

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



FOOD FIND

The hottest restaurant in Park City

BY KARI BODNARCHUK | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

PARK CITY, Utah — Glowing red embers nestle against charred logs on a grill in one of Park City’s coolest new restaurants, Firewood. This isn’t like your local Scout troop’s campfire or your backyard Weber, though. Different areas of the massive 14-foot-long, custom-built grill range in temperature from 500 degrees to 700 degrees — or more.

Here, renowned chef John Murcko creates the most exquisite fine-dining cuisine over an open flame, turning out delicately prepared scallops, tender meats, and vegetables with the perfect blend of smoky goodness and inner crunch. Murcko, who has run 48 restaurants in Park City and Sun Valley, Idaho, opened Firewood just over a year ago, and brings passion and years of practice to working with this primitive cooking technique.

“We see dramatic spikes of temperature depending on the type of wood we’re burning,” explains Murcko, who uses apple, cherry, peach, and other varieties. “Our thermometers all say E (for Error) when they go above 500 degrees, so we determine how hot it is by how long we can hold a hand over the fire.”

The fires get built around 2:30 p.m. each day and it takes 3½ hours until they’re fully ready. In the meantime, around 4 p.m., Murcko and his cooks start smoking the meats.

“That’s when we can see how the wood is doing,” he says. “What flavor is it giving off? How’s the heat? Are we happy with the mixes of wood together? We keep exploring with the different wood. I may not have apple wood this week, but I have peach. The flavor is great, but the heat is not, so I’ll add cherry to boost up the heat.”

The moisture content of the wood also impacts how it burns. “Some wood gets cured for a year, but it may not be dry enough, so you have to adjust for that,” says Murcko. “We love that. You’re always growing here.”

Murcko, a master of open-flame cooking, came upon this technique naturally. He and his family have a cabin off the grid in southern Utah, where the main source for cooking family meals was originally a wood stove. Eventually, Murcko built outdoor fire pits where he prepared meals in Dutch ovens buried in the ground. Since his fellow chefs often work over the holidays, Murcko began hosting their friends and families for holiday meals that evolved into dining festivals with upward of 50 people. He prepared elaborate meals using rotisseries and grills, and he experimented with different varieties of wood.

Murcko soon decided to open a restaurant that relied entirely on cooking with firewood — a risky endeavor, since he wanted to offer fine-dining cuisine, not burger and brat pub-style dishes.

“I thought, ‘Wouldn’t it be incredible if you could reproduce those same types of flavors in a restaurant, and if everything was cooked over wood?’ ” says Murcko.

Firewood opened in late 2016, a huge hit among locals and visitors to Park City, and it has evolved over the past year (the restaurant is on its sixth menu since opening).

“It’s been interesting working in the coal beds,” says Murcko. “We use steel baskets for a lot of things. We bury food in the coals and put food right on top of the coals, and that creates a completely different set of flavors — it adds a lot more smoke to it. Or we work with cast iron on the grill. . . . We’ve learned how to get the most out of the



John Murcko

vegetables and meats without masking the flavors.”

Murcko also designed the restaurant’s décor, which offers a rustic yet industrial feel. It has exposed brick walls from the original historic building, ceiling fans from reclaimed windmills, and salvaged single-pane metal windows from an Ohio schoolhouse that provide diners with views of the grill and the cooks in action.

“A kitchen is the most central spot in a home, and I always wanted to create that in a restaurant, where you feel like you can be a part of the cooking,” says Murcko. “People write us notes and hold them in the windows.”

The main dining room seats 145 people, and a cozy room with a round table and walls of bookcases — called the Chef’s Library — seats 8 people for smaller gatherings and special occasions. Downstairs, the Nickel Bar — a bar literally covered with hundreds of nickels — draws visitors who want to grab a cocktail or dine in a more tucked-away casual setting (it offers a full menu), or who may just be in town for a few days and can’t get a reservation upstairs (the main dining room is often fully booked). A private back dining room seats another 20 people.

Regardless of where you sit, ask to peek into the kitchen. Whether you’re a Boy Scout, a backyard cook, or simply a lover of fine cuisine, you’ll enjoy watching Murcko and his cooks prepare fabulous meals on that one-of-a-kind grill.

FIREWOOD 306 Main St., Park City, Utah, 435-252-9900, firewoodonmain.com.

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HERE

WOMEN'S BIKE TOUR IN VERMONT Learn about bike maintenance, discuss nutrition and fitness, and explore country roads alongside Lake Champlain during a women's-only bike tour in northern Vermont. Sojourn Bicycling and Active Vacations has teamed up with Terry Bicycles to offer Women's Weekend Vermont Bike Trip, July 14-17, based at the Basin Harbor Resort and Boat Club on Lake Champlain in Vergennes. The weekend starts with a lakeside reception where you'll meet tour leaders and other participants, and enjoy Vermont wine, beer, and cheese. Over the next three days, you'll learn about women's fitness, nutrition, and gear, find out how to tune up your bike and do basic repairs, and have plenty of time for pedaling around this tucked-away corner of Vermont. Rates start at \$1,595 per person, including accommodations, most meals, bikes and related equipment, tour leaders, and van support. 800-730-4771,

RACE YACHTS VISIT NEWPORT Get up close to state-of-the-art race yachts, tour Newport Harbor with experienced sailors, and enjoy hands-on exhibits on everything from marine life to weather, when the world's premiere ocean sailing race makes a 12-day stop in Newport, May 8-20. The Volvo Ocean Race Newport Stopover welcomes seven VO65 boats and features dozens of family-friendly activities, many of them free, at Fort Adams State Park. Try cranking the grinding machine — a tool used to adjust the trim of a boat's sails — or maneuvering



a Sail Newport J22 around Newport Harbor (no experience needed). Visit the One Ocean Exploration Zone to see exhibits on marine life, sailing, ocean conservation, and weather. Then enjoy watching several days of racing from Gurney's Newport Resort and Marina before the VO65 boats begin their next leg to Cardiff, Wales. www.volvooceanracenewport.com.

THERE

TEEN-ONLY ZONE AT FIVE-STAR RESORT One Four Seasons resort in Mexico has opened a new teen-only complex with places to hang out and play out of reach of parents. Step through the colorful graffiti'd gates of The Container, located at the Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita, and you'll find a large garden with Acapulco chairs and sunbeds, an outdoor charging station, and large shipping containers that feature different activities. The cinema container has an 85-inch TV and bean bag chairs for watching movies, and the video game container offers Xbox,

PlayStation, Switch, and two virtual reality areas. The center also organizes street soccer, beach volleyball, and local hikes, and workshops on Huichol and canvas string art graffiti. The center welcomes 13- to 19-year-olds daily from noon to 10:30 p.m. Entry free for guests; added fee for workshops. Room rates start at \$695. www.fourseasons.com/puntamita.

NYC EXPANDS MICRO HOTEL ROOMS The Pod Hotels, a pioneer of the

micro-hotel concept, has opened Pod Times Square in the heart of New York City. Like its sister properties in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Washington, D.C., the hotel offers clean, crisply designed rooms with minimalist space yet all the right features — from great location to free Wi-Fi — for budget-minded travelers. Pod Times Square, located at 42nd Street and 9th Avenue, features 665 rooms, an Italian-American restaurant, a tiki bar with an outdoor space overlooking Times Square, and the company's newest concept: micro apartments for travelers seeking longer stays. These Pod Pads, as they're called, range from 600 square feet to 800 square feet, versus the standard 115 square feet for a micro hotel room, and include access to a fitness center and a guest lounge with stunning city views. Rates start at \$125 per night. 844-763-7666, www.thepodhotel.com/pod-times-square.



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