



PHOTOS BY RICHARD ATKINS / FOR THE SUN-NEWS

NAPA VALLEY — the scenery is as intoxicating as the region's most famous export.

Cruising California's *town and wine country*

By Richard Atkins
FOR THE SUN-NEWS

It's easy to see how so many get caught up in the sentiment of "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." One travel official noted, "The song is a musical postcard from 'Everyone's favorite city.'" In 1962, two unknown composers brought the song to Tony Bennett's musical director, who was searching for new material for Bennett to sing at the famed Fairmont Hotel on Nob Hill. The rest, as they say is history.

Our first stop, needless to say, was a two-night stay at the glorious Fairmont. Because of the hotel's sheer size, you might think you were entering a government building in Washington. However, the minute you encounter that wondrous lobby, a feeling of grand nostalgia hits you front and center from this one-of-a-kind property. In scope and style, you'd swear you were on the Titanic, with stately, turn-of-the-century styling, (the architect, Julia Morgan went on to design Hearst Castle) — marble floors and columns, sparkling chandeliers, vintage furniture and an intricate array of picture frame moldings that adorn the hotel's ceiling. Everyone who was anyone, from presidents to movie stars has graced these hallowed halls of grandeur creating an experience second to none.

Our room was luxuriously appointed, high above the city with a spectacular view of the bay, Alcatraz and familiar Coit Tower. Don't forget to dine at the exciting Tonga Room with its Polynesian flair or attend afternoon tea at the Laurel Court. Nearby attractions include the Cable Car Museum and Grace Cathedral, the second largest Episcopal Church in the United States with two enchanting labyrinths. Cable car lines run in front of the hotel, so it's easy to hop aboard for your next destination. From concierge to bellman, the Fairmont's service is impeccable.

Brunch, Van Gogh, sushi and chocolate

The Universal Café is a perfect spot for brunch. It's obvious by the crowds, this is a local find inhabited by residents and tourists who happily stumble upon it. All



THE PHENOMENAL lobby of the San Francisco Fairmont Hotel.

Slideshow online

Atkins' slideshow of California's town and wine country by reading this story online at lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-sunlife. Or, find the photographic highlights at www.flickr.com/photos/56192354@N08/show.

the food is organic and the chef thinks out of the box with such offerings as pumpkin donuts in vanilla crème anglaise and sweet potato pancakes. The ambience is fiercely social as there are rows of deuces where you can't help but know your neighbors, but that's OK. Enjoy!

Post-Impressionist masters Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne and others are now appearing at the de Young Museum's exhibit on loan from the Musée d'Orsay's collection in Paris. A must-see exhibit as these pieces are rarely seen in the states.

I was never a fan of sushi. However, after dining at Ozumo, I have turned Sushi aficionado! The restaurant is quite large and usually packed which is always a good sign. We were lucky to be seated at the window overlooking the waterfront. The establishment is bustling and chic, yet warm and comforting. Our server was American but told us he spent years working in Japan and was keenly versed in all areas of sushi and sake. He suggested we indulge in a sake pair-

ing with about seven courses and dessert. That's a lot of sake, but an incredible experience, especially if your palate is not used to the new sensations. My wife, who is a sushi lover, expressed that it was the best sushi she had ever tasted. A must when in San Fran.

Tours of Alcatraz, a strong live theater scene, Union Square shopping and a jaunt to Ghirardelli Square for some chocolate will satisfy your other needs while visiting the city by the bay and don't forget to say, "Go Giants!"

► Fairmont San Francisco, fairmont.com/sanfrancisco, (866) 540-4491, sanfrancisco@fairmont.com, 950 Mason St., starting at \$191 per night

► Universal Café, universalcafe.net, (415) 821-4608, universalcafe@sbcglobal.net, 2814 19th St.

► Ozumo Sushi Restaurant, ozumo.com, (415) 882-1333, 161 Steuart St.

► Urban Tavern for Lunch, urbantavernsf.com, (415) 923-4400, 333 O'Farrell St.

► de Young Museum, Post Impressionist exhibit, deyoung.famsf.org, (415) 750-3600, 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Drive, through Jan. 18th

Wine country

For the second leg of our trip, we arrived at the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn and Spa.

Walls surround the perimeter of the hotel making the property feel like a private compound, California Mission style. There are many pleasing structures, each with its own unique charm.

Our suite was on the third floor of an ivy-covered building with a balcony overlooking a serene courtyard and fountain. The interior was bedecked with an intricately carved, four-poster bed with loveseat and chair facing a cozy fireplace. Don't forget an inviting jacuzzi center stage and a master bath ornamented with talavera tiles to further the Spanish intent.

The Spa at the Mission Inn is formidable at 40,000 square feet, complete with thermal mineral springs discovered by American Indians a century ago. Taken from the ancient Greeks, the spa recommends a bathing ritual, which entails many soothing steps, including a warm mineral soak and eucalyptus steam room aimed at total relaxation before your treatment begins. My wife experienced the cellular rejuvenation facial which smoothes and lifts the skin. The spa offers total pampering across the board and is a one-stop luxury spa facility.

► Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn, www.fairmont.com/sonoma, (866) 540-4499, smi.reservations@fairmont.com, 100 Boyes Blvd., Sonoma, from \$221 per night, activities from horseback riding to hot air ballooning.

Best Sonoma fine dining — Santé

Tucked discreetly off the tranquil lobby of the Sonoma Fairmont is Santé, Chef Andrew Cain's Michelin-rated fine-dining show place. A perfect meshing of elegance and taste, starting with three kinds of bread that dazzle the taste buds, dreamy cream of mushroom soup, amuse-bouche of cauliflower custard topped with caviar to a duo of beef sirloin and melt in your mouth braised pavé à la bourguignon. End with a sinful peanut butter ganache and say "WOW!" The produce is local, the service is flawless and the experience, superb.

If you venture away from the hotel, don't venture too far to the Glen Ellen Inn Oyster Grill and Martini Bar. Situated in a residential area, the feel is warm and inviting like you've invaded someone's home. The comfort food takes with French onion soup, raw oysters, Alaskan halibut and popcorn ice cream.

► Glen Ellen Inn Oyster Grill and Martini Bar, glenelleninn.com, (707) 996-6409, 13670 Arnold Drive, Sonoma

Bodega/Bodega Bay — Hitchcock's 'The Birds'

Seventy minutes from Sonoma is Bodega Bay where we set out to see where "The Birds" was filmed. The ride was scenically pastoral as we passed through the small town of Bodega and caught a glimpse of an old Victorian house down a side street. The structure was so captivating, we turned back to see what it was. Bingo! It was the Potter Schoolhouse used in "The Birds." Hitchcock filmed scenes in the town of Bodega a few miles from Bodega Bay as he could not get permission to stop traffic on Highway 1. Continue on to Bodega Bay to that famous Tides restaurant, gift shop.

► Potter Schoolhouse, Bodega Highway, Bodega California, Bodega Bay, bodegabay.com, (707) 875-3866

Best fine dining — Napa

The Meritage Resort and Spa is a great place to stay while ex-

ploring Napa. Our room overlooked the resorts' vineyard where they produce their Trinitas brand. The Spa Terra and Wine Cave is built underground, below the vineyard. Connected to the Wine Cave, Spa Terra continues the pleasing wine cellar-like interior design. We had an incredible couples massage in a wonderfully atmospheric room and the spa gift shop and adjacent tasting room complete the experience. Don't forget to dine at the hotel's restaurant Siena, for breakfast, lunch or dinner.

► The Meritage Resort & Spa, themeritageresort.com, (866) 370-NAPA, info@themeritageresort.com, 875 Bordeaux Way, Napa

Best fine dining — Celadon

The main dining area of the restaurant exists within a cavernous warehouse made at once cozy and intimate with warm lighting and a blazing hearth. When in wine country, do indulge as Celadon has a stellar selection. Graduate to sweet calamari with ginger, a sumptuous Caesar salad, onto an onion-crusted chicken breast or Moroccan-braised lamb shank and the palate is awash with flavor finishing off with blood orange sorbet. Bravo to chef/owner Greg Cole. Michelin-rated.

► Celadon Restaurant, celadonnapa.com, (707) 254-9690, contact@celadonnapa.com, 500 Main St., Napa

Wine tours

Don't miss the Jordan Winery. The drive is well worth the trip to see the Jordan Estate. Enjoy tours and wine tastings in their private library and experience their to-die-for 1982 Rivière Russe White Dessert Wine. Other wineries to visit include Robert Mondavi, V. Sattui, Chateau St. Jean and Ledson.

► Jordan Winery, jordanwinery.com, (800) 654-1213, info@jordanwinery.com, 1474 Alexander Valley Road, Healdsburg, California

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WHAT'S THE DEAL?

By Carol Sottili

THE WASHINGTON POST

This week's travel bargains from around the globe:

► **The Rosewood San Miguel de Allende**, a new resort in Mexico's Colonial Highlands 180 miles north of Mexico City, is offering an introductory package for stays Feb. 1 through April 20.

The deal starts at \$378 a night (with \$83 taxes and service fees) and includes lodging, breakfast for two at the 1826 Restaurant and valet parking. Spa services are also

discounted by 25 percent. After the promotion, the room alone will start at \$448 per night. Info: (888) 767-3966, rosewoodsanmiguel.com.

► **Star Clippers** has free cabin upgrades on its holiday sailings. Deal applies to the Dec. 19 Costa Rica cruise on the Star Flyer and to four Caribbean sailings aboard the Star Clipper and the Royal Clipper, departing Dec. 18 and 26. Rates vary.

For example, on the Dec. 18 Royal Clipper sailing, which travels round trip from Bar-

bados, book a category five cabin for \$2,485 per person double and receive a category four cabin, which normally starts at \$2,735. Port charges are \$245 per person extra. Info: (800) 442-0551, starclippers.com.

► **Blount Small Ship Adventures** is offering a free pre-cruise night on four itineraries in 2011. Deal includes airport transfers to the ship, onboard lodging, dinner and breakfast. Value varies by cruise. For example, the nine-night Caribbean Spectacular:

St. Martin & Antigua itinerary, which sails round trip from St. Maarten, starts at \$3,089 per person double (plus \$250 port charges). Value of free night with meals and transfer equals about \$400 per couple.

Cruise must be paid in full by Dec. 31. Info: (800) 556-7450, blountsmallshipadventures.com.

► **The all-business-class airline OpenSkies** has sale fares for travel through Feb. 28. Round-trip fare from Washington's Dulles interna-

tional airport to Paris Orly is \$1,520, including \$120 taxes, a savings of \$280. Book at flyopenskies.com by Dec. 16, or pay \$50 more by calling (866) 581-3596.

► **China Spree** is offering a six-night trip to China starting at \$1,266 per person double. Package includes international flights from Washington, flight from Beijing to Shanghai, four nights at the Beijing Huabin International Hotel, two nights at the Shanghai Crowne Plaza, breakfasts, hotel transfers

and taxes.

For cheapest price, depart in January or February, and pay by check 50 days before departure.

Priced separately, flights in February cost \$1,273 and hotels about \$688, for a total savings of more than \$350 per person. Info: (866) 652-5656, chinaspree.com.

Prices were verified Nov. 24, but deals sell out and availability is not guaranteed. Restrictions such as blackout dates and advance purchase may apply.