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Day Trippin'

By Fran Miller



HanaHaus at 456 University Ave. in Palo Alto, the site of the historic New Varsity Theatre, offers communal entrepreneurial workspaces and Blue Bottle Coffee. Photos Fran Miller

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Beyond the hotel's happenings, Palo Alto offers all kinds of activities. Lafayette Reservoir devotees might enjoy a hike around The Dish. Named for its iconic hilltop landmark, the 150-foot diameter radio telescope built by the Stanford Research Institute in 1966 sits on Stanford property and is one of most popular trails on the entire Peninsula. Walkers and joggers traverse the hilly, well-paved path and are rewarded with panoramic views of the Stanford campus and the Bay Area. Two entrance points provide a 3.7-mile loop, the Stanford Gate at Stanford Avenue and Junipero Serra Boulevard, and the Gerona Gate near East Campus Drive, and the third Alpine Gate entrance off of Highway 280 takes you on a five-mile lasso loop.

For a less strenuous hike, step out the door of the Four Seasons and explore the stately traditional homes, beautiful gardens, and wide, tree-canopied streets of the Crescent Park neighborhood, home to many Bay Area high rollers. Head down University Avenue to find great shopping and restaurants. Dine at Rangoon Ruby for lunch or dinner, and you may find yourself sitting next to Mark Zuckerberg who frequents the Emerson Street Burmese restaurant, the cuisine of which is a combination of Indian, Chinese and Thai.

Lamorinda fans of the HBO hit television series "Silicon Valley" know that the show's humor is derived from the 'truth is stranger than fiction' school of comedy. Hoodie-wearing 'Pied Piper' doppelgangers can be found in any Palo Alto restaurant and café, as can the VCs (venture capitalists) and 'treps,' (entrepreneurs) that the show so humorously satirizes. Silicon Valley is entertaining because Palo Alto and its inhabitants are entertaining. But why sit on the couch and watch the television show when one can so easily experience the real thing?

Palo Alto, just an hour drive south, buzzes with energy and an entrepreneurial spirit that is palpable. A trip, whether for the day or a weekend, inspires, and the hotels that cater primarily to weekday business travelers tend to spoil weekend guests. Our weekend home base, the Four Seasons Hotel Silicon Valley at East Palo Alto, was no exception. The glass of champagne offered at check-in set the tone for an indulgent stay that included treatments at their serene spa, lounging by the sumptuous third floor pool, and dinner and music at Quattro, their onsite Italian restaurant.

Quattro's Friday evening summer entertainment, dubbed Chronicle Nights, is alone worth a stay at the hotel. Designed in playful opposition to the area's unceasing tech progress

and advancement, Chronicle Nights invites guests to step back in time and enjoy music and cocktails from previous decades. Quattro manager David Farah keeps the musical acts under wraps until just days prior, employing the Forrest Gump approach: "Like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're going to get." What we got was Santana lead singer Tony Lindsay, accompanied by jazz saxophonist Michael O'Neill, sitting a few feet away, serenading an intimate crowd with '30s standards.

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For a real Silicon Valley-esque experience, head to HanaHaus at 456 University Avenue, the former site of the historic 1920s New Varsity Theatre and more recently a Borders bookstore. The space is now home to the Peninsula's first Blue Bottle Coffee outpost and a 15,000-square-foot community workspace that bills itself as "a community of purpose defining a new café experience where creative individuals and entrepreneurs can come together to meet, socialize, share ideas and connect with experts." HanaHaus is to the current generation what garages were to Hewlett, Packard, Jobs and Bezos - a communal simulation of "Silicon Valley" character Erlich Bachman's "Incubator."

For additional weekend activities, wander the gloriously landscaped two and a half acre Gamble Gardens and the historic house, tea house and carriage house at 1431 Waverley Street (all free), or visit Stanford's Cantor Arts Center with its diverse collections that span 5,000 years of art history and include one of the largest presentations of Rodin bronzes outside Paris - 200 works in all. Twenty are on display in the Sculpture Garden, a fun place to visit at night due to the artistic lighting. Admission to the Cantor galleries, gardens and café is free.

Whether exploring University Avenue and the Stanford campus, plugging-in and caffeinating with the treps at HanaHaus, or just relaxing poolside at the hotel, a weekend in Palo Alto provides just the right combination of stimulation and relaxation, and leaves visitors with an "in-the-know" understanding of the self-deprecating humor of Silicon Valley.



The Dish, a five-mile hiking and jogging path, offers panoramic views of the Stanford Campus.

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[back](#)

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