

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

Tell me you're going somewhere famous for skiing, casinos, showgirls and water sports, I'll wish you a nice trip. Add that it's Reno-Tahoe, I'm calling shotgun.

LEGEND

\$ = Entrees average less than \$10

\$\$ = \$11-\$20

\$\$\$ = \$21+

Of course, it is possible to pay more or less based on selections.

The Reno-Tahoe area, which straddles the Nevada and California borders at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, boasts more than 1,300 restaurants serving

everything from buffets to gourmet meals—a foodie's haven. During a recent visit, I visited several return-worthy restaurants perhaps best known to locals:

At **Adele's** in Carson City, Nev. (\$\$\$, www.adelesrestaurantandlounge.com, 775-882-3353), I overheard a couple debating the thickness of orange skins: navel vs. Valencia. Clearly, this is a

restaurant for people passionate about food. That Chef Charlie Abowd shares this commitment becomes clear as the server describes the specials—more than 30 daily, even though the menu exceeds 75 items—which include everything from Maryland crab cakes to rack of lamb. The cuisine is creative, which in this case is not a euphemism for weird. Order with the confidence of knowing you'll savor every bite.

Bar of America in Truckee, Calif. (\$\$, 530-587-3110) is exactly the kind of watering hole you'd hope to find in a quaint historic downtown. It's a warm, cozy pub where you can linger over a beverage. Hungry? Guests can order from the menu of the **Pacific Crest Grill**, an upscale bistro adjacent to the bar.

The **Chocolate Bar** in Reno (\$, 775-337-1122) is a chocoholic's fantasy. Nearly everything on the drinks and desserts menu incorporates cocoa. Try the Mayan hot chocolate—the bit of red pepper, though it sounds quite odd, only intensifies the sweetness.

The view at **Cottonwood** in Truckee (\$\$\$, www.cottonwoodrestaurant.com, 530-587-5711) makes the deck a popular dining spot in summer. But it's the hearty, fresh menu that draws crowds all year long.

No need to choose just one of the dozen microbrews at the **Great Basin Brewing Company** in Sparks, Nev. (\$\$, www.greatbasinbrewingco.com, 775-355-7711). Taste several, as four-ounce samples are just 99 cents. Many of the offerings change seasonally, ranging from the reliable to the slightly bizarre yet surprisingly tasty.

In **N Out Burger** in Reno, Sparks and Carson City (\$, www.in-n-out.com, 800-786-1000) is like the love child of Steak & Shake and the Varsity—one that's smarter, friendlier and more fashionable than its parents. The menu lists just three burgers, fries and drinks. A local confided

IF YOU GO:

Getting there: Delta offers daily nonstop flights from Atlanta to the Reno International Airport.

Where to stay: The Peppercorn Hotel Casino (www.peppercornreno.com, 866-821-9996) is one modern option. The Truckee Hotel (www.thetruckeehotel.com, 800-659-6921) is an historic one. Rooms from \$49/night; options vary and rates change seasonally.

Know before you go: Compared to Atlanta, the dry air and high altitude can be an adjustment. Drink more water than usual.

When to go: When your favorite foods are in season. Most chefs use fresh, local ingredients.

What to do: Between meals enjoy a spa treatment at Siena Spa in Reno (www.sienareno.com, 877-590-7529). For more options visit www.visitrenotahoe.com.

PATTIE LESSER



EATING ACROSS RENO-TAHOE

RESTAURANTS ARE REASON ENOUGH TO VISIT THE POPULAR REGION



PHOTOS/HOPE S. PHILBRICK

Above: Bar of America and Pacific Crest Grill are in historic downtown Truckee. **Bottom left:** Charlie Abowd, of Adele's, had the honor of cooking at the James Beard House in November 2005. His Carson City restaurant boasts one of the largest menus around. **Bottom right:** PlumpJack Café's butternut squash purée.

that additional items are available to those in the know, including "the animal," a burger slathered with mustard before it's grilled.

At **LuLou's** in Reno (\$\$\$, 775-329-9979) the design may say high-end IKEA, but the cuisine says this chef is one confident dude—who's earned the right to be. The menu,



an eclectic mix of fresh, seasonal ingredients, changes regularly and, like its forks, the result is artsy yet functional. Everything we sampled—from the ahi tartare and butternut squash ravioli to the grilled lamb loin and seared scallops, to the caramel chocolate tart—tasted divine.

Our server explained that the menu changes twice weekly at **PlumpJack Café** in Squaw Valley, Calif. (\$\$\$, www.plumpjack.com, 800-323-7666) to showcase "the same theme, with different flair." You may not enjoy the same butternut squash purée soup or sea bass risotto as I did, but if your dinner is half as good you won't be disappointed.

Roxy's Bar and Lounge in Reno (\$, www.eldoradoreno.com, 800-879-8879) boasts 102 different martinis. With so many options, don't all order the same old thing. If pink is important, skip the cosmopolitan and try the raspberry lemonade—it's much smoother. During happy hour (daily, 4:30-6 p.m.) all martinis are \$4.

Squeeze In, located in Truckee (\$, 530-587-9814), is housed in a building that's 10 feet wide—hence the name. You may feel like you're rubbing elbows with the guy at the table next to you, but the menu is anything but tiny with more than 60 creative (and huge!) omelets and more.

No matter what brings you to Reno-Tahoe, you'll need to satisfy hunger and thirst—but to me, that's reason enough to go. **SP**