

I've Traveled California for 20 Years and This Is Napa Valley's Most Charming Town—With Hot Springs and 50 Wineries

April 12, 2026 - By Cu Fleshman

In the small town of Calistoga, on the north end of California's bustling Napa Valley, rocky volcanic peaks hem in a cute town that's quietly built up a reputation as one of the most charming towns in the area.

Legend has it that Calistoga got its name from a drunken boast made by Mormon pioneer and businessman Sam Brannan. In the mid-19th century, he reportedly stated that he would make the area "the Saratoga of California"—except, in Brannan's inebriated state, it came out "the Calistoga of Sarafornia." Thus, Calistoga was born, and the town has maintained its down-to-earth atmosphere and warmth ever since.

"We're in the Napa Valley, but we're a place for any budget," says Eric Reichert, president and CEO of the Calistoga Chamber of Commerce. "Anyone who wants to come up here can feel relaxed and feel like they're getting the luxury treatment, no matter what their budget is. We include wine in everything we do, but it's definitely the well-being and wellness aspect that brings people here." Though only about two-and-a-half square miles, Calistoga offers tons of activities in a relatively small area—including a cute downtown, wine tastings, and the "Old Faithful" of California. Here's what you need to know before planning a trip to Calistoga, California.



Best Things to Do

Sample local wines.

Even if you don't think you're into wine, you can't visit Calistoga without at least one tasting. The Calistoga American Viticultural Area has more than 50 wineries to choose from, some of which are quite famous among oenophiles and others of which offer a more intimate experience. Downtown Picayune Cellars & Mercantile pours up small-batch wines, Chateau Montelena is set in an impressive stone chateau and is world-famous for its 1976 award-winning Chardonnay (watch the 2008 movie "Bottle Shock" before or after your visit), and the women-owned [Larkmead](#) provides refined, sit-down tastings on a sprawling estate.