



The 38 Essential San Diego Restaurants, Spring 2016

[Candice Woo](#) on Apr 5, 2016, 8:36a



Hello there, it's time to update the **Eater 38**, your answer and ours to any question that begins with, "Can you recommend a restaurant...?" This specially selected group covers much of the city, spans myriad cuisines, and aims to collectively satisfy all of your restaurant needs. Every few of months, we'll be adding worthy restaurants that were omitted, have newly become eligible, or have stepped up their game; restaurants must be **open at least six months** to qualify for consideration.

This round, two restaurants that couldn't be more different join the list — Sushi Tadakoro and Cantina Mayhuel. One is a temple to the precise Japanese art of sushi while the other celebrates agave and casual Mexican cuisine. But both showcase a dedication to authenticity in food and drink and inspire intense loyalty from its diners.

Restaurants are listed in no particular order.

If your favorite restaurant isn't on list, [send us a note](#) nominating it for inclusion; we'll be posting updated versions of the Eater 38 map throughout the year.

1 Kaito Sushi

Kaito Sushi inspires devotion and reverence from sushi purists who delight in owner Kazuo Morita's dedication to the freshest seafood and time-honored technique.

130 N El Camino Real
Encinitas, CA 92024

2 Market Restaurant & Bar

Chef/owner Carl Schroeder has an enviable culinary resume and a much-admired reputation for his seasonal cuisine and thoughtful cooking style.

3702 Via De La Valle
Del Mar, CA 92014

3 Addison at The Grand Del Mar

Eater readers say that Addison, the signature restaurant at the Grand Del Mar, is one of the splurge-worthy spots in town, Chef William Bradley's menu combines his French training with local ingredients and contemporary plating.

5200 Grand del Mar Way
San Diego, CA 92130

4 A.R. Valentien

Executive chef Jeff Jackson and chef de cuisine Kellie Crosson head up a highly-trained farm-to-table kitchen; their Thursday night artisan table dinners are something to behold.

11480 N Torrey Pines Rd
La Jolla, CA 92037

5 Tender Greens

Accessible, affordable and fast, Tender Greens has become a reliable go-to for San Diego diners. This is the group's first San Diego location and also where local salumi company P. Balistreri got its start.

4545 La Jolla Village Drive

San Diego, CA 92122

6 The Marine Room

Executive chef Bernard Guillas and chef de cuisine Ron Oliver couldn't have a more dramatic backdrop for their menu that has global influences but remains rooted in SoCal seasonality.

2000 Spindrift Dr

La Jolla, CA 92037

7 Whisknadle

From-scratch cooking combined with a casual approach to fine dining have kept this La Jolla restaurant relevant and revered.

1044 Wall St

La Jolla, CA 92037

8 George's At The Cove

Executive chef Trey Foshee is cited as a guiding force in San Diego food culture and one of most committed champions of local ingredients.

1250 Prospect St

La Jolla, CA 92037

9 Nine-Ten Restaurant and Bar

San Diego has several stellar hotel restaurants and this is one of them. Executive Jason Knibb is unassuming and un-flashy but his innovative and creative food speaks for itself.

910 Prospect St

La Jolla, CA 92037

10 Yakitori Taisho

This cozy yakitori-only spot is under the same ownership as Yakitori Yakyudori but the meticulously grilled skewers served here are superior. The primary focus is on chicken, from unctuous grilled chicken skin to tender chicken meatballs and deconstructed chicken wings.

5185 Clairemont Mesa Boulevard

San Diego, CA 92117

11 Sushi Ota

Helmed by a venerable sushi master (request a seat in owner Ota-san's section of the sushi bar), the restaurant is unassuming, low-key and unquestionably authentic.

4529 Mission Bay Dr

San Diego, CA 92109

12 The Fishery

A local seafood distributor, market and restaurant in one. Chef Paul Arias does right by his product; his Tuesday tasting menu (\$28 for 4 courses) is a good time to taste how.

5040 Cass St
San Diego, CA 92109

13 Bankers Hill Bar & Restaurant

Chef Carl Schroeder and Terryl Gavre's second, more casual spot (the partners are also behind MARKET Del Mar), has become a solid neighborhood favorite for its food and cocktails.

2202 4th Ave
San Diego, CA 92101

14 Blind Lady Ale House

At this beacon in the Normal Heights neighborhood you'll find a quality lineup of beer, house-brewed and otherwise, and a local farm-driven menu of tasty pizzas and salads.

3416 Adams Ave
San Diego, CA 92116

A small, cozy spot in the East Village with a menu of updated bistro classics and a beloved brunch that manages to be untrendy yet totally stylish.

721 9th Ave
San Diego, CA 92101

16 Carnitas' Snack Shack

The extreme popularity of this casual and friendly pork-centric eatery has spawned a North County outpost and another location in the works on the downtown waterfront.

2632 University Ave

San Diego, CA 92104

17 Wine Vault & Bistro

Tucked above India Street, this hidden gem features winemaker events, an ever-changing seasonal menu and prix fixe dinners that feel like a steal. Friday: \$20, 3-courses; Saturday \$30, 5-courses.

3731 India St

San Diego, CA 92103

18 CUCINA urbana

Even six years after opening Bankers Hill, tables here are still some of the most sought-after in town thanks to a shareable Italian-inspired menu that's both modern and familiar.

505 Laurel St

San Diego, CA 92101

19 Starlite

Celebrating seven years in San Diego, Starlite helped to launch the local craft cocktail scene and is a haven for late night eaters who still want good food - the kitchen's open until midnight every night.

3175 India St

San Diego, CA 92103

20 Jayne's Gastropub

A real-deal gastropub with a British co-owner and a well-executed modern pub menu. The wine list is more interesting than most, cocktails too.

4677 30th St

San Diego, CA 92116

21 Puesto

After scoring big at a number of recent food competitions, it's safe to say that Puesto has more to offer than just tacos, although they do those pretty well too.

789 W Harbor Dr

San Diego, CA 92101

22 Juniper & Ivy

This new-ish restaurant from chef Richard Blais has already established itself as a San Diego contender, helping to further activate Little Italy and encouraging eaters to dine out more frequently to catch the ever-evolving menu.

2228 Kettner Blvd

San Diego, CA 92101

23 Ironside Fish & Oyster

Though some readers tell us they wish the menu were a bit more ambitious, the combination of well-prepared, pristine seafood combined with impeccable cocktails is hard to beat.

1654 India St

San Diego, CA 92101

24 Tiger!Tiger!

This might be San Diego's best example of a craft beer eatery, done without pretense. The food here more than measures up to the beer.

3025 El Cajon Blvd
San Diego, CA 92104

25 Fathom Bistro, Bait & Tackle

Uniquely San Diegan, this craft beer bar attached to a still-operational bait and tackle shop on a pier specializes in house made sausages.

1776 Shelter Island Dr
San Diego, CA 92106

26 Buona Forchetta

Regulars rave about the char and chew of the oven-burnished crusts at this friendly and bustling South Park pizzeria, which also specializes in homemade pasta.

3001 Beech St
San Diego, CA 92102

27 Jsix Restaurant

A recent remodel and revamped menu from executive chef Christian Graves, with new daily specials, have put this East Village spot on diners' regular rotation.

616 J St
San Diego, CA 92101

Executive chef Brian Redzikowski shines brightest at his Chef's Table experience, when he can fully tap into his culinary depths, but the well-trained chef's Asian-inflected menu is consistently tasty and thoughtful. Food-focused folks may want to eschew KE's club-like weekends in favor of quieter weeknights.

2001 Kettner Blvd
San Diego, CA 92101

29 Bencotto Italian Kitchen

Handmade pastas and quality Italy-sourced products, plus a sleek, contemporary setting, help distinguish this Little Italy eatery from the rest of the neighborhood.

750 W Fir St
San Diego, CA 92101

30 Cowboy Star Restaurant & Butcher Shop

An in-house butcher shop, skilled mixologists and a non-stuffy vibe set this steakhouse apart from its expense account counterparts. Try for a seat at Victor Jimenez's chef's counter.

640 10th Ave
San Diego, CA 92101

31 Urban Solace

Chef and owner Matt Gordon has established a loyal following for his unpretentious new American comfort food and popular Bluegrass Brunch.

3823 30th St
San Diego, CA 92104

32 Stake Chophouse & Bar

Providing a compelling reason to venture to Coronado, Stake is a special occasion spot that's quickly risen high in the steakhouse ranks as a next-generation modern meat palace that pays equal attention to rest of its seasonally-inspired menu.

1309 Orange Ave
Coronado, CA 92118

33 Romesco Mexiterranean Bistro

This is currently chef Javier Plascencia's only San Diego-based restaurant and a great place to taste his version of Baja Med cuisine, which is now electrifying the greater food world.



4346 Bonita Rd
Bonita, CA 91902

34 Aqui es Texcoco

Traditional Barbacoa-style lamb, stuffed into tacos and enchiladas or on top of sopes or tostadas. In any form, it's delicious - the Travel Channel's Andrew Zimmern agrees.

1043 Broadway Ste 108
Chula Vista, CA 91911

35 Bracero

In its six months of existence, the newly-eligible Bracero has managed to hold the interest of the dining public and keep itself in the center of the culinary spotlight, earning a spot on the list for its focus on showcasing traditional Mexican flavors, as experienced through a modern lens.



Photo Credit: Courtesy Bracero

1490 Kettner Blvd, San Diego, CA 92101 [Visit website](#)

36 Catania

Last spring, Whisknadle Hospitality debuted its latest offering, a farm-to-table eatery in the seaside neighborhood of La Jolla that pays tribute to the Italian coastline. Seafood is treated with care here, and a wood fire provides proper treatment to pizzas as well as meat and produce.

7863 Girard Ave

La Jolla, CA 92037

37 Sushi Tadokoro

Showcasing pristine seafood, chef/owner Takeaki Tadokoro practices traditional edo-mae style sushi in an elegantly spare setting. Reservations are recommended for this 28-seat restaurant that tops many sushi purists' lists.

2244 San Diego Ave Ste C

San Diego, CA 92110

[Visit website](#)

(619) 297-0298

38 Cantina Mayahuel

Known industry-wide as a mecca for agave spirits long before they were uber-trendy, this Adams Avenue gem is also one of the best practitioners of authentic Mexican food. Top plates include carnitas tacos and real deal mole, offered as a special a few nights a week.

2934 Adams Ave

San Diego, CA 92116