

**16** WAYS TO RECHARGE YOUR WORKOUT

**SPECIAL  
ISSUE**

# MEN'S JOURNAL

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## ANDY SAMBERG

THE **BROOKLYN  
NINE-NINE** STAR  
ON HOW TO BE  
FUNNY IN  
2020

SECRETS TO A  
**STRESS-FREE LIFE**

IN SEARCH  
OF BIGFOOT  
**P. 20**

UNDERGROUND WITH  
**U.S. BORDER  
AGENTS**

**P. 68**

**JOHN  
TURTURRO**  
REVISITS THE  
WORLD OF  
**THE BIG LEBOWSKI**

# 2020

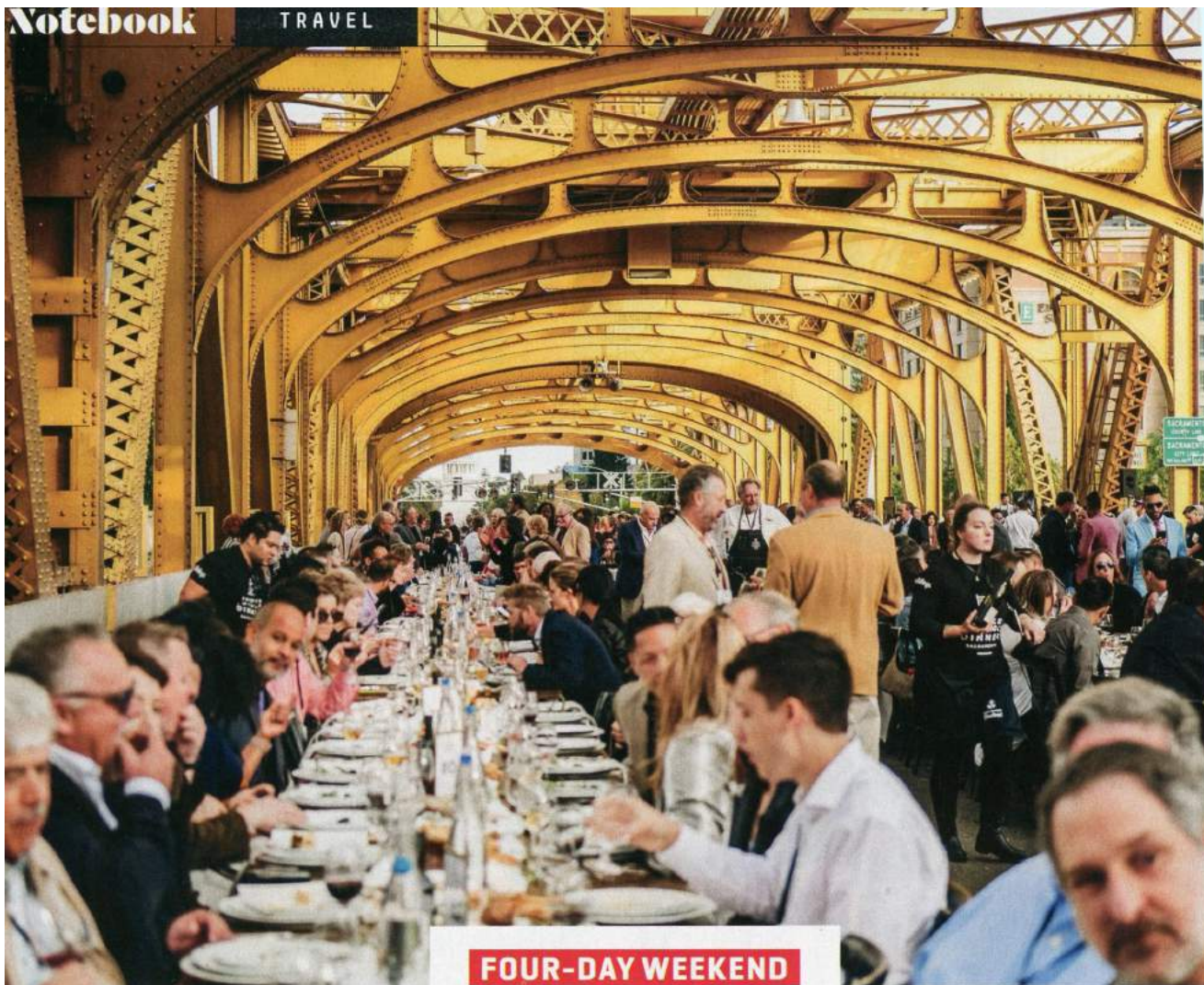
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FOUR-DAY WEEKEND

# Cali's New Foodie Capital

Once sleepy Sacramento is now a hub of creative energy, thanks to new investments and a rich history. And it just may be America's most exciting new dining destination. **by BLANE BACHELOR**

**I** **F YOU LOOK** up while jogging around Sacramento these days, as I discovered last fall, you may find yourself face-to-face with a four-story-tall orangutan. Or a menagerie of jungle birds in flight. Or even Johnny Cash.

Over the past several years, some of the best muralists in the world—including heavyweight artists Axel Void and Shepard Fairey—have transformed the state capital's buildings into a giant plein air gallery, with more than 120 pieces of art. It's all part of Sacramento's Wide Open Walls, a two-week festival promoting the arts.

During my running tour of the murals, my jogging buddy/guide was Jenn Kistler-

McCoy, founder of Sac Tour Company, which specializes in tours via foot or bike. At the time, Kistler-McCoy was training for the Boston Marathon; I was just hoping to detox a bit after too many culinary indulgences the night before. Along our six-mile route, Kistler-McCoy pointed out a dozen or so murals, explaining the artists and story behind each one.

"The mural movement started in the 1960s," she said. "This isn't a new phenomenon—it's just finally getting the attention it deserves."

The same can be said for Sacramento itself. Once described by now governor Gavin Newsom as "just so dull," California's capital is on a tear these days, transform-

ing its longtime reputation as a stodgy political hub into a bona fide culinary destination and outdoor-recreation hotbed.

In June, the Kitchen, a spacious restaurant serving \$135 prix fixe meals—with delicacies like roasted quail over port-braised red cabbage—was awarded the city's first Michelin star. The chef-owner behind the menu, Randall Selland, has long been an institutional figure in Sacramento's foodie scene, having taken full advantage of the region's abundance of farms and ranches. The Sacramento Valley produces much of the country's fruits, vegetables, and nuts, and it's that rich agricultural heritage that inspired the moniker "America's Farm-to-Fork Capital."



## FOUR DAYS IN SACRAMENTO

### WHERE TO STAY

The boutique **Citizen Hotel** is a fitting nod to the city's stately roots, decorated with framed political cartoons from *The Sacramento Bee*. For a more see-and-be-seen spot, head to the **Kimpton Sawyer**, home to Sac's first rooftop pool.

### WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

It's hard to go wrong with the Italian-influenced seafood dishes at **Allora**. Or get your brisket-and-beer fix at **Urban Roots Brewing & Smokehouse**. The **Canon** has amazing al fresco dining, with designed-for-sharing plates like bulgogi butternut squash.

### CATCH A BUZZ

The **Beer Vault**, housed in a 1912 bank building, has 68 self-pour taps to sample from. Or revel in the old-school vibe at **B Side**, a Midtown bar where DJs spin vinyl on the weekend. Want vino? You can choose from 24 sparkling wines served by the glass at **Fizz Champagne & Bubbles Bar**.

### DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT

...strolling around **Old Sac**, which offers a glimpse into the city's Gold Rush-era riverfront district... savoring **Milk Money's** absurdly delicious doughnuts with cheeky names like *Bananas & Pajamas*.



▲ Clockwise from above: The Golden 1 Center arena; Kru Japanese restaurant; one of the city's many murals. Opposite page: The annual Tower Bridge Dinner.

"In the dead of winter, we're still being supplied from local farms," says Oliver Ridgeway, who, while executive chef at Grange, helped put Sacramento on the culinary map. In 2018, Ridgeway left Grange to open his brasserie-style eatery, **Camden Spit & Larder**, and many of the city's culinary talents have similarly opened their own restaurants.

The city is growing on other fronts, too. In 2016, the \$557 million Golden 1 Center opened as the new home of the NBA's Sacramento Kings—and as the world's first 100 percent solar-powered arena. The public-private venture has transformed a formerly blighted swath of the city into **Downtown Commons**, or **DoCo**, which includes a luxury hotel; **Punch Bowl Social**, a hybrid bowling alley/arcade; and two dozen restaurants and retail shops. In two years, a professional soccer team is scheduled to play in a new \$300 million stadium in the booming **Railyards** district, a mega-development just north of downtown that's roughly eight times larger than **New York's Hudson Yards**.

"We didn't just want to be that place between Tahoe and San Francisco any-

more, so we decided to invest in ourselves," says Raymond James Irwin, a Sacramento native and president of **Fizz Champagne & Bubbles Bar**, located in DoCo. "The city is changing because the leaders in our community decided, let's do it instead of just talking about it."

Sac's year-round mild weather makes it easy to burn off calories by exploring the city's leafy neighborhoods via foot or two wheels. For longer rides, cyclists have the 32-mile **American River Bike Trail**, which runs to the Sierra Nevada foothills. Closer to downtown, the **Sacramento River Parkway Trail** is popular among runners, with views of the river and its iconic, mustard-yellow **Tower Bridge**. Standup paddleboarders and kayakers are a common sight, and farther afield, there are several national forests rich in both hiking and Gold Country history.

Not unlike modern-day Californians, Sacramento's Gold Rush-era residents faced fires and severe flooding of the river; many left and never returned when the boom fizzled. But the city's infrastructure and economy have come a long way since then, and locals these days are finding plenty of reasons to stay for the long haul.

"You could have asked me 10 years ago if I'd be back in Sacramento, and I would have told you no way," says Dane Blom, a native of the city who was named executive chef at Grange in 2018 following stints in New York and Napa. "But now I have zero plans to go anywhere. I love it here." ■