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LIVING

FOOD & WINE

Santa Barbara
chef Cat Cora
shares insider
intel on the local
culinary scene.



By Heidi Dvorak

Savoring SaMo

Good times aren't limited to this city's famous beach and Ferris wheel. Its robust dining scene provides plenty of flavorful adventures, as well.



(lemeridiendelfina.com) serves as an intimate

official Green Tour to see how the hotel embraces the city's eco-conscious conservation efforts, such as with a gym floor made of recycled tires.

Green-minded and deliciously diverse (clockwise from top, right): The pool at Shore Hotel is solar-heated; farmers' market finds and a host of culinary traditions drive Native menu items like Fig Vanilla Custard; Tūmbi chef Imran Ali Mookhi turns out South Asian cuisine; guest rooms at Le Méridien Delfina Santa Monica, a winner of the city's Sustainable Quality Award, come with a green incentive: Declining daily housekeeping earns vouchers for local eateries; Seaside on the Pier serves creative casual food beside the Pacific Wheel.

September may be the best month of all to visit Santa Monica. School's back in session, a hoard of tourists have returned home, and the temperature is a tad cooler, in other words, perfect. Two diversely different hotels with new offerings make the cut here, but new restaurants take center stage, since there are a whopping 500 eateries packed in the city's 8.3 square miles.

STAY

Just four blocks from frenzied beach traffic, the regal **Le Méridien Delfina Santa Monica**

retreat. Many rooms have ocean views, and the interior is peppered with works by noted local artists like Laddie John Dill. September spotlights **Au Soleil: A Summer Soirée**, a celebration of amusements, such as evening tours of the Santa Monica History Museum and **Rosé & Illustrate**, which are instructor-led painting sessions enhanced by glasses of rosé.

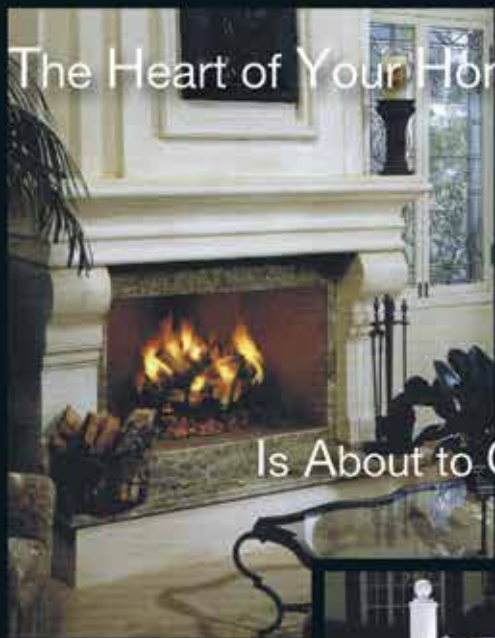
The ultra-mod LEED Gold-certified **Shore Hotel** (shorehotel.com) honors its seven-year anniversary of sustainability this fall with special packages for guests as well as perks on eco product sampling and green transportation throughout September. Request the

EAT

A visit to the Santa Monica Pier is de rigueur. There, diners at the rooftop lounge of **Seaside on the Pier** (seasideonthepier.com) can claim bragging rights to an expansive ocean view as well as elevated Cali beach fare, like succulent coconut shrimp, perfectly fried crab cakes, hefty burgers, and twice-cooked buffalo wings. The Pacific is also visible from the outdoor patio of **Tūmbi Craft Indian Kitchen** (tumbibar.com). Chef Imran Ali Mookhi is more like a curator of Indian, Pakistani, and Afghani street >

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP, RIGHT: COURTESY OF SHORE HOTEL; JAKE AHLES PHOTOGRAPHY; CARL LARSEN; DAVID PHELPS; COURTESY OF SEASIDE ON THE PIER

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Go Santa Monica



The Gourmandise School (above) teaches pros and novices how to make the most of locally sourced ingredients. The brunch menu at Del Frisco's Grille offers Nonna's Pan Cinnamon Rolls (below), topped with bourbon-espresso caramel sauce and toasted pecans.

food with standouts like *pani puri*, a chickpea-filled puff pastry set atop a glass of kick-ass tamarind-mint water, as well as rich, creamy Butter Chicken. **Del Frisco's Grille** (delfriscosgrille.com) is the seaside scene for comfort food brunch dishes on steroids. Crack Coffee is a wildly pleasant eye-opener of cold brew infused with Mount Gay Black Barrel Rum. Beyond



indulgent are Nonna's Pan Cinnamon Rolls swimming in bourbon-espresso caramel sauce and Croque Madame oozing with garlic crème.

Powerhouse restaurateurs Jeremy Fox, Josh Loeb, and Zoe Nathan bring their culinary spins to Mexican cuisine at **Tallula's** (tallulasrestaurant.com), a beach-close hang featuring organic fare, such as Albondigas With Cranberry Beans, Squash Blossom Quesadilla, Chicken With Peach-Almond Mole, and margaritas.

The lure of the Pacific is strong, but venturing inland has its rewards, too. If only the communal table is available at **Native Restaurant** (eatnative.la), *Top Chef* contestant Nyeshia Arrington's showplace of creative eats, grab a seat for dishes like Charred Eggplant Mousse, Korean Fried Chicken, and Foraged Mushroom Spaghetti. If the Anthony Bourdain mural outside of **Gramercy** (gramercysm.com) indicates anything, it's that this dressed-down neighborhood bar and eatery is far from ordinary. Flat-screens may dominate the décor, but stellar dishes such as the Slider Trio (with pork belly), Maine Lobster Roll, and the Burrata Salad deliver top-notch taste.

Curious about where the next great chef might be learning the culinary ropes? Check out the new location of **The Gourmandise School** (thegourmandiseschool.com) at Santa Monica Place. That's where working chefs like Evan Kleiman or Rose Lawrence might be guest instructors in either of two commercial kitchens. And to take some of Santa Monica home, stop by the Third Street Promenade for artistic sugary treats from **Carlo's Bake Shop** (bakeshop.carlosbakery.com), made famous on *Cake Boss*. ♦