

# ICGNIC

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## *These Restaurants Are Taking the Multi-Sensory Experience to the Next Level*

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BY DENA ROCHÉ JUNE 13, 2018



Photo above: Sublimotion by Tamas Kooning Lansbergen

Step right up to the next greatest show on earth—dining! In a society where constant entertainment is at our fingertips, it's no surprise that food as theater is an emerging trend. But the idea of food as a multi-sensory experience is nothing new as exhibition kitchens have provided many fun nights. We eat with our eyes, our sense of smell, and our taste buds. Our most memorable meals are always tied to the overall experience, not simply a great steak. Locally and globally, innovative restaurateurs are redefining our idea of an epic epicurean experience. Here are some of the best.



Photo by Tamas Kooning Lansbergen

## **SUBLIMOTION, IBIZA**

What do you get when you combine lasers, video projections, and virtual reality with chefs boasting 10 Michelin stars serving a one-table restaurant? A wild, totally unique, unforgettable experience at the most expensive restaurant in the world. At about \$2,000 a person, **Sublimotion**, under the direction of Chef Paco Roncero, is a surreal, futuristic look at dining. Twelve lucky guests are treated to a highly choreographed experience in a specially designed room that serves as an ever-changing canvas. Projections on the walls and table itself morph the environment from a cabaret to the inside of a Champagne bottle to a magical forest. Dishes are paired to the theme; for example, one dish is in a hanging garden that descends from the ceiling.

The chefs work alongside engineers, illusionists, screenwriters, DJs, and 25 servers to create the three-hour, multi-sensory extravaganza. The kitchen turns out course after course of unique items, like a fruity pill that dissolves in the mouth like sorbet, or fish served in cockleshells as “sharks” swim around the room, or a deconstructed shrimp scampi enjoyed while “riding” the Orient Express. There’s even a point where diners don Samsung VR goggles to pair with a course. According to Eduardo Gonzales, Sublimotion’s director and co-founder, a new experience is about to be revealed.

“This year we will have a new scene in which we will use the ‘hybrid reality’ to submerge the guests in a virtual environment,” Gonzales says. “It will be like sitting down to eat at the table of a video game where snacks float around you and you can pick them up, take them to your mouth, and then discover that they are absolutely real and delicious! It will be an incredible moment.”

## KAI, PHOENIX

While Sublimotion is like a Lady GaGa concert, a meal at **Kai** is like listening to a finely-tuned orchestra. Kai bills itself as a journey, with the very attentive wait staff as your guides. It begins when very large, wood-framed menus with original Native American art are propped up on the table with the pomp and circumstance of a Van Gogh revealing.

The waiter first describes the painting on each menu before launching into the history of the Pima tribe, whose cuisine Kai represents. He then explains that the menu is divided into The Birth, The Beginning, and The Journey (appetizer, bigger appetizers, and mains) or the entire table can choose tasting menus of six or twelve courses. Each dish, from the Ha:!, a mesquite-smoked squash purée with O’otham Gourds and agave cotton, to a Wagyu beef entrée with native seed search bean ragout, is presented with a flourish and a story. Throughout the meal you’ll learn about the culture and legends of the tribe.



Tea activated smoking plant at Kai

Sensory experiences like a plant that begins to smoke when tea is poured over it to activate the underlying dry ice are designed to heighten your senses. The smell is intended to evoke a desert monsoon aroma, while the tea pouring sounds like desert rain. The journey doesn’t end until you retrieve your car from the valet and find a small wooden box with blue corn meal muffins for the morning and a handwritten note from your waiter.

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## BARTON G, LOS ANGELES & MIAMI

Dinner at **Barton G** is about people-watching, selfie-taking, and not taking yourself too seriously. While Corporate Chef Jeff O'Neill has an impressive pedigree, having worked for Eric Ripert, Daniel Boulud, and Charlie Palmer, it's the theater you remember perhaps more than the food itself. The décor is club-like, and fellow diners are shooting selfies at the rate of a teen girl posing with Justin Bieber. But you have to forgive them, as the experience is probably one of the most Instagram-able you'll have while fine dining.

Order the Don't Be a Jerk Chicken, and a whole bird in a cage along with a video arrives, or The Lawn Moo-er, an artery-clogging, 48-ounce, grass-fed porterhouse served atop an actual lawnmower on a plot of lettuce grass. We love the Lobster Pop-Tarts that comes with a toaster, and by no means should you miss Marie Antoinette's Head-Let Them Eat Cake for dessert. The towering bouffant of cotton candy would make Marge Simpson jealous.



Cubanito Chocolate Cigar

“Barton G. is American cuisine with a twist. It's still whimsical, fun, and we make people smile. At the end of the day, that's it. There's no greater success, we feel, than making everyone happy,” says creator Barton Weiss. “It's about service—the way you present, the timing, everything. It becomes entertainment...We have no boundaries, no limits. There's no reason why we can't defy all laws of gravity, and there's no reason why you have to eat on a white plate.”



Photo by Pepo Segurado

### **TICKETS BAR, BARCELONA**

Brothers Albert and Ferran Adria, the duo who brought the world molecular gastronomy in their 3-star Michelin restaurant **elBulli**, are the masterminds behind **Tickets Bar** in Barcelona. The circus-like, casual, and often-loud atmosphere belies the creativity and complexity of the multi-course tapas cuisine.

In 2014, Tickets received a Michelin star and was lauded on *Restaurant Magazine*'s top restaurants of the world list. Reservations are required months in advance, and unlike anywhere else in Spain punctuality is a must or your table will be lost. Guests can select from the menu, or put their faith in the kitchen to map out the experience.

An open kitchen allows diners to watch as dishes like the summertime tree hung with strawberry "cherries" in elderflower foam and pistachio acorns are created. The dish arrives at the table with pruning scissors to cut off the treats. The mackerel dish is marinated with lime and chili tableside and is presented with a timer. When the timer goes off the ceviche is ready to eat. "I have a curiosity to discover new limits and new ways to understand gastronomy," says Chef Albert Adria.