

# prevue

Destination experiences for meetings + incentives

## Culinary Combos

Creating multifaceted group experiences



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# California



## New cuisine twists and trends from West Coast chefs create enriching experiences for meetings and incentives

[ON LOCATION] LAUREL HERMAN / GRISEL DIAZ-ORS

California's wine country, like wine, gets better and better with time. Earlier this year, we checked out five, four-star properties from California's Central Coast regions of Santa Barbara and Carmel to Northern California's Napa and Sonoma. Each destination exploded with wonderful wine choices to match their stellar reputations along with hyperlocal foodie experiences that groups have come to expect from California—one of the trendsetters of culinary experiences.

### BACARA RESORT & SPA

The spectacular and private location on 78 acres and a 2-mile span of coastline make this Santa Barbara resort a top pick for corporate retreats, conferences and incentive groups. Majestically placed on a cliff looking over the Pacific Ocean with beach access, Bacara offers 70,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space.

All the guest villas and suites, which range from 450 to 3700 sf, have terraces, and many have water views. A renovation of all guest villas and suites was just completed in June, including poster platform beds, pillow top mattresses and bedding by Frette, plus technology upgrades like 48 led TVs and in-room iPad tablets for guest services.

Another plus for this property is the Foley Food and Wine Society, which offers wine tastings from the California Foley-Johnson group of wines. One of our favorites was the 2010 Cherryblock from Sebastiani.

Off-site, the resort offers "Bacara Crush" teambuilding during harvest season. It's a hands-on harvest experience where groups work alongside Santa Barbara County winemakers and producers—walking the vines, sorting grapes and assisting with punch downs. Bacara Crush is very interactive and educational, offering no shortage of wine tastings! At the end of the day, groups get a signed certificate from the winemaker that lists the wine they helped to produce. A modified version of this experience is available year-round.

When it comes to food at Bacara, Executive Chef Vincent Lesage says not to miss their bistro bolognese, a mix of three types of meats cooked together with tomato sauce and finished with a dash of cream. Lesage also recommends the Foley Pinot Noir or the Trinitas Chardonnay.

### CARMEL VALLEY RANCH

This relaxed yet chic corporate retreat is set to unveil 30 new one-bedroom suites this July. At 750 sf each, the 181 suites, accented by natural tones of honey, earthy browns and greys, and reclaimed woods, stone and leather, will offer guests privacy and luxury with valley and vineyard views.

The resort is a haven for creative and local food and wine experiences. The 500-acre scavenger hunt, Ranch Race, for instance, ends in the Ranch Chef Challenge, which allows groups of 20 to 60 to experience what it feels like to be a culinary celebrity. Elsewhere at the ranch, an expanded equestrian



*Previous:* Bacara Sky Ranch  
*Below:* Wine Cave, Calistoga Ranch

program, “The Art of Being with Horses,” offers a series of guided exercises that connect groups to horses in a compassionate way, ultimately channeling creativity, self-awareness and responsiveness. Birdwatching, soap making, spa, and golf are other popular activities.

Food is another bonding experience at Carmel Valley. We asked Serena McCabe, director of group sales for a “not to be missed” wine and signature dish.

“Many of our ‘must’ experience dishes feature fish that fisherman Jerry catches in the nearby Monterey Bay, including our line-caught big eye tuna poke with jalapeno and citrus ponzu, wakeme seaweed salad and avocado. For wine, we suggest the chardonnay from local winery Wrath wines, or a glass of our own reserve dry rose, which we released this past May from our four-acre vineyard.”

The property’s main lodge restaurant recently underwent a renovation that added two new dining spaces enclosed by barn doors for intimate groups of 22 or 44, plus a 1,500-sf terrace that offers valley and vineyard views. Buyouts of Carmel Valley Ranch can be arranged for groups of up to 181.

## **MERITAGE RESORT AND SPA**

Situated close to downtown Napa in the southern part of Napa Valley, this 9-acre resort is well suited for large groups—50,000

sf accommodates groups of up to 1000. Large event spaces from the Carneros and Meritage ballrooms can be broken down to salons for smaller meetings as well. There are also outdoor terraces, an event piazza and lawn.

The Meritage Resort and Spa’s hillside vineyards and on-site wine tasting cave, Trinitas Cellars, is a popular gathering spot for up to 200. The buyout venue offers opportunity to work closely with the winery and its proprietor/CEO/winemaker to create unique dishes that pair with the wines produced from their vineyard. Special cuts of meat like locally raised lamb, grilled octopus, veal and top sirloin with cognac sauce.

Meritage Resort partners with the Silverado Cooking School for group cooking classes that result in a sit-down meal with fresh ingredients from local purveyors and Napa valley wines. Andrew Bradley, director of marketing and communications, says this sort of teambuilding is a common occurrence back at the resort as well.

“For teambuilding, we have winemaking classes that allow teams to compete and make their own Meritage (Bordeaux style) blend and cooking classes where participants are put into teams to help the chef create their own meal.”

Bradley adds that Opus One, Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars and Silver Oak Cellars Napa Valley are all popular wines, with Snake River Farms’ “American” wagyu flat iron steak with beluga lentil





*Below (l-r):* Meritage Resort; Farmhouse Inn  
*Right:* Seasonal cuisine, Carmel Valley Ranch

croquettes, coffee roasted heirloom carrots, shitake mushrooms with a bordelaise sauce making for a “must-try” dish, followed by house-made beignets, of course.

## CALISTOGA RANCH

For groups that want super privacy and have lucrative budgets, this Auberge Resort at the north end of Napa valley and minutes from the quaint town of Calistoga, delivers a relaxed nature-infused luxury experience. Built around century-old oaks and creeks of rushing water, corporate retreats for groups of up to 200 will find inspiration on this 157-acre hillside resort.

The vineyard offers its own delish cabernets that groups can enjoy in a variety of spaces—from dining and meeting in the vines to the Creekside Clubhouse, where December through June, the lull of gushing water is a soothing backdrop for retreats from 12 to 28.

Accommodations include 45 one-bedroom cabins with optimal privacy (only ten years old) plus five two-bedroom cabins.

“Only 9 trees were taken down when we built the cabins, says Mike Moran, director of sales and marketing. “We placed them into the environment instead of outside.”

Calistoga Ranch is an inspiring setting, with trails boasting valley views, a beautiful hilltop spa, wine cave for special dinners and the Lommel Lawn lakeside for dinners with stargazing. The cuisine at the hilltop restaurant would be Michelin-rated in our opinion if it was open to the public. We experienced a four-course dinner that included the best short ribs—slow cooked for 72 hours and paired with smoked

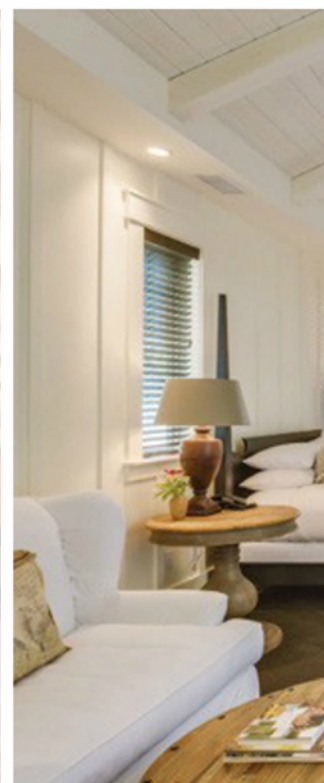
greens, icicle radish and black garlic ad micro wasabi—this journalist has ever experienced. The Sonoma duck was equally impressive, with black trumpet mushrooms pomegranate and watercress, as was the red kuri squash ravioli with parmesan brodo, ginger and nutmeg. Dinner was paired with the 2012 Sotero’s Vineyard Cabernet and the 2008 Calistoga Ranch Beckstoffer To Kalon.

Surprisingly, Moran says his “must try” recommendation is something entirely different. “The Calistoga Ranch To Kalon Cabernet achieves elegance and intensity, plus our pasta selections change seasonally by executive Chef Aaron Meneghelli, who draws on his Italian heritage to offer dishes inspired using generations-old family recipes and fresh bounty of Napa Valley.”

Calistoga Ranch is equally adept at creative culinary teambuilding, Moran says. “We are fortunate to have our own vineyard, chef’s garden and chicken coop, which allow us to create memorable experiences where groups can not only dine but harvest eggs from our chicken coop and enjoy the farm fresh breakfast dishes at omelet stations set up in the vineyard.”

## FARMHOUSE INN

A beautifully restored 1873 farmhouse with nine new barn rooms make the luxury, 25-room Farmhouse Inn a perfect choice for corporate retreats or incentives. Located in Sonoma County’s Russian River Valley, the 6-acre property exudes warmth, elegance and genuine hospitality. On property are hotel owners and siblings Joe and Catherine Bartolomei, who are fifth generation farmers,





winery and vineyard owners. They have created a special place for retreats—including hand-picked furniture—and for “insider” wine country experiences in Sonoma County. We loved the private decks overlooking the woods with indoor/outdoor fireplaces. Radiant heated bathroom floors and steam showers also got our attention.

One of the best meals we ever experienced in California was here at the Farmhouse Inn’s Michelin-rated restaurant. Chef Steve Litke prepares three and four course menus to inspire any group. We feasted on duck egg fettuccini with wild mushroom bolognese, quail egg, Pecorino Tuscan, shaved Perigord black truffle with duo of Akaushi beef, a Zinfandel-braised short ribs, and grilled New York sirloin duo served with roasted garlic horseradish potato puree and miso braised kale. This, along with the chocolate soufflé with bourbon crème anglaise to finish were amazing. Paired with the selected wines by a staff sommelier, the food experiences at this property are through the roof.

Incentive groups also have to try the on-site farm-to-table spa. Located in a re-imagined horse stable, the elegant and rustic facility touts an interactive apothecary cart and aromatherapists who customize spa treatments with your own choice of oils, herb-infused soaps and fresh fruit jam scrubs.

The Farmhouse Inn has special relationships with nearby wineries for all kinds of authentic teambuilding experiences.

**[bacararesort.com](http://bacararesort.com); [farmhouseinn.com](http://farmhouseinn.com); [meritageresorts.com](http://meritageresorts.com); [carmelvalleyranch.com](http://carmelvalleyranch.com); [aubergeresorts.com](http://aubergeresorts.com)**



## 4 Cali Food Trends for 2015

“ Social media continues to influence. Planners show us inspiration boards on Pinterest, which we are happy to replicate. Clients are also looking for fun, themed action stations. This challenges us to be more and more creative and we love that!”  
**Vincent Lesage, Bacara Resort & Spa**

“ Groups are looking for seasonal and local food, straight from the land. Our taste of Carmel Valley Ranch program takes this concept a step further as groups get to interact with our artisans that include a fisherman, beekeeper and ‘salt guy.’”  
**Serena McCabe, Carmel Valley Ranch**

“ Chefs are moving toward more unusual and unique herbs like ramps (wild garlic), nettles, dandelion and other foraging herbs. Farm-to-fork is now the norm with added demand for sourcing fresh sustainable seafood and humanely raised meats.”  
**Andrew Bradley, Meritage Resort & Spa**

“ We are seeing more requests for healthy cuisine options such as kale and quinoa salads, individually crafted juices and dishes with organic ingredients and groups really migrating to family style meals, with large platters of food being passed for a more social culinary experience.”  
**Mike Moran, Calistoga Ranch**

