

LA TRAVEL

Inspiring Angelenos to Travel Near and Far

**CELEBRITY HONEYMOON
FEATURE WITH**

David Henrie

**THE EDITOR'S
GUIDE
TO**

Punta Mita

One on One with

Candace Cameron Bure

Actress, Producer, Author and Inspirational Speaker

This Season's Hottest Getaways: Ann Arbor, Nusa Penida, Playa del Carmen, Tri-Valley & San Juan

TRI-VALLEY NOSTALGIA

By: Richard Carroll

Photography: Halina Kubalski

For avid travelers longing to be captivated by the wistful nostalgia of an overlooked wedge of Northern California that is compassionately enamored with maintaining its historic roots, the city of Pleasanton awaits with open arms. Tucked away in Tri-Valley, a triangle-shaped expanse consisting of three valleys; Amador, Livermore and San Ramon, all a surprising and untrammled escape and where parking is free, the American flag is out and about, and appetizing wineries are thriving.

Thirty-five miles east of San Francisco and seemingly a world apart visitors are greeted by a Pleasanton gateway sign arched above the tree-lined street, along with touches of nicely preserved mid-19th Century architecture. The welcoming sign greeting visitors since 1932 and one of the few remaining gateway signs in the country is a foreshadowing of Pleasanton's loving preservation. The city's leaders have sheltered a six-block long treasure fortunately forbidding large chain stores to move in and devastate the heart of downtown. Honored with esteemed awards such as "America's Best Cities to Live in," "America's top Hometown Spots," "Top 25 Most Uniquely American Cities and Towns," and a "Main Street Award," Pleasanton with a small town flavor dating to 1894 has held off the developer's wrecking ball.

With enormous forethought the Main Street streetlights are based on the original, while residents can refuel the family car at a petite nicely restored 1931 four-pump gas station that looks as if it should be a showcase museum piece, or pick up a quart of milk at one of only two drive-through dairies remaining in California. The original 1914 Town Hall is now a museum, and the 1920's brick Fire House has cleverly been converted to the Firehouse Art Center, while the oldest building in town, the 1852 Kottinger Historic Adobe Barn is currently housing a colorful floral and gift shop, and reportedly a presence or two.

With tales to tell the Adobe Barn on the National Register of Historic places located just off Main Street was once a jail administered by Justice of the Peace John Kottinger who was forced to build a tunnel to covertly transport the bandits from the old courthouse on Main Street to jail when he encountered the prisoner's cronies in crime who would sweep in on horseback and momentarily liberate them.



Exploring downtown it seems as if every few feet one comes across a bit of historical significance or an affable welcome. Dean's Café, smack dab in the middle of Main Street displaying the original sign is an earthy step back to the 1960's with classic leather booths, walls decorated with historic black and white photos, and a menu the size of a magazine. Sara who has worked there forever with a welcoming "Hi Hon", might give you a neck massage while serving classic California comfort cuisine.

Across the street the Rose Hotel, a 34-room boutique property owned by former NFL coach John Madden is designed for travelers who love to collect elegant memories. Opened in 2001, the Rose with deep pockets has created a masterpiece of design with the use of rare woods, a stunning handcrafted showcase staircase, an exceptional chandelier and lighting touches, and custom-made high-end furniture and bedding. Repeat visitors claim it's the finest hotel in the entire Bay Area and with the city's strict guidelines fits perfectly within Pleasanton's Main Street.

However stepping back a few years to the 1850's the rag-tag destination was tagged "The Most Desperate Town in the West," a base for quick-draw bandits who knew how to ride and shoot a five round Colt pistol, and who would partake at the dubious gambling halls, and busy brothels. According to residents the city's incredible

history has left a few spirits roaming about. Factual or not an entertaining free self-guided City and Haunted Walking Tour booked at the Museum on Main, covers 13 of Pleasanton's most haunted sites.

An impressive addition to downtown is Sabio On Main, hosted by Chef Francis Hogan, 36, who spent much of his life working in noted San Francisco Bay Area restaurants and recently honed his skills in Valladolid, Spain learning from Michelin starred chefs of Castille y Leon. Hogan with co-owner Jim McDonnell work closely with the local farmers, fishermen and ranchers, which have helped to make their re-created modern Madrid-style tavern a huge success in concert with a robust wine list including Tri-Valley labels, perfect for tasty tapas and ocean offerings.

With Napa and Sonoma recognized worldwide, Tri-Valley wineries are a glorious step back in time where a sense of discovery can tickle the senses. Livermore Valley, small and compact, is home to 54-plus wineries and 4,000 acres of planted grapes with family owned boutique, mom and pop wineries producing award-winning vintages. Mark Clarin Winemaker at family owned McGrail Vineyards explains, "The folks that live here in Livermore City and the town of Danville are smart and educated and appreciate the finer things in life, and it's a great place to work the earth. We have a gravelly soil where the vines have to struggle and because of this are a bit stronger, which is the potential for something exceedingly interesting."

Nearby Concannon and Wente Vineyards, 1883, are two of America's oldest ongoing wineries under the same family label and



stewardship. In 1936 Wente was the first winery in the country to bottle, label, and market Chardonnay as a varietal. While in Livermore visitors can blend their own wine at the Wente Winemakers Studio, and enjoy Southwestern/fusion cuisine at the high-energy Posada Restaurant. A contrasting Tri-Valley gem is fashionable Danville, a white collar town with thumbs down industry, a strong sense of community, fine dining at the farm to table Farmer's Almanac, and the stunning Blackhawk Auto Museum featuring a rotating collection of 150 cars displayed like a work of art.

Another Danville work of art is the great America Playwright, Eugene O'Neill, Father of America Drama, and Nobel Prize honoree who came to Danville for the isolation and a place to write, settling on 13-glorious acres in the Las Trampas Hills. Now a National Historic Site and assessable via a National Park Service shuttle from the Museum of the San Ramon Valley on Railroad Avenue, the passionate narrated tour is an intimate sensation

listening to intriguing stories of his life and times while being a guest in his home. Danville has also designed a small Eugene O'Neill park across from the library with an O'Neill sculpture, a passage from Long Day's Journey into Night, and nine photo displays.

Tri-Valley has not forgotten those who love a brew or two. The Blue Brew Bus with owner Brian Luke at the helm leads guests on a Craft Brewery tour including Altamont Beer Works, Livermore's first craft brewery since Prohibition. Be it nostalgia, wine tasting, or a ride on the Blue Brew Bus Beer Bash, Tri-Valley is a blast.

