parked out front.) Other perks include a Michelin-starred restaurant, 130-foot adults-only pool and on-site yoga studio.

As for hitting the mud, the resort came up with the perfect hybrid — a treatment that gives the traditional mud ritual a decided upgrade while still retaining all the kitschy fun. At the bathhouse at Spa Solage, the 90-minute Mudslide kicks off with a visit to the mud bar where a "mud-tender" (yes, really) custom blends a mud-clay mix with essential oils targeted to specific issues (stress relief, muscle soothing, etc.). Then it's on to a heated room where you apply your mixture and lay out on a stone slab to let it dry. After a mineral water bath, you head to a lounge where you're wrapped in a down blanket before laying back in a zero-gravity chair that vibrates in tune to music. It feels just as good as it sounds. *90 minutes, \$148; rooms from \$425, solagecalistoga.com*

### THE TAKE-HOME

Admittedly, mud bathing — especially in its traditional form — isn't the most private of experiences. If soaking in a goo-filled tub with only a curtain separating you from the next guest isn't your idea of relaxing, you can still get some of the skin-refining benefits without affronting your modesty. Our advice: Take home a jar of **Indian Springs Facial Mud** — made of 100 percent pure volcanic ash, it's the same base used during treatments on the property. While you won't have the benefits of the geothermal water at home, mixing the powder with the everyday stuff and letting it dry before rinsing will still give your skin a powerful complexion-perfecting punch. *5 oz., \$10, indianspringscalistoga.com*



Top left: DIY mud treatment at Solage Calistoga, Indian Springs;  
Bottom left: main swimming pool at Solage