

Regional Treasure

Taste of Cave Creek highlights flavors of the Southwest

By Lauren Wise

It is a delicious secret that Cave Creek has a spectacular culinary scene. The chefs combine popular tastes from around the Valley – Mexican and Navajo flavors, dry-aged steaks, handmade Italian pasta or down-home Southern dishes – and add a little Western flair to their concepts. And for the past 25 years, the two-day Taste of Cave Creek culinary event has been an opportunity for chefs to showcase their distinct flavors and for eager diners traveling from all over the Valley to experience them.

As one of the biggest annual events in the town, Taste of Cave Creek this year will run from Oct. 17-18, and host over 8,000 enthusiasts in Stagecoach Village. The Taste of Creek is not only a way to showcase the best culinary talents the area has to offer, although that is a main focus, with over 30 restaurants offering samples on-site. It was also started over a quarter of a century ago as a chance for residents to mingle with their neighbors, a way for the community to come together. It's an outdoor setting that's prime for visitors to weave in and out of restaurants' "mobile" kitchens, demonstration booths, art gallery displays and beer gardens. And in the center of it all, almost like a meeting point for revelers to reconvene, is the city gazebo with nonstop live music and dancing.

Some of the restaurant highlights include locally loved spots like El Encanto, Harold's Cave Creek Corral, Buffalo Chip and The Horny Toad – all bound to be offering some favorite menu items ranging from barbecue to fried chicken to pollo fundido,



PHOTOS SPECIAL TO NVM

Kids' activities abound at the festival.

with a few culinary surprises thrown in. But there are several lesser-known gems such as Indigo Crow, The Creek Cookies and Cream, Bryan's Black Mountain BBQ, Brugo's Pizza Company and My Sweet Blessings Bakery & Bistro. Restaurants often feature two to four dishes, ranging from \$4-\$5 a piece, at each booth.

This year's Taste of Cave Creek will also feature a brand-new event to showcase the relationships between some of Arizona's most talented chefs, ranchers and fishermen. Called the "Head to Tail Cookoff," the event sees local chefs and butchers each choosing a featured animal to cook in front of the crowd and utilizing the entire animal, including offerings such as whole lamb, salmon, pigs and deer.

But when it comes to Arizona flavors, it's not just about the food.

The Taste of Cave Creek also offers a star-studded line-up of wine, beer and spirit experts dishing out generous pours and flavor profiles. With 21 breweries posted up in the beer garden, visitors can sample a vast selection of Arizona-made beers from the likes of Phoenix Ale Brewery, SanTan Brewing Company and Huss Brewing, experiencing flavors like cactus, orange blossom, local honey and jalapeños. Just outside the beer garden gates, you'll find some of the state's (and country's) top spirit makers, including Roger Clyne's Mexican Moonshine Tequila, Cave Creek Whiskey and Dulce Dorado Honey & Vanilla Infused Tequila.

All in all, it's an ideal event to discover your new favorite Cave Creek restaurant – or even Cave Creek cocktail.

And in line with the community aspect of the event, all proceeds from Taste of Cave Creek tickets sales benefit the Special Olympics Arizona, as well as the 17th Operation Santa Claus charity drive. For the latter, attendees can bring either a new toy, children's clothing item, packaged food item or monetary donation to the front entrance.

Tickets cost \$10 (children 12 and under are admitted for free), while food tickets cost \$3-\$5. Tip: Park at Cave Creek and School House roads, where a free shuttle picks up attendees for drop offs at the venue. For more information, visit tasteofcavecreek.com.



ABOVE: Chefs from all over the Valley will be cooking at Taste of Cave Creek.

BELOW: Gourmet burgers and veggies exist in harmony at the festival.

