

Rediscover charming Solvang



Photos Dan Miller

By Fran Miller

Most know Solvang merely as a sugar stop along Highway 101. This Danish capital of America has long served as a brief road-trip detour for butter cookies, butter rings, kringle, and cinnamon crisps. But Solvang has evolved. Hip lodging options, fine wine, and Michelin level cuisine now find a home here alongside the venerable bakeries and clog shops. It now takes more than a pit stop to fully explore the small town and its many offerings. If

you've not been lately, Solvang is worthy of a fresh look. Here are some of our favorite things:

Stay: One peek at The Winston, the town's new, upscale boutique hotel, and you'll want to spend one night in each of its 14 fabulous rooms. Each is distinct in size and layout and each features dazzling décor in vibrant hues. Housed in the town's historic Old Mill Clock Tower, this 'invisible service' hotel combines old world charm with modern amenities. The Winston believes that the best

way to help its guests get the most out of their stay is to simply get out of their way. Rather than a standard check-in process, it provides unique access codes. Rather than a loud, public lobby bar, it stocks a private, guest-only honor bar. And complimentary breakfast is delivered discreetly to your door.

Dine: It remains that no trip to Solvang is complete without a pastry purchase. Birkholm's Bakery & Cafe has been a Solvang mainstay for generations of visitors. Third generation baker Thomas

Birkholm now mans the bakery that his grandfather established nearly 70 years ago, where you'll find all of the Danish originals.

Restaurant industry duo, chef Michael Cherney and his wife Sarah bravely opened peasants FEAST mid-pandemic and Chef Cherney's Solvang Hot Chicken, Meatball Sandwich, and the popular Pastrami Smoked Salmon Sandwich have proven to be a hit. A roomy outdoor patio surrounds the indoor dining room, which is housed in a circa-1970s greenhouse, one of Solvang's iconic buildings.

The owners of Ramen Kotori possess impressive culinary pedigrees and their experience is evidenced in every bowl of delicious ramen. The impassioned partnership between Chef Budi Kazali, owner/operator of Santa Ynez Valley's award-winning Ballard Inn and onsite restaurant The Gathering Table, and husband and wife team, Francisco and Erica Velazquez has transpired into one of Solvang's most popular eateries.

The only restaurant in the Santa Ynez Valley to receive a Michelin Plate honor, First & Oak is the creation of Jonathan Rosenson who serves as its sommelier. The charming restaurant features beautifully plated menu items featuring locally sourced ingredients. The restaurant's wine list is interesting and approachable, with a number of selections from the Rosenson family's own CCOF Certified Organic Coquelicot Or-

ganic Estate Vineyard, located within walking distance of the restaurant.

Wine: Solvang is home to more than 20 tasting rooms within its 2.4 square miles. Varietals from the Santa Ynez Valley, Santa Maria Valley, and Sta. Rita Hills are featured amongst well-known labels and those waiting to be fully discovered. Some of our faves: Visitors to the Lucas & Lewellen and Tuscan-flared Toccata Tasting Rooms can sample more than 20 world class wines, as well as shop a variety of gourmet foods, gifts, and unique wine related items. At Dana V. Wines, proprietor and seasoned wine-maker Dana Volk can be found pouring her outstanding Pinots, Chardonnays, and Bordeaux Blends on her front patio where fire pits ward-off evening chill.

More: Hans Christian Andersen Park features a lovely 1.3-mile hiking trail within its wooded grounds; during summer months, keep an eye out for the 100-plus goats that are brought in to provide weed abatement. Find fresh cut artisanal cheese, charcuterie, fresh bread, and accoutrements at the Cailloux Cheese Shop, an upscale, European-style specialty food retailer. The Solvang Spice Merchant specializes in premium spices, teas, salts, sugars and fun gifts. When indoor museums are once again open, the Elverhoj Museum of History & Art and its Rembrandt exhibit (through the end of this year) are a must.



Miramonte student strives to 'create curiosity' through the lens

... continued from Page B1

"I strive to create dialog and encourage others to preserve, appreciate and take care of our natural world.

"During these challenging times of climate change and habitat loss," Edwardson continues, "I hope to create curiosity about our wild and natural spaces. I hope to be able to capture what I can of the beauty of our delicate ecosystem and share my appreciation for the special place in which we live."

A serious photographer must have a considerable amount of patience because so much time is spent waiting for that perfect photo opportunity. Edwardson does. "One time in the Truckee area," his

mother, Antonia, recalls, "Thomas stood in the middle of Webber Lake, chest deep, for two hours, waiting for the ospreys to come down and pick up the fish. He got the picture but I just kept thinking, 'Is that camera insured?'"

And like that photographer in "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," Edwardson admits to having had times when he's waited to take a picture, only to let the opportunity go by as he simply appreciated the beauty of his subject.

A trip to the Santa Cruz area to see the forests that were burned by the recent fires resulted in incredible photographs showing both the devastating effects of wildfires and the resilience of

nature. "I got a picture of green shoots peeking through the burnt out plants and trees," Edwardson says. "In the contrast of the green against the blackened trees, you can see how nature is resilient and how life always finds a way."

Edwardson and his brother, Will, a Miramonte freshman (and, according to Edwardson, an insect fanatic), both volunteer at the Lindsey Wildlife Experience and the Oakland Zoo, sharing their passion for nature, wildlife protection and conservation.

Although still in high school, Edwardson's dream is to one day become a professional nature photographer. It appears he's well on his way!

As Seen in Lamorinda



A perfectly camouflaged turkey hides among branches in the Moraga backyard.

Photo Sora O'Doherty

Battling cancer, stroke for stroke

... continued from Page B2

"I was going to swim for a couple of months to show people that I was dedicated and it was a realistic goal and that I was on pace to make it successfully. However, with all of this year's complications, I had to put things off in setting up a way for people to contribute. Everyone had other things in their lives that became their priorities."

Miller's fundraising campaign became far more public on different levels starting Nov. 1 when the Aquatic Director at the Soda Aquatic

Center, Andrew Morris, and the General Manager of the Chabot Canyon Racquet Club, Steve Squire, sent out emails to all of their respective members informing them of what Miller was looking to accomplish and what he was raising money for. There is also an announcement on the video screen at the Soda Center which periodically displays what Miller is doing.

In the short period since the fundraising campaign has begun, there have been more than 100 donors totaling over \$13,000.

Jonathan Winter, from

Moraga, is a twice-a-week swimmer at the Soda Center and has come to know Miller well: "David is the person who originally encouraged me to swim more than once a week. He is always positive and encouraging and always makes the swimmers feel welcome. It's only recently that we became aware of David's goal and I have contributed to his account."

Even when the pool was shut down due to the air quality issues and it was no longer heated, Miller did not let that stop him. "I did not lose much time at all," Miller

said. "I simply pulled out my wetsuit. I might have lost a week here and there but I was able to keep swimming."

Miller is expecting to cross the million-yard finish line Dec. 27 and is hoping to have people swimming along with him. "There are 34 lanes in the aquatic center. My plan for the last day of swimming in this project is to invite or auction off the swimming lanes," he said. "I'm hoping that I will have 33 other swimmers that will donate \$250 to swim with me on the day that I reach a million yards."

To learn more about Miller and his quest, he has set up a website called Swimamillion.org. It reports his monthly progress, explains his reasons for such an undertaking, lists all of the relatives and friends who have dealt with cancer, some of whom have lost that battle, and a way to pay tribute to Miller's efforts by making a contribution to the Cancer Research Institute.