

# Sean Dempsey

The Assistant General Manager and self-proclaimed concierge at The Meritage Resort and Spa lives and breathes Napa. So it's hardly surprising that he knows everything there is to know about the US wine capital

**Napa is the gastronomic mecca of the West Coast.** There are so many restaurants and wineries that you never have to leave the city for dinner or a stellar glass of wine. And new places are always popping up, so guests can come back again and again and get a different experience each time.

**I know all the nooks and crannies, and people know me.** The owners of the restaurants and wineries know they need to reach out to the concierges because we talk to each other and share trade secrets about the best places to go. This information will then trickle through to our visitors.

**It's a one-way street when dealing with guests.** They are like fish out of water, so they expect the concierge to have all the answers and suggest things for them to do. As well as recommending places to visit, I sometimes create a whole itinerary for them.

**Many people stay at the hotel just to use the spa.** Aside from wine and food, spas are now very popular in Napa. And we have the best at the Meritage – Spa Terra, which is located in a wine cave.

We know the importance of good communication; it's what people pay for. We've got real synergy at the resort and everything runs smoothly, so we don't have any big disasters. We take pride in giving the guests the best experience possible

**St Helena is the place to go for shopping.** It's an old town in the heart of the valley; it's not trendy, and offers a real taste of the past with its many 19th-century buildings. But walk up Main Street and you can get anything and everything, including a Rolex at David's.

**I've had a few Guinnesses with José Feliciano.** He is unassuming and very approachable; he didn't want any special treatment. We swapped addresses and I sent him a Christmas card last year. We've had many other celebrities staying at the Meritage too, including Gene Simmons, Stevie Wonder, Matt Damon and Fred Couples.

**Celebrities don't want to wait and expect everything to be ready when they arrive.** They prefer not to check-in and like to go straight to their room to avoid the hordes of people asking for autographs. But otherwise, they are fairly low-key when they are here and their requests are minimal; they just want a nice room and a bit of privacy.

**Napa is to wine aficionados what Disneyland is to kids.** There's so much to see; you can visit all the wineries whose wine you've tasted at home, and see for yourself where it's made. And it's a very approachable place; in many cases, you can park at the side of a road and walk round any winery.

**Robert Louis Stevenson spent time in Napa – you can find out all about it at the Sharpsteen Museum.** My ideal day out would definitely include a trip there; it's dedicated to Napa Valley history – I love it and so do my kids. Also, I'd go to Alston Park, which has great hiking trails; Opus One, one of my favourite wineries; and the Artesa Winery for its views. Then I would go to Cole's Chop House for dinner, a classic American steakhouse in downtown Napa.

To make a reservation at The Meritage Resort and Spa and experience Napa like a local, visit [www.SummitHotels.com](http://www.SummitHotels.com)

You can find some of the best wineries off the beaten track. It's not always the quality of the wine or the food that makes a place, but the whole package. The esoteric experiences are often the most impressive, because you don't bump into huge crowds of people

**The film *Ratatouille* was based on a restaurant near Napa.** The French Laundry in Yountville – with three Michelin stars – is one of the top restaurants in the world, and its owner, Thomas Keller, was a consultant on the film. Rumour has it that the cooks in it are all based on people who work for him. It's very common to get requests for a reservation, but it's like Fort Knox to get in to. You have to start calling about two months before you want to go.

**A concierge must have a great deal of knowledge, but much of this is acquired by osmosis.** You must be integrated into the local area and know the people as well as the places. It's quite easy to do, but it does take time to gain this level of familiarisation. I've lived and worked in several hotels in Napa Valley for 20 years and I've been at the Meritage for three and a half.

**Art is also a big attraction.** Some wineries offer amazing art as well as great wine. Clos Pegase in Calistoga, for example, is a shrine to art and wine and boasts three storeys of ancient art.



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