

Popping the Corque

Wine Country's Best Digs

By Michael Cervin



Chumash Indians walked lands around Solvang, Los Olivos and the Santa Maria Valley in Santa Barbara County for thousands of years before Europeans settled here. Of course, it was Danes who bought and developed Solvang, creating a unique Danish village. But the circle has become complete as the Chumash tribe, with their acquisition of Hotel Corque, has returned to its roots. Though located in Solvang, Hotel Corque is really the antithesis of its Danish surroundings. Solvang started in 1911 as a Danish outpost from its native homeland and is still ripe with its Scandinavian heritage. But a new modern sensibility, as evidenced by the interior design of this hotel, has taken hold. Located off Solvang's main road, this is a quiet property near the Alisal golf course, wine tasting, and horseback riding.

Two million people visit Solvang each year and with high-end properties almost non-existent, it's no wonder that Hotel Corque runs at capacity. Santa Barbara is a 35min drive away for beach activities and cultural events, The historic Santa Ynez Mission is, literally, a stone's throw away and, though rarely mentioned, there is a private motorcycle museum across the street open for public viewing with a \$10 fee. Cachuma Recreation area is just nine miles down the road, another former Indian settlement, and now a place for boating, fishing and camping. Hotel Corque is only a four-block walk to Solvang's restaurants, wine-tasting room, Danish specialty stores and microbreweries. But it's just as easy to make a short drive to picture perfect wineries, studded with vines and oak trees, for a classic wine country picnic.

The traditional Scandinavian exterior belies the heart of this hotel and its sophisticated modern feel. Taken down to bare bones, the renovation from its former iteration took nine months to transform the interior of this property into something out of the ordinary for Solvang. The interior is urban hip, large over stuffed chairs dot the lobby, custom created lighting fixtures illuminate public spaces. The exterior and verdant grounds remain traditional Danish, with the exception of the open-air brick patio. This straddles the hotel and restaurant, perfect for dining al fresco, or a glass of local wine. But the mix of old and new blend seamlessly here. Hip, modern and sophisticated, Corque feels like it belongs in San Francisco



or New York, not rural Solvang, but that is part of the beauty of this unique property.

This was originally a high-end Danish hotel, but it has morphed into a sleek and sophisticated hotel catering to a younger crowd. The 122 rooms and suites, ranging in size from 550 to 900 square feet, are very non-Danish, replete with autumnal tones, colors and wood accents. Twenty percent of the rooms offer full bathtubs and some with private balconies and/or patios. The bathrooms utilize green marble countertops, while all the rooms offer flat screen TVs, free Wi-Fi. Beds are cradled with leather headboards and are fitted with Egyptian cotton sheets, and the result is rooms and a hotel that feels professional, business like but still comfortable and relaxing. There are in-room refrigerators and coffee makers as well, though they have coffee service in the lobby every morning. What are called the Mission View rooms peek out to the historic Santa Ynez Mission. Additionally, this is a smoke free facility, with an exterior brick patio, outdoor pool and hot tub, and plenty of free parking. One of the nice touches is that, though the hotel is only three floors, key card access is required for elevators to help ensure privacy and security. There's also 7,500 square feet of meeting space for intimate gatherings, weddings and reunions.

Since Corque is owned by the Chumash Tribe, if you have a hankering for some gambling or even live concerts, there is free shuttle service to the Chumash Casino, just three miles down the road. The Casino also has its own hotel and spa services are available for guests of Corque, including getting a pedicure while reclining on their zero gravity chairs. The Spa at Chumash Casino Resort actually is the most comprehensive spa in the Santa Maria Valley, and there is nothing like it between Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo. This is the only Five Diamond service you'll find, and the spa commands 4,500 feet of space with multiple treatment rooms, massive men's and women's locker rooms, an outdoor pool and hot tub, and indoor fitness room. Open daily from 9am to 7pm the spa does not cater to anyone under 18 years of age.

Sleek and sophisticated, Root 246 is the hotel's fine dining experience. Located in a separate building next to the hotel, it looks like it belongs

ONCE A SAIL, FOREVER A SEA BAG

TOTES • ACCESSORIES • HOME DÉCOR

sea bags®



MADE IN MAINE OF RECYCLED SAILS

Manufactured in the heart of Portland, Maine's working waterfront, Sea Bags designs and handcrafts one-of-a-kind tote bags and accessories from recycled sails that have sailed around the world.

Visit us at www.seabags.com
1-888-210-4244



in Hollywood, not in rural Solvang, and that's part of the evolution of Solvang and wine country cuisine. The menu rotates often, depending on seasonal ingredients, since this sits squarely in an agricultural region. You'll find house made charcuterie, local bison dishes, and steelhead trout on the menu from the local river. The clientele is more the young, urban crowd, and you don't see a lot of old school Danish residents here. The restaurant has two rooms separated by a bar with an elegant club feel. They offer their "kitchen table," located directly inside the kitchen itself for a unique energetic dining experience. Root 246 offers dinner only and a Sunday brunch. The Santa Ynez Valley and Solvang really visually pop in early spring, April and May, after winter rains cause the hills to become verdant green, and this is the best time to visit. The vineyards are just experiencing bud break and the pace of the Valley is slow and casual. But the fall is also a great time to visit; the air is crisp and clean, crowds have subsided and sunrises and sunsets bathe the Valley in amber hues. Fall brings harvest in wine country, so it's still a beehive of activity. True, there are more events that take place during summer, but that also means crowds and lines for this small village which can easily get congested during peak summer days. Wine tasting rooms, several within walking distance of the hotel, can also be immensely crowded during summer. So bypass the hectic in favor of the relaxed and make Hotel Corque your choice for a wine country getaway.

To learn more go to www.HotelCorque.com.

