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Rediscover charming Solvang

By Fran Miller



Photos Dan 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, kringles, 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 Organic 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 winemaker 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.



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