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Culinary: Where Palate-Pleasing Adventures Abound

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The colorful cultures that give the Southwest its signature flavor have fortunately left an indelible mark on Scottsdale's more than 600 restaurants. Here, the influences of Native American, Latin and Western-style cooking and ingredients have created a mouthwatering mélange of dishes accented by indigenous and international elements. Lately, even more exotic fare such as Asian-fusion has arrived on the scene, creating an endless menu of global dimensions.

A key ingredient to this table-top renaissance is the arrival of star chefs drawn here by the area's many fine resorts and restaurants. They are gaining accolades for taking local cuisine to new heights, exploring with ingredients like organic Native American squashes and ultra-fresh seafood. The result is a stellar cache of award-winning dining opportunities that make Scottsdale a palate-pleasing adventure that has to be tasted to be believed. Following are just a few ideas from the vast menu of Scottsdale's culinary angles.

Star Chefs

All of the right ingredients have come together under the sun here to create a food lover's paradise: top chefs, premium restaurants and an exemplary training ground with the **Scottsdale Culinary Institute**. Integrating the prestigious Le Cordon Bleu culinary program for more than 1,000 students, the Institute operates L'Ecole, a Mobile Three-Star restaurant, the highest award a student-operated restaurant can receive. A full-service student restaurant, L'Academie Café, also tempts taste buds at a second campus in downtown Scottsdale.

Reflecting the Institute's success, the new Sky Bridge Campus adds more than 50,000 square feet of facilities, including a new 80-seat demonstration kitchen outfitted for broadcasting shows. The kitchen also is used for cooking classes, celebrity chef demonstrations, corporate functions and team building.

Another opportunity for aficionados to learn from Scottsdale's best is offered by Michael DeMaria, a local culinary legend who teaches at his own kitchen studio. Owner and chef of **Michael's at the Citadel**, he holds regular classes and demonstrations where Southwestern flavors are meshed with Continental techniques.

Some chefs of note include Nobu Fukuda of **Sea Saw**, lauded by *Gourmet* magazine as one of the three best sushi chefs in the United States and most recently selected by *Food & Wine* magazine as one of the "Best Chefs in America" in their July 2003 issue. Fukuda serves a hybrid style of wine-friendly Japanese tapas, available either from the restaurant's eight course menu or from the main menu of daily hot and cold selections. Deborah Knight, head chef and owner of award-winning Mosaic restaurant imaginatively interprets global cuisine. Taking diners everywhere from India to Ethiopia and back to the Southwest with her exciting take on various styles and ingredients, Knight, too, was named one of the country's top chefs in the July 2002 issue of *Food & Wine* magazine.

Having served as executive chef at renowned locations such as **The Boulders Resort**, award-winning chef Chuck Wiley is now summoning a sophisticated, Asian-tinged menu featuring farm fresh ingredients at elements restaurant, located at the chic aerie known as the **Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain**. And certainly no stranger to fine diners in Scottsdale, veteran-star chef Robert McGrath, winner of the 2001 James Beard Award for Best Chef, continues to wow picky palates at his **Roaring Fork** restaurant.

Stellar Cuisine

Along with the kudos top chefs are receiving, Scottsdale's restaurants are earning stars and diamonds, proving that the area is home to some of the best restaurants in the country. The American Automobile Association (AAA) has

awarded their highest honor, Five Diamonds, to the **Marquesa at The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess** and **Mary Elaine's at The Phoenician**. Four Diamonds have been bestowed on another Fairmont restaurant, **La Hacienda** (the only Mexican restaurant to receive this award in Arizona), as well as the **Acacia at Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale at Troon North** and the **Terrace Dining Room** at The Phoenician.

The stars also are shining on Mary Elaine's, which has received the Mobil Travel Guide's Five-Star award, while Four Stars have been awarded to the Marquesa, Acacia, Terrace Dining Room, and **Chaparral at Marriott's Camelback Inn Resort**.

Other venues sharing the limelight include the Roaring Fork and **T. Cook's at Royal Palms**, which were tapped by *Food & Wine* magazine for "Best Reflecting the City" and the "Number One Restaurant in Scottsdale/Phoenix" respectively. And not forgetting smaller taste buds, *Restaurant Hospitality* magazine honored **Squash Blossom at the Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort at Gainey Ranch** with a "Best Kids' Menu" award.

Crossing Borders

Scottsdale cuisine has its own distinct flavor thanks to the many cultures that have contributed zesty ingredients, spices and sauces that are now freely mixed to create savory specialties. The region's first inhabitants were Native Americans from tribes like the Pima, Hopi and Hohokam, who contributed key ingredients to local cooking such as the "three sisters" – corn, beans and squash. Mexican roots can be found in items like posole, while mesquite grilling recalls the Old West. Today, restaurants such as **Mezcal** showcase this heritage, featuring authentic south-of-the-border influences on their menu such as quesos fundidos, various moles and tamales.

Other restaurants taking regional cuisine to mouth-watering heights include Rancho Pinot Grill and celebrated **Cowboy Ciao**. At **The Boulders Resort**, guests not only can dine sublimely at the resort's several restaurants, but they also can assist in the selection of fresh produce, accompanying chefs to local farms to select ingredients they will dine on that evening!

And when visitors finally do leave Scottsdale, they can always take the taste of the Southwest with them, thanks to tasty take-aways like **Goldwater Foods of Arizona** salsas. Founded by the daughters and granddaughter of former Senator Barry Goldwater, popular favorites include the Mohave Mango, Papago Peach and Ruby Raspberry salsas. Goldwater's salsas are also award winning. Their Rio Verde Tomatillo Salsa took home first place in the 2003 Scovie Awards, at the annual fiery foods and barbecue show and expedition.

Western Flavor

The savory flavors of the Old West still ride high in Scottsdale, where a corral full of venues continue the tradition of hearty, home-spun fare. **Pinnacle Peak Patio** fires-up mesquite-grilled steaks and chicken with all the fixin's, plus live music and dancing seven nights a week. Beer aficionados also will appreciate the on-site brewery where hand-crafted brews are just a tap-pull away. Suit types, however, beware, because the restaurant has a strictly enforced no necktie policy. Anyone caught with a tie will have it promptly snipped with scissors and nailed to the rafters! At last count, almost one million neckties are hanging high.

Rawhide Steakhouse provides authentic Western fare throughout the week as well. Here cowboy favorites such as fried rattlesnake, barbecue ribs and rocky mountain oysters are served-up with a healthy dose of Western hospitality. Thirsty patrons can then head next door to an authentic saloon, where well-known libations and Rawhide's specialty drinks are poured by friendly bartenders.

Originally a ranch bunkhouse dating from the 1880s, **Greasewood Flat** still retains its authentic Western aura while serving up stellar hamburgers as well. Patrons can lounge at outdoor tables perfect for star-gazing or hang their hats inside, where spurs, wagon wheels, tools and other original Western implements add the feel of a real cowboy hangout. They also can enjoy popular singers crooning Western ballads Thursday through Sunday nights in a tradition that has seen the likes of Glen Campbell and John Denver perform.

Dating back to 1882, the **Reata Pass Steakhouse** is another historical bonanza, offering mesquite-broiled steaks and tasty country music on its menu. Since the structure has succumbed to fire over the years, the only original part of the building left is the stone foundation, but it still has enough cowboy charisma to have served as the setting for episodes of the TV series "Bonanza" and feature films. And just in case any patrons get out of hand, a jailhouse dating back to the same era sits across the street ready to welcome visitors.

Serving up Western-themed fare with a more sophisticated slant, award-winning chef Robert McGrath's **Roaring**

Fork offers delectable dishes such as mustard-crust rainbow trout and chile-cured breast of duck. Another venue to try this New West cuisine, along with a stable full of house brews poured at a horseshoe shaped bar, is North Scottsdale's **The Unlikely Cowboy**.

Smart and Healthy

With spas such an important part of the Scottsdale experience, spa menus at various resorts and light fare at area restaurants mean nutritious feasts abound for health-conscious visitors. But don't think for a minute that healthy equals bland because the entrees being offered here could stand on their own for taste alone. At **The Boulders Resort's Golden Door Cafe**, a balance of protein, carbohydrates and vegetables are struck with delicious perfection in entrees such as their Pan-Seared Veggie Burger, Smoked Chicken Breast and Red Chile Taboleh, and Butternut Squash Soup with Curried Yogurt and Almonds.

At **Marriott's Camelback Inn Resort, Sprouts**, their signature spa restaurant, serves up tasty, eclectic offerings including dishes like a Crab Quesadilla. The emphasis on all the menu items here is heart-healthy cuisine interpreted with the flavors of the Southwest. And as a special benefit, menu items are tallied within caloric categories, so health-conscious diners can meet their goals.

The Phoenician, home of the legendary **Centre for Well-Being**, incorporates a healthful Choices menu into its several restaurants. Featuring items like caramelized diver scallops, the guiding principal here is that the food we ingest determines the degree of wellness one can ultimately achieve.

Willow Stream – The Spa at Fairmont Scottsdale Princess introduced the bento box concept as part of the spa's Lifestyle Cuisine program when it opened its doors in late 2001. Upon arrival, each guest is provided a menu of choices featuring natural foods and beverages with a balance of carbohydrates, fats, proteins and complex carbohydrates. When the guest is ready to dine they are delivered a bento box with their selections. Executive Chef Reed Groban created the menu with the intent of not assigning a specific diet to all guests but to provide them with the information they need in order to make informed choices. Some staples on the spa cuisine menu include Sundried Yellow Tomato & Olive Quinoa, Port & Shallot Marinated Beef Tournedo and White Bean Hummus.

The Four Seasons Spa has a full menu of healthy choices giving travelers nutritious options when away from home. Executive Chef Simon Purvis and his culinary team created the resort's Spa Cuisine menu featuring a variety of nutritionally-balanced appetizers and entrees, as well as light desserts. Low in sodium and fat, these unique menu items stray from the typical "healthy" fare and contain interesting ingredients presented in an innovate manner. Some of the more popular dishes include Wild Mushroom Ravioli, Five-Spiced Rare Ahi Tuna and Herb Grilled Asparagus Salad topped with beetroot vinaigrette and sauteéd wild mushrooms, among others.

Celebrating Good Taste

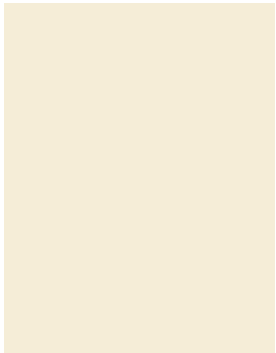
Food inspires celebration, and no destination puts together those two elements better than festive Scottsdale. Here, the key ingredients are excellent food, great living and good causes. For starters, each April, more than 60,000 aficionados of fine cuisine converge here to sample the latest creations by the area's most renowned chefs, caterers and vintners at the **Scottsdale Culinary Festival**, a nationally-acclaimed week-long event celebrating gourmet food and wine. Proceeds from the series of epicurean dinners, appetizer competitions, reserve wine tastings, student competitions and cooking demonstrations benefit the Scottsdale Cultural Council, Art Education Council and scholarships for students enrolled in culinary education programs.

This event, recognized as one of the most innovative of its kind in the country, also features the Great Arizona Picnic, which offers food sampling and continuous musical entertainment.

Adding its own distinctive cachet to the menu of events here, the **Scottsdale Celebrity Chef Golf Invitational**, presented by *Bon Appétit* magazine, made its debut in May 2002. Benefiting the Make-A-Wish Foundation, the weekend event features nine celebrity chefs from around the country playing side-by-side with top Scottsdale chefs and guests. A host of exciting festivities surrounds the tournament, including an ArtWalk in downtown Scottsdale, specialty dinners, culinary workshops, cooking classes, wine tastings and a champagne brunch. Events are hosted by area resorts, golf courses, restaurants, and galleries for golfers and non-golfers alike.

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