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ABOUT



This Is Calistoga Upvalley Mud

SHARE: Man’s quest for health and wellness is as old as, well, man himself. Our ancestors knew the healing power of soaking in thermal waters infused with minerals such as Sulphur, magnesium, and calcium. These waters arise from deep within the earth, usually where there has been volcanic activity. Wherever you find mineral waters and volcanic ash, you’ll find spas and wellness centers.



One of the most famous places for indulging in thermal water is Calistoga, California, a small town in northern Napa Valley known primarily for two things: wine and spa treatments.

The town was developed by Sam Brannan, a businessman from the East Coast who aimed to make Calistoga the Saratoga Springs of the West. In 1860, he opened up the first resort spas in Calistoga. He then campaigned to have the railroad come to Napa — and his dream was realized. Soon, wealthy San Franciscans came to Calistoga to enjoy a weekend in the healing waters.

Today’s Calistoga visitors continue to enjoy the thermal waters and volcanic mud treatments. There is an amazing variety of ways that the mud and mineral waters can be combined to create unique treatments to heal the body, mind, and spirit.

The most obvious way to enjoy the healing waters of Calistoga is to either soak in a tub or swim in one of the outdoor pools (one of *my* top things to do in Calistoga).

A variation on a simple soak is an oxygen–infused thermal water whirlpool treatment. I can’t say I noticed any additional benefits from the oxygen, but the whirlpool was relaxing and my skin felt great afterwards. For centuries in Europe, people have sought out the geothermal springs to heal skin diseases like psoriasis and eczema.

If You Want To Get Dirty...

Try the full immersion into a tub of thick volcanic mud mined from the area. The mud is mixed with peat to give it texture. It’s a bit of a challenge to physically get into the tub; you have to sort of wiggle your way down in temperatures that reach 110 degrees! I think the best way to approach this experience is to pretend you’re a kid splashing around in mud puddles...

The minerals from the volcanic ash mixed with the thermal water are said to relieve arthritic conditions, joint pain and skin problems. I don’t know if the mud really makes a difference, but it can’t hurt. I think like most things that are beneficial for humans, repetition and consistency are probably essential to its success. It is really frustrating, that consistency thing.

At another posh Calistoga spa, mud is mixed with essential oils, and with the aid of a spa attendant, you slather the mixture all over your body. You then relax on a heated stone platform in a room much like a dry sauna. The heat helps the body absorb the mud’s minerals and the essential oils. This treatment, called a mudslide, takes about an hour from beginning to end. You bake in the mud and essential oil mixture for 20 minutes, then shower off. This is followed by a 20–minute soak in a separate, private room. Bonus: you can choose to enjoy a glass of local sparkling wine while you soak. I chose yes! Finally, you relax in a zero gravity chair wrapped in warm blankets.

Ahhhh....

Following your treatment, swimming in one of the many outdoor pools is a treat without an extra charge. Most hotels have outdoor thermal pools or Jacuzzis. If spa treatments aren’t your thing, you can still enjoy the thermal waters that have made Calistoga famous.

– Penny Sadler contributed this blog post. Penny writes about destinations, wine, food, travel style and adventures. She’s a WSET–certified wino and celebrity stylist who often finds herself dreaming of moving to Napa Valley. Follow her on twitter@PennySadler and her blog: [Adventures of a Carry-on](#).

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