

WINTER 2019 SOCALPULSE.COM

SAN DIEGO

where

BECAUSE YOU'VE ARRIVED

**MEXICAN
EATS & AGAVE
COCKTAILS**

**SAN DIEGO
OPERA'S
NEW SEASON**

**THE ART OF
BEER HALL
HOPPING**

BBQ BLISS

WHERE TO MAKE A PIT STOP FOR THE TASTIEST BARBECUE IN TOWN

It's no news flash that San Diego is a hub for fine Mexican dining, tequila and taco shops. Yet, over the last two years, a movement has been growing of chefs and bartenders looking to take things up a notch, not simply with cuisine, but also with what to wash it all down with ... and agave spirits have become the stars. This means chef-driven fare that is familiar, yet refined and progressive; and cocktails that celebrate and epitomize the very best of Baja and other regions beyond our border to the south. Here are nine of our new favorites.

DEATH BY TEQUILA Death by tequila? Let's hope not. Taking a break from our cares courtesy of tequila? Yes. The contemporary restaurant and bar in Encinitas serves healthy, coastal Baja cuisine crafted by Executive Chef Angelo Sosa (a *Top Chef* alum). Menu standouts include the wood-fired salsa, organic street tacos, albacore aguachile and a veggie entree that changes daily. The bar menu boasts 80-plus tequilas, 30 mezcals, and wines and beers from Valle de Guadalupe. We'll drink to that. 569 S. Coast Hwy. 101, Encinitas, 760.782.2240

The Los Muertos cocktail at Death by Tequila. Opposite: craft tacos at Lola 55.



ALL ABOUT AGAVE

THE CITY'S LATEST CROP OF RESTAURANTS MARRY TEQUILA, MEZCAL AND MORE WITH REFINED MEXICAN FARE. BY SARAH DAoust



OPENING SPREAD: SAM WELLS; COLE FERGUSON; ANTONIO DIAZ DE SAND; OPPOSITE: ANTONIO DIAZ DE SAND

LOLA 55 A chef-driven taco shop with a full bar? Sold. Touted as a “fine-casual” concept, Lola 55 is just that—a 3,200-square-foot, counter-service-style, modern eatery by Tijuana-born founder Frank Vizcarra. Executive Chef and partner Andrew Bent oversees a boutique menu of about nine beautifully crafted tacos—including squash blossom rellano, rib-eye carne asada, spicy smoked fish, and vegan and gluten-free tacos. Bar manager Gareth Moore has designed a menu of fresh, citrus-forward agave libations. Try the Tequila Sling, infused with Creole Shrub, Jamaica, pineapple, lime and cava. For dessert: homemade churros and ice cream sandwiches. Designed by Bells & Whistles (the edgy design team behind the coolest spots in town), the space alone is reason to visit—soaring industrial ceilings, lush indoor foliage, a turquoise-tiled bar and turquoise-topped tables, and floor-to-ceiling windows. It’s a true urban oasis. 1290 F St., East Village, 619.542.9155

EL ROY’S TEQUILA BAR + KITCHEN Take the ferry or Coronado Bridge across the bay to this charming new offering by Blue Bridge Hospitality. Featuring more than 90 tequilas and mezcals, El Roy’s serves cocktails such as the Smokey Paloma with mezcal, grapefruit and agave nectar; plus mezcal and tequila tasting flights; eight themed margaritas; and sangria, beer and wine. Meanwhile, the food menu marries modern with traditional. Think: Mexican corn pudding, duck confit empanadas, pork belly banh mi tacos, and roasted yam and poblano flautas. Rivaling the exceptional food and drink are the views. Take in panoramas of the bay and

downtown skyline from the restaurant’s 1,200-square-foot sundeck. 1201 First St., #115, Coronado, 619.537.0195

TAHONA Oaxacan cuisine and cocktails arrive in Old Town with the debut of Tahona. The 2,000-square-foot restaurant boasts a dedicated mezcal tasting room with more than 120 varieties; plus agave cocktails such as the Mexican Firing Squad and an old-fashioned margarita. Be on the lookout for special events, organized mezcal-tasting group trips to Baja and Oaxaca, and a rumored speakeasy set to open this winter. 2414 San Diego Ave., Old Town, 619.255.2090

EL JARDIN Agave spirits command the cocktail menu at this Liberty Station cocina and tequila bar, helmed by Executive Chef Claudette Zepeda-Wilkins (also a *Top Chef* alum). Choose from Baja wines, mezcals, tequilas and even Mexican sake. Signature sips—designed by cocktail master Christian Siglin—include the Baja-Ma Mama with coffee-infused tequila and Backstrap rum, and the Oaxacan Old-Fashioned with reposado tequila and mezcal. To dine, sample regional Mexican cuisine via ancestral recipes from Tijuana to Guadalajara, infused with modern touches. Notable dishes include the roasted bone marrow and crispy octopus; slow-cooked pork shoulder; and the surf and turf tostada loaded with dried shrimp ceviche, crispy carne seca, avocado and grasshoppers (yes, grasshoppers). 2885 Perry Road, Point Loma, 619.795.2322

VOLCANO RABBIT Named after the world’s second-smallest rabbit, which is native to Mexico, this tequila bar

Death by Tequila’s Jessica’s Hibiscus cocktail; menu sampling at El Jardin. Opposite: El Jardin’s airy bar area.