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Carmel-by-the-Sea Living Large With World-Class Chefs

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Carmel-by-the-Sea has quietly but consistently emerged as one of the West Coast's top destinations for food and luxury culinary events, with the village now home to some of the country's finest chefs. Albeit with a population of fewer than 4,000 people – not counting the summer visitors – Carmel boasts enough top chefs to have turned many heads.

"There just may be more world-class chefs per square mile in Carmel-by-the-Sea than anywhere else in the nation, perhaps in the world," said Rich Pepe, owner of two popular village dining destinations, Vesuvio and Little Napoli. "It's impressive to look around the restaurants in our village and see the incredible talent that continues to settle here."

Readers of *Travel + Leisure* magazine think so highly of Carmel that the California Central Coast town was named No. 3 for "World's Best Cities for Romance" behind only Paris and Venice. In its write-up of Carmel, the magazine singled out Aubergine's acclaimed executive chef, Justin Cogley, who joined the restaurant in 2011 by way of Chicago. Under Cogley's direction, Aubergine has been nominated for three James Beard Foundation awards including Best Chef, West. Cogley also has been awarded the title of Grand Chef Relais & Châteaux, joining an esteemed list of internationally celebrated chefs, as well as "Best New Chef" by Food & Wine magazine.

"If I had to describe my food, I would say each plate has a purpose," says Cogley, who has created a culinary event in Carmel – Rediscovering Coastal Cuisine – where talented chefs are invited to collaborate on a 12-course tasting menu that celebrates California's Central Coast.

Another major culinary event just finished its second year in Carmel, the Relais & Châteaux GourmetFest, a prestigious food and festival featuring a "Who's Who" list of top national and international chefs. This summer in Carmel, Cogley has plenty of company among his peers when it comes to notable achievements and stellar resumes.

Kurt Grasing worked in some of the worlds' finest restaurants – Clift Hotel in San Francisco; Narsai's in Berkeley, Calif.; 231 Ellsworth in San Mateo, Calif.; Four Seasons in Boston; Pierre Hotel in New York; and La Gavroche in London – before opening Grasings in 1998 where he today remains owner and executive chef.

When the late and legendary chef Julia Child was quoted as saying, "You don't have to cook fancy or complicated masterpieces – just good food from fresh ingredients," she could have easily been talking about today's chefs in Carmel.

Whether that's Cogley or Grasing, or several others – La Balena's Brad Briske, Basil's Soerke Peters, Affina's James Anderson, Dametra Café's Faisal Nimri and countless others – Carmel boasts a lineup of acclaimed chefs who have perfected the art of using Monterey County's bounty of farm-fresh ingredients, while pairing them with the region's top wines.

"We are blessed to have a wide range of restaurants and options here in Carmel," Pepe said. "You don't need a discriminating palate or a fat wallet to have a great dining experience; there's something for everyone."

Pepe's Little Napoli, in fact, was featured in a recent "Diners, Drive-ins and Dives" segment as host the Food Network's Guy Fieri paid a visit to Carmel-by-the-Sea.

Here is how to find the popular Carmel culinary attractions:

- **Aubergine**, Monte Verde at Seventh, [831.624.8578](tel:831.624.8578), auberginecarmel.com
- **Grasings**, Sixth and Mission, [831.624.6562](tel:831.624.6562), grasings.com
- **Basil**, San Carlos between Ocean and Seventh, [831.626.8226](tel:831.626.8226), basilcarmel.com
- **La Balena**, Junipero between Fifth and Sixth, [831.250.6295](tel:831.250.6295), labalenacarmel.com
- **Affina**, San Carlos and Sixth, [831.250.7744](tel:831.250.7744), affinacarmel.com
- **Damettra Café**, Ocean and Lincoln, [831.622.7766](tel:831.622.7766), dametracafe.com
- **Little Napoli**, Dolores and Seventh, [831.626.6335](tel:831.626.6335), chefpepe.com
- **Vesuvio**, Junipero and Sixth, [831.625.1766](tel:831.625.1766), chefpepe.com

It's never been easier to get to Carmel-by-the-Sea by air, with Monterey Regional Airport (MRY) just a 10-minute drive away. Convenient direct flights are available to and from San Francisco (SFO, United Express),

Los Angeles (LAX, American Eagle/United Express), Las Vegas (LAS, Allegiant Air), and Phoenix (PHX, U.S. Airways), as well as to San Diego (SAN, Alaska Airlines). Alternatively, San Jose International Airport (SJC) is a pleasant 75-mile drive mostly along the coastline, from the north.

The Carmel Hospitality Improvement District – a collective organization of the City of Carmel and Carmel Innkeepers Association – is working to promote the village’s abundant attractions, events, and stunning seaside location.

From its incomparable white-sand beach to many choices of distinctive meeting venues and lodging properties, Carmel-by-the-Sea has it all.
For more information, visit CarmelCalifornia.com.

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