

## Take A Weekend Break At The Napa River Inn

One of the great things about living in the Bay Area is its proximity to Sonoma and the Napa Valley. It's a quick drive north and, in just over an hour, the sky-high buildings of the city give way to low-lying vineyards surrounded by rolling hills.

While the wineries of the region garner the largest share of attention, the area has a great deal to offer beyond wine. Recently I was invited to be a complimentary guest at one of the area's landmark hotels, so I took a quick trip to the town of Napa for some overnight R & R.

My destination was the charming Napa River Inn — the only Michelin three-star downtown hotel in the city of Napa. Located in the Historic Napa Mill, the building, which was built in 1884, is a National Registered Landmark and has been awarded one of the Dozen Distinctive Destinations by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



The Inn itself is a cozy place featuring 66 guestrooms designed to reflect 1800s elegance. My room was well appointed in soft burgundy reds, minty greens and butterscotch yellows. It had a terrific view of the river, a gas fireplace and was a half a block walk to the main shops and restaurants of Napa. It made for a perfect weekend getaway spot with all the amenities necessary including:

- Complimentary breakfast delivery from Sweetie Pies bakery
- Evening wine tasting featuring local wineries
- Wireless High-Speed Internet access in all guest rooms

A longtime foodie, I'm not easy to wow when it comes to restaurants — especially in the Napa valley, where the quality of meals is some of the highest in the country. But Celadon, the Napa River Inn's restaurant, is reason alone to visit the Napa River Inn.

Adjacent to the Inn, the restaurant serves “Global Comfort Food” and specializes in Mediterranean, Asian and American Cuisine. Open daily from 11:30 a.m., the restaurant serves lunch and dinner. My only regret is that my stomach was not big enough to try everything on the menu. However, I did manage to plow my way through a few inspired dishes. Here are some of the highlights:

Endive and pear salad with blue cheese, candied walnuts and honey mustard vinaigrette. \$12. Although this could fall under the category of a typical “California cuisine” salad — somehow this one didn’t. The quality of the blue cheese and the intensity of the dressing took it up a notch.

Sweet coconut fried prawns with mango, cucumber and greens, sesame-citrus vinaigrette. \$14. I’ve had this dish in other places, and it can often be heavy handed — not at Celadon. The prawns were light and the sharpness of the vinaigrette was a perfect balance to the sweetness of the mango.

Moroccan-inspired braised lamb shank with golden raisin and toasted almond couscous. \$23. I’m such a nut about lamb that anytime I see it on a menu, I almost always have to order it, so I’ve eaten a lot of it. This dish did not disappoint and managed to be delicate and substantial at the same time.

No trip to the Napa River Inn would be complete without an appointment to the La Pelle Skin Spa & Boutique, just down the street from the Inn. This establishment is just what you would want (and expect) in quaint Napa. The establishment is small and unpretentious — and the service is personal and top-drawer.

Offering a full menu of services, from their signature facial (\$105) to hot stone massage (\$160), the spa prides itself on providing a quiet place where guests of the Inn and those visiting the area can get away from the world — even if only for an hour or two.

With summer just around the corner, and the Napa River Inn just a short drive away, what better time to take a break and spend a night, or two, sipping wine, taking in a spa and savoring great cuisine?