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■■■ DINING OUT

BY BETH DEMMON



Little Italy Food Hall

Deck the Food Halls

Growing trend makes its way to San Diego with announcement of four more opening in the next year

No food hall is the same, but they share an objective: to offer a variety of diverse culinary experiences under one roof. Over the past decade, food halls have quietly proliferated across the American landscape and are estimated to skyrocket in number in the next few years. Cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago and New York have historically been hubs for these types of establishments — with Eataly considered by many to be the original catalyst for the modern-day trend — but San Diego is catching up quickly. ◀



Belcampo Meat Co at Grand Central Market



La Macelleria at Eataly



ABOVE: Tacos Tumbra's at Tomas at Grand Central Market

BELOW: The Oyster Gourmet at Grand Central Market



Food halls aren't stereotypical mall food courts immortalized by '80s movies like *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. Gone are the fluorescent lights and soulless chain restaurants hawking greasy grub designed to be inhaled from plastic trays. Rather, food halls have evolved into candy stores for grown-up gourmands, allowing visitors to choose between indulging in an authentic French crêpe or nibbling on a charcuterie board dotted with locally sourced meats.

Communal seating is key, as is Instagramability.

"The biggest difference between the food courts of yesteryear and the food halls of today is quality and soul," explained Arturo Kassel, managing partner and CEO of Whisknadle Hospitality (the team behind Park Commons, a food hall coming soon to Sorrento Valley). He stresses the craftsmanship behind the concept, as well as a focus on local artisans. Quality is assured, but fast-food prices are not.

Variety is also a crucial element of successful food halls. Grand Central Market in Los Angeles has nearly 40 vendors with a mix of trendy favorites (Eggslut) and some who have been stationed there for more than 50 years (Roast to Go). From a Latin grocer to an oyster bar headed by Los Angeles' only *master escailier* (shellfish master), food halls strive to offer something for everyone — including the discerning diner.

"The role of food halls today is to appeal to a group of people who have a variety of tastes. No more arguments in the group over where to eat," said Mike DiNorscia, CEO of Grain & Grit Collective, creators of Little Italy Food Hall.

A few years ago, this type of dining experience was most often found in food truck parks like those scattered across Austin, Texas. But as pushback from brick-and-mortar restaurants stifled food trucks' popularity, San Diego trucks like Mastiff Sausage Company opted to permanently park in food halls instead. By making the shift to a shared space, vendors can appeal to consumers' demand for instant gratification, as well as reduce operating costs and benefit from a shared marketing presence. David Spatafore, principal of Blue Bridge Hospitality, the owner and operator of Liberty Public Market, believes "the food hall can be an equalizer for small local business."

Locally, Liberty Public Market is the best known of the markets currently operating, but it's facing major competition from concepts in Little Italy and those slated to open in Poway, Carlsbad and Barrio Logan, to name just a few. With a number in the works and several already humming along, San Diego County seems to be on the cusp of a true food hall renaissance.

Here's a look at the growing food hall trend around the county.

BELCAMPO MEAT CO. PHOTO BY MIKE BAKER; LA MACELLERIA PHOTO BY ELIZABETH DANIELS PHOTOGRAPHY; TACOS TUMBRA'S A TOMAS PHOTO BY AMPARO RUIZ; THE OYSTER GOURMET PHOTO BY CLAU FREYINGER; PARANA EMPANADAS PHOTO BY LAILA SAID; LIBERTY MARKET STATION PATIOL BY ROBERT BENSON

(Open Now)



Parana Empanadas



LIBERTY PUBLIC MARKET

Point Loma's Liberty Station has been a shopping and dining destination since its overhaul in 2000, but 2016 marked a turning point in its history with the introduction of Liberty Public Market. The 25,000-square-foot venue hosts more than 30 artisans and culinary concepts, where patrons can enjoy local beer flights at the popular bottle shop/bar Bottlecrafter, authentic Japanese cuisine at RakiRaki Ramen & Tsukemen (check out the chicken karaage), expert cheese selections at Venissimo, a medley of carnivorous delights at Liberty Meat Shop, and much more.

2820 Historic Decatur Rd., Point Loma
619.487.9346, libertypublicmarket.com



**(Open
Now)**
CONTINUED

LITTLE ITALY FOOD HALL

The pocket-sized food hall in the heart of San Diego's culinary hub opened in summer 2018 with Italian values in mind: good food, good friends and good community. Six food stations and a full bar offer options inspired from near and far, including Milanese-style pizza (Ambrogio15), "genre-bending fare" at Not Not Tacos from local culinary celeb Sam "The Cooking Guy" Zien, and Japanese-fusion seafood (Single Fin Kitchen). The adjacent open-air Piazza della Famiglia spans 10,000 square feet of communal space to wine and dine, gab and graze, or laugh and nibble. 550 W. Date St., Ste. B, Little Italy 619.269.7187, littleitalyfoodhall.com ◀



PHOTO BY JOHN GASTALDO

(Coming Soon)



WINDMILL FOOD HALL

The iconic windmill nestled alongside I-5 has caught the eyes of passersby since its construction in the 1980s. Now, its revitalization will provide a home for approximately 10 vendors in what is scheduled to be the next food hall project to debut in San Diego County. The 12,000-square-foot space will sling out unique sliders from locals Notorious Burger, Korean-style fried chicken from newcomers Cross Street Chicken & Beer, authentic Belgian *frites* and Liège waffles from Belgium Delights, New England-style lobster rolls from Lobster West, and of course gourmet street tacos from Taco Lady. A second floor speakeasy will round out the concept in 2019. 890 Palomar Airport Rd., Carlsbad



PARK COMMONS RENDERINGS BY BLUE MOTIF



PARK COMMONS

The team behind Whisknadle and Catania are setting up to launch a 10,000-square-foot food hall and event space in Sorrento Valley's The Park campus. The venue, which is expected to open at the start of 2019, will be stocked with local favorites such as Dark Horse Coffee Roasters as well as promising newcomers like Allspice (Middle Eastern cuisine), Best Dressed (soups and salads), Slow Poke ("fast life, slow food"), and El Parque Cocina Mexicana. Patrons will be able to enjoy indoor and outdoor seating, as well as food to go that will cater to the bustling business-lunch crowd. 9645 Scranton Rd., Sorrento Valley, parkcommonssd.com

PAN Y SAL

Barrio Logan will soon have its own food hall within the walls of a cultural institution, the 40,000-square-foot Bread & Salt art space and exhibition center. Slated to open in spring 2019, Pan y Sal will be home to a handful of vendors including Tijuana chef Jorge Garcia Flores, as well as a yet-to-be-named Baja craft brewer, bakery, coffee shop and wine store. A kitchen classroom will host workshops and pop-ups designed to incorporate the local community, as well as bring the spirit of Baja California to San Diego. 1955 Julian Ave., Barrio Logan breadandsaltsandiego.com

PHOTO BY HOWARD LIPIN



THE OUTPOST URBAN FOOD HALL

Poway isn't one of San Diego's revered dining destinations — yet. The team behind Outpost hopes to change that by developing an "urban food hall" sprawled over 21,000 square feet with 15 vendors (to start). Tenants have not yet been finalized for the food hall that's expected in fall 2019, but guests can expect a mix of familiar faces (including from 3 Local Brothers Group, the team behind Urge Gastropub and Mason Ale Works) and new concepts in the three-building, \$35 million development that will also house residential units, retail shops and a health/lifestyle center. 13247 Poway Rd., Poway

Beth Demmon is a San Diego-based craft beer writer whose work has appeared in Beer/Advocate, Playboy, Thrillist, MUNCHIES, Tales of the Cocktail, and more. Email her at beth@bethdemmon.com.