

PLANET JACKSON HOLE

FEATURE: A Foodie Christmas

By *Ted Scheffler* on December 22, 2015

After digging into Jackson Hole's culinary milieu, a visiting food critic will never be the same.

Jackson, WY – As a food, wine and travel writer based in Salt Lake City, I'm never more than a half hour or so (with dry roads) from a choice of seven different top-notch resorts, plus the ski town of Park City. So I hadn't thought much about visiting Jackson Hole, until I was made an offer I couldn't refuse: an expense paid trip with the sole purpose of eating and drinking my way for a week (split between two visits) through some of Jackson's premier restaurants and watering holes. Sometimes, my job doesn't suck.

Keep in mind, however, that I am a trained professional. I wouldn't recommend hitting 11 restaurants in a 48-hour period, as I did at one point during my mission, unless you are truly gluttonous or a competitive eater like Joey Chestnut, which I'm not. In other words, don't try this at home... lest you don't mind an extra 10 pounds resulting from your culinary conquest. That said, I'd do it all again in a heartbeat.

So, with the resolve of a Jedi warrior, I essentially dropped in blind armed with a list of restaurants and bars suggested to me by a team of Jackson Hole locals and foodies, knowing virtually nothing of the valley beyond spine-tingling tales of Corbet's Couloir. It must be noted, I didn't make it to every eatery I'd have liked to – that would take another month or more – but I visited enough restaurants and watering holes to get a pretty good picture of the Jackson dining and drink scene. And I have to admit, I came away *very* impressed. There is an abundance of excellent food, libations and skilled service professionals packed into this relatively small town.



The Kitchen: Fried oysters rockefeller (Photo: Robyn Vincent)

Day 1: We're not in Kansas anymore

For a mid-afternoon nosh we dropped into **Bin 22** (200 W. Broadway, 739-WINE) – a place I wish they'd clone in Salt Lake City. The combination tapas restaurant and wine/liquor store — buy a bottle of hard to find wine in the store and grab a table to enjoy it — turned out to be one of my favorite Jackson joints. As chefs busily prepared dishes in the open kitchen, we enjoyed friendly conversation at the bar with a terrific barkeep named Maggie who kept our wine glasses full while we nibbled on a cheese plate (*loved* the crumbly Shelburne Farms cheddar). Be sure to order the house-pulled fresh mozzarella when you visit.

I was struck by the combination of cozy and contemporary at **The Kitchen** (155 N. Glenwood, 734-1633, TheKitchenJacksonHole.com), with its bamboo bar and tables, eco-panel wave of light and the arched wooden wall on the dining side of the restaurant. Equally impressive is the food, which I'd rate right up with meals I've had at renowned Nobu restaurants. A Japanese-Irish chef who grew up in Mexico, Santiago Kano's innovative, travel-based cuisine (he'll tell you at least two countries are in every dish) included some of our favorites. We loved the tuna tartare kissed with truffled ponzu, and especially the wildly popular (so we were told by fellow diners) luxury shrimp — a serving of what had to have been at least 50 tempura shrimp poppers with sweet and spicy aioli. I look forward to returning to sample The Kitchen's exciting new winter menu, which includes Kano's piquant fried oysters Rockefeller (France, Morocco and the U.S.). The chromatic dish happens to be featured on the cover of this issue.



Bin22: Gulf shrimp (Photo: Carrie Patterson)



Bin22: Wine bliss (Photo: Carrie Patterson)

Day 5: Praise be to Italy



Il Villaggio Osteria: Fusilli (Photo: Robyn Vincent)

With a new executive chef — Serge Smith — and a new winter menu focused on its specialty, rustic Italian fare, **Il Villaggio Osteria** (3335 W. Village Dr, 739-4100, JHOsteria.com) is the perfect spot for a cozy lunch or fantastic dinner in Teton Village. Take a ski break and enjoy a quick plate of antipasti such as tuna tartare, meatballs with house-pulled mozzarella or venison carpaccio — its silky meat juxtaposed by crunchy granola. Or, you can go whole hog with dishes like truffle-infused pappardelle with mushrooms, pork cheek with braised cabbage, or perhaps something simple but sensational such as the classic pizza margherita, fresh and gooey from the eatery's wood-fire oven. Pair any of these dishes with wine from Osteria's extensive and thoughtful vino list, or saddle up to the bar and enjoy a creative libation at the hands of the cordial Sam Miller. Next time I visit JH, one of my first stops will include a visit to one of Osteria's renowned sister eateries, Rendezvous Bistro.