

CULINARY CARMEL: TAKE A GASTRONOMIC TOUR OF THIS SEASIDE TOWN

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The Magazine of the East Bay

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+

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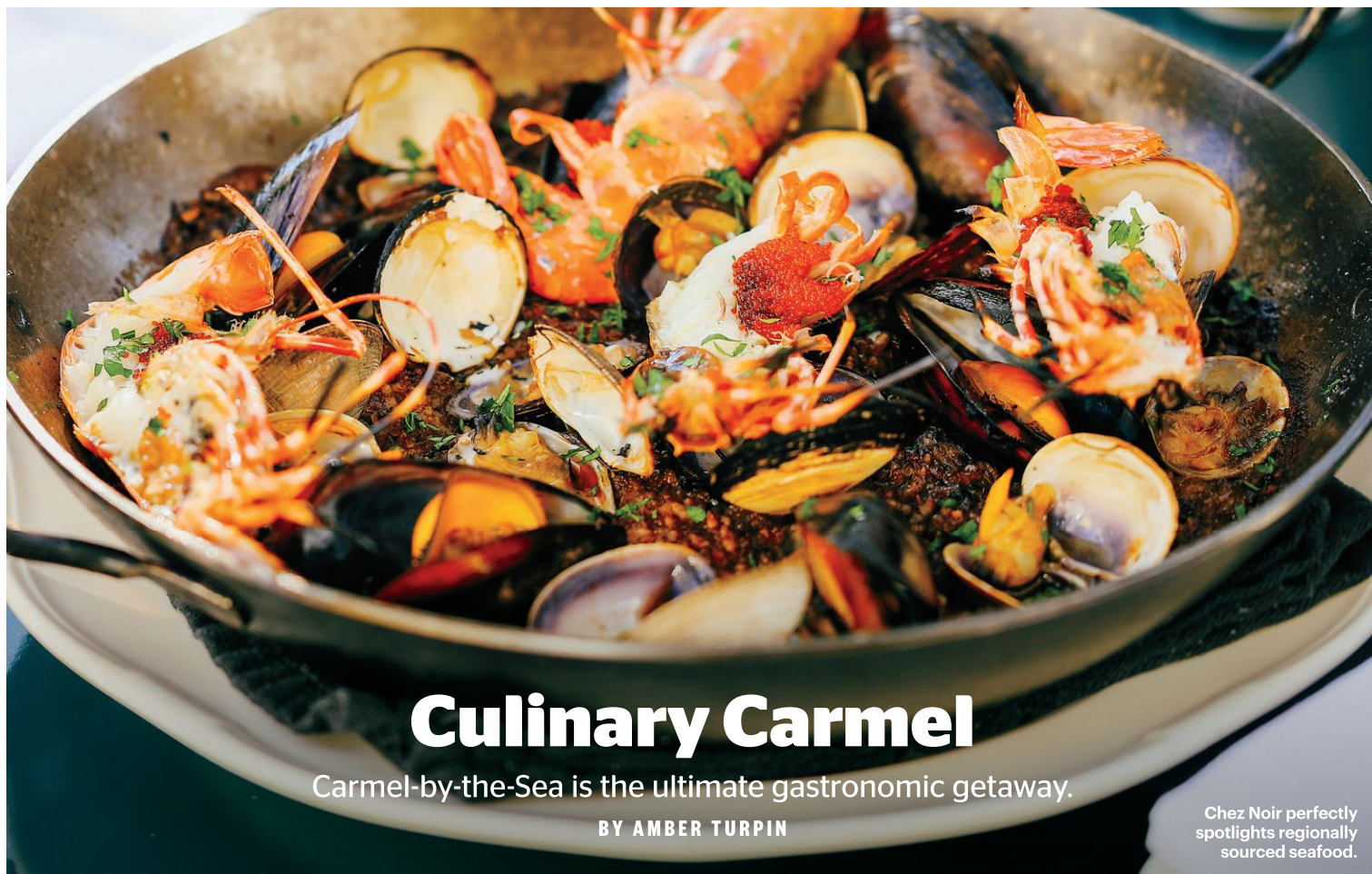
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NOVEMBER 2023 \$4.95



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ONE FINE WEEKEND



Culinary Carmel

Carmel-by-the-Sea is the ultimate gastronomic getaway.

BY AMBER TURPIN

Chez Noir perfectly spotlights regionally sourced seafood.

Some might say that **Carmel-by-the-Sea** has a reputation as being a bit quaint. Yet the one-square-mile village, famous for having had Clint Eastwood as a mayor as well as for a bevy of weird laws (no ice cream cones or high heels allowed), has more restaurants per capita than any other small city in the country. With over 60 eateries and more on the horizon, Carmel (and its environs) is having a culinary moment, especially after its recent Michelin mentions. If you are looking for a charming food-centric getaway, head to this tiny pocket of a town just a three-hour drive from the East Bay.

Luxe Lodging

The first thing to do is get settled at one of Carmel's 40 hotels. Your lodging choice

could be a serene spot to rest before and after your outings or a foodie epicenter unto itself. The new **Carmel Beach Hotel**, which opened in June and is a sister property to the lauded **L'Auberge Carmel**, is both a lovely stay and a culinary zone in its own right. The hotel operates somewhat like a private club, with guests getting exclusive access to the on-property **Secoya** restaurant, overseen by chef Justin Cogley of Carmel's Michelin-starred **Aubergine** and head chef Diana Phipps. An impressive breakfast, served in-room and in the tucked-away courtyard space, is included for all guests; there is also a "snack" menu during the day with items like charred avocado with corn and a chilled buckwheat soba salad, perfect for taking down to **Carmel Beach**, just steps away. The small yet robust bar in the lobby will cover all your beverage needs.

For another fabulous place to lay your head, consider the twin **Le Petit Pali** hotels that opened in July. Their locations are well situated for walking to restaurants, plus they have superb programming that incorporates many local businesses, makers, and producers. One such example: the recent social hour collaboration with **Stationæry**, which provided house-made potato chips and espresso martinis free to overnight guests. The hotels also offer a complimentary champagne breakfast marked by a burst of European sensibility; the meal includes perfect eight-minute eggs, thick yogurt in ceramic pots, granola, almond butter, dates, and local sourdough with whipped butter and craft Marmalade Grove jam—plus, of course, lovely coupe glasses full of bubbly.



Carmel's small-town charm is complemented by big-city sophistication.

The Meal Deal

That Pali spread is a great start to a day of strolling, shopping, and more eating. Carmel has many food options, some classics that have been here for decades and some newcomers that are garnering a lot of buzz. After burning off breakfast with a walk along the cobblestone streets, stop at Stationæry for excellent coffee, huge salads, and their signature potato pancake topped with seasonal goodies like baby zucchini, Sungold tomatoes, fromage blanc, crispy garlic, and a soft-boiled egg. Duck into their wine and merch shop next door to pick up a “Potato Pancake” or “Biscuits and Jam” sweatshirt—or grab a bag of Carrier Roasting coffee and a bottle of wine for later.

The Carmel location of the popular **Alvarado Street Brewery** is another great option for an eclectic lunch, with dishes like a house-smoked pastrami sandwich, street corn pizza, and tempura cauliflower with coconut rice, perfectly paired with their crafty beers. The Mai Tai P.A. is a crowd-pleaser, but the Paloma Pizzazz imperial sour (if it’s on tap) is also satisfying. After lunch, don’t skip a visit to the **Cheese Shop** across the way, a landmark in the Carmel Plaza shopping center that has an amazingly diverse cheese selection as well as wine. Look for the opening of the highly anticipated **Nicolás Cocina de Herencia**, which features three generations of Mexican recipes given a modern twist by chef Susana Alvarez (of Salinas favorite Villa Azteca).

After a much-needed rest, head out for happy hour at **Bud’s**, the newly spiffed-up bar at La Playa Carmel. You might time it right for their secret daily 10-minute happy hour, when every drink costs just 10 cents. For dinner, you hopefully booked

a reservation at **Chez Noir**, a passion project of husband-and-wife chef-owner Jonny Black (known for his leadership in acclaimed kitchens such as Quince and Atelier Crenn) and co-owner Monique Black. The four-course seafood-centric tasting menu highlights ingredients sourced from the peninsula (an à la carte menu is available at the small bar). Add-ons include the house caviar, cocktails, or wine pairings. Even the cocktails tell a story of seasonality and intrigue; try the astounding tomato martini with a perfect balance of tart, sweet, and savory. Chez Noir was just awarded a Michelin star in July, an impressive feat for such a young establishment.

There are countless other spots that might be easier to get into and are equally full of memorable menus. A go-to for excellent

Oaxacan food and superb mescal-based cocktails is **Cultura Comida y Bebida**. **Promesa** is a newcomer with authentic Spanish cuisine, including tapas, curated wines, and inventive cocktails. **Akaoni** is a no-frills but super legit sushi spot that will not disappoint, especially if you aren’t in the mood for a long-format formal dining experience. But if you are in such a mood, **Foray** could be right up your alley. The menu showcases wild products and foraged West Coast ingredients, including mushrooms found by co-owners Caroline Singer and chef Michael Chang’s dog, Falco. Dishes like the Dungeness crab raviolo with saffron and pink peppercorn are creative and impeccably served.

Side Trip to Big Sur

If you are up for a drive about 30 winding miles south, go for the ultimate dining experience at **Sierra Mar** at Post Ranch Inn in Big Sur. A new dinner program launched in March 2023 by culinary director Reylon Agustin and his longtime colleague executive chef Il Hoon Kang is an experiential unfolding of dreamy bites and sips. If dinner isn’t an option, consider making the trip for lunch, which has a new menu and format that draws from the abundant on-site garden. You are seated at the edge of the world, with the ocean stretching out in all directions on view from the glass-walled dining room.

Yes, you will be full after this trip, but your weekend food adventure is likely just an amuse-bouche. There aren’t enough meals in a day to hit up all the great spots in Carmel in a short getaway, so start planning your return visit.



Culinary artistry is on the menu at Foray.