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287 Best Restaurants

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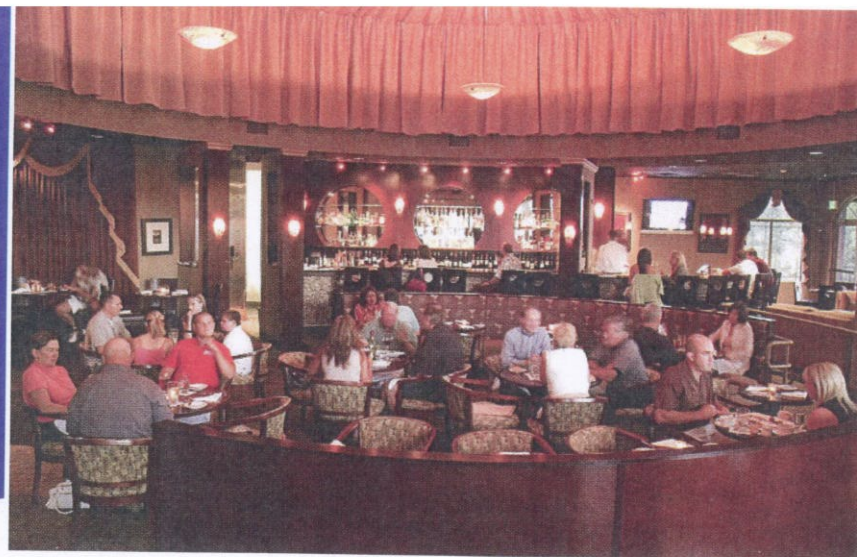
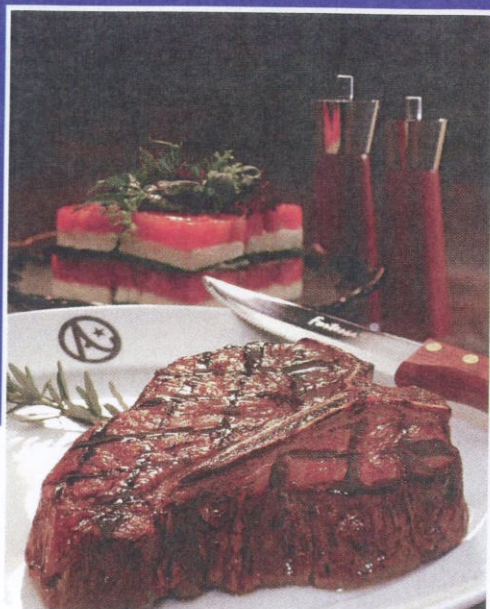
By Kira O'Donnell

You no longer have to go to the big city for a good meal.
There are restaurants aplenty right here.



People who live in Lincoln, Auburn and Rocklin no longer have to trek to downtown Sacramento for a first-rate meal. High-quality restaurants have been popping up in the region for the past several years, keeping in lively step with the population growth in South Placer County. Longing for rustic country French cuisine, traditional Mexican fare or a plateful of Indian catfish *pakor*as? Look no further than your own backyard.





The Town Lounge

Roseville

The arrival of The Town Lounge in July 2005 created a buzz among local foodies and fine diners. The menu is interesting, the ambiance is unique and welcoming, and the restaurant offers live jazz on the weekends. It's located in a strip mall that houses a large movie theater complex and a Mikuni restaurant, and when you approach its handsome chocolate-brown exterior, you'll hear lively jazz tunes piped out onto the parking lot and the restaurant's large patio. Inside, the sunken dining area showcases a small stage upon which sits a glossy black grand piano. The menu characterizes the food as "California cuisine," but there is a strong Asian influence in dishes such as the wok-seared scallops with Chinese lo mein noodles, the wasabi-crusted ahi tuna with Japanese sticky rice and the firecracker kung pao calamari appetizer. But there's also a solid range of "continental" fare, from the kitchen's Caesar salad to the chicken breast stuffed with prosciutto and goat cheese. Don't miss the refreshing Fuji apple salad or the brawny 16-ounce grilled rib-eye steak, served up with a big mound of bacon-cheddar mashed potatoes.

The Town Lounge also offers a popular brunch, with everything from a French dip sandwich and Tuscan chicken salad to eggs Benedict and a vegetable frittata.

1595 Eureka Blvd., Roseville; (916) 789-1900

Austin's Steakhouse at Thunder Valley Casino

Lincoln

Austin's Steakhouse is a guaranteed reward for Thunder Valley visitors who wade through dizzying rows of blinking, flashing slot machines and glazed-eyed gamblers in the cavernous, night-is-day, day-is-night ambiance of the casino. After entering the front door of Thunder Valley, just keep walking and walking until you reach the back. There, you'll find a peaceful, relaxing oasis from the noise and sensory overload of the main floor. The dramatically designed steakhouse features whimsical stained-glass room dividers; stripy, rounded booths straight out of a Dr. Seuss book; a handsome, wall-sized wine display; and an open kitchen with brisk, smiling chefs in crisp jackets and stiff white hats. The lighting is low, the service impeccable, and the menu reminds us of Morton's and Ruth's Chris with its focus on aged red meat and pricey, à la carte side dishes. We devoured the delectable grilled bacon-wrapped shrimp, whose plump saltiness was the perfect accompaniment to Austin's generously sized martinis. The Caesar salad, topped with a disc of fried Parmesan, was large enough for two, and the petite filet mignon, blanketed with a rich Béarnaise sauce, was fork-tender. I also recommend the sinfully caloric, fluffy creamed spinach.

1200 Athens Ave., Lincoln; (916) 408-8327; thundervalleyresort.com/austins.aspx

Above Photos (Left to right):

Austin's Steakhouse at Thunder Valley Casino
Photo courtesy of Austin's Steakhouse at Thunder Valley Casino

The Town Lounge
Photo courtesy of The Town Lounge

Fat's Asia Bistro & Dim Sum Bar
Photo courtesy of Fat's Asia Bistro & Dim Sum Bar

Le Billig French Cafe
Photo by Ben Furtado

The lighting is low, the service impeccable, and the menu reminds us of Morton's and Ruth's Chris with its focus on aged red meat and pricey, à la carte side dishes.



Fat's Asia Bistro & Dim Sum Bar

Roseville

Visiting a Fat family restaurant is like walking onto a movie set: The dining environment is often as decorative and colorful as the food coming out of the kitchen. I especially like the palm trees “growing” from the floor of Fat’s Asia Bistro & Dim Sum Bar; they lend a languorous, tropical feel to the restaurant. The last time I visited, I was disappointed to discover that the trees, though formerly alive, are actually “preserved” (read: dead) and are, as our waiter explained cheerfully, “just stuck in concrete.” The restaurant staff is charged, he added, with “pulling the fronds out once in a while to dust them off.” However, the information doesn’t detract from the beauty of the space, which features moss-green drapes hanging softly between rooms, thick bamboo poles sticking rakishly out of mustard-yellow pots and shiny black tables surrounded by sturdy rattan chairs. Don’t miss an opportunity to gobble some of the restaurant’s wonderful dim sum, like the dainty, translucent shrimp *har gow* (steamed shrimp dumpling) or the earthy pork *shu mei* (steamed pork-filled dumpling), bursting with a delicious meaty, mushroomy aroma. The large menu also offers a great selection of noodle dishes and interesting Asian entrées, such as the Indonesian spicy pork, stir-fried with a sambal chili paste, and “Thai Seafood in a Fat Pot”: shrimp, scallops, mussels, calamari and fish immersed in a red curry sauce. The kitchen puts out very crispy panko-crusted calamari, and I also recommend the enormous plate of poached baby bok choy, served with chewy whole shiitake mushrooms, crispy-cooked bright-orange carrot wedges and fluorescent-red pickled ginger.

1500 Eureka Road, Roseville; (916) 787-3287; fatsbistro.com

Le Bilig French Cafe

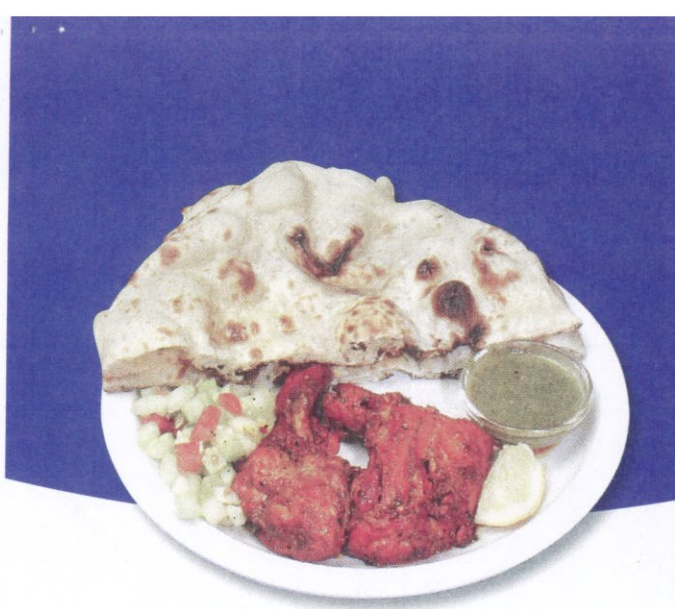
Auburn

I have the highest regard for Marc Deconinck, chef/owner with wife Monica of Le Bilig French Cafe. One of the region’s earliest and most passionate proponents of the “eat local, eat seasonal” philosophy, Deconinck has spent the past 12 years serving up first-rate country French cuisine whose ingredients are sourced from small local farmers, artisan food producers and his own extensive family garden. The Deconincks’ five children have been seamlessly and lovingly incorporated into the restaurant over the years; one of the children greets and seats you, while others may be working on homework at a spare table or hanging out with dad in the kitchen. The restaurant is small (only 11 tables) and cozy, with sponged gold walls and ceiling that make you feel like you’re sitting in a pretty gift box. Deconinck’s menu changes frequently, shifting with the seasons and reflecting the ripest produce available at the local farmers market. On a recent visit, I was wowed by the mixed greens salad, tossed with irresistibly warm applewood bacon and topped with soft rounds of bleu d’Auvergne cheese. Deconinck’s Dungeness crab and avocado salad was a perfectly molded sphere, with fat chunks of sweet crabmeat atop creamy, perfectly ripe avocado, all perched on pleasingly bitter dressed endive leaves that radiated out like a sunburst. The Painted Hills beef bib steak, chewy and flavorful, came with an intense, darkly caramelized shallot sauce, and the braised veal cheeks were as tender as soft butter. The rhubarb-apricot tarte tatin, an innovative rendition of a traditional French dessert, shone with tangy, bright spring flavors.

11750 Atwood Road, Auburn; (530) 888-1491



The rhubarb-apricot
tarte tatin, an
innovative rendition
of a traditional
French dessert,
shone with tangy,
bright spring
flavors.



Chaat Cafe serves up casual, inexpensive, very fresh Indian cuisine, from pakoras and tandoori wraps to curries and stuffed naan bread, all delivered with warmth and friendliness.

Above Photos (Left to right):

Chaat Cafe
Photo courtesy of Chaat Cafe

Zinfandel Grille
Photo courtesy of Zinfandel Grille

Zinfandel Grille
Photo courtesy of Zinfandel Grille

Chaat Cafe *Roseville*

It's a shame that Chaat Cafe is buried in the very back of a large, anonymous Roseville strip mall. You have to work to find it; we drove around for quite a while before we spied it, located among countless similar-looking retail spaces. However, the mall blandness is left at the door. As soon as you enter, you'll be struck by this cheery eatery's curry-yellow walls, upon which hang humorous black-and-white Bollywood posters. The floors are cool tile, the tables wooden laminate, and faded pictures of menu items hang behind the cash register. Chaat Cafe serves up casual, inexpensive, very fresh Indian cuisine, from pakoras and tandoori wraps to curries and stuffed naan bread, all delivered with warmth and friendliness. As we deliberated about the menu, the owner helpfully suggested the assorted pakora appetizer: eggplant, zucchini, onions, potatoes and cauliflower, dipped in a mildly spicy batter and deep-fried. "You'll love these," she said. She was right: The scorchingly hot pakoras were crunchy and addictive, accompanied by a zingy mint chutney and a sweet, earthy tamarind sauce. Another hit that day was the *aloo tikki* appetizer: tangy, crusty discs of mashed potato, spiced with green chili and onions, served with cooked garbanzo beans speckled with finely chopped red onion and cilantro. And be sure to try the kitchen's *tikka masala* roll (two to an order)—soft, made-to-order naan stuffed with creamy chicken tikka masala and chopped red onions, tomatoes and cilantro.

7452 Foothill Blvd., Roseville; (916) 782-5885

Zinfandel Grille *Rocklin*

It's easy to whiz past the Rocklin Park Hotel, located alongside busy I-80, and not give a thought to the restaurant associated with it. Hotel restaurants are rarely known for the quality of their food or service. However, Zinfandel Grille is worthy of your consideration: Not only is it a beautiful restaurant, but its wide-ranging, Cal-Ital menu offers a number of interesting and solidly prepared lunch, dinner and brunch items. The restaurant's interior, with its soaringly high ceilings, harvest-gold carpets, dusky beige walls and long, gauzy off-white drapes, is romantic and sophisticated. A house specialty is the wood-fired pizzas, ranging from a simple pepperoni with tomato sauce, mushrooms and mozzarella to the Thai pizza, loaded with peanut sauce, sesame chicken, cilantro and carrots. Try the spicy, enormous ham calzone, stuffed with cappacola ham, tomatoes, fresh basil and Parmesan. The kitchen puts out a first-rate Reuben at lunchtime, piled high with corned beef, housemade "apple kraut" (made with apples instead of cabbage) and melted Jack cheese on rye bread, served up with a large mixed greens salad. Dinner entrées include oven-roasted duck breast with Port sauce and bacon-wrapped meat loaf with mashed potatoes.

5450 China Garden Road, Rocklin; (916) 630-0400; rocklinpark.com/restaurant.php



La Provence is Roseville's rendition of a rustic yet elegant country French restaurant. Plopped down among gnarled, ancient oak trees, La Provence offers some of the prettiest outdoor dining in the region.

Above Photos (Left to right):

La Provence Restaurant and Terrace
Photo courtesy of La Provence Restaurant and Terrace

La Provence Restaurant and Terrace
Photo courtesy of La Provence Restaurant and Terrace

La Provence Restaurant and Terrace

Roseville

La Provence is Roseville's rendition of a rustic yet elegant country French restaurant. Plopped down among gnarled, ancient oak trees, La Provence offers some of the prettiest outdoor dining in the region. Sit under a big umbrella on the serene patio, soothed by soft jazz tunes and the heady scent of rosemary, and I bet you'll forget all about the kids and the piles of laundry waiting for you at home. Inside, the restaurant takes you back in time with its rough ceiling beams, earthen tile floors and wooden sideboards. The enormous fireplace that dominates the room is especially delightful in the colder months, contributing a convivial cheeriness.

Chef partners Bernard Brun and Joshua Rabbie define their cuisine as "the flavors of France and the Mediterranean regions prepared with California style," and as you peruse the menu (which changes seasonally), you will discover both traditional items, such as *soupe au pistou*, a Provençal spring vegetable soup topped with basil pesto, and a beautiful bouillabaisse (served only on Friday and Saturday nights), and more creative dishes like the hamburger Provençal (served with caramelized onions on a ciabatta bun). If you get the chance, order the *petites artichauts marines*, thinly sliced baby artichokes marinated in extra virgin olive oil and dotted with Meyer lemon slices, feathery shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano and bits of Serrano ham. This is a wonderful and refreshing flavor combination on a balmy summer's evening with a glass of sparkling wine. Other recommendations include the excellent *calmars frits*, crunchy fried calamari with pimento aioli dipping sauce, and the huge *onglet sauce échalotes*, juicy slabs of grilled hangar steak drizzled with an intense shallot and red Côtes du Rhône wine reduction, accompanied by super-crispy hand-cut *frites*. Save room for dessert: the pear tarte tatin (a deeply caramelized, upside-down fruit pastry) is the best in the region. (Note: La Provence has an inexpensive kids' menu—all items are only \$3—including a grilled cheese sandwich, hot dog or corn dog, and macaroni and cheese.)

110 Diamond Creek Place, Roseville; (916) 789-2002; laprovinceroseville.com

The Ridge Bar & Grille

Auburn

Golfers at Auburn's picturesque The Ridge Golf Club are keeping a secret: Their attractive club houses a restaurant with one of the most gorgeous views in Placer County. The Ridge Bar & Grille offers a full breakfast, lunch and dinner menu, serving diners in an airy, open space that looks out directly onto the tree-studded, gently rolling course below. The unlucky few whose chairs are turned away from the golf course view are placated by a dizzyingly large, hand-painted mural depicting gentle hills and vineyards under a bright blue sky, in which an acrobatic red plane zooms daringly through clouds. The dining area feels a bit commercial (think wedding reception/banquet room) with moveable walls and a "heavy-use" carpet with a busy leaf pattern. However, the ambiance feels relaxed and the servers are friendly. If you visit during lunch, try the hearty Ridge burger, an 8-ounce Prather Ranch certified organic beef patty with a choice of cheese, or the cashew chicken sandwich, appealing because it's light on mayonnaise and big on flavor. Dinner items include grilled salmon, pasta primavera and Asian-marinated teriyaki pepper steak.

2020 Golf Course Road, Auburn; (530) 888-7888