

TRIPS!

»TRAVEL NOW: GREAT GETAWAYS AND DISCOVERIES | Edited by Sheila F. Buckmaster

Living Off the Land

As agritourism grows, spending the night on a farm means more than just milking cows at dawn. **By Elaine Glusac**

The Apple Farm in northern California's Anderson Valley is a foodie's slow-lane fantasy. Just behind a roadside stand piled high with Pink Pearl, Spitzenberg, and Sierra Beauty apples, 30 acres of fruit trees surround a farmhouse cum cooking school where freshly cut herbs top butcher-block kitchen counters and shelves of earthenware pots and plates dot the sunny yellow walls.

"We show people you can live the life you dream," says Apple Farm owner Karen Bates. "You won't make lots of money, but you will have a nice life."

The Apple Farm's blend of harmony and hard work spans old-fashioned agriculture (Karen and Tim Bates grow 70 varieties of apples) and newfangled hospitality: Her parents, Sally and Don Schmitt, run a weekend cooking school using produce homegrown or sourced nearby. The family's third generation helps tend the barnyard animals and extensive kitchen garden on the biodynamic farmstead some 120 miles north of the Bay Area.

The importance of good food is an everyday thing. "We teach cooking and philosophy," says Sally, who, with her husband, established Napa Valley's famed French Laundry before selling the restaurant in 1994.

"Apple farming is a losing proposition these days," Sally continues, citing



Down on the Apple Farm (clockwise from top left): A guest room's orchard view, cooking class accomplishments, a gaggle of resident turkeys out and about, and bins of local color.

depressed prices and global competition. "We have to do something to support our apple-growing habit."

Subsistence farming meets boutique innkeeping at a bumper crop of retreats like the Schmitts' four-guest-room spread. In California—and way

beyond—farm-focused resorts appeal to food fans keen on produce provenance (local!) and juiced to temporarily apprentice in growing, harvesting, and preparing food. Call it agritourism for sophisticates.

At the Apple Farm, both the Schmitt

clan and the de facto family that binds weekend cooking students over the Montague stove dine at a long hearthside harvest table, or out on the patio under a mulberry bower. Discussions about farm economics and tips on growing tomatoes take place over relaxed, savory meals of succulent pork loin with fennel-seed-peppered apples or olive-oil-crust tarts.

Up to eight students assemble most Fridays, checking into either a light-flooded bedroom above the kitchen or one of three orchard cottages that mimic local barns. The evening begins with

a three-course meal paired to local Hush Vineyards and Handley Cellars wines. Between Saturday's two-dish lunch and the four-course dinner, off-duty cooks stroll the aisles of apple trees, hike the old-growth redwoods in Hendy Woods State Park, or continue their quest for authentic tastes at local wineries. Interested visitors may collect eggs, feed sheep, and pick lettuce alongside their hosts.

"For me, a visit to the Apple Farm is a doubleheader: It feeds both the soul and the stomach," says Sue Cross, a special-events planner from St. Helena

—and an annual patron of the farm. "I leave with a new feeling about the Earth," she says, "knowing the chickens in the yard are responsible for the best omelet in the world."

»**TripPlanner Apple Farm cooking school farm weekends** are \$940 (\$1,440 for two) and include two nights lodging, food, drinks, and instruction. **Weeknight lodging** starts at \$175 per cottage. 707-895-2461; www.philaapplefarm.com

Chicago-based writer and foodie **ELAINE GLUSAC** recently drove across South Dakota in search of the perfect elk burger.

Second Helpings

More resorts that make farm-to-table connections.

Crescent Moon Cabins

DOMINICA, WEST INDIES Crescent Moon offers travelers the best of what rugged Dominica is known for—good hiking, refreshing river swims, and color-saturated views down a lush Caribbean valley—but it also surprises them with sophisticated meals created by a Culinary Institute of America-trained expat. Chef Ron Viveralli works with ingredients grown on the 10-acre resort, which doubles as an exotic farm.

"People come here because they're nature-centered foodies who like to be hands-on," says Viveralli, who, with his wife, Jean, runs the property, at the center of which are still-supported cottages and one-room wood cabins.

Other than meat, fish, and soybeans, which are sourced locally, Crescent Moon grows its own in a garden setting that belies its productivity. A greenhouse guards tender vegetables; scattered groves produce star fruit, avocado, and papaya; goats provide milk for cheese; and chickens contribute eggs.

"This isn't farming where you have acres and acres of flat land," says the couple's daughter Tiana, a landscape designer who runs the greenhouse. "We're showing people the Dominican style of growing, where you carve out a garden, keep a few goats, and mix in some fruit trees."

The Viverallis' enthusiasm inspires guests to tag along to milk the goats or learn to roast local coffee beans in Ror's repurposed pop-corn kettle.

"That they're growing their own food is a major draw for us," says Eric Cohen of Raleigh, North Carolina, on his honeymoon at Crescent Moon. "We plan to spend a day just hanging around here."

■ **Cabins** from \$115; dinner, \$35. 767-449-3449; www.crescentmooncabins.com

Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa

CHANDLER, ARIZONA First-timers at Kai, the Native American-influenced restaurant here, are often surprised to learn that olives, citrus fruits, and other menu elements grow on-site. The Pima and Maricopa tribes, which have farmed the valley for 2,300 years, own the hotel as well as the surrounding 16,000-acre Gila River Farms, where cultural concierge Ginger Sunbird Martin takes guests the first Thursday of every month for an in-depth look.

"We're proud of our agricultural history," says Martin, who traces such products as Pima cotton back to the tribe. "It's in our blood."

Farm manager Bobby Stone jumps down from a six-row John Deere combine in the cotton fields to guide visitors to the citrus orchard, sharing naval orange sections from a fruit-laden tree. En route to the "gin yard," where machines seed, clean, and pack 500-pound cotton bales, he points out melons and olives.

After a 118-year court battle to regain water rights was resolved in their favor in 2004, the tribes are increasing their farming. One hope is that members will return to a traditional diet of corn, beans, and squash and perhaps

reduce diabetes, which afflicts 50 percent of Pima Indians. At the local elementary school, Kai chef Michael O'Dowd encourages kids to help harvest specialty greens for his kitchen. The tour concludes at Kai, where appetizers feature "lettuces handpicked by the children of Gila Crossing School."

■ **Rooms** start at \$189. 602-225-0100; www.wildhorsepassresort.com



Morgan's Rock pool; Wild Horse Pass art (bottom).

Morgan's Rock Hacienda & Ecolodge

PLAYA OCOTAL, NICARAGUA When coffee grower Clemente Poncon bought 4,400 acres along Nicaragua's Pacific coast, local authorities suggested he build a golf course. He went in the opposite direction, reforesting hills that had been stripped of their hardwoods for quick cash. He planted 5,000 fruit trees and then built 15 thatched bungalows in eucalyptus and walnut woods above a pristine cove.

Howler monkeys swing from trees and hummingbirds buzz the blooms at Morgan's Rock—a luxury resort that takes its sustainable mission seriously. Guests preorder meals to reduce kitchen waste. And there's a dairy farm tucked away in the forest, where guests can join its proprietors, the López family, for breakfast.

Ismael López milks 12 Brahma and Swiss cows, and collects eggs from a palm-roofed coop. Inside an adobe-walled kitchen Catalina López grinds freshly boiled corn by hand, forming the dough into hamburger-size rounds she hands off to guests, who shape their own tortillas. Over a wood fire, she prepares red beans, rice, and scrambled eggs.

"We're helping sustain the environment—and also sustaining the local people, who help guide our tours," says Morgan's Rock sales manager Marcela Carvajal Gómez.

■ **Bungalows** are \$195 per person per night, which includes all meals and some drinks. 011-506-232-6449, www.morgansrock.com. —E.G.

