

## The 6 Best Ribs in the Bay Area



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There's something about a juicy, perfectly seasoned rib that screams summer. Pair it with a side of corn, beans, and slaw and it's a bona fide party. These chefs don't use sauce as a mask to cover up dry meat at their restaurants, but instead use sauce to enhance the natural flavors inherent to the meat. This is how barbecue should be.

## Smokestack

Though Chef Brandon Korf cooks only over live fire and with a smoker (no cooking with gas here), the aroma from the business's brewery at the rear of Smokestack has the place not smelling of smoked meat but of, well, a brewery. No matter. Served simply on a paper-lined metal tray, the pork spare ribs command your full attention. Seasoned with salt, pepper, and sugar, the ribs are smoked for three-plus hours over California almond wood and are spritzed every half hour with Korf's signature spiced vinegar (that's Carolina-style for American rib aficionados). The result is a densely meaty, super-juicy rib with notes of coriander that Chef swears comes from the heritage Duroc and Berkshire pigs he uses.

## Oola

Exposed brick, bar stools shaped like marshmallow lollipops, and a silent Japanese movie screening on the wall above the bar tag Oola as hipster/modern in a playful, Californicated way — a good match for Chef Ola Fendert's updated flavors. But it's the decadent Asian-style ribs, available at brunch, dinner, and on the bar menu (that is: whenever you want them) that are an instant classic. Sweet and savory from the ginger-soy glaze, the ribs are one chewy bite of perfectly burnt ends after another and are impossible to stop eating. (Go ahead and try, I dare ya!) Served with a creamy cilantro and apple-spiked slaw, the spiced ribs are an unexpected, finger-licking good, just say no to eggs, brunch delight.

## The Keystone

Located just steps from the Metreon, The Keystone at the Mosser Hotel could have become just any other tourist restaurant. But Chef Banks White brings his one-of-a-kind Southern (he's from Texas) by way of Asia (White

has traveled extensively through the region) interpretations to his new menu. His South by Southeast fried ribs are an exemplary example of his fusions. Plated with crisp pickled okra and dusted with fried garlic, the ribs have a citrusy almost spicy lime flavor from calamansi (originally cultivated in the Philippines) followed by a deep, umami character from soy glaze and chewy-crispy bits that will make every rib lover sigh.



Cochon Volant's BBQ Combo (Laiko Bahrs).

### **Cochon Volant BBQ Smoke House**

Not far from downtown Sonoma, Cochon Volant recently set up a brick-and-mortar home where its roaming band of smokers could put down roots.

Chef Rob Larman makes a mean brisket — smoked for no less than 14 hours — but pull up a red stool at one of the tall counters and savor some

ribs. Beef short ribs (available only on the weekends) and baby back pork are winners, benefitting from their extended smoke bath and Larman's steady hand on the chile jar (yes, there's some kick in these ribs). Add a bit more heat with the slightly sweet Sonoma Sauce or slather on some mustard coriander sauce. Either way, it's win-win.

### **Bocanova**

The East Bay has its share of racked ribs but it's at Bocanova, a Pan American restaurant in Jack London Square, that pushes your perception of ribs to a newer, fresher place. Chef Owner Rick Hackett often draws inspiration from the Asian-influenced cuisine of Peru, known as *Chifa*. Hackett's Chifa-by-way-of-American-barbecue ribs beautifully mesh North and South American flavors with soy glaze, housemade oyster sauce, black garlic, ginger, and chiles. Cut Korean style and grilled to order, these ribs are never braised in keeping with Chifa style. Yum.

### **Verge**

At the newly reimagined Verge, the restaurant within the Toll House Hotel in Los Gatos, Executive Chef Albert Nguyen-Phuoc is redefining "Asian Fusion." Trained in France, Nguyen-Phuoc easily shifts from the Vietnamese cuisine of his heritage to the flavors of Europe and his long-time home, Northern California. His classic French training comes through

in the beef short rib (available at dinner only). Simply seasoned with salt and pepper, then cooked sous vide for 72 hours, the ribs are finished with a tomato glaze and beef au jus before serving. The result is a luscious rib that doesn't hide its beefiness but *does* melt in your mouth.