Best 50 restaurants in Sacramento

SN&R eats through old favorites, hidden gems and trendy hotspots to pick the region’s best dining experiences

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When I first moved to Sacramento, I did what I assume any ordinary food-obsessed person would do. I Googled, “Best restaurants in Sacramento.”

What I found were suggestions on Yelp and TripAdvisor, crowdsourced websites that tend to be an unreliable reflection of reality. Now, that same search yields ideas from national tastemaker Thrillist and the San Francisco Chronicle’s restaurant critic—in other words, people who don’t even live here are dictating where to eat in Sacramento, and that’s bogus.

We set out to curate an essential list of restaurants that both celebrates the new and innovative as well as the old-school and classic. More importantly, we wanted to highlight Sacramento’s amazing diversity and showcase the full of range of worthwhile dining experiences you can have in the region. They most definitely are not all white-tablecloth affairs, but they are all delicious.

Of course, with any such list, there need to be some rules. We narrowed the geographic scope to Sacramento and its immediate suburbs—no Davis, Auburn or Amador County, though we know there are some gems there. Restaurants had to be open at least three full months in order to be considered. With some other stipulations, we cast out a call for nominations to local voracious diners and wound up with well more than 100 names. From there, we ate and debated and ate and debated. And ate. And here we are: SN&R’s best 50 restaurants in Sacramento, listed in alphabetical order. (Scroll down or click here for a map of all of our picks.)

The shrimp taco at Chando's Tacos: fried shrimp, slaw and layers of flavor on a special pink tortilla. PHOTOS BY ANNE STOKES

Price guide for one
$: $10 or less
$: $11-$20
—Janelle Bitker

Bacon & Butter

When chef-owner Billy Zoellin first launched Bacon & Butter in Midtown, he could only use the space’s kitchen for breakfast and lunch. Finding an untapped niche for California-style breakfasts, Zoellin moved to a larger location—contemporary and light-filled—in 2014 but kept the format. Lines continue to form outside daily for hearty fare with abundant locavore tendencies. Get in early; the restaurant only takes reservations for large groups.

Order: flapjacks, biscuit sandwich, bee pollen with yogurt and granola, burger; $$; 5913 Broadway; (916) 346-4445; http://baconandbuttersac.com. AMR

Biba

Emilia-Romagna native Biba Caggiano opened her restaurant 30 years ago, well before Sacramento’s dining scene began to take off. Now, she’s nationally acclaimed for her high-end pastas and traditional Italian meals, served in a historic timbered building that has seen the neighborhood change massively around it. Expect special-occasion celebrations and politico networking nightly. The many-layered lasagna, only available on Fridays and Saturdays, is legendary.

Order: lasagna verdi alla Bolognese, baked ziti with Caggiano sausage, zuccotto Fiorentino cake; $$$-$$$$$; 2801 Capitol Avenue; (916) 455-2422; http://biba-restaurant.com. AMR

Binchoyaki Izakaya Dining

Multigenerational Japanese families fill this petite restaurant on a nightly basis, where the emphasis is on sharing lots of items over drinks. The centerpiece is the open-flame grill, with skewers of meat getting an extra flavor boost from the binchotan charcoal imported from Japan. Other small plates—and luxurious sauces—show finesse. For years, Sacramento waited for a true izakaya. This is it.

Order: Krispy Rice, grilled black cod, a bunch of skewers; $$-$$$$; 2226 10th Street; (916) 469-9448; http://binchoyaki.com. Ja.B.

Bubbie’s Love Deli & Catering

For some reason, word still hasn’t spread about the small, no-frills and wonderful Jewish deli tucked inside a nondescript strip mall in Citrus Heights. On weekend mornings, the neighborhood pours in for the promise of eggs, smoked fish, kosher meats and boiled bagels—just like in New York. OK, the bagels probably aren’t going to please recent transplants, but everything else sure will.


Cafe Marika

This cozy jewel box of a restaurant carries an old-world, old-fashioned vibe and food to match. Hardly anything has changed since Cafe Marika first opened more than 25 years ago—and that’s a good thing. The three-course dinners—soup or salad, choice of entree and apple strudel for dessert—are still a bargain, and the Eastern European mains still exemplify comfort food at its finest. When given the option, always choose spaetzle.
Chickens become your best friends at Sunflower Natural Food Restaurant.

Order: chicken paprikash, Hungarian goulash, schnitzel; $-$; 2011 J Street; (916) 442-0405. *Ja.B.*

**Cafe Plan B**

The casual counterpart to the more upscale Plan B still feels like a special night out, with its open kitchen, open-air dining room and hip soundtrack reminiscent of a Parisian lounge. We slightly prefer it for its more expansive menu, which features simple, well-executed French fare. Regardless, most rightfully go for the classically Belgian combination of plump, steamed mussels and crisp, shoestring fries dusted with herbs.

Order: nantaise with pommes frites; $$-$$$; 1226 20th Street; (916) 447-3300; [http://cafeplanb.com](http://cafeplanb.com). *Ja.B.*

**Cafe Rolle**

Look to Yelp or the Food Network for the best restaurant in Sacramento, and you’ll probably find Cafe Rolle. The tiny East Sacramento spot remains a perennial lunchtime favorite for its simple but oh-so-satisfying hot sandwiches that drip with melty cheese, quality butter and flavored mayo. When in doubt, go for fish—chef-owner William Rolle comes from a family of smoked salmon gurus in Lyon, France.

Order: a hot sandwich with salmon, prawns or lamb; $; 5357 H Street; (916) 455-9140; [http://caferolle.com](http://caferolle.com). *Ja.B.*

**Chando’s Tacos**

Lisandro “Chando” Madrigal operates a few taquerias—and food trucks—but the original location remains a favorite, having lured in hungry crowds for years with the heavy scent of pork adobada simmering on the outdoor grill. For most tacos, the sizzling filling is nestled between hot corn tortillas and topped with the holy trinity of cilantro, onions and a guacamole crema, but the crispy mulitas, no-frills burritos and cheese-adorned vegetarian options keep customers coming back for more.

Order: mulitas, tacos de papa, anything with adobada; $; 863 Arden Way; (916) 641-8226; [www.chandostacos.com](http://www.chandostacos.com). *Ju.B.*

**Cielito Lindo Mexican Gastronomy**

Inside a former fast-food spot, chef-owner Ramiro Alarcon transcends first impressions with his masterful renditions of regional Mexican dishes. Don’t expect heavy, cheese-laden taqueria fare, but nuanced cooking with Aztec, Spanish and French influences. After a devastating fire, Alarcon came back with a renewed emphasis on promoting traditional Mexican culture and attentive service to match.

Order: mole poblano, sopa verde del campo, celery-pineapple agua fresca; $$; 3672 J Street; (916) 736-2506; [http://cielitolindo.us](http://cielitolindo.us). *AMR*

**El Bramido Mexican Restaurant & Bar**
It doesn’t look like much from the outside, but this colorful restaurant churns out epic Mission-style burritos and street tacos. Across the board, the nuanced meats hit all the right textural notes, but it’s the seafood—and expansive tequila selection—that keeps El Bramido packed.

Order: seafood plates, crispy tacos, burritos; $$-$-$; 2394 Northgate Boulevard; (916) 565-1552. Ja.B.

**Ella Dining Room & Bar**

Light, bright and elegant Ella is an ideal restaurant for celebrating any occasion. The high ceilings, covered with reclaimed Hungarian farmhouse shutters, reflect the restaurant’s luxurious yet grounded style. Persuaded by seasonal themes, the menu changes often but guests can rely on richly flavored meats, tender seafood and house-made pastas to accompany a wide-ranging wine list. The popular happy hour also offers great deals.

Order: bone marrow, aged rib-eye, cocktails, desserts; $$$$-$$$$$; 1131 K Street; (916) 443-3772; [http://elladiningroomandbar.com](http://elladiningroomandbar.com). A.T.

**Empress Tavern**

There are many different nights to be had at Empress Tavern. Any old date night will feel like an occasion as you descend into this tucked-away grotto. You can pregame before a show at the Crest, sitting at the bar for nonpareil snacks and killer cocktails. Bring parents, who will be wowed by the meat-heavy feasts and old-school desserts. Or, book a party at the chef’s table and get raucous while the cooks look on. Not all things to all people, but close.

Order: griddled bacon, short-rib stroganoff, honey fried hot chicken; $-$$$$$; 1013 K Street; (916) 662-7694; [www.empressstavern.com](http://www.empressstavern.com). B.G.

**The Firehouse Restaurant**

Of course the food at the Firehouse is very good, and you can’t go wrong with any fine cut of perfectly-prepared beef. But the reason to come to this 55-year-old landmark is the Firehouse itself: a staggeringly gorgeous, dramatically elegant and memorable space steeped in local history. The ivy-covered courtyard is probably Sacramento’s most exquisite setting for lunch on a nice day.

Order: any steak, $89 prix fixe menu; $$-$$$$$; 1112 Second Street; (916) 442-4772; [www.firehouseoldsac.com](http://www.firehouseoldsac.com). Ja.B.

**Fish Face Poke Bar**

Chef Billy Ngo, also of Kru, has earned Sacramento’s trust when it comes to raw fish, so naturally his poke spot is the city’s best. Poke as he serves it is a choose-your-own-adventure of sauces, add-ins and sides. It can take a visit or three to dial in your jam, but once you do, you’ll be hooked like ahi tuna on a line. Or just trust in Ngo and go with the chef’s poke of the day.
Order: poke with yuzu ponzu and sides of sushi rice and kimchi; $$; 1104 R Street, Suite 100; (916) 706-0605; www.fishfacepokebar.com. B.G.

Formoli’s Bistro

Aimal Formoli is all ears. Noting that East Sacramentans are a well-traveled lot who long for the foods they’ve experienced in Europe, Formoli and his wife, Suzanne Ricci, set their culinary sights on serving the appetites of their neighbors while incorporating other international influences. Still, Formoli and Ricci don’t simply offer food so much as they open their home to the community they so devotedly listen to and serve.

Order: whiskey burger, poutine; $$-$$$$; 3839 J Street; (916) 448-5699. KRA

Grange Restaurant & Bar

With a focus on local farms, executive chef Oliver Ridgeway offers solid menus for breakfast, dinner and everything in between. Located in the Citizen Hotel, the restaurant is dark and cozy yet plenty of natural light streams in from 18-foot windows. It’s prime for high-powered lunches—look for some funny politically-themed details in the decor around the hotel and key government officials at the bar.

Order: zabuton, any seafood; $$$-$$$$$; 926 J Street; (916) 492-4450; www.grangesacramento.com. A.T.

Hawks Public House

It’s as though the little sister restaurant of Hawks in Granite Bay moved to the city, set herself up in a loft and is leading the fast-paced urban life. Hawks Public House’s caliber of food is just as high as the original restaurant, but the approach is more casual in a vibrant, bustling room with an open kitchen and wood accents. Charcuterie is a focus here, as well as house-made pastas enveloped in rich sauces. The restaurant’s take on brunch is refreshing, too.

Order: vegetable “snacks,” burger, pastas, croque madame; $$-$$$$; 1525 Alhambra Boulevard; (916) 588-4440; www.hawkspublichouse.com. A.T.

Hawks Restaurant

Hawks represents the ultimate white-tablecloth experience in the area—well-worth the 25 minute drive from Sacramento. Chef-owners Mike Fagnoni and Molly Hawks create menus that pay tribute to local ingredients via Italian- and French-inspired dishes. It’s always difficult to choose between ordering à la carte or going with the exquisite seasonal tasting menu—either way, don’t miss pastry chef Misty Greene’s sweet endings.

Order: gnocchi, braised meats or $80 prix fixe; $$$$$; 5530 Doulgas Boulevard in Granite Bay; (916) 791-6200; http://hawksrestaurant.com. A.T.

Jamie’s Broadway Grille

In a sea of change—farm-to-fork this, new arena that—Jamie’s is a blissful island of same. The servers are warm, the noncraft beer is cold and the taxidermy buffalo head watches over all. A masterfully prepared
Big meals and flavor abound at Binchoyaki Izakaya Dining.

slab o’ meat will likely be at the center of your plate, bathed in gravy or jus and nestled against an old-school mixed salad, crisp battered fries or buttery mashed potatoes. May it always be so.

Order: garlic steak sandwich, smoked prime rib, clam chowder; $-$$$$; 427 Broadway; (916) 442-4044; http://jamiesbroadwaygrille.com. B.G.

Jimmy’s Peruvian Restaurant

One of Sacramento’s only places for Peruvian eats is actually located inside a Mexican restaurant. When you take a seat at this dive, you’ll get menus for both Jimmy’s and Ay Carumba—obviously, go for Jimmy’s, which excels with seafood and capturing the many cultural influences that make Peruvian flavors sing.

Order: ceviche, fried fish; $$; 3032 Auburn Boulevard; (916) 676-6256; http://jimmysperuvianrestaurant.com. Ja.B.

Juno’s Kitchen & Delicatessen

Refrain from making spurious claims of sandwich greatness if your bread is bogus and falls apart. Mark Helms makes and bakes all the bread for Juno’s, the cozy East Sacramento spot he and his wife Susan Vasques own. Despite Juno’s only being open six days a week, he spends seven days a week crafting loaves from his wild sourdough starter. Helms is in service of his bread and because of this, the sandwiches remain some of Sacramento’s best. Helms does not stop—luckily, Helms lives down the street.

Order: sandwiches, especially the smoked trout; shrimp mac ‘n’ cheese; $$; 3675 J Street; (916) 456-4522; www.junoskitchen.com. KRA

The Kitchen Restaurant

There is no other restaurant in Sacramento—and the country, for that matter—like the Kitchen. Totally unique in its format, dining at this 25-year-old fixture feels like a party in a theater. Over five courses and four hours, chefs put on a show in the elegant dining room, while an epic intermission lets you wander through the kitchen—backstage, essentially—to chat with cooks and sample more bites. If at the end you are somehow still hungry, you can request seconds.


Kru Contemporary Japanese Cuisine

It’s not every day that a restaurant move sparks thousands upon thousands of words in the local press, but Kru isn’t just a regular restaurant—it’s a civic treasure, upon which both chefs and the general public agree. If the more spacious location doesn’t ease the pain of the long wait, a Japanese whiskey highball or three courtesy of the new, liquor-stocked bar certainly will.

Order: omakase, warm mushroom salad, pork belly and uni; $$$-$$$$$; 3135 Folsom Boulevard; (916) 551-1559; http://krurestaurant.com. B.G.
La Bonne Soupe Cafe

Though La Bonne Soupe’s famed founder Daniel Pont sold the place in 2011, lines still snake out the door every day by noon. The petite sandwiches look deceivingly simple—usually three ingredients on a freshly baked baguette—but they’re a treat. Even better are chef-owner Edward Stoddard’s soups, intensely flavored and often luxuriously creamy.

Order: half sandwich with any soup, though especially seafood; $; 920 Eighth Street; (916) 779-9754. Ja.B.

Lalo’s Restaurant

The weekend barbacoa estilo Hidalgo is rightfully legendary and often runs out before lunchtime, but if you miss it, you can console yourself with some of the area’s best tacos, tortas and quesadillas. Not those kiddie-menu-type quesadillas, these are made from crisp, fresh masa with creative fillings like huitlacoche, flor de calabaza and rajas. A visit to Lalo’s is the next best thing to a trip to Mexico City.

Order: barbacoa with consommé, tacos al pastor, licuado de mamey; $; 5063 24th Street; (916) 736-2389. B.G.

Localis

Seasonal, locally-sourced cuisine is the focus of a lot of Sacramento’s farm-to-fork restaurants, but Localis offers more technicality, inventiveness and whimsy than most of the competition. Chef-owner Chris Dann-Barnum is a talent to watch—and you can literally watch him cook at the bar, which offer the most fun seats in the house. Go for lunch to take advantage of more affordable, casual fare. And if you’re vegan, gluten-free or have other dietary restrictions, Dann-Barnum will take care of you.

Order: octopus, any dessert, chef’s tasting; $$-$$$$$; 2031 S Street; (916) 737-7699; www.localissacramento.com. Ja.B.

Lou’s Sushi

Brussels sprouts in a sushi roll? Check. Blistered shishito pepper tempura? Yep. But it’s not just the unusual variety that makes Lou’s Sushi a standout—chef-owner Lou Valente’s dedication to the essentials is first-class, with steamed rice befitting a classic sushi master. Valente demonstrates both technique and creativity in his approach to Japanese cuisine, making a dining experience as surprising as it is delicious. Plus, Lou’s has the vegan sushi market cornered.

Order: omakase or sushi rolls, such as the Zig Zag or Kaiware Kid; $$-$$$$; 2801 P Street; (916) 451-4700; www.lousushi.com. Ju.B.

Magpie Cafe

It’s rare that a restaurant’s brunch game is as strong as both its lunch and dinner, but here we are. Dining at Magpie is elegant and delicious while remaining unstuffy and casual, no matter what time of day you
The beef noodle soup at Yang's Noodles is warming and hearty.

visit. With a menu strongly supported by local produce and proteins, dishes are beautifully plated and highlight seasonal ingredients, making it a strong contender for frequent repeat visits.

Order: pork chop, vegetable plate, ice cream sandwich, chocolate-avocado mousse; $-$ $$; 1601 16th Street; (916) 452-7594; www.magpiecafe.com. Ju.B.

Masullo Pizza

This pizzeria feels like a hidden wonder at its tucked away location in Land Park, but its perfect crust is no secret. Thin and fire-blistered, chewy but not doughy, chef-owner Robert Masullo knows how to make a crust that elevates the craft. Toppings lean on the gourmet side with offerings like arugula, oyster mushrooms and an herby anchovy persillade, but the finest bites are any pie’s remnant crust pieces, drizzled with chili oil.

Order: Elisa, Triana, meatball appetizer; $$; 2711 Riverside Boulevard; (916) 443-8929; www.masullopizza.com. Ju.B.

Mother

Mother appeals to both the animal-friendly and carnivorous with its playful vegetarian take on comfort food. The space is tiny, but Mother’s new walk-up counter service makes for quick, friendly service from the same team that owns downstairs neighbor Empress Tavern. The menu is economic but thoughtful with its popular veggie burger, sandwiches, crave-worthy sides and creative pasta dishes that don’t seem like a meat-heavy restaurant’s sad, vegetarian afterthought.

Order: carrot-nut burger, mushroom po’boy, daily pasta; $$-$ $$; 1023 K Street; (916) 594-9812; http://mothersacramento.com. R.L.

Mulvaney’s B&L

When Patrick and Bobbin Mulvaney opened their restaurant 10 years ago, they predated the Sacramento’s trendy farm-to-fork movement. With a consistent dedication to local farms and purveyors, the Mulvaney’s staked their claim on building community, expanding from the original 19th-century firehouse into the neighboring former mechanic’s shop to create a must-visit compound. Go for the whole pig roasts and daily specials starring the freshest produce; stay for the family atmosphere.

Order: Del Rio Botanical salad, house-smoked salmon, pork chop; $$–$$$$; 1215 19th Street; (916) 441-6022; http://mulvaney’sbl.com. AMR

NixTaco

No other casual Mexican restaurant in the region attempts the same level of ambition and greatness as NixTaco. Chef-owner Patricio Wise makes tortillas fresh throughout the day, every day, using his own nixtamal made from heirloom corn. Grab something off of the impressive craft beer list to pair with a few tacos and admire the handiwork—the food is only going to get better at this young restaurant.
Order: tacos with al pastor, carne asada, rajas con queso or chicharron; $-$ $$; 1805 Curby Way, Suite 12, in Roseville; (916) 771-4165; http://nixta.co. Ja.B.

Nopalitos Southwestern Cafe

Open only on weekdays for breakfast and lunch, Nopalitos is a locals-only kind of place, yet supremely welcoming. The Southwestern-inspired menu, with its gentle spices and salad options, is refreshingly different than any other on offer in the larger Sacramento area—and the tart, charred green salsa at the salsa bar is good enough to eat with a spoon.

Order: Little Cactus Special, tamale bowl, chile verde anything; $; 5530 H Street; (916) 452-8226; www.nopalitoscafe.com. B.G.

OneSpeed

Chef-owner Rich Mahan of longtime favorite the Waterboy helped usher in Sacramento’s era of gourmet pizza with OneSpeed. Housed in a long, light-filled space in East Sacramento, it dishes up produce-driven pies and entrees with regional beers and wines. Clever bike-themed decor celebrates Mahan’s love of cycling. Enjoy the outdoor patio in good weather, which is most of the time.

Order: Rick’s pizza, sausage pizza, focaccia with red pepper hummus, chopped salad; $$; 4818 Folsom Boulevard; (916) 706-1748; http://onespeedpizza.com. AMR

Pangaea Bier Cafe

After playing basketball in Europe, Rob Archie returned to Sacramento to open a beer-friendly cafe like the ones he enjoyed overseas. Tucked into a small but convivial space in Curtis Park, Pangaea thrives on its eclectic beer list and surprises with its better-than-brewpub food. The simple yet brilliant burger won two successive Sacramento Burger Battles and took 11th place in 2015’s World Food Championship.

Order: burger, mac ‘n’ cheese, bratwurst; $$; 2743 Franklin Boulevard; (916) 454-4941; http://pangaeabiercafe.com. AMR

Pho Ru

A Vietnamese restaurant inside a Filipino shopping center has become a home base for anyone wanting to try banh canh cua, a viscous crab soup loaded with chewy noodles, shrimp, pork and quail eggs. Even with Little Saigon and the seemingly endless supply of Vietnamese restaurants in town, it’s a tough dish to find, and Pho Ru’s version performs brilliantly. Even so, it’s the restaurant’s other, less traditional dishes that make it a repeat-destination.

Order: crab noodle soup, fried trout, butter crunchy beef; $; 6115 Mack Road; (916) 476-3754; www.rurestaurant.com. Ja.B.

Pooja Indian Grill

Indian food is a popular choice for vegetarians and vegans—the menus usually offer ample choices. Pooja Indian Grill doesn’t disappoint, but in fact ups the game with entrees and sides so robust and perfectly spiced you’ll be hard-pressed to pick. The vegetarian maharani dinner feast makes for an ideal tasting menu replete with the likes of samosa, chana masala and dessert. Pro tip:
The menu has a rich naan offering—it doesn’t hurt to sample several kinds.

Order: vegetarian mahrani dinner, lots of naan, mango chutney; $$; 1223 Merkley Avenue in West Sacramento; (916) 375-8906; http://poojaindiangrill.com. R.L.

The Press Bistro

Chef-owner David English boldly left Ella Dining Room & Bar to open this smaller, Mediterranean-inspired restaurant. It worked out: The Press feels classy yet warm and laid-back, with tasty tapas and pastas presented without fuss—and the prices consistently remain lower than the competition. It’s the sort of neighborhood spot that inspires devout regulars, who return for their same favorite dish over and over again.

Order: braised short-rib, any pasta; $$-$$$$; 1809 Capitol Avenue; (916) 444-2566; www.thepressbistro.com. Ja.B.

Quan Nem Ninh Hoa

Can a restaurant with one truly great dish be a great restaurant? It can when the dish in question hits all the marks of sweet, salty, fishy, fatty, crunchy, herbal, fresh and spicy, in the way that the best Vietnamese cuisine does. Throw in a festive, hands-on, roll-your-own aspect and yes, one dish can land you in the 50 best.

Order: house special spring rolls with nem nuong, banh beo; $; 6450 Stockton Boulevard; (916) 428-3748. B.G.

Ruchi

Solid South Indian cuisine is something of a unicorn in Sacramento. Enter Ruchi, easily the best South Indian restaurant in the city. Ruchi’s dishes are bright, warm, different and familiar all at the same time. Generous portions blast the senses: scents are reminiscent of flowers and even Christmas, while creamy textures yield synesthetic comparisons to a deep and rich royal purple. Be smart by bringing friends, sharing plates and saving your billfold the extreme exercise of being tempted to try each and every item on the menu.

Order: gobi manchurian dosa, apollo fish, baingan bharta; $$; 2600 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 100; (916) 927-2600; www.indianruchi.com. KRA

Saddle Rock

The restaurant may be green but the chef, Matt Masera, formerly of Mother and Empress Tavern, is time-tested and Sacramento-approved. Each tangentially gold rush-inspired dish is lovely and creatively composed, often with one touch that artfully elevates—a sprinkle of tarragon here, a dab of pine syrup there. Some dishes already feel like local classics, and Masera brought those addictive, salty brown butter cookies with him from Mother, thank goodness.

Order: Chicken “Skin” a Biscuit, baked oysters, beef Wellington, catfish nuggets; $$-$$$$; 1801 L Street; (916) 706 2011; www.saddlerockrestaurant.com. B.G.
Sampino’s Towne Foods

At lunchtime, crowds pour into this charming, old-school Italian deli for hefty sandwiches and homemade pastas. The family-owned operation recently expanded to include a dimly-lit, romantic dining room for dinner Friday and Saturday nights as well, where the portions are enormous and red sauce is king.

Order: meatball sandwich, lasagna, sausage dinner; $-$$-$; 1607 F Street; (916) 441-2372; www.sampinosfoods.com. Ja.B.

Savory Fried Chicken

At most local Filipino joints, you pick from a line of already prepared food that’s been sitting around for who-knows-how-long that greets you in a Styrofoam box. Styrofoam remains a fixture at Savory Fried Chicken, but the Elk Grove spot gets an immediate leg up for its made-to-order cooking. Whole fried chicken with gravy is the main attraction, but Savory also prepares traditional favorites and sides. Save room for dessert—the malasadas, Portuguese-style doughnuts, arrive hot from the fryer.

Order: chicken adobo, longanisa, halo-halo, malasadas; $; 9174 Franklin Boulevard, Suite C, in Elk Grove; (916) 395-3905. Ja.B.

Shige Sushi

In a city cluttered with bombastic sushi rolls and neon lights, Shige Sushi sets itself apart in its traditional approach. Shige Tokita runs the sushi bar with quiet, disciplined mastery; his movements as precise as the julienned pieces of ginger that might grace your hamachi. Nigiri from the specials board—or better yet, omakase, where you let the chef serve you whatever he deems best that day—is the way to go here. Sit back and enjoy the show.

Order: omakase; $-$$$; 5938 Madison Avenue in Carmichael; (916) 331-7300. Ja.B.

South

When South first opened, its fried chicken became an instant hit: crispy, tender, juicy and flavorful. A true mom-and-pop restaurant, South was built with love, using family recipes as the foundation for contemporary and classic Southern fare. Guests feel at home immediately in the easygoing space, equipped with counter service and a hip vibe.

Order: fried chicken, spicy shrimp, cornbread, pecan pie; $$; 2005 11th Street; (916) 382-9722; http://weheartfriedchicken.com. A.T.

Sunflower Natural Food Restaurant
There’s a reason this casual, vegetarian eatery has been a popular destination for ages: Healthy, organic food that’s inarguably hippie-centric but also just so, so tasty. Rich in whole grains, seeds and fresh veggies, the extensive menu sports a fast-food vibe but without the grease or empty calorie bombs. Most menu items can be ordered vegan, and if you sit outside, you can commune with the friendly chickens who roam the grounds. Sweet.

Order: nut burger, nutty taco, fresh juices and smoothies; $; 10344 Fair Oaks Boulevard in Fair Oaks; (916) 967-4331; www.sunflowernaturalrestaurant.com. R.L.

Tây Giang

Rising San Francisco rents brought Tây Giang to south Sacramento, along with a modern interior and careful presentations of Vietnamese favorites. Rice-based meat and seafood entrees dominate rather than pho on this thoughtfully planned menu, with plenty to satisfy families, vegetarians and those with other dietary restrictions. Order widely to experience the breadth of the kitchen’s skill.

Order: DIY wraps, grilled grape leaf beef, grilled catfish; $-$; 7321 Stockton Boulevard, Suite 100; (916) 688-8223; http://taygiangrestaurant.com. AMR

Tori’s Place

Sisters Veronica Richmond and Victoria Haggins radiate soul from this tiny, periwinkle shack in Del Paso Heights. This is Southern food like you wish your mom made: big, rich and unapologetic. The crispy-soft hot water cornbread will hook you, but it’s the complex gumbo that will have you raving to all your friends.

Order: gumbo, smothered pork chops, fried chicken; $; 1525 Grand Avenue; (916) 646-6038. Ja.B.

The Waterboy

Would the Waterboy feel as special if you could afford to eat there often? Most of us will never find out, and maybe that’s for the best. Each eagerly-anticipated visit brings with it a quickening of the pulse upon entry into the golden light of the dining room, inside of which your every wish will be skillfully anticipated and seamlessly fulfilled. The pacing is luxurious, the mood is relaxed and romantic—this restaurant just might get you laid.

Order: veal sweetbreads, bouillabaisse à la Rick, seasonal fruit crostata; $$-$$$$; 2000 Capitol Avenue; (916) 498-9891; www.waterboyrestaurant.com. B.G.

Yang’s Noodles

At Yang’s Noodles, everything you need to know is in the name. It’s all about the hand-cut noodles, the ones found in the restaurant’s extremely popular beef noodle soup. People travel from the Bay Area for Yang’s hard-to-find dishes, which reflect cuisines from Taiwan, Northern China and the Sichuan province. Use your noodle, go to Yang’s and slurp up the freshest noodles in town.

Order: lamb roll or beef roll, beef noodle soup, dumplings; $; 5860 Stockton Boulevard; (916) 392-9988. KRA
Top 50 restaurants in Sacramento