

10 SPECTACULAR HIKES AND DRIVES

Sunset

LIVING IN THE WEST

TASTY FALL SOUPS & STEWS

RECIPES TO WARM UP
YOUR WEEKNIGHTS

BEST OF
THE WEST

25 PERFECT
WEEKEND
HOTELS

P. 64

Pumpkin soup
with pumpkin
seed-mint pesto
P. 89

Bargain shopping
for great new plants

PARTY TIME: autumn cider,
gourmet caramel apples

Fresh-from-the-garden cocktails

OCTOBER 2011

\$4.99US \$6.50CAN



Best Hotels in the West

Check in and you're instantly on vacation. Relaxed. Pampered.

Napa Valley's
Solage Calistoga

RACHEL WEILL



NAPA VALLEY

Solage Calistoga

Wine country is filled with gorgeous hotels that bristle with Michelin stars, but somehow, Solage manages to have “the best pool in Napa, period,” says our reviewer, a window-walled gym that channels “Martha Stewart’s private gym in Bedford,” and the requisite Michelin star—without costing \$700 a night. Comfy, barn-chic studios with a spiffy pair of loaner bikes and shaded patios create a sanctuary feel, and the spa is one of the best. \$350/\$585; 95 rooms & suites; solagecalistoga.com SCORE: 85



BEVERLY HILLS

Crescent Beverly Hills

Under \$250

The stylin’ rooms at the Crescent are admittedly a tight squeeze, but what vaulted this hotel onto our list is its value score, with under-\$250 rooms in one of the toniest parts of L.A., plus the glamorous art deco design. At night, a high-energy bar and palm terrace make it a great place to meet up with friends. Extra points for fully loaded iPods by the bed, plush HD Design/Eco Friendly toiletries, and room service. \$159/\$219; 36 rooms & suites; crescentbh.com

SCORE: 76



SONOMA

Farmhouse Inn

In wine country, anyone can put some high thread-count sheets on the bed and charge a bundle. What rockets the inn to the top of Sonoma’s hotels is the truly thoughtful service and attention to food and wine. We’re talking tips from Sonoma’s only master sommelier and a Michelin-starred menu filled with ingredients grown on the innkeepers’ farm, not to mention “the best huevos rancheros of your life.” And there’s no end to the special touches: self-serve counters for bath salts, s’mores, and Italian sodas; spa ingredients from the garden; even private steam rooms. \$350/\$390; 18 rooms & suites; farmhouseinn.com

SCORE: 83



SANTA BARBARA

Inn of the Spanish Garden

This inn won us over with its “mini Chateau Marmont” feeling: Like L.A.’s famous property, “it’s easy to imagine the publicity-shy seeking privacy under a lemon tree in the courtyard.” Spacious, Spanish mission-style rooms with Juliet balconies and graceful ironwork are the reason to book here, and even without a full kitchen, the inn serves a lovely breakfast, room service, and local wines in the evening. \$295/\$349; 23 rooms & suites; spanishgardeninn.com

SCORE: 87.5



RANCHO SANTA FE, CA

Rancho Valencia

There’s not a thread out of place at this hotel near San Diego. Let us gush: Amazing iced tea at check-in. A suite so large you could move in, like, for life. A great pool and gym. And extraordinary service, as evidenced by the “melt-your-heart turndown” (robes, water, a stuffed animal). For tennis fans, there are 18 courts and pros on staff. \$490/\$578; 49 suites; ranchovalencia.com

SCORE: 86



Wow amenity

BLOOD-ORANGE ICED TEA

Our sleuth called it “the best iced tea of my life.”



Crescent Beverly Hills



Strategies for getting even better rates

GET SOCIAL The biggest buzz in travel booking are sites like LivingSocial.com and Groupon.com, which sell discount vouchers. LivingSocial comes out with new deals on Wednesdays—touting discounts of up to 50 percent that are bookable up to a year ahead. For Groupon Getaways, Groupon teamed with Expedia to reach 135,000 hotels. Both require purchase up-front.

BE FLEXIBLE Many hotels are more transparent about rates now, posting price calendars that allow you to time your stay based on when you can get

the best deal. Plus, hotels often tweet bargains to savvy followers days before deals go public.

SIGN UP FOR FLASH SALES On private sale sites like SniqueAway.com, TabletHotels.com, and Jetsetter.com, luxe hotel packages run at 20 to 60 percent discounts, and sales generally last a week. But before you pull the trigger, call the hotel directly to ask for a better deal. Flash sites (and deal sites in general) rarely offer the cancellation flexibility that a hotel does, and most require full payment up-front.