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Santa 'Claws': California restaurants welcome Dungeness crab for the holidays

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Dungeness Crab Salad with Persimmon Carpaccio
Photo: Marinus Restaurant

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Dungeness crab season is back just in time for the winter holidays, and chefs at California's top restaurants couldn't be happier.

"If there is one ingredient from our waters that defines the Bay Area, it's Dungeness Crab," says Mark Dommen, chef for [One Market](#) in San Francisco. "It's delicious and versatile, so it's a great ingredient for chefs to work with, and it's sustainable, so it's great for the environment too. The natural sweetness and richness of the crab makes it one of my favorite local ingredients."

Among Dommen's specialties are a Crab Salad with Apple Water, and the restaurant is currently serving his popular Dungeness Crab with Fuyu Persimmon, Pomegranate and Hearts of Palm.

San Francisco offers plenty of other crabby options, including at the [Stinking Rose](#) on Columbus Avenue, a garlic-lovers paradise. The colorful eatery is where Giants manager Bruce Bochy headed to celebrate the night before the team's big victory parade, feasting on their Sizzling Iron Skillet Combination of Roasted Crab,

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Mussels and Shrimp. And yet another can't-miss San Francisco treat is the [Crab House](#) on Pier 39, which serves hungry diners more than 500 orders a week of its Whole Roasted Crab in Secret Garlic Sauce. Both establishments are part of a select restaurant group under the culinary guidance of Chef Andrea Fronicillo, who has even co-authored a book on these tasty crustaceans for Random House (*Crab: Buying, Cooking, Cracking*).

Over in the East Bay, Berkeley's [Gather](#) plans to offer a special dinner entree on days to be determined in coming weeks that will be called Watermelon Radish Crab 'Ravioli' with Mint Salsa Verde, Crab Oil, and Meyer Lemon Leaf. It will include thin-sliced watermelon radish marinated in olive oil and lemon and used as the pasta, with the filling made with Dungeness crab and aioli. Are you hungry yet?

Travelers in the mid-coast region should consider getting their crab fix at [Marinus](#), the acclaimed restaurant tucked away at Carmel Valley's Bernardus Lodge. Among the appetizing items coming from Chef Cal Stamenov are a Dungeness Crab Salad with Persimmon Carpaccio and Yuzu Vinaigrette.

"Thanksgiving also marks the beginning of Dungeness crab season in the Monterey Bay, and we always anticipate its arrival, just in time for the holidays," says Chef Stamenov. "There are many varieties of crab in the United States, each fiercely defended as 'the best' by its regional devotees. I'm partial to Dungeness because it's local, meaning that it comes to the kitchen door fresh from the sea. The cold water of the Monterey Bay makes for sweet, succulent crabmeat and the crabs are good size, ranging from 1 to 3 pounds."

And down in Southern California, it's hard to imagine a restaurant getting much crabbier than [Gladstones Malibu](#), where Executive Chef Daniel Elmaleh is featuring crab in such dishes as Crab Cakes, a delicious Jumbo Lump Crab Roll, and Crab Alfredo Fettuccini. The seaside establishment also offers seasonal crabs in their raw form for the daily Market Price, in traditional dishes like King Crab Cocktail, a Seafood Tower, Two-Pound Alaskan Jumbo King Crab Legs, and even whole.

Early reports on Dungeness crab season, which officially launched on November 15 in the Coastal Zone between Bodega Bay and Pacifica, reveal that it looks like a thriving year. Good news indeed for fishermen, chefs, and diners around the state ready to dig in to some delicious Dungeness.

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