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HOW TO **EAT** AND **DRINK** LIKE A COLORADAN



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ON THE ROAD

Mountain destinations for state's culinary travelers

Head for the hills to try some of the best cuisine outside of the Front Range

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Snow forecasts, fall foliage predictions and bucket-list hiking trails all have considerable influence over where Coloradans venture for vacation within our state's rectangular boundaries. But for food lovers, a memorable meal — better yet, several well-planned reservations — is what guides itineraries.

Beyond the Front Range, several of Colorado's mountain towns have become destination-worthy dining hot spots, buoyed by the culinary world's top awards from Michelin and the James Beard Foundation. And on the Western Slope, culinary travelers will find a wine country that's spiked with adventure and restaurants that source from neighboring purveyors.

Here are five dining destinations in Colorado worthy of a getaway.

Breckenridge

Snag one of the four seats at **Rootstalk's** new chef's counter to enjoy an extended tasting menu that features a few more dishes beyond the restaurant's seven-course rendition. Located in a charming Victorian home, the 60-seat restaurant is helmed by chef-proprietor Matthew Vawter, who grew up in Breck and won Best Chef in the Mountain West this year from the James Beard Foundation.

"We've been pushing the envelope as far as sourcing," says Vawter, who gets deliveries from farmers on the Western Slope as well as garden goodies from Esterra Culinary Garden in Boulder, a favorite among Colorado's top chefs.

His other Breckenridge concept, **Rad-**



HELEN H. RICHARDSON — THE DENVER POST

Bartender Jacob Pereira makes a drink at the bar inside the popular restaurant Rootstalk, which is in an old home along Main Street on Feb. 28, 2023, in Breckenridge.

icato, is where you'll find hearty Italian dishes like a whole branzino prepared in white wine butter and pastas with foraged mushrooms or tossed with grilled purple broccoli.

You might also be surprised to find out that a fantastic sushi restaurant is hiding out in these hills. **Mountain Flying Fish**, where the owners source from Japan's fish markets, is Vawter's favorite place to eat in town and he orders whatever sushi rolls are being featured.

The best stay for foodies is **The Carlin**, "a restaurant with rooms" on Breck's Main Street. The restaurant's raw bar

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Matt Vawter accepts the Best Chef Mountain award onstage during the 2024 James Beard Restaurant and Chef Awards at Lyric Opera Of Chicago on June 10 in Chicago.

PROVIDED BY JEFF SCHEAR — GETTY IMAGES FOR JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION

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stacks impressive seafood towers with oysters, crab, shrimp and more, and main dishes span from grouper fish and chips to braised pork shank. Round out the evening with a nightcap at the subterranean tavern — then head to bed, an elevator ride away.

Grand Junction and Palisade

putting our state on the map for unique sparkling wines that range from fizzy and funky pét-nats to vinos produced in Charmat tanks. And, of course, after a day of wine tasting, you've got to have something in your stomach to soak it all up.

Head to Hotel Maverick in Grand Junction, which has a fantastic rooftop restaurant called **Devil's Kitchen** that's partly run by hospitality students. The region makes a great learning lab for Colorado Mesa University students because the rich, high-desert soil yields

spire creativity, says Brittney Stuckenschneider, the restaurant manager at Devil's Kitchen. The team puts together seasonal menus with microgreens from Grand Valley Micro Farms, fresh bread from Kulina Lani Organic Sourdough and produce from neighboring orchards — including nectarines, plums, peaches and apricots.

Hyperseasonal is the name of the game at the Western Slope's celebrated restaurants like **Pêche** (French for peach), a cozy restaurant in Palisade. **Bin 707 Foodbar**, which is James Beard-nominated Chef Josh Nieren-

berg's Grand Junction restaurant, also has a menu that rotates with the seasons, but locals will also point you here to try the craveable Bin Burger with truffle aioli.

Vail

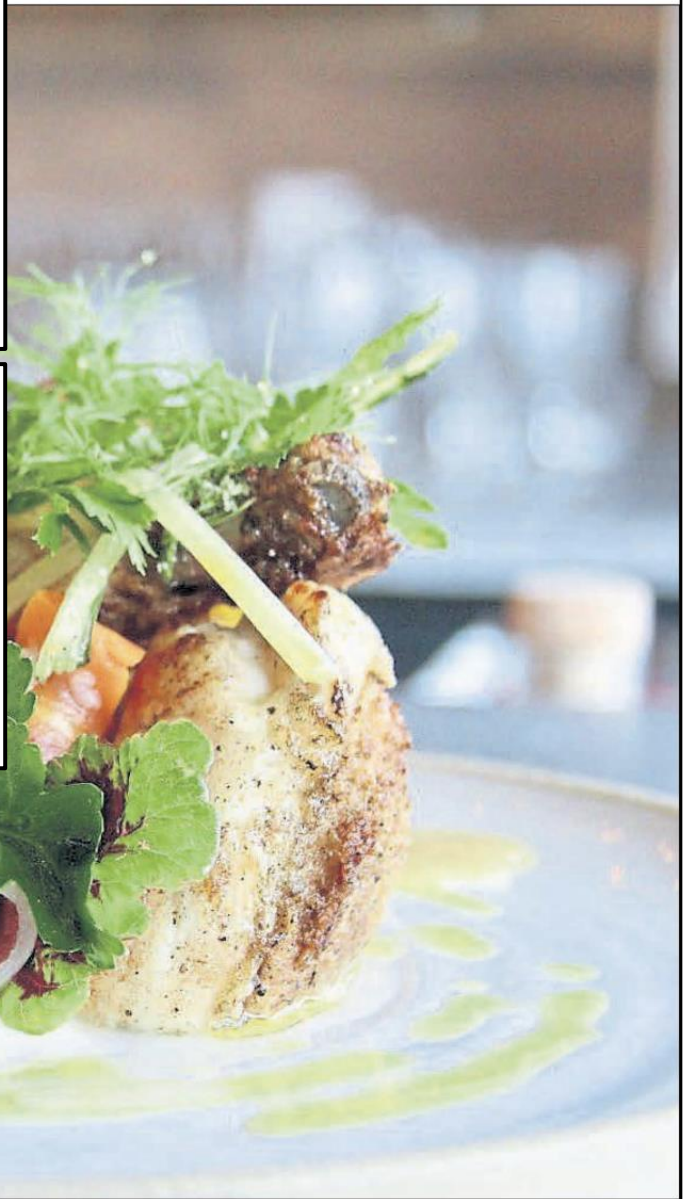
Vail's dining scene is world-class, presenting unique culinary experiences. Both **Sweet Basil**, which fuses flavors from around the world, and **Osaki's**, a sushi spot, earned Michelin recommendations in 2023.

But there's much more. Upgrade your

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Roasted chicken at Pêche Restaurant in Palisade.

PROVIDED BY ASHLEY CHASSEUR



PROVIDED BY THE SONNENALP

Diners can customize their fondue experience at Swiss Chalet at the Sonnenalp with add-ons like truffles and champagne or, for some heat, jalapeños and chili flakes. On the raclette route, you can order the cheese with potatoes and balsamic mushrooms or opt for meats including beef tenderloin, bacon, chipolata (a spicy sausage) and smoke Polish sausage.

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fondue with truffles and champagne at the **Swiss Chalet**, an alpine-themed restaurant inside the Sonnenalp hotel in Vail (the cheese is imported from Switzerland). Or follow the Hollywood-like red carpet to **Moon Rabbit** for craft cocktails like the Sage Advice, a tequila and muddled strawberry cocktail that comes with a card containing a nugget of wisdom. Or try an omakase experience at **Matsuhisa Vail**, where Chef Nobu Matsuhisa's stints in places like Peru and Argentina influence his Japanese menu.

New for this ski season, **Tavernetta** is opening up a second location inside Four Seasons Vail Resort and Residences, bringing its fresh-made pastas and Italian wine list to the resort town, where the team will also debut its first-ever breakfast menu.

Aspen

Home to Aspen Food & Wine, one of the country's top culinary gatherings, Aspen is high on the list of many culinary enthusiasts.

Book a five- or nine-course tasting menu at **Bosq**, which was one of a handful of Colorado restaurants that nabbed a Michelin star in 2023. The tasting menus are influenced by what's in season, with a focus on foraging and fermenting.

Other Michelin-recommended restaurants worth checking out in Aspen include **Element 47**, which is inside the Little Nell and is known for its wine list, house-made pastas, and wagyu; **Mawa's Kitchen**, where executive chef Mawa McQueen serves Afro-Caribbean dishes with a French influence, and **Prospect**, a handsome restaurant in Hotel Jerome that showcases local and regional purveyors. Speaking of the luxury hotel, **DESTINATIONS » PAGE 10**



ALEXIS AHRLING — AHRLING PHOTOGRAPHY

Mawa McQueen, the chef and owner of Mawa's Kitchen in Aspen; McQueen was a James Beard Award semifinalist in 2022.



PROVIDED BY BEAVER CREEK

Beano's Cabin in Beaver Creek glows at night.

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sidle up to its on-site **J-Bar** for a milkshake with a heavy pour of bourbon that's known as the Aspen Crud and that originated during Prohibition, a boozy shake flying under the radar as

a dessert.

Beaver Creek

Vail and Aspen are well-known foodie destinations, but Beaver Creek also has some fun surprises in store as well, like **Beano's Cabin**, a mountaintop spot where you can arrive on horseback in the summer or via a horse-drawn sleigh in the winter. In the winter months,

Chef Mackenzie Nicholson skis into the restaurant for her shifts.

Nicholson, who grew up hunting and fishing with her dad, designs many of her menus around wild game, from Rocky Mountain elk short loin to rabbit and a bison tartare that's served with fresh-grated horseradish and a quail egg yolk.

Round out your fine-dining circuit

with an omakase experience at **Sakaba**, inside The Ritz-Carlton Bachelor's Gulch where Japanese wagyu sprinkled with green tea salt sizzles on petite stones and sushi rolls like spicy tuna come spiced with green chili. For a special meal, book a reservation at Michelin-recommended **Mirabelle**, a restaurant in a cute house, complete with a greenhouse, and led by Belgian-born Master Chef Daniel Joly.