

YOLO COUNTY / The Next Napa? / Living in Yolo is like living in Provence, without the three-hour lunches

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For years, those of us who live in Yolo County have had to define ourselves gastronomically with descriptions such as, "We can be in north Berkeley or Sonoma in 45 minutes" or "San Francisco is just an hour and a half away from us." Winters, Woodland, West Sacramento and even Davis were viewed by many of our acquaintances as the hinterlands of culinary civilization, even though Yolo has been quietly fueling the Bay Area's food revolution since the 1970s. Now it's finally claiming its place in the Northern California stratosphere of food, wine and the good life.

We've enjoyed organic fruits, vegetables and nuts for more than 30 years at the Davis Farmers Market, been able to buy lug boxes of dead-ripe fruit at local fruit stands and sample some of the best tacos north of the border. Local wineries and microbreweries keep us in beverages. Most of us take olive, walnut, almond, apricot, prune and citrus trees for granted because they line our roads and populate our backyards, and lots of old-timers cure their own olives, and make chorizo and homemade fruit wines and alcohol. Now, so do a lot of the newcomers. Living in Yolo County is a lot like living in Provence, without the three-hour lunches.

Although Yolo County has eluded the spotlight, it has become an important player:

- World-famous viticulture and enology departments at UC Davis have influenced winemaking around the world;
- The Davis Farmers Market is the oldest certified market in California and has been a model for markets around the country;
- The county's organic farmers have been growing and shipping produce to the Bay Area for more than 30 years, and pioneered the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) that brings boxes of Yolo County bounty year round to San Francisco and beyond, making kitchen and restaurant bywords of names such as Riverdog, Full Belly Farm, Capay Fruits and Vegetables, Good Humus and Eatwell Farms.
- Walnut, almond and prune orchards cover much of Yolo County's rich farmland, along with fields of tomatoes, rice, alfalfa, wheat and grapes.

Yet Yolo is becoming more than just an agricultural county with a big university. The Palms in Winters brings artists like Norton Buffalo and Charlie Musselwhite to play on its stage, while Davis' Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts offers international fare such as the Shanghai Ballet, the National Dance Company of Ireland and Britain's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. You can hike the county's miles of backcountry and trails, fly-fish Putah Creek or float down Cache Creek, bringing along a picnic of local wine and food and finishing with a stay at one of four bed and breakfasts, or at a hotel or inn in downtown Davis.

Yolo County, like Napa, has lots to do and much to be discovered in this emerging area bordered by Putah Creek, Blue Ridge and the Sacramento River:

Winters

An orchard and farming center since its inception, Winters is Yolo County's quirky, slightly counterculture town, where R. Crumb, artists cooperatives, weavers, musicians and organic farmers lived more or less in harmony with longtime locals. In the past few years that image has grown, even though Crumb now lives in Southern France and his favorite hangout, George's Goodstuff, has closed. Recently the Palms Playhouse, for years a cult attraction in Davis, relocated to the renovated Winters Opera House, so several nights of the week we can see the same acts that play the Bay Area clubs.

Winters (population around 6,000) is a food town, too, producing everything from nuts and oranges to organic vegetables, and it has three highly recommended eateries (one of them a taco wagon), plus two fruit stands selling local products.

The main eateries are downtown - one across from the Opera House, the other one almost next door. The landmark Buckhorn Steak and Roadhouse, located in a brick hotel built in 1889, draws locals and out-of-towners nightly for its steaks, prime rib and old-time atmosphere. The Putah Creek Cafe, written up in the *Savuer* 2001 Best 100 issue for its apricot bars, serves down-home specials.

A few doors away is Chuy's. Coming into town on Highway 128, on your left is Verduzco's taco wagon, perfect for a delicious quick burrito or whole meal to go.

Winters is home to numerous food producers. Terra Firma Organic Farms - which not only supplies vegetables to Bay Area restaurants such as Chez Panisse but also provides weekly CSA boxes to locals and the Bay Area - farms out to the west. In town is Mariani Nut Co., the

world's largest independent nut processor, owned by the local Mariani family, descendent of the Marianis who farmed the Santa Clara Valley in the early 1900s. In early fall, once the nut harvest has begun, hundreds of trucks and ocean containers move in and out of the downtown nut plant, carrying almonds and walnuts across the country and around the world. Prune plums are also a sizable crop here, and in August, when the fruit is harvested and processed, the air is heavy with the sweet fragrance of drying plums - formally known as prunes.

For much of the last century Winters was an apricot town - school used to get out in May so there would be a labor force for the packing sheds and dry yards - but the apricot orchards evolved into almonds, prune plums and walnuts. A few ranches still grow, harvest and dry apricots, but the quantity has diminished over the years, although not the quality, which is far superior to the cheaper imports. You can find local dried fruits and nuts at the Fruit Tree farm stand, right on Highway 128, the road to Lake Berryessa, just a few long blocks west of Railroad Avenue.

Where to Eat in Winters

The Buckhorn Steak and Roadhouse

The Buckhorn Steak and Roadhouse - with its long, cowboy Western bar, chandeliers, beveled-glass mirrors, dark wood booths, mounted deer heads and California paintings - is just how you'd like a small-town roadhouse to feel. People come from all over the region to eat the famous charbroiled tri-tips, slabs of prime rib as big as the plate, rib-eye steaks and racks of lamb cut and aged by Superior Farms in Dixon to owner John Pickerel's specifications. Pickerel resurrected the Buckhorn in the 1970s, and more recently, he and his wife, Melanie, opened Buckhorn Grills in Napa, Emeryville, Walnut Creek and San Francisco, all of which specialize in tri-tip steaks.

2 Main St., Winters; (530) 795-4503. Dinner only, appetizers \$5.95-\$12, entrees \$13.95-\$24.95, desserts \$3.95-\$4.95; low-price specials Mon.-Thurs. Chuy's Taqueria and Restaurant

If you want ceviche tostadas that evoke a Mexican beach, succulent and spicy with chile and lime juice, or hot-off-the-grill bay shrimp or fish tacos, this is the place to go. People first sampled Chuy's great marisco dishes when he brought his second taco wagon to the far end of town a year or so ago. When it recently disappeared, there were some very disappointed people until it was learned that Chuy was opening a restaurant. Seafood plates, seafood soup and seafood cocktails as well as the familiar torta, taco and burrito items are the stars, but there's a big selection of meat items as well. It's all good. On weekends, you can get homemade menudo.

208 Railroad Ave., Winters; (530) 795-9811. \$1.25-\$13.99.

Putah Creek Cafe

Directly across the street from the Buckhorn is the Putah Creek Cafe, also owned by the Pickerels. The cafe has an old-time diner ambience, with turquoise and orange McCoy pitchers and platters on the shelves, and home-style food, from meatloaf sandwiches with mashed potatoes to tortilla soup. Unlike the Buckhorn, which is open only for dinner, Putah Creek Cafe is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Six a.m. finds farmers commandeering their usual tables and other early risers at the counter drinking coffee and eating home-baked sweet rolls. A little later, the cafe fills up with townspeople and bicyclists from Davis who have completed the first part of the Davis-Putah Creek loop. The breakfast menu has six different omelets, chilaquiles with eggs and beans, fresh fruit, sausages and pancakes. On weekend mornings, families, joggers and bicyclists fill the sidewalk in both directions, all waiting to sit down to breakfast, hot coffee and juice.

1 Main St., Winters; (530) 795-2682. Dinner Thurs.-Sat., breakfast and lunch 6 a.m.-2:30 p.m. daily, until 3 p.m. on Sunday.

Breakfast \$3.95-\$8.95, sandwiches \$5.50-\$7.45, salads \$2.95-\$6.95, entrees \$8.25-\$14.95.

Verduzco's Taco Wagon

From 11 a.m. when it opens to 7 p.m. when it closes, the taco wagon from Dixon's El Verduzco restaurant is constantly busy. Executives neatly dressed in pressed khakis and white shirts walk down from Mariani Nut Co., big-rig drivers pull over, contractors and their crews pile out of pickups, traveling cowboys with their horses and cowedogs stop, and moms and their kids, schoolteachers, teenagers, mechanics, real estate agents and field crews are also part of the mix. You can get a fresh, spicy array of beef, pork or chicken (as well as lengua (tongue) and cabeza (head)) served up in tacos, burritos, tortas or platillos. Service is fast and friendly, the food is great, prices are rock bottom and you can quickly catch up on the gossip, from fishing holes to land prices.

On the south side of Highway 128 between Highway 505 and the flashing red light at Railroad Avenue in town. Maddy's Farm Produce

This is the place to buy lug boxes of local, seasonal fruits and vegetables for canning, jams and jelly. Look for cherries and apricots in late spring and peaches, nectarines and plums in summer. They have a more limited supply of corn, green beans and tomatoes, but these tend to sell out early in the day.

27710 County Road 90, Winters; (530) 795-2970. Open Memorial Day through Labor Day weekend.

The Fruit Tree

On the north side of Highway 128, on the western edge of town, you'll find locally grown peaches, plums, figs and tomatoes in summer; citrus in winter; cherries and apricots in late spring and early summer; and pumpkins and winter squash in fall. Dried fruits and nuts are stocked year-round.

Highway 128 in Winters on the way to Lake Berryessa; (530) 795-1739 or (530) 795-2853. Open year-round, but call first.

What to do in Winters

The Palms

Upstairs in a renovated 19th century brick opera house, Palms impresario Dave Fleming presents an eclectic assortment of artists who perform blues, rock 'n' roll, soul, country, gospel and jazz. Recent headliners include Maria Muldaur, Rodney Crowell Band, Mumbo Gumbo and Corby Yates. Tickets are sold a few doors away at Kimes Hardware.

13 Main St., Winters; (530) 795-1825 or www.palmsplayhouse.com.

Lake Solano and Putah Creek

From late spring through early fall, you can rent canoes and pedal boats for use on the lake or creek, which are especially popular with fly-fisherman. There are also several swimming ponds, plus picnic tables and barbecues. When you catch your fish, trophy or not, go have a Polaroid taken at Berryessa Sporting Goods and join the proud line posted at the counter and on the walls. The store's also a good place to buy fishing supplies, drinks and snacks, and get fishing tips and local gossip, as well as a latte at the coffee bar in the back.

Lake Solano County Park Pleasants Valley Road, south of Highway 128, Winters; (530) 795-2990..

Berryessa Sporting Goods: 115 E. Grant Ave., Winters; (530) 795-1278.

Where to Stay in Winters

Abbey House Bed and Breakfast

A wide, farm-style porch surrounds this newly restored turn-of-the-century house located downtown in Winters. Contractor John Siracusa and his wife, Liz, bought the 1905 house that the Catholic Church planned to demolish. The Siracusas moved it two blocks and completely renovated it. Cheerful landscaping around the house includes a potager garden, which contributes herbs and vegetables to the hearty breakfast that also showcases locally grown fruits and vegetables, as well as farm-fresh eggs.

101 Abbey St., (530) 795-5870.

Woodland and the Backcountry

Woodland, the Yolo County seat, is a real valley town, with wide, heavily shaded streets, historic buildings and a sleepy atmosphere. It's surrounded by tens of thousands of acres of wheat, rice, tomatoes and corn that have made and lost the fortunes of the community over the past 150 years. Not noted so much for fine food as for down-home, hearty rib-sticking fare that will get you through the workday, Woodland, like other Yolo towns, is beginning to change its culinary identity. Its historic agricultural buildings, many of them downtown, house burgeoning restaurants and cafes instead of machinery and tools.

Attorney Tom Stallard is behind one of the most recent changes, the renovation of the historic Cranston's Hardware Store at 618 Main St. When he purchased the building a few years ago, he knew he wanted to develop the 20,000-square-foot space for a restaurant. For more than 100 years, farmers relied on Cranston's for tools, supplies and gossip; the store was a big part of the community. In its new incarnation, it will still be a focal point, with one part home to Tazzina Bistro - featuring seasonal, local produce - and the other part home to one of the region's finest independent bookstores, the Next Chapter, with a cafe featuring homemade soups, sandwiches and other simple fare.

Across the street and east a bit is the popular Ludy's Main St.BBQ, set in another turn-of-the-century building whose small brick facade and sidewalk cafe tables belie the huge interior and the back patio, where both smoky barbecue and music are served. On Main a couple of blocks west is cheery Quatro Milpas, a relatively new Mexican restaurant that uses all fresh ingredients and has some tempting specialties.

A few blocks off Main Street, Morrison's Upstairs, located in a historic hotel building, is a favorite for fine-dining stops and catered affairs. Morrison's Downstairs is a newly opened deli that welcomes the lunch crowd into its brick interior.

The Backcountry

The backcountry of northern Yolo County, north and west of Woodland, is a contemporary food lover's dream, with award-winning wineries, organic farms, natural honey, almond orchards and local olive oil. Yet the countryside retains the feel of the newly settled West. Here you'll find the rolling Dunnigan Hills where R.H. Phillips Winery's 1,600 lush acres of vineyard, primarily Syrah, Viognier and

Cabernet Sauvignon, stand in verdant contrast to the surrounding sere grasslands. Here, too, are the farms of Jim and Deborah Durst, and Short-Night Farm, owned by Pat and Jeff McAravy, all of them organic farming pioneers. Today, Durst sells his organic heirloom tomatoes and melons nationwide, and Short-Night is a regular at San Francisco's Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market.

Just a few miles to the east, Capay Valley - dotted with the small towns of Guinda, Brooks, Capay, Rumsey and Esparto - is a thriving community of organic farmers, some of whom were the originators of the 1970s organic farming movement that revolutionized food in the Bay Area.

Jeff and Annie Main (Good Humus Farms), the late Kathy Barsotti, and her then-husband Martin Barnes (Capay Valley Fruit and Vegetables) not only began organic farming in Capay in the 1970s, they also, along with Ann M. Evans and Henry Esbenshade co-founded the Davis Food Co-op and the Davis Farmers Market. In 1986, the two couples, along with Dru Rivers and Paul Muller (Full Belly Farm), John and Gretchen Ceteras (Blue Heron Farm) and others, founded Yo-Cal Produce, a cooperative located in Davis that marketed Yolo County's organic produce in the Bay Area through wholesalers such as Greenleaf Produce, broadening the market for the farmers and allowing them to devote more time to farming and less to finding buyers.

Although the venture failed, the farms and the sense of cooperation and friendship endured. Says Rivers, "I don't think any of us, even now, realize what we have. We do so much together, cooperating with trucking, marketing, always calling each other, sharing."

"We socialize a lot together," says Jeff Main. Part of that socializing culminates every October when 10 Capay Valley farms put on the "hoes-down" festival.

Midway up the valley, almost next door to the Cache Creek Indian Casino, you'll find the newcomer, Capay Valley Winery. Started only a few years ago, it now has its own Capay Valley appellation.

In front of the little town of Yolo on I-5 just north of Woodland is Gorman's Restaurant, a longtime favorite of every farmer, traveling salesman and agricultural field man within a wide radius. But there's something new: Graham Wilcox, formerly of Spago, is cooking, and his wife, Gretchen, a wine expert, is front of the house. At press time, Gorman's was closed for an extended summer vacation.

Where to Eat in Woodland

and the Backcountry

R.H. Phillips Winery

Although there's no restaurant per se, R.H. Phillips is one of the great Yolo places to eat. Bring your own picnic, buy some wine and lunch under on the winery's umbrella-shaded patios, or join one of the winery's monthly dinners or special events with the winery chef, Rachel Levine. From the patio is a sweeping view of hillsides covered with olive trees and vineyards. In the tasting room and wine shop, you can sample and purchase fine wines such as Toasted Head Chardonnay, Syrah and Viognier, all with the Dunnigan Hills appellation.

R.H. Phillips grew out of an unlikely vision. Row cropping and dry farming in this area was always a difficult business, hence the Hungry Hollow nickname. Brothers John and Karl Giguere, grandsons of R.H. Phillips, looking for a break from the marginal wheat, barley and sheep cycle, planted 10 acres of grapes as an experiment in 1980, and now they are now California's 21st largest winery, producing 600,000 cases of wine annually on ground that was once unthinkable as grape producing.

26836 County Road 12-A (just north of Esparto or west of Yolo); (530) 662- 3215, Ext. 322, or www.rhphillips.com.

Cuatro Milpas Taqueria y Restaurante

Right on Woodland's Main Street, tucked into an unprepossessing storefront, is Cuatro Milpas Taqueria y Restaurante. Part of the family is from Mexico City and part from Sinaloa, so the menu reflects those regions as well as the Jalisco items ubiquitous to Yolo County taquerias. The fare is fresh, tasty and inexpensive, with a few surprises on the menu. One is panbazo, a Mexico City torta made with potatoes and chorizo and finished with crema, chopped white onions, quesadilla fresca, lettuce and salsa. But the real surprise is that the both halves of the roll are dipped in enchilada sauce and grilled before being filled, creating a panini-like sandwich with a steady, lip-stinging burn. It might be Woodland's best sandwich.

534 Main St., Woodland; (530) 406-1039.

Morrison's Upstairs

A favorite white-tablecloth restaurant with locals, Morrison's has a full bar and is often the setting for special-occasion meals and events.

428 First St. (at Bush), Woodland; (530) 666-6176.

Ludy's Main St. BBQ and Catering

While Ludy's is mostly known for its ribs dripping in a tomato-based barbecue sauce, the hamburgers are counted as among the best in Yolo County. Several nights a week, bands play the patio.

667 Main St., Woodland; (530) 666-4400.

Ranch Kitchen

Like much of Yolo County, this diner harks back to earlier times, when people with appetites worked up from a long morning's ranch work would knock back fried eggs, hash browns, steak and homemade biscuits deep in gravy. You can still get those big breakfasts, or just a side order of biscuits and gravy.

240 N. East St., Woodland; (530) 666-3543.

Jody's Restaurant and El Charro Restaurant

These used to be small, hole-in-the-wall restaurants, but their large local following led them to expand.

425 East St., Woodland; (530) 668-9777.

306 Sixth St., Woodland, (530) 662-3804.

Where to Stay in Woodland

and the Backcountry

Capay Valley Bed & Breakfast

Capay Bed & Breakfast offers not only the standard B & B fare of individually decorated rooms and a hearty breakfast, but access to its 142-acre working ranch. Guests will find almond orchards, grazing sheep, bald eagles and more than 80 assorted animals, from farmyard rabbits and pigs to the more exotic rescued tortoises, plus short hiking trails. The favorite, however, is the half-mile trail that climbs to the mountain top behind the bed and breakfast. On a clear day, you can see across the Sacramento Valley to the Sierra, and the owners will even drive you up and back, if you want, or up, if you want to walk down. The 100-year-old farmhouse, renovated in 2002, has four guest rooms, and children are welcome.

15875 State Highway 16; (530) 796-3738 or www.capayvalleybedandbreakfast.com.

Snowball Mansion Inn

This historic mansion, built in 1877 on a slight rise above a curve of the Sacramento River, was a gift from Yolo County pioneer John Wells Snowball to his wife. Gleaming white, with graceful columns and porches, the mansion's grounds include lawns, rose-covered pergolas, towering palm trees and huge sycamores. The inn, operated as a bed and breakfast, is completely furnished in period antiques, complete with Oriental rugs. There are three rooms, and a large, hearty breakfast is served. It's located just outside the small town of Knight's Landing, about a 15-minute drive from Woodland.

42485 Front St., Knight's Landing; (530) 735-1122 or www.snowballmansion.com.

What to do in Woodland

and the Backcountry

Visit Capay Valley Vineyard

Pam Welch and Tom Frederick planted their first grapes in 1998, in their vineyard that was just recently given the new Capay Valley appellation. The couple planted Tempranillo, Syrah, Viognier and Cabernet Sauvignon, and while the Rhone-style wines made from them have been on the market a scant two years, the Syrah has already won a San Francisco Chronicle Wine Award.

Tours and tastings by appointment only.

1 Ranch Road, Brooks; (530) 796-4110.

Go River Rafting on Cache Creek

For the adventuresome, a trip down Cache Creek's Class II and Class III warm-water rapids, through deep, wild canyons and mountains guarded by bald eagles and tule elk will provide plenty of appetite for the local food and wine.

Whitewater Adventures offers one- and two-day trips with guides and all meals. (800) 977-4837 or gotwhitewater.com.

Cache Canyon White Water Trips offers self-guided raft trips. (800) 796- 3091 or www.cachecanyon.com. Go Trail Riding or Overnight Packing

Four Aces Ranch, headquartered in Winters, has two ranches in the Cache Creek area totaling 67,000 acres and will put together custom trail rides and overnight packing trips deep into the backcountry. Day trips are available at the Winters Ranch.

F-8251 Winters Road, Winters; (530) 795-1535.

Go Hiking

Northwestern Yolo County, which is contiguous to parts of Napa and Lake counties, is a hiker's paradise, with creeks, hot springs, oak glens and small mountains. Bring a picnic and your camera or paintbrushes. See the Yolohiker.org Web site - a superbly presented array of many, many hikes, not a few of them challenging.

Buy a Holiday Turkey at Brannigan Turkey Farm

Brannigan is a major supplier of fresh, free-range turkeys locally and to the Bay Area. Place orders early for Thanksgiving and the holidays either through your local market or directly with Brannigan.

39621 County Road 24 A, Woodland; (530) 662-4205.

Visit Yolo County Historical Museum

This museum is a step back in time, when people processed their own food and had to maintain their farms and household equipment themselves. The museum houses collections of furnishings and artifacts from the 1850s to 1930s. Aside from just being able to walk through a house built in the 1850s, it's great fun to tour the outlying dairy and poultry room, root cellar, blacksmith shop and examine the agricultural machinery and tools and the historical plantings on the 2 1/2-acre park.

512 Gibson Road, Woodland; (530) 666-1045. Tours 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Mon., Tues.; noon-4 p.m. Sat., Sun. Admission \$2. Davis

The small city of Davis (population 55,000) alongside Interstate 80 has a reputation for its progressive politics, bicycle paths and energy-conscious policies.

The dominant feature of Davis is the UC campus, with its 27,000 students, world-class faculty and research facilities, and now the newly completed Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts. Founded in 1906 in what was then called Davisville as "California's University Farm," UC Davis has evolved into one of the most influential centers in the world of agriculture in general and specifically for enology and viticulture. Several generations of grape growers and winemakers from California to Australia, South Africa and Europe, have been shaped at Davis, and have consequently influenced the wine we drink today.

Davis is also home to California's first certified farmers' market, which over the past 25 years has altered the way many of us eat and think about food. The founders of the Davis Farmers Market were among the pioneering organic farmers that changed organic food from a marginalized concept associated with hippiedom to a force to be reckoned with in the national marketplace, while at the same time supplying the Bay Area's burgeoning restaurant world and farmers' markets with some of the finest produce in the world.

Not surprisingly, Davis has a very popular and successful food co-op, and the downtown store is a local landmark and meeting place not only for Davisites, but for healthy and earth-conscious shoppers from the surrounding area. Inside the large, cheery space, you'll find fresh fish, organic and conventional meats, a deli with vegan and vegetarian treats as well as conventional deli foods, an in-house bakery, the largest selection of bulk, organic foods in town, and an extensive range of homeopathic health-care products.

Throughout downtown Davis, around its greenbelt and even in its strip malls, you'll find cafes, coffeehouses, restaurants and bakeries, as well as inexpensive eateries that reflect the city's ethnic population, both town and gown. Indian, Hunan, Thai, Mexican, Cantonese, Japanese, Italian and Greek restaurants are tucked in and around the city's music stores, clothing shops, art galleries, bookstores and banks, along with plenty of places for hot dogs and hamburgers.

Where to Eat in Davis

Cafes and Coffeehouses

Mishka's Cafe

After the Davis Farmers Market, while you're downtown, you might stop for a coffee at Mishka's. Reminiscent of the early days in coffeehouses along Berkeley's Telegraph Avenue, Mishka's is one of several colorful, locally owned coffee houses where students can be found deep in conversation or surrounded by books, studying.

514 Second St.; (530) 759-0811.

Ciocolat

Visiting Ciocolat is like being in a small European chocolate shop. The white Italian marble tabletops have vases of fresh flowers; chocolate tarts, fruit mousse cakes and chocolate truffles are displayed in a curved glass case; and dessert wines are served by the glass. Mary Lou Hedriana, who apprenticed at San Francisco's Ritz-Carlton Hotel and was its pastry chef, founded this oasis. Although she is now deceased, her husband, Herman Hedriana, continues her dream, assisted by two general managers. The hot tip here is high tea, served Friday through Saturday from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m., with an elegant white-linen service complete with savory cucumber sandwiches on doilies, hot English tea and a three-tiered selection of cookies, tarts and chocolates (reservations necessary). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are also served.

301 B St.; (530) 753-3088.

Cafe Bernardo

The very casual Cafe Bernardo features a sit-down bar on one side and a California cuisine restaurant with an open kitchen on the other. Try the salmon BLT, Thai noodle salad or one of the special wood-oven pizzas. The restaurant is located within the quiet and tasteful Palm Court Hotel.

234 D St.; (530) 753-9560.

Cafe California

Across the tracks and down a bit from the 1914 Mission-style train depot, Cafe California has long had a big local following for lunch and dinner. White tablecloths in a casual setting show off the dishes prepared primarily with locally grown, in-season ingredients. Try the salads, pastas and grills.

808 2nd St.; (530) 757-2766

Dos Coyotes Border Cafe

Dos Coyotes features Southwestern fare cooked on open grills, including fish, and big, hearty salads with ingredients such as fresh jicama. Try the fish tacos, which come heaped with shredded cabbage and crema.

2191 Cowell Blvd.; (530) 758-1400 and 1411 W. Covell; (530) 753-0922 or www.doscoyotes.net.

Sophia's Thai Bar & Kitchen

This crowded, very popular restaurant doesn't accept reservations, so the line often spills out onto the sidewalk, but while you wait for your table, you can get a drink in the large tropical-style, open-air bar. The restaurant is tucked in behind the bar and serves an array of fresh, quick Thai food, from big platters of pad thai to delicate coconut-based soups.

129 E St., (530) 758-4333. \$3.50-\$13.50.

Sudwerk Privatbrauerei Hubsch

This is a large, attractive, award-winning microbrewery with five beers on tap, plus wine and beer garden fare such as hot potato salad and sausages.

2001 Second St., (530) 758-8700.

The Farmer's Kitchen

If you miss the farmers' market but want a fresh-from-the-market salad, try the regional salad bar at Roseanne De Christifaro's the Farmer's Kitchen. Located at her Natural Food Works storefront, this indoor-outdoor casual cafe has a menu based on local organic produce from the market. A sample menu in early summer included sorrel soup, sweet fresh fig and peach salad, and green beans with tarragon salad.

620 Fourth St.; (530) 756-1862 or www.naturalfoodworks.com.

Taquerias

There are taquerias all over Davis and Yolo County. Typically they are small, family-owned and operated, and reflect the origins and tastes of the family who owns them. They are a great place to get tasty, inexpensive food in a simple setting. These are two in Davis that we especially like:

El Mariachi Taqueria

El Mariachi is a family-owned and -operated business located in a light and airy space in a block shared with one of Davis' downtown movie theater complexes. It prides itself on using fresh ingredients, and the salsa bar is a main attraction at the restaurant, featuring more than 20 fresh (sometimes made three times a day) salsas and moles such as salsa de semilla (pumpkin seed), salsa de cascabel (chile), salsa de ajo (garlic) and salsa de nopales (cactus, locally grown) along with the usual tomato, fruit and tomatillo salsas. Fresh juices, such as watermelon or horchata, are available, as is beer. Chef Victor Martinez is especially proud of his local nopales, and burritos with nopales and grilled meat are a specialty, as are his moles.

400 G St.; (530) 750-0688.

Taqueria Davis

Passing through the door of the Taqueria Davis transports you to Mexico. Murals on the wall depict village scenes and the tables are covered with bright oilcloth. Try the pesca a la Mexicana, the seven-fish soup, fresh chicken tamales or the coctel de camaron (shrimp cocktail) and tostada de ceviche. The fresh shrimp cocktail is made while you wait, served warm in a beer mug dressed with slices of fresh lime.

505 1/2 L St.; (530) 758-8453.

The Mustard Seed

Offering fine dining, indoors and out, in the rustic elegance of a converted wooden cabin, the Mustard Seed is a local favorite for special occasions. Lunch features simple fare such as homemade gazpacho, sandwiches and a dozen different salads. For dinner, look for an intriguing variety of salads as starters, and a small but interesting selection of main courses featuring lamb, fish, pasta and Angus beef.

222 D St.; (530) 758-5750.

Lunch \$2.95-\$10.95. Dinner: appetizers \$6-\$10, main course \$14-\$20. Lunch 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Mon.-Fri., dinner 5:30-8:30 p.m. Tues.- Sun.

The Symposium Restaurant

Greek specialties such as moussaka, souvlaki and dolmas, plus grilled meats and fish, are served as full dinners with soup or salad, rice or potatoes, and seasonal vegetables. Wood-oven pizzas, billed as Gourmet Greek Pizzas, are favorites at this Davis institution. Traditional appetizers such as pan-fried baby squid with lemon marinade, roasted eggplant dip and spinach and feta pie in phyllo dough are also available.

1620 E. Eighth St.; (530) 756-2525. Appetizers \$4.25-\$7.50, dinners \$12.50- \$24.95, pizzas \$7.95-\$18.95.

Soga's Bar and Restaurant

Yolo County's favorite bar to take a date, according to a 2003 survey, is Soga's. The upscale bar and restaurant is owned and operated by Yolo County- raised Matt and Lynn Soga. The elegantly appointed, modernist restaurant serves favorites such as angel hair pasta, grilled salmon, steaks and fish and chips, as well as soups, salads and simple appetizers. The candlelit piano bar is a big attraction.

217 E St., (530) 757-1733. Appetizers and salads \$5-\$10, entrees \$8-\$20.

What to Do in Davis

The Davis Farmers Market

The Davis Farmers Market, founded in 1976, is visited weekly by 10,000 people. It operates under a city-built structure twice a week, year round, rain or shine, in Central Park. One hundred and thirty vendors are on the market's roster, and about 80 are there at any one time. "Ninety percent of our vendors come from within an hour to an hour-and-a-half drive away," says Randi Mc Near, the market manager, "and about one-third of them are organic [farmers]."

There are also lots of prepared products such as jams, jellies and chutneys. Annie Main of Good Humus Farm sells pomegranate syrup, lavender jelly, orange and grapefruit marmalade, and delicately woven lavender wands. Sharon Casey and Guy Baldwin of Towani Organic Farms in neighboring Butte County sell organic garden starts in spring, and in fall, garlic braids and wild wreaths of sunflower heads and chiles.

"Picnic in the Park" on Wednesday nights offers live music, ponies, rock climbing and bouncy houses for the kids, and dinner vendors including the Buckhorn Steak and Roadhouse with charbroiled tri-tips, Ludy's Main St. BBQ from Woodland, and charbroiled shrimp and chicken from Dos Coyotes. If you want dinner and dessert prepared from seasonal market fare, try the market chef, Robert Karns. Karns has a catering business in Woodland, but on Wednesday night and Saturday mornings, he cooks fresh-from-the-market fare to order. One week it might be grilled portobello mushrooms atop corn-studded polenta with an organic side salad, and the next grilled wild salmon with

mashed Yukon gold potatoes and pickled beets. The morning market finds him grilling toast and cooking up omelets and frittatas with organic eggs and seasonal vegetables.

Central Park (Third and B streets). 4:30-8:30 p.m. April-Sept.; 2-6 p.m. Oct.-March on Wednesdays; 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Sat.; (530) 756-1695 or www.dcn.davis.ca.us.

The Davis Food Co-op

The Davis Food Co-op is easy to spot with its bright-green color and deconstructionist architecture. A large, red statue of a tomato by local artist Gerald Heffernon marks the entrance. Inside, it's easy to help save the planet. There's a deli with vegetarian and vegan delights as well as sandwiches made to order. The co-op has its own bakery in addition to offering products from locals Village Bakery. The meat counter has a selection of organic and conventional meats, and the largest selection of bulk, organic foods in town.

620 G St.; (530) 758-2667 or www.daviscoop.com.

Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, UC Davis

A full season of world-class performances with artists from around the world, as well as from Davis and Sacramento.

One Shields Avenue, UC Davis; (530) 752-1915 or www.mondaviarts.com.

Festivals In and Around Davis

Picnic Day at UC Davis

Held in April each year, this is the university's traditional open house, which began in 1909 as a basket picnic for faculty and students, their families and guests from nearby Davisville. It begins with a pancake breakfast on campus for alumni, followed by a large parade through the downtown with floats, horses and old University Farm tractors and harvesters. Watch the parade alongside the Davis Farmers Market, then walk a few blocks to campus and join 50,000 or so others for the daylong series of events, like dachshund racing, champion dog Frisbee players, a rodeo and educational displays, the most popular of which is the cow with a glass stomach.

(530) 752-6320.

Whole Earth Festival,

UC Davis

Held Mother's Day weekend in May each year, the UC Davis Experimental College sponsors this festival, the largest all volunteer-run festival of its kind in the country. Crafts, spiritual talks, ecological teach-ins and organic, vegetarian food are offered. Bring your own utensils and cup or you'll pay a deposit to use theirs.

(530) 752-2569. Davis Farmers Market

Fall Festivals

Held in October before Halloween, the first fall festival includes fresh pies, contests and a large, artistic scarecrow auction that supports the Davis Joint Unified School District's garden-based learning and farm-to-school program. The scarecrows are made by elementary school children.

Fall Festival 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Oct 25.

The Saturday before Thanksgiving is a special celebration with cooking demonstrations provided by local celebrity chefs featuring food from the market you might enjoy serving for your Thanksgiving Day dinner.

Thanksgiving Festival 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Nov. 22. Pig Out at Davis

Farmers Market

The first Saturday in March is Pig Day at the market, with Miss Piggy, little piglets in a petting zoo, piggy activities and even piggy-faced bread (a specialty of Upper Crust bakery).

Hoes Down Harvest

Celebration

Held each October as a fund-raiser for local and statewide organic farming programs, this celebration is a day on the farm with music, treasure hunts for the children, dancing and plenty of farm-fresh food along the banks of Capay Valley's Cache Creek. Hoes Down is a

cooperative effort among 10 Capay Valley farms that gives visitors a chance to visit some premier organic farming operations and camp out under the stars.

Oct. 4-5, Full Belly Farm, Capay Valley; (800) 791-2110 or www.hoesdown.org.

Esparto-Capay Valley

Almond Festival

Along Highway 16 in the Capay Valley, you'll pass through a blossom land where acres and acres of almond trees make a sea of pale white on each side of the road. If you can't make it for the festival, take the drive on your own during the height of the bloom.

February and March, (530) 787-3242.

Some Places to Stay

All of these hotels are in the downtown area, within walking distance of Central Park and the university.

Best Western Palm

Court Hotel

This elegant hotel offers 27 rooms and a continental breakfast. 234 D St.; (530) 753-7100.

University Inn Bed &

Breakfast

Located in a restored house opposite the university, this charming inn offers four rooms and stocks your in-room refrigerator with fresh fruit and drinks. 340 A St.; (530) 756-8648.

Hallmark Inn

Opposite one of the movie theater complexes in town, the inn offers 135 rooms, conference facilities and a complimentary breakfast. 110 F St.; (530) 753-3320.

West Sacramento and its Back Roads

West Sacramento and the hinterlands of eastern Yolo County are defined by the broad, smooth flow of the Sacramento River as it wends its way to join San Francisco Bay. This part of Yolo County stretches from Knight's Landing through the semi-industrial, multiethnic port city of West Sacramento, along the river through bucolic vineyards, fields, and the sleepy riverfront town of Clarksburg.

Before Interstate 80 was built, Highway 40 was the main artery to the Bay Area, and it passed through West Sacramento on what is now West Capitol Avenue, then entered Sacramento. The avenue is still lined with fading motels, but interspersed are dozens of ethnic markets, shops, and eateries catering to West Sacramento's diverse population of East Indians, Russians, Laotians, Hmong, Thais and Mexicans.

Driving south out of West Sacramento along the river puts you almost immediately into a gentle rural setting where fields are bordered by huge oak trees, and vineyards stretch into the distance, reminiscent of the tranquil Napa Valley of decades past.

What to do in

West Sacramento

and its Back Roads

Drive Along the River to Bogle Vineyards and Winery

This spectacular drive along the Sacramento River takes you deep into the heart of a piece of rural California that seems suspended in time. Branches of willow trees drag gently along the waterway on one side of the narrow road, while rolling vineyards line the other. A few miles past the small town of Clarksburg is the family-owned Bogle winery, with its dockside tasting room on Elk Slough and shady picnic grounds. The Bogles first planted 20 acres of grapes in 1968; today they have more than 1,200.

At the winery, taste Old Vine Zinfandel, Petit Sirah, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, along with Phantom, a blend of Petit Sirah, Zinfandel and Mourvedre, and have a picnic under the willow trees as you look out across the slough.

37783 County Road 144, Clarksburg; (916) 744-1139 or www.boglewinery.com.

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