

Holbrooke Hotel



FOOD FINDS

Standout spots for your road trip off the beaten path.

BY CAROLE DIXON

If you're thinking of embarking on a great foodie road trip, Grass Valley and Nevada City might not be at the top of your list, but here is why they should be—along with a few other unsung culinary finds in California.

Grass Valley and Nevada City

Even for a California native, Grass Valley and Nevada City are seemingly out of the way, yet could be easily incorporated into a trip to Lake Tahoe. Fly into Sacramento, and it's about an hour drive to both spots, which are less than five miles apart.

For lodging, choose from the **HOLBROOKE HOTEL** in Grass Valley or **THE NATIONAL EXCHANGE HOTEL** in Nevada City. The owner of Acme Hospitality in Santa Barbara, Sherry Villanueva, who has given us Loquita, The Lark, and La Paloma—to name a few—knows a good thing when she sees it. In this case, it was two historic properties from the mid-19th century. But first, she brought in

Lightning Bar Collective designers (of Villa Royale and the Azure Sky in Palm Springs) to revamp both spots with modern touches and amenities.

At the Holbrooke, the **GOLDEN GATE SALOON** is a must stop before lunch or dinner for house-made horchata, and

if you ask nicely, they'll spike it with mezcal or tequila. In the **GOLDEN GATE** restaurant, chef Zachary Ahrenholtz is behind the Mexican-inspired menu in the bar and restaurant featuring albondigas soup with ample meatballs, crispy pig ears with avocado mousse, or sashimi-grade tuna tostadas. For a nightcap, head down to the **IRON DOOR** basement speakeasy for more cocktails and a possible ghost sighting, as there is rumored paranormal activity at both properties, and this one has a secret passageway to an old gold mine.

Built in 1856, The National Exchange



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HOLBROOKE HOTEL AND THE NATIONAL BAR: KAT ALVES



The National Bar



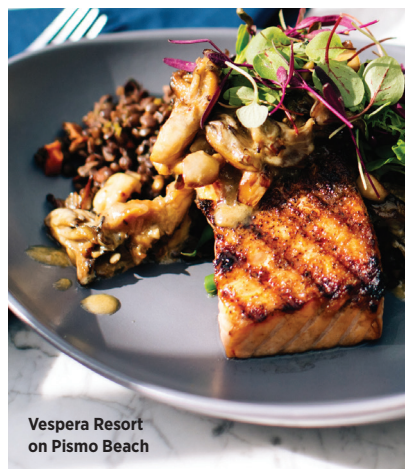
Small Barn

is a historic Nevada City landmark at the base of the Sierra foothills, with easy walking access to saloons, restaurants, shops, and a bucolic hike down to the Yuba River suspension bridge. The Victorian-style hotel has many fascinating nooks and crannies amid the William Morris wallpaper, but you'll want to base yourself in **THE NATIONAL BAR** or at French restaurant **LOLA**, which could hold its own next to Bouchon in Napa or Bicyclette in L.A. With executive chef Tom Bevitori at the helm, you'll enjoy standouts like French onion soup, walnut pâté, steak frites, and chocolate pudding cake. And this is one time in your life you should definitely not skip breakfast or brunch—with spinach quiche, croque madame, and mushroom tartine on offer. Also plan on a traditional Chinese afternoon tea service in the Grand Lounge led by local historian and guide Anthony Jones—who can also be booked for private tours.

Pup-Friendly Pismo

You may have viewed Pismo Beach as a seaside pit stop on your way to San Luis Obispo or Paso Robles for wine tasting, but the tiny town now has a resort hotel and restaurant worthy of its own visit. **VESPERA RESORT ON PISMO BEACH** sits along the city's boardwalk and offers guests

access to a canine-friendly beach with panoramic ocean views and stargazing with in-room telescopes in the evening after dinner at the **SOMERSET GRILL**. Executive Chef Frank Barajas has installed an "Oceanside Americana" menu with local ingredients used for miso salmon with foraged mushrooms, flat-iron steak with sauce verte, and grilled swordfish with broccoli romesco. For breakfast, don't miss the Vespera toast with avocado smash, pea tendrils, micro herbs, and watermelon radish. On the weekends, the **BLEND BAR** has live outdoor music with craft cocktails and fun bar snacks such as the Baja seafood cocktail and skillet fondue.



Vespera Resort on Pismo Beach

Plant-Based Central Valley

Located inside the historic **EL CAPITAN HOTEL**, a JdV by Hyatt in downtown Merced, **RAINBIRD** brings the first upscale tasting-menu restaurant to the Central Valley. Helmed by Executive Chef Quentin Garcia, the vegetable-forward restaurant embraces local produce with a five-course tasting menu showcasing the seasonal harvest and farm-to-table fare rooted in the surrounding agricultural region. Interesting options include smoked cauliflower custard and chestnut mushroom risotto.

Temecula Tasting

This Riverside County wine region has come a long way in the past few decades, but you might not know that a celebrity chef is now in the food mix at modern bistro **SMALL BARN** in Old Town Temecula. Culinary director and chef Angelo Sosa, who has appeared on Food Network's *Iron Chef* and *Top Chef*, has put together high-quality, seasonal menus with prime cuts of beef such as the Westholme Wagyu tomahawk steak with bone marrow truffle butter and pan-roasted Petaluma chicken with pistachio basil pesto, while featuring produce at its peak to complement the curated selection of local wines. **P**