

Garden of Earthly Delights at Carmel Valley Ranch



The green hills that surround Carmel Valley Road tend to attract outdoorsy types who like to follow up a long hike or round of golf with a massage, a glass of pinot noir, and a dinner that was just picked from the kitchen garden. It's an easy getaway, about a three-hour drive south of the city, and six miles past Carmel-By-The-Sea. This fall, one of the valley's longtime resorts, Carmel Valley Ranch, reopened its 500 acres after remodeling their 139 guest suites, lodge, fitness centers, and adding beekeeping, a spacious spa, herb and vegetable gardens, and a small vineyard.

There are two outdoor saline pools, one to have a drink by in the evenings when the resort breaks out the s'mores and lights the firepits and a Junior Olympic version in a separate family area called River Ranch. Rooms have large soaking tubs, cozy fireplaces, and a deck that looks out onto the valley and the new gardens. During the day, there are led hikes, yoga, pilates, and TRX group classes, and visits to the apiary, where Italian honeybees make the wildflower honey you can sample onsite or taste in the Lodge Restaurant.

Executive chef Tim Wood focuses on simple garden-fresh cooking: arugula salads, stuffed squash blossoms, braised rainbow chard, slow-roasted ratatouille, and plenty of shaved truffles next to roasted chicken and Angus steak. Herbs from the ranch appear in most everything on the menu, even the spa menu, which includes a lavender honey wrap, orange blossom and marigold body scrub, and arnica sports massage. It's a cozy, restful retreat, for whenever you need to come back down to earth.