



Meadowood

NAPA VALLEY

San Francisco

MEADOWOOD

CALIFORNIA



Country club_USA



STAY HERE.

Join the club

Ben Groundwater CHECKS INTO THE ULTRA-EXCLUSIVE MEADOWOOD RESORT IN CALIFORNIA'S NAPA VALLEY.



TO CALL MEADOWOOD A HOTEL IS A misnomer; it doesn't do it justice. It's a country club, an estate. Guests don't walk around here, but are ferried throughout the carefully manicured grounds in golf carts, or in the house Mercedes. Make a quick call from your private cottage and one will appear outside within minutes, ready to take you to the pool, or the tennis courts, or the croquet lawn, or the golf club, or the three-Michelin-starred restaurant.

Meadowood is set in the middle of wine country, North America's most famous. The Napa Valley is hugely popular, yet still feels like your own boutique northern California hideaway, a beautiful area of vine-covered hills and quaint little towns that's only a short morning's drive from the bustle of San Francisco. The nearest town to Meadowood is St Helena, the epitome of Main Street USA culture, a place of white picket fences and mom-and-pop corner stores. There's an unhurried charm to the town, where local wines are drunk in upmarket bars and growers and viticulturists come to talk vintages and yields.

Meadowood itself, however, can feel like a self-contained town that you'll never need to leave. Set on an extensive property of wooded hills, it's been largely left to nature, with seven kilometres of hiking trails snaking around the estate. The guest cottages are spread out with privacy in mind – some rest on slopes on Meadowood's outer boundaries; others huddle around the croquet lawn like business-



BOOKS

RECOMMENDED READING

The Vineyard by Idwal Jones
California Fiction
A fictional novel drawing on the history of California winemaking and winemakers in the early 20th century.

men at a board meeting. They're subtly luxurious, with none of the over-the-top glitz of most upscale resorts. These are places for friends and families.

You can make your own breakfast each day, or call a cart to take you to The Grill restaurant, where a table awaits overlooking the pines and fairways of Meadowood's nine-hole golf course. Birds chirp over pancakes and coffee; a golfer whoops from the ninth green. It's hard to tell if the other diners are talking about

tee times or their plans for dotcom takeovers and the resurrection of Wall Street. Probably both.

The Meadowood golf course is far from a championship edition, although it's ideal for those looking to sharpen their game. A little hut to the side of the first tee houses TrackMan technology, an advanced system used to observe and correct absolutely everything about your golf game apart from your choice of trousers. Distance of carry, ball speed, ball rotations, club-head speed, club-face angle, swing path... Everything is tracked and measured. Every swing is video-taped and analysed, every shot radar-traced to its completion. For the amateur golfer it is, frankly, frightening.

At the end of the session, Doug Pike, Meadowood's golf pro, passes over a laminated card with all of the professional



PGA players' TrackMan stats on it, purely for comparison to your own ridiculous numbers. "The PGA guys are amazing," he says. "But what you should realistically be aiming for is on the other side of the card." Flip it over – it's the stats for the LPGA players. Understood.

Most days at Meadowood are whiled away in quiet idyll. Some guests choose to just sit on cottage balconies sampling purchases from local wineries. Others head down to the pool for a few laps and a cocktail in the sun. Others join the croquet pro for a game (although be warned, dress rules are strictly enforced – you'll need all-white attire to join in). Some people belt their way around the nine-hole golf course. Others still spend hours hiking the estate trails, presumably as a way to justify the incredible dinner they'll consume later.

That dinner is eaten at Meadowood's famed restaurant (simply called The Restaurant), a place helmed by chef Christopher Kostow and the proud bearer of three Michelin stars. Nineteen different dishes make it out to the table during Kostow's tour de force, a degustation menu of modern American cuisine using locally grown produce. There are fava bean leaves with radishes, a molecular take on toast and jam, clam chowder in ball form, a gastronomist's version of prawn toast, abalone, truffles, and dessert after dessert. Everything, of course, is served with a glass of Napa Valley wine, some of it among the finest in the New World.

It's all you can do afterwards to stagger back to the waiting golf cart and enjoy the ride back home, back to the warmth and comfort of your own cottage in the Napa hills.

STAYING THERE

Rooms at Meadowood range from US\$475 (about A\$454) per night for a Studio to US\$2,250 (about A\$2,149) per night for an Estate Suite. A meal at The Restaurant costs US\$225 (about A\$215), with an extra US\$225 (about A\$215) for matching wines. meadowood.com

CALIFORNIA DREAMING
Opposite page clockwise from top left: A tranquil Treeline Room; A Hillside Terrace living room; The three Michelin starred The Restaurant; The bathroom of a Meadow Room.

This page clockwise from top right: The adult swimming pool; Pine cured venison, tuna and sorrel; Meadowood from above.

GETTING THERE

United flies direct from Sydney to San Francisco daily. Return economy fares start from A\$1,309 and business class fares from A\$6,247. Flight time is around 14 hours. united.com
Meadowood is in St Helena, in California's Napa Valley. To get there, you can hire a car from San Francisco, or have a vehicle from the resort take you door to door. The journey takes just over an hour.