

Appetite for Adventure

BY JULIE BIELENBERG / PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUSI THURMAN & DENISE VIGIL | AUGUST 01, 2023



Bin 707 Foodbar

Gone are the days when high-quality dining options could only be found in Front Range cities and cosmopolitan resort towns. Now, they're spread all around the state, often showcasing the unique flavors of their given regions. With colorful palettes of ingredients, frequently picked fresh from local farms, these restaurants await road-trippers seeking out recreational adventures in Colorado's vast natural spaces.



A customer at Taco Party in Grand Junction

Taco Party, Bin 707 Foodbar, and Pêche

Direction: West on I-70; Destinations: Fruita, Moab, and canyon country

Two-time James Beard Award semifinalist Josh Niernberg opened Taco Party in 2017. Located in downtown Grand Junction, this modern eatery's specialty is—you guessed it—tacos. Hundreds of them rotate seasonally, a half dozen or so at a time; the edgy, regionally focused menu also offers dishes centered around main ingredients such as braised bison, ruby trout, and fried cactus.

The standout at Taco Party is the guacamole, made from ever-changing ingredients that reflect the micro-nuances of the region, such as pear gastrique (a kind of sweet-and-sour flavoring for sauces), amaranth furikake (a savory Japanese seasoning blend), and serrano peppers. There's always a twist to the guacamole; for example, Niernberg might infuse it with local apple juice instead of the traditional lime.

Rounding out the menu are local sodas, beer and wine on tap, and seasonal soft-serve ice cream, all homemade—flavors include Olathe sweet corn, Meyer lemon marshmallow, coffee toffee hazelnut, and chocolate guajillo grapefruit. tacopartygj.com

If time allows, linger over a sophisticated dinner at Bin 707 Foodbar, Niernberg's original eatery in downtown Grand Junction. Opened in 2011 with the purpose of helping to revive the local economy, it's a more elegant presentation of seasonal Colorado cuisine—starting with that of the agriculturally rich Grand Valley. bin707.com

On Main Street in Palisade, fine-dining Pêche is easy to find but a table there can be hard to snag. You'll want a reservation at this peach of a concept by chef-owner Matthew Chasseur, who brings his New Hampshire earthiness—along with a Culinary Institute of America education and worldly résumé—to this little town in Colorado's prime wine and fruit country. Expect no more than a dozen items on

the menu, with delicacies such as charred figs and Palisade heirloom tomatoes setting the tone for creative cuisine—think fried chicken, steak, and lamb served with enviable forage from local farms alongside Asian influences including Chinese and Thai. pecherestaurantcolorado.com



Craftsman Brew Co.

Direction: East on I-70; **Destinations:** *Sylvan Lake State Park, Holy Cross Wilderness*

Tucked into an unassuming strip mall in Edwards is Craftsman Brew Co., one of the Vail Valley's most eclectic eateries, a chef-driven craft sandwich shop turned brewpub—with plenty of dishes to share in a communal atmosphere.

Small plates include oysters on the half shell with Colorado habanero mignonette, salmon crudo with local apple, chicken liver pâté with balsamic fig jam and pickled fennel, and Colorado lamb spareribs. There are sharable mains for the table, too, like fish tacos and grilled steak frites.

Don't miss the original sammies: The half dozen options include a lobster roll, green chili Philly, and mushroom pastrami—served with the traditional deli side choice of soup, salad, or fries.

Rotating taps pour a wide selection of Colorado beer, both the Craftsman's own (brewed on site) and others. craftsmanbrewco.com



Beny's Diner & Mesa Winds Winery

Direction: Southwest; **Destinations:** *Mesa Verde National Park, Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park*

Located on historic Main Street in Cortez, Beny's Diner is consistently ranked as having among the best chile verde in the state. At this locals' haven, everything is made in house and the vegetarian green chile recipe is a long-held family secret. Large portions provide ample to-go nosh for the road. Beny's serves just breakfast and lunch, so time your visit accordingly. benysdiner.com

In the heart of the West Elks AVA (American Viticultural Area), Mesa Winds Winery sits atop a mesa at 5,800 feet in elevation, just above the quaint town of Hotchkiss. Southdown Babydoll sheep graze among the vineyards and orchards, which supply a truly farm-to-table restaurant onsite. Open seasonally, the restaurant offers a limited menu that also highlights the products of other area farmers and artisans, changing frequently based on the garden goods. mesawindswinery.com



Friar's Fork and Sanctuary

Direction: South, Destination: Great Sand Dunes National Park

Opened in 2022, Friar's Fork and Sanctuary occupies a 1920s adobe church in downtown Alamosa that wife-and-husband owner-operators Denise Vigil and Neelson Villipando refurbished themselves. Serving diners in the church's former assembly hall, the standout Italian eatery with seasonal Mediterranean accents offers grinders, local proteins, and big bowls of housemade pasta and sauce. A 2023 James Beard Award semifinalist for Best New Restaurant, the Friar's Fork is complemented by the adjacent Sanctuary, a cocktail and coffee lounge housed in what used to be a chapel. ***friarsfork.com***

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