

colorado

TRAVELER

SPRING 2019

Stirring It Up

Colorado's Chefs Create
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Elite dining experiences for every palate

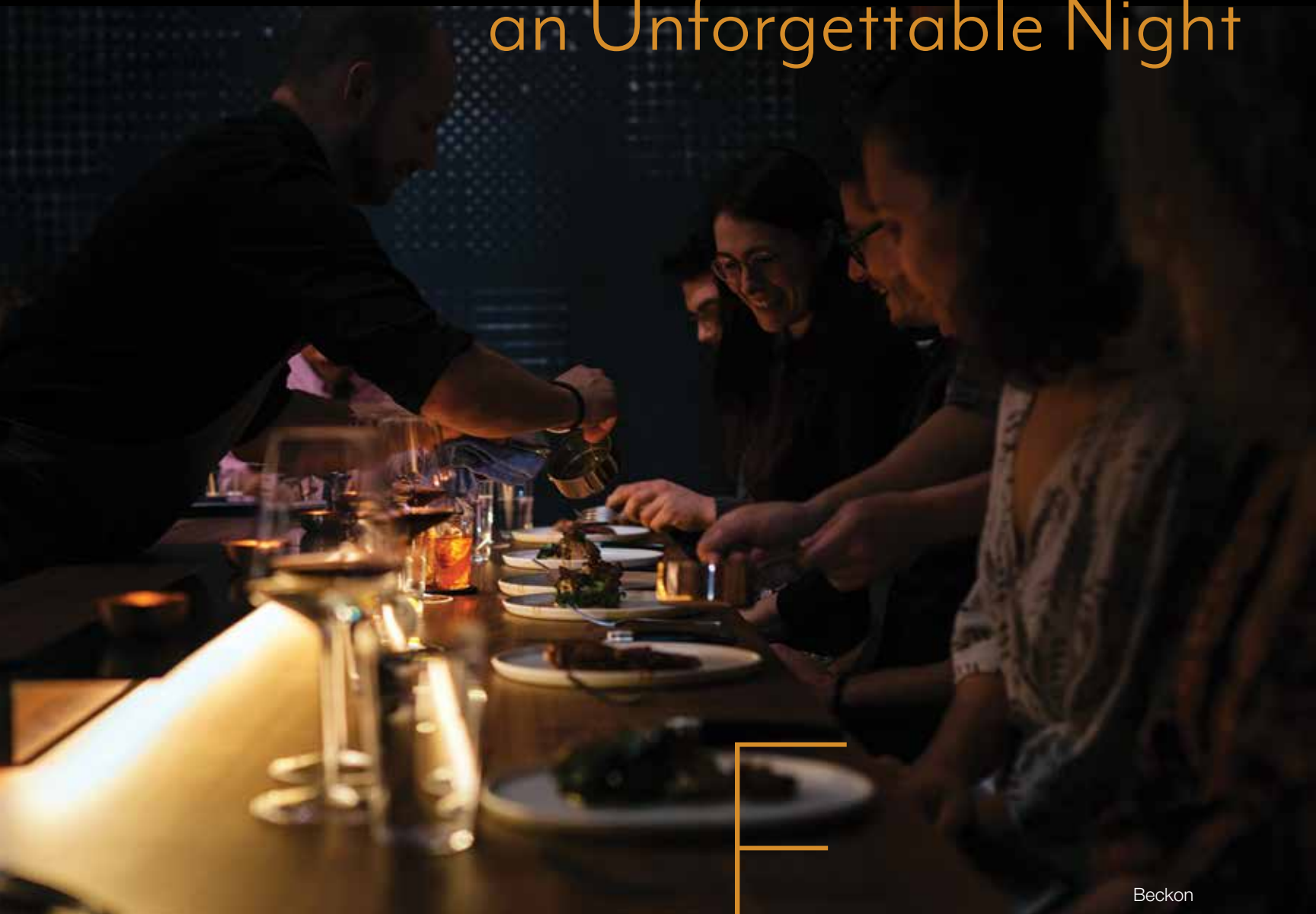
Hike to the Waterfall

A beautiful way to get back to nature

Festival Fun

An insider's look at under-the-radar festivals

Chef-driven Delights for an Unforgettable Night



Beckon

A look at elite dining experiences in Colorado

By **Eric Elkins**

Eating in Colorado is a traveler's treat, with a wide range of restaurants, pop-ups, bars serving tasty bites, food halls, and even quick-service spots focusing on locally sourced menu items and creative concoctions. You can spend \$10 on a bowl of pho that you'll still be thinking about weeks later, less than \$50 on a delicious array of small plates and a cocktail, or a hundred bucks on a full-on dinner for two, wine included.

But sometimes you just want to splurge. Whether it's a special occasion, the rare date night, a vacation in a new city, or just a creative way to spend your tax refund, many Colorado restaurants offer the kind of dining that costs a little (or a lot) more and is worth every penny in quality and full-on experience.



Beckon

Courtside Seating

Spending an evening at the chef's table in a fine restaurant can be so much more than just watching someone hustle to make your food. It can be an intimate look into the inner workings of a kitchen, the chance to see how much effort and care goes into every dish, and a rare opportunity to chat with the passionate people behind the scenes.

The chef's table at **Frasca Food and Wine** is plunked down right inside the famous Boulder kitchen, tucked just out of the way of the servers zipping in and out, close enough to hear the orders called and received and to watch as the team seems to effortlessly serve up some of the best food in the nation. You might chat with co-owner and James Beard award-winning Master Sommelier Bobby Stuckey about your choice of wines, or maybe one of the executive chefs will stop by to share the inspiration for the pasta dish he or she just put in front of you. Frasca's "Quattro Piatti" menu is a four-course prix-fixe wonder, but you'll want to add in an appetizer or two and pair it all from the vast Italian wine list. The chef's table experience is intimate, exclusive, and unforgettable.

The entire restaurant is a chef's counter at **Beckon** in the RiNo Art District of Denver. With only 18 seats in the whole place, formed in a U-shape around the open preparation area, you'll want to purchase your tickets the moment they're released at the beginning of each month. The multi-course tasting menu, largely influenced by Scandinavian flavors, changes based on seasonal ingredients available. You'll never have the exact same meal twice. Opt for the wine pairing, but be sure to try one of their inventive and well-balanced cocktails before the first dish arrives. Each small plate builds on the previous one, meticulously formulated for a magical mix of flavors.

For super-intimate dining, visit **The Bindery's** website to enter the lottery for a spot at their chef's table, which has a mere four seats available, right in the middle of the open kitchen, one night per week. The all-inclusive, seven-course tasting menu with wine pairings is curated specifically for the evening, with award-winning chef Linda Hampsten Fox (see page 43 for more) and her team each presenting a unique dish. Each chef brings a different approach to the table, including the uber-talented pastry crew. Entries are selected at random, and winners are notified two weeks before the dinner for confirmation.



Frasca Food and Wine



Urban Farmer



Put a Steak In It

When it comes to beef, Colorado's steakhouses are unparalleled. Our meat mavens know their craft, and you can find a perfectly prepared steak on just about every menu in Denver, in the mountains, and even on the plains. But if you're looking for the true carnivore's experience, several restaurants offer tastings that show off the differences between aging, cuts, feed, and more.

At **Urban Farmer** in downtown Denver, the menu developed by Chef Chris Starkus is so local, some of the ingredients come from right there in the restaurant. Urban Farmer grows their own mushrooms (be sure to order the tableside sauté), sources honey from the hives on the roof of the building, and uses produce from the chef's own farm south of Denver. You won't want to miss out on the dry-aged foie gras torchon, but the star of the menu is the New York Steak Tasting, which features 6-oz. slabs of sliced beef — grass-fed, grain-finished, 21-day dry aged, and 7x Colorado wagyu — to try side by side. Really want to elevate the experience? The sommelier will pair each type of steak with a different red wine for you to sip between bites. If all the meat and mushrooms aren't decadent enough, Urban Farmer's desserts (including honeycomb from upstairs brought down to scoop out in front of you) are absurdly delicious.



Frasca Food and Wine

Citizen Rail's location on the first floor of Kimpton's Hotel Born at Union Station allows for a different kind of steak-centered celebration. Their "Taste of the Born" experience includes a night at the hotel, where the plush rooms offer views of Denver in all directions and an introduction to the restaurant's dry aging room from Chef Christian Graves himself. You'll want to sit at the chef's counter so you can watch the line at work in front of the wood-fired grill while you eat your three-course meal, which includes a side-by-side tasting of dry-aged vs. unaged New York steak. Be sure to order the Plunder Road cocktail, with the perfect balance of mezcal, clarified milk, chartreuse, and cantaloupe. It's an unexpected delight. After dinner, cozy up in your room upstairs, or hop across the way to **Tavernetta** or the **Cooper Lounge** for a nightcap.

Eating beef at **Corrida** is a totally different situation. This Spanish steakhouse in Boulder is all about variety. From Colorado wagyu to a 45-day dry-aged angus tomahawk to Miyazaki eye of ribeye, you'll get the meat sweats just looking at the menu. But don't forget to go beyond the beef and try Basque-inspired dishes like a salt cod brandade or the oysters with gazpacho gelée. Maybe start with their cured meats and Spanish cheeses while you await the gin-and-tonic cart, and ask the tender to make recommendations on which tonic water will go best with the gin of your choice. If the weather is lovely, sit on the balcony and enjoy one of the most dramatic rooftop views in the city.



Citizen Rail's



Jack Atfield

Game Creek Restaurant



Flagstaff House

Dinner and a Show

Sure, sure, a fancy dinner is special, but sometimes you want the whole evening to be a study in spectacle.

At **Nocturne**, a jazz restaurant and club in Denver, you can dine while enjoying the stylings of whichever brilliant band is playing on the stage. Order dish by dish, or surrender to the “Renditions” tasting menu, a five-course journey inspired by an iconic jazz album.

As co-owner Nicole Mattson puts it, “The chef and culinary team listen to the album and research the importance of each song for inspiration to create a dish. Sometimes the rhythms of the drums remind the chef of the sound of the whisk in a bowl or sometimes the location of where the song was written inspires a regional flavor to be incorporated into the dish.”

If you’re fortunate enough to get a reservation on the evening of the new menu launch (which happens every two to three months), a band plays each song from the album while the dishes are delivered to the tables. The sommelier explains the wine pairings and the chef shares his inspiration for each plate.

“It’s an exclusive one-night event that is part Ted-Talk, part Chef’s table, part concert,” says Mattson. The tasting menu is available for a few weeks after the launch.

If you’re up in the mountains, you may be interested in another kind of show. Getting up to **Game Creek Restaurant** in the back bowls of Vail Mountain is a special experience in its own right. Start off on the Lionshead Eagle Bahn Gondola (cozy blankets provided for the chilly trip up), and then, depending on the season, ride a snowcat or a four-wheel drive shuttle to the lodge. The place has a classic Tyrolean feel, but the food is anything but stuffy. Choose between the four-course menu or five-course sequenced chef’s table experience. And then ride back down full of food and smiles.

Beano’s Cabin up at the top of Beaver Creek is the more rustic sister restaurant, and you get there via an open-air sleigh ride in the winter. The five-course menu is full of Colorado favorites, like striped bass and roasted venison.

If food with a view is your kind of thing, make your way up to the world-famous **Flagstaff House**, founded back in 1971. The epic indoor and outdoor dining area overlooking the city of Boulder has breathtaking views that deepen and change as the sun goes down behind the mountains. But the Flagstaff House is more than a pretty spot — the menu, wine pairings, and service are as elevated as the restaurant. The multicourse chef’s tasting offers plate after plate of balanced perfection, from an oyster amuse bouche to venison tenderloin. The restaurant earned its *Forbes Travel Guide* Four Star status for the 41st year in a row, and it shows. Be sure to order the flaming s’mores decadence for dessert. You won’t be disappointed.

Chef's Choice

Speaking of letting the chef do the curating, you may be surprised to find out that Colorado is home to fresh and delicious sushi and other Japanese dishes. And when you really want to enjoy the best a sushi restaurant has to offer, omakase (chef's choice), is always the way to go.

Nobu **Matsuhisa's** namesake restaurants in Denver, Vail, and Aspen offer an omakase that includes way more than a few bites of fresh fish. You'll start off with the raw goodness of three signature delights — maybe it'll be fatty tuna tartare with white sturgeon caviar on top, followed by lightly seasoned slices of sashimi, and then a three-nigiri sampler, with a cold, fresh salad variation after that. From there, you'll dive into two main dishes, like their umami-cured seabass and a perfectly cooked lamb lollipop (a personal favorite). A soup course (emulsified foie miso soup, anyone?) and a delicate dessert dish finish you off for real.

For an exclusive chef's choice experience over in LoHi, look into the "Segretto Room" at **Bar Dough**. This secret space fits up to 10 guests and includes a "chef-curated" dining experience, with wine or cocktail pairings to match the meal. If you're a fan of Chef Carrie Baird, who was in the final four on Top Chef and a fan favorite (see page 40 for more about Carrie), you'll want to reserve this space so she and her team can put together an unforgettable meal for you and your closest friends.

For one of the most fresh and mind-blowing chef's tasting menus you find anywhere, visit **Black Cat** in Boulder. With the majority of its ingredients sourced from Chef Eric Skokan's own certified organic and biodynamic 130-acre Black Cat Farm just outside the city, the menu changes constantly. This isn't one of those tasting menus where you'll still be hungry for a cheeseburger at the end of the evening. Each wholesome and hearty dish builds on the one before it, with seasonal flavors masterfully layered one on top of the other. Choose the premium wine pairing if you're up for tasting a range of unique and whimsical varietals the sommelier selects specifically for each dish, working closely with the kitchen team for the perfect match or counterpoint. Black Cat's cozy and intimate space, with its sofa booths and homey throw pillows is warm and inviting. Be sure to check their website for special farm dinners in the spring and summer!

Whether you're looking for the finest steak dinner, an intimate or private dining experience, or just an all-around special evening out, Colorado's chefs are ready to treat you to something truly memorable and delicious.



Matsuhisa



Black Cat

2011 Con Poulos Photography



Masterpiece Deli

Big Bites on a Budget

Eating well
doesn't have to
break the bank

By **Eric Elkins**

Sometimes the best dish you'll have when traveling is the one for which you paid the least amount of cash. It might come from a street food vendor who just happens to be open at the moment you pass by, or a tiny local restaurant right next to your hotel. Or it's 2 a.m. and you've just left your third bar, and you're looking for something delicious to soak up that last cocktail before you head back to the hotel. These spots might be inexpensive, but the ingredients are fresh, probably locally sourced, and you won't be hungry when you're done.

The Go-To

From quick-serve to a seated dinner, Colorado's Mexican restaurants are where you can fill up on hearty comfort food for just a few bucks. One quick rundown couldn't do justice to the number of spots where you can indulge in the perfect carne asada (ask any local and you'll get a different answer), but these are a few local faves:

El Corazon — This downtown stalwart has served many a famished family over the years. Their mole is particularly special.

El Taco de Mexico — Family-owned like many on this list, and an essential stop when visiting the galleries of the Santa Fe Arts District.

Little Anita's — A regional chain, arguably best-known for their breakfast burrito.

Los Carboncito's — People will drive out of their way for the lengua.

Mexico City Lounge — Tacos, tacos, tacos!

Torta Grill — The fresh bread and hot and melty insides make these tortas unforgettable.

Quick and Messy

Sometimes, you just need a slab o' meat between slices of bread to get you through. These spots have that and more.

Ballpark Vienna Beef — The perfect stop on your way to or from a Colorado Rockies game at Coors Field. Grab the Chicago Dog + Italian Beef special for heart-stopping goodness.

Biker Jim's Gourmet Dogs — Surprise yourself with a rattlesnake & pheasant dog or Alaskan reindeer, or just go for the Angus all-beef. Whatever you do, order crispy onions on top.

Crown Burger — Believe it or not, you can get four BLTs or perfectly greasy burgers for just \$10.

Illegal Pete's — Legendary, enormous burritos nearly bursting with fresh ingredients, open all day and late into the night.

Masterpiece Deli — A LoHi sandwich staple from master chef Justin Brunson. Sure, you could go with the healthy and delicious seared tuna on an English muffin, but the Reuben special is the real winner.

Fast and Healthy

Sometimes you crave a nutritious, still-delicious, and inexpensive meal, but need more than a salad to get you through.

Biju's Little Curry Shop — Inspired by southern Indian cuisine, with scratch-made dishes that'll warm your soul. Order some chili lime tots to go with your curry bowl.

Kokoro — Japanese fast food couldn't be more delicious. Try the beef curry, opt for "sobaghetti" or tempura udon, or just fill up on tasty gyoza. This family-friendly restaurant has been serving up healthy bowls of happiness in Denver for more than 30 years.

Ohana Kitchen — The OG of poke spots in Denver, this little oasis of Hawaiian delight is not to be missed.

Maria Empanada — When owner Lorena Cantarovici started baking out of her garage, she probably had no idea her pockets of Argentinian goodness would become a Denver institution. Now she has five locations and more on the way.

Sit, Stay

A sit-down meal doesn't have to max out your credit card. But it might just fill your belly.

20th Street Café — The classic downtown fixture isn't fancy in the least, but that doesn't mean you should skip out on their breakfast fried rice.

Bonnie Brae Tavern — Founded in 1934, this neighborhood spot is probably best-known for Mike's Cheeseburger Pizza, with ground beef, mozzarella (or American cheese), pickles, and onions.

Dead Battery Club — Enjoy affordable cocktails and a range of fresh baked buns while you kick back in this stylish little spot.

Interstate Kitchen and Bar — Settle in for one of the best burgers (Angus or vegan!), or their eight-hour roast beef sandwich with horseradish cream. Don't miss the best French fries in Denver.

Right to your Door

Sometimes, you just want to eat in the comfort of your pjs, and have hot food other than pizza delivered when you want it, pants optional.

Boney's BBQ — Get extra saucy, knowing you can jump right in the shower once you've put away all the brisket and burnt ends!

Daikon — Order yourself a fresh and fabulous banh mi sandwich on a fresh baguette.

Melita's Greek Café — Old school charm and gyros for all!

Peter's Chinese — Small and mighty, this place has the best scallion pancakes and perfect sesame chicken. Peter himself may be the one to answer the phone when you call and order.

Shish Kabob Grill — Located just on the edge of downtown, with big platters of Middle Eastern comfort food. Don't forget to order extra hummus.

Hot Noods

Just need an inexpensive bowl of carb comfort? They're easy to find all over Denver.

Menya — Whether you visit the noodle bar on the 16th Street Mall or their ramen and poke spot a quick walk over the Millennium Bridge, you'll be quite sated by the outcome.

Sakura House — A classic Japanese noodle house in Sakura Square, which is our own mini Japantown.

What the Pho — Easy downtown access to hot bowls with lots of broth and noodles.

Zoe Ma Ma — Union Station's quick-serve Chinese spot serves up a duck noodle wonton soup on Fridays and Saturdays, and their noodle soups are everything.



Biju's Little Curry Shop



Dead Battery Club



Zoe Ma Ma



Brass Tacks



My Brother's Bar

Bar Food and Late Night

Just finished a fun night at the theatre or live music downtown? Get fed until the wee hours so you don't wake up hungry *and* hungover.

Brass Tacks — Not only does this friendly bar serve Vietnamese-inspired family-style grub (Viet-Cajun Shrimp Boil, anyone?), but their baba ganoush and burgers are quality.

Denver Ted's — Nothing like a late-night cheesesteak to set you up for a good sleep.

Famous Original J's Pizza — Josh Pollack, the genie behind Rosenberg's Bagels & Delicatessen opened this New York-style haven at the back of the 715 Club in Five Points. Slices so fresh, thin, and hot, you can fold them in half.

My Brother's Bar — The oldest bar in Denver was a regular hangout for Neal Cassady and the Beat Generation. Get yourself a Jalapeño Cream Cheese Burger (JCB) and a fries and rings combo to share until way late.

Pony Up — If you're downtown and all you crave is a French dip sandwich, stop here and select from a menu full of variations, and order a cocktail from some of the sweetest bartenders in the city.

Sputnik — An old-school bar with unexpected dishes and a killer vegan menu. This is where you go after a night of live music along South Broadway, or when you want a PBR and something tasty for lunch.

There — The kitchen is open late and the steamed buns are delicious.

Mountain Moneysavers

A stop for food on the way to the resorts (or a break from the fancy) doesn't have to empty your wallet if you know where to look.

Moe's Original Bar B Que — Delicious and affordable at any of their locations, but the one in Vail is right near the gondola at Lionshead, which means a beer and brisket are close at hand.

Local Joe's Pizza — Another Vail go-to. Nothing too fancy here, just kick-ass pies served late (and even delivered!).

Loaded Joe's — Avon's secret weapon just down the way from Beaver Creek serves up lamb and eggs for breakfast and live music for dinner.

Blue Coyote — You'll want to "Gnar to the 'yote" for margs and tacos after a day on the mountain. Right in Beaver Creek.

Fatbelly Burgers — Stop by this Carbondale gem on the way to Aspen for grass-fed goodness that's locally sourced and always on point.