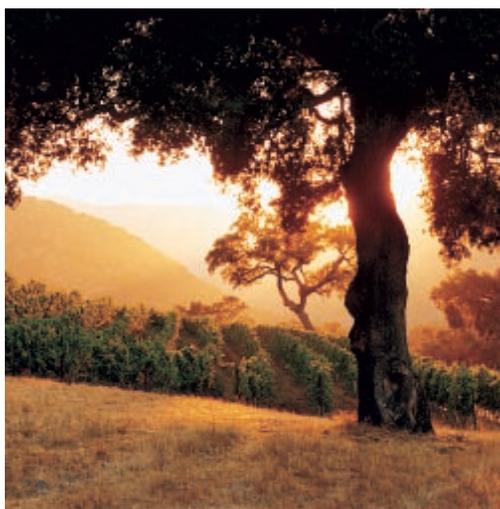
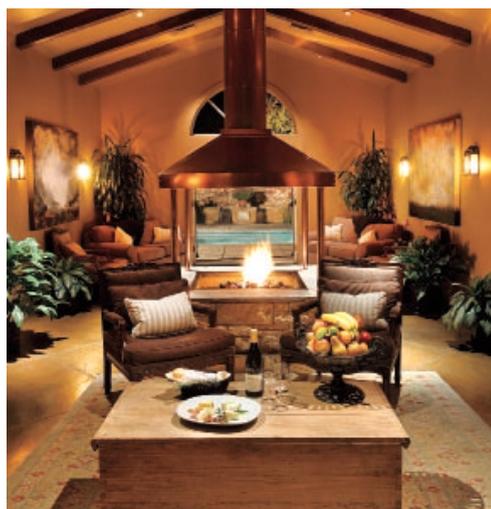


Best of Both Worlds

Enjoy beach strolls, wine walks, special dinners, and a relaxing spa in—and around—Carmel. **BY SUSAN SAFIPOUR**



OUR TRAVEL DILEMMA: We wanted to spend our anniversary at Bernardus Lodge, one of our favorite boutique hotels in NorCal. We had basked in its over-the-top luxury right after it opened 13 years ago, shortly after our wedding, and we thought a return would be a lovely way to celebrate. ¶ But I also wanted to spend a night in Carmel so we could check out the shops, do the wine stroll, and most importantly, hit the beach for some romantic walks along the shore. ¶ The thing is, once I got that idea in my head, there was no getting it out. And I know myself well enough—and my husband does, too—to realize that if we didn't stay in Carmel, well, one of us was going to be unhappy.

So we decided to gun it down to Carmel early Friday morning, spend the day and night there, then head to Bernardus on Saturday. It would be a lot of packing and unpacking, but my husband agreed, using his best Ricky Ricardo impression. “Yes, Lucy.”

Unfortunately, the weather was less cooperative. Friday morning, a major rainstorm hit the coast. It was the type that blows down fences and washes out yards. My husband didn't say a word as we turned south onto 680, our windshield wipers set on max. I started praying for a break in the storm because pelting rain was not part of my romantic beach walk plan. Not only that: I forgot to pack an umbrella.

It was drizzling when we pulled up in front of Cypress Inn, a boutique hotel co-owned by Doris Day that welcomes dogs, making it an especially charming spot, full of poodles, basset hounds, and Chihuahuas. Our suite was compact but well appointed, with a living room opening onto a private patio. The best part, however, was the fireplace and a bottle of complimentary sherry—both of which would come in handy after that walk in the rain.

But here's the thing. Even though it was raining, and we got soaked, the beach was breathtaking beyond belief, with huge, majestic clouds, moody gray light, and crashing waves. We kicked off our shoes and strolled from one end of the beach to the other. Later, after a dainty lunch of crustless sandwiches at Cypress' tea service, we headed out on the wine stroll, popping into Carmel's chic boutiques in between tasting rooms.

I'm glad we only sipped a little on our wine stroll because the inn's “yappy hour” is a must. Served there are classic cocktails from the pre-Prohibition Era to the 1970s, researched by the head barman, Drago Cvetkovic. The cocktails, along with flat screens playing Doris Day movies, make you think Rock Hudson and Tony Randall will belly up to the bar any minute.

Luckily, the rain petered out, and we enjoyed a light dinner outside at Vesuvio, a nearby Italian restaurant, where we sat on cozy couches by the fire pits at the rooftop lounge. It was a cloudy night, so we didn't get to wish upon any stars, but the experience felt hip and fun, and made for a great date night.

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getaway



The very best thing about Carmel is that the sidewalks roll up early. There's no staying out all night at a club—just head back to your hotel, crank up the fireplace, and enjoy the peace and quiet of this seaside resort.

Saturday morning, after waking up to delicious house-made popovers served at 8 a.m., we raced back to the beach under dazzlingly bright blue skies, with gulls swooping along the shore and a coastful of dogs fetching sticks and balls and barking hellos to everyone. We enjoyed every minute of our day in Carmel, and yet, we were so excited to be heading back to Bernardus after all these years.

We were especially pleased to discover that everything we loved about Bernardus is just as we remembered. We felt as if we were well-taken-care-of guests at a great country estate. Our room was big and comfy, with a large fireplace, a huge, deep bathtub, and cozy throw blankets.

When we arrived, the staff greeted us with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc. At first it seemed a bit early in the afternoon for wine, but what was I thinking? This was the beginning of our wine-country escape, and it was a perfect start to an afternoon of bocce and croquet on the lawn.

Bernardus even has the same chef as at our last visit, Cal Stamenov, who prepared a special meal for us that evening in Marinus, the formal dining room. He wanted us to try several courses, which sounded divine but a bit heavy. So he cooked small bites—numerous courses

of surprising creations such as Nantucket Bay scallops in a green apple broth, all flawlessly prepared and paired with wines from the Bernardus vineyard by sommelier and wine director Mark Buzan.

As much as we hated to leave Bernardus for even a minute, we did venture to Refuge, a year-old hydro-thermal therapy day spa. Refuge claims to clean the toxins out of your body with steam or sauna sessions followed by cold plunges. I don't know whether it really does, but we loved doing the circuit over and over, plus floating in the hot tubs, chilling in the gravity-free chairs, and savoring the silence. At \$39 per person, Refuge is worth a day trip.

Make it a weekend you'll never forget—with beach and Bernardus and wine strolls. You, too, will return home refreshed and reconnected, thinking you've been gone for weeks. Even my husband would recommend it. ■



The Details

WHERE TO STAY

Bernardus Lodge, 415 W. Carmel Valley Rd., Carmel Valley, (888) 648-9463, bernardus.com.
Cypress Inn, Lincoln and Seventh St., Carmel, (800) 443-7443, cypress-inn.com.

WHERE TO PLAY

Refuge Day Spa, 27300 Rancho San Carlos Rd., Carmel, (831) 620-7360, refuge.com.

WHERE TO EAT

Marinus, at Bernardus Lodge, 415 W. Carmel Valley Rd., Carmel Valley, (831) 658-3595, bernardus.com.
Vesuvio, Corner of Sixth and Junipero, Carmel, (831) 625-1766, vesuviocarmel.com.

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