

Destination Divas Find Top

# California SPODS

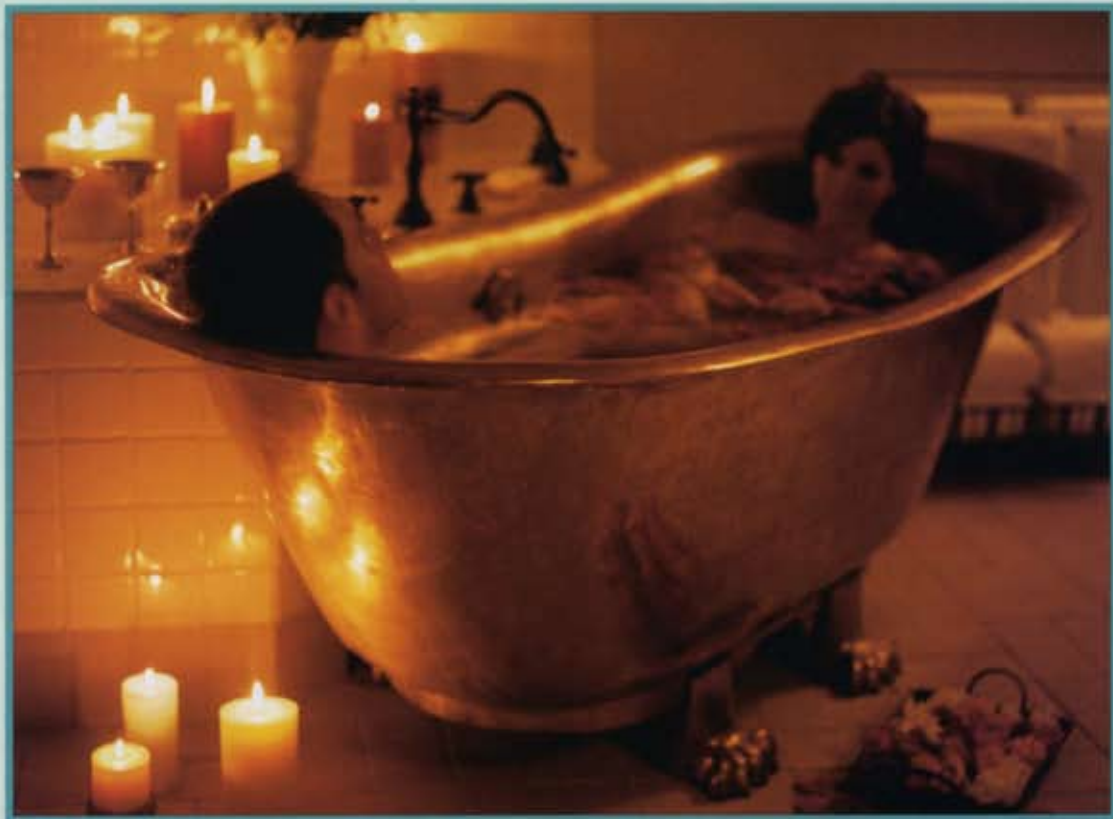
*By Carolyn Gerin and Jolene Rae Harrington*

You've got the ring and the guy, the last handful of rice has hit you squarely in the solar plexus, and the gown is being hermetically sealed for the next several centuries. Bravo! It's time to rock and roll, hit the friendly skies and collapse guilt-free into a chaise lounge with a Mai-tai poolside. We're not against exercise, healthy living, lean cuisine or South Sea snorkeling, but after a life-altering event, the idea of walking to the pool and back might seem a tad ambitious. For once in your life, allow a team of expert handlers cater to your every whim. Pretend you're Paris and Stavros, or Ava and Frank — before the divorce. Revel in your hedonism, drink champagne for breakfast, have sex two or more times a day (clocking in at exactly 100 calories burned per hour depending on height and weight), or be a true libertine and order room and spa services for the duration of your nuptial odyssey. With chefs and masseurs like the ones we discovered, you will never want to leave the compound. We didn't, and have tales of reckless abandon in the dining area and beyond.

# Northern California



Photograph courtesy of Ojai Valley Inn & Spa



To this end, we exalt the fine spa, resort, restaurant combo for a luxe honeymoon experience. You don't need to think, plan, stress or trip. But, dear reader, if you decide you simply must see Prague, climb something, or engage in spear fishing, please repair to one of these spas for at least 3 days. You will have time to unwind, let your minds and bodies relax, and ward off that case of strep that's been waiting for perfect moment to infect you, and pierce your pink bubble.

So, we bring you the top spas of northern and southern California. As a San Franciscan resident, Carolyn reluctantly volunteered to tackle the taxing job of meeting extremely handsome and talented executive chefs and sommeliers, delight in their wizardry, enjoy nature's bounty and ambiance and then melt under the expert ministrations of massage therapists and facialists. Jolene Rae Harrington, of *Here Comes the Guide*, a fellow destination diva and denizen of the pleasure principle, took the harrowing task of covering southern California. Our mission was to educate and enlighten. Let the treatments begin!



## The Carneros Inn

If you've ever wanted to channel Hollywood glamour, sit poolside by the wood burning stove and sip a chilled Sauvignon, or gaze at lavender hills dreamily from the hot tub while waiting for your goat butter body wrap or red flower hamman full body massage, Carneros is for you.

Located at the entrance between Sonoma and Napa, private "farm-shui" cottages with a hip, minimalist, and slightly Asian-Agri-chic décor delights the senses. Decadent outdoor showers and private patio flanks the vineyard, heated floors, and a bed of such sublime comfort, (with a toasty fireplace at the foot) you may rethink your entire approach to living and design upon returning home.

The Hilltop Restaurant is stunning, sitting like a crown jewel at the center and offers a breathtaking view: both the hills and uber-chic people watching are unparalleled. The cuisine under chef Kimball Jones and his trusty sous, Joseph Hatch, is divinity. The pool area also offers another perk: no "Marco Polo" squeals emitting from the deep end. Adults Only rule is enforced here, although there is a family pool slated to open soon. Romantic possibilities are endless: epicurean wine and nibbles at Swanson's tasting salon, hot air ballooning and long walks (and kisses) between the vines (and the 800 thread count sheets).

[www.TheCarnerosInn.com](http://www.TheCarnerosInn.com)



## The Ventana Inn

As if transported by Frodo to a magical land of luxurious tree houses, you enter the Ventana and leave reality behind. Located on 243 acres in the heart of the breathtaking and dramatic Big Sur, the Ventana is unlike any place on earth. The rooms are rendered in a stylish Wild-West-Luxe aesthetic with a huge wood burning stove and leather 40s club chairs that engulf you in comfort. The Vista Suite (Oprah's favorite) has amber wooden walls and ceilings that bathe the room in golden light, hand loomed rugs and a bathroom bigger than most studio apartments. The largest four poster bed I've ever seen with cotton sheets the consistency of silk is the epitome of honeymoon comfort; where else are you going to spend most of your time? Good question: What about the hot tub — located on the private balcony and overlooking the Pacific. A chilled glass of champagne (or ice cold milk and warm homemade cookies delivered every day) is just the ticket for a lazy early evening after a 90-minute massage or body wrap and an afternoon of Japanese hot and cold baths (or day of hiking or surfing).

For evening, allow a private golf cart to escort you to Cielo, a wondrous mélange of California Mediterranean kitchen wizardry under the tutelage of executive chef Anthony Calamari and super sous, Domingo Santa Maria. Cellar master Matt Hiscock will make sure that each wine pairing is perfect from the seared scallops to the venison molé. The Ventana is unforgettable (like your honeymoon should be).

[www.ventanainn.com](http://www.ventanainn.com)



## The Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa

Anthony and Cleopatra could not have had more decadent spa treatments than at the venerable Sonoma Mission Inn. With a nod to the ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman baths, bathing rituals include: warm thermal baths, the hot and cold pools, herbal steam room, individual mineral baths, private outdoor cabaña, whirlpools, Watsu treatment pool, Kur rooms, Vichy room and private couples' rooms with baths. And this is all before the couples massage!

The SMI is also one of the only spas that caters to the gentleman in British club house style (wood lined rooms, snifters of brandy, Cuban cigars) with the signature sports massage and gentleman's facial. Whoever said that brides have all the fun? After an herbal detoxifying body wrap and purifying facial, you are glowing and relaxed.

You may want to go wine tasting or soak in your hot tub for two in your honeymoon suite, but make sure you head over to Santé's later for captivating cuisine by Michelin chef Bruno Tisane and his trusty sous, Joe Brown. Recipes are handcrafted with meticulously chosen local products from artisanal vendors.

[www.sonomamissioninn.com](http://www.sonomamissioninn.com)



## The W Hotel San Francisco

Walk into the lobby of the W Hotel in San Francisco, and feel the buzz of anticipation, whether you are newly married, touring with the Strokes, an international spy, or a Bond girl — it's that cool. Beautiful people, dressed in the height of hip and sipping signature cocktails at most hours of the day to the steady beat of Thievery Corporation, makes the vibe of the W — "the warmth of cool" — completely understandable. (Pack some wardrobe candy, as you can pick out the conventioners a mile away).

The Extreme Suite boasts a royal blue velvet couch straight out of Tom Jones' bachelor pad, and dark wood detailing; it is the penthouse you wish you had. The soccer field-sized bed is located strategically in front of the wrap-around windowed corner, and offers such a breathtaking view of the city, you can almost make love under the stars. Greeted by apple-tini fixings and an excellent W-themed musical compilation in the den, we contemplated treatment options at the mod and marvelous Bliss Spa.

The Bliss 75 massage is seventh heaven: rubbed head to toe in Bliss body butter and then having my feet encased in warm paraffin wax, I floated away under the powerful hands of Guadalupe. Later, steamed, exfoliated, and soft as a baby's behind, we repaired to the XYZ Lounge, the stylish cocktail lounge and enjoyed a libation before a historic dinner prepared by sous Chef Rob Hurd who is wing man to executive chef Paul Piscopo. Expert wine pairings from a virtual wine encyclopedia, Michael Garcia, caused us to float from one course to the next without ever having to think.

[www.whoels.com](http://www.whoels.com)



## The Meadowood Inn

If "old school" is your mantra and you want to replicate a little of its magic (not to mention you can still fit into your madras shorts), the Meadowood is for you.

Nestled into a beautiful, 250-acre valley, the Meadowood is reminiscent of the country clubs of a bygone era, and boasts an impressive 9-hole golf course, with vintage Hickory Stick golf (as well as Doug Pike, resident golf pro and instructor), championship croquet lawns, seven tennis courts, a nine-hole walking golf course, hiking trails, swimming and hot tubs, a wine educator, a wine and hors d'oeuvres reception every evening and a spa that has some of the most experienced practitioners in captivity. For the bride and groom with a wish list, the Meadowood will keep you busier than two kids at summer camp.

Many of the massage therapists have more than 1500 hours of experience, and the spa uses the excellent Jurlique botanical skincare line. After a rejuvenating soak in the hot tub and then steam room, we relaxed with a glass of champagne and the spectacular cuisine of Vincent Natress, Executive Chef of the Restaurant at Meadowood. Chef Concierge and Sommelier Michael Scherzberg wowed us with his wit, charm and wine pairings. The perfect end to a perfect day ended in front of the fire with a glass of brandy, and that wonderful feeling of being consummately content.

[www.meadowood.com](http://www.meadowood.com)

## Indulgence The Home Spa, Santa Barbara



Think of it as a spa-on-the-go, your own caravan of cosmeticians and pampering experts ready, willing and able to travel to YOU, whether it be at home, hotel, or in the case of one loyal customer, yacht. Based in Santa Barbara, the congenial Brazilian proprietor, Caroline Loureiro, uses top-of-the-line products and the finest practitioners. The perfect antidote to "ordinary" for bridal showers, bachelorette parties or pre-event prep. Indulgence specializes in wedding make-up, hair (up-do's, too!) and even waxing (yes, Brazilians are part of the repertoire!).

I decide to spread the love by hosting a Spa Party for a few lucky friends. The Indulgence team sets the mood with fountains, rose petals and champagne, and arranges their spa stations around the living room. My first stop has me melting under a masseuse's gentle ministrations; then putty-like, I float to the sofa for a pedicure, which includes a musical eye mask that soothes with Nature's melodies. She custom-blends my foundation from her own line of mineral-based cosmetics, creating the most dewy, natural look I've had since prom night. My girlfriends are so impressed, they purchase Cyndi's personalized formulations on the spot.

Whether you're planning a Central Coast celebration or romantic getaway, count on this talented entourage to provide first-class Indulgence.

[www.indulgencehomespa.com](http://www.indulgencehomespa.com)