

REOPENING SAN MATEO

2020 IN NUMBERS

- The U.S. restaurant and food service industry made \$240 billion less than originally expected.
- More than one hundred thousand eating and drinking businesses closed either temporarily or for good.
- There were 2.5 million fewer jobs in the eating and drinking place sector than there were pre-pandemic.*

*as of the National Restaurant Association's 2021 State of the Restaurant Industry Report

ALL SPICE

1602 S. El Camino Real \$\$\$\$

All Spice, a fine dining restaurant serving Indian fusion cuisine, prides itself on its unique flavors, dynamic menu and warm relations with longtime diners. Founded in 2010 by chef Sachin Chopra and his wife, Shoshana Wolf, its dishes incorporate components based on their inspirations and discoveries.

Chopra, originally from India, came to the U.S. to attend The Culinary Institute of America to learn French technique and later worked under renowned French chef and restaurateur Danielle Boulud. Though many expected Chopra to make the Indian food of his home country, he wanted to explore different avenues of cooking, which he did through opening All Spice. A house-turned-restaurant featuring three cozy dining rooms interconnected by doorways, All Spice held a Michelin star in its San Mateo location from 2013-15, a distinction it aims to regain.

During the pandemic, All Spice experienced a 75% decrease in sales, laid off nine staff members, reduced working hours and electricity use and transformed from a fine dining restaurant to a takeout operation. Though All Spice attempted to partner with DoorDash and Uber Eats for delivery, it received few orders and quickly realized these platforms are tailored for fast food orders. If All Spice had received many orders, it would've lost approximately 30% of its profit, which is the fee these platforms charge restaurants for partnered orders.

Though All Spice never closed, it was limited to takeout for the first three months of the pandemic, then again in December and January. Reopening for outdoor dining in June of 2020, with a streamlined menu to reduce costs, was a lifeline. All Spice operated with limited capacity indoor dining in October and November, then again in late February. It has been serving both indoors and outdoors since capacity restrictions were lifted this past June.

All Spice is grateful for the financial support it received from the San Mateo County Strong Fund and personal protective equipment loans and support from the Restaurant Revitalization Fund, a program providing emergency assistance for eligible businesses. The restaurant has since rehired its staff.

BAY WATCH

201 2nd Avenue \$\$

Bay Watch Restaurant has been operating for more than 20 years. Some popular menu items include pumpkin pancakes, papaya and omelets. When the pandemic surged in early 2020, the restaurant had to cut their staff down to two cooks and one server working per day. For a while, they only served takeout and the restaurant wasn't bringing in much profit, which resulted in worries about the possibility of going out of business. When reopening in person, the restaurant managers tried to hire back previous staff members, but some had either gotten new jobs or refused to work. The restaurant also struggled with the mandates as not all customers respected their rule to wear masks. The staff members have continued to work hard to maintain the quality of their food, and appreciate the support of people in the community who come to eat there.

SURUKI SUPERMARKET

71 E. 4th Avenue \$\$

Japanese immigrant Shuji Suruki began the Suruki grocery business in 1974 with a truck. He searched phone books for Japanese people in the area, then delivered food to their homes, traveling distances that ranged from San Francisco to Salinas. In 1980, Suruki opened his first shop in Burlingame, later moving the business to San Mateo in 1990. That's where he formed the Suruki Supermarket that has become a downtown staple over the years.

Since the pandemic, the supermarket has seen a 50-60% increase in business as people opted to shop for groceries and prepare food at home instead of dining in restaurants. Suruki's fish counter, a go-to destination for sashimi, almost doubled in sales. Suruki attributed the fish counter's explosive growth in business to people's eagerness to shop for food they could take home to enjoy. Due to the surge in business, Suruki's has faced a slight employee shortage and began tasking less experienced workers with more skilled crafts, such as cutting sashimi.

C.R.E.A.M.

SAN MATEO LOCATION CLOSED \$

Eleven years ago, Jimmy Shamieh began CREAM's first retail store in Berkeley, Calif. Since then, CREAM has expanded to 12 stores in the Bay Area and was named "an ice cream shop you need to visit before you die" by BuzzFeed. CREAM stands for "Cookies Rule Everything Around Me" and was partially inspired by hip hop group Wu-Tang's song "C.R.E.A.M."

"CREAM to us represents the cream of the crop, reflecting the [high] quality of our products," Shamieh said. "It's [also] cream with ice cream, so it has a lot of nice connotations."

CREAM is known for its ice cream sandwiches in flavors such as salted caramel, chocolate mint chip and strawberry, but it also sells milkshakes and ice cream cakes for birthdays.

Unfortunately, CREAM has not yet fully recovered from the negative impacts of COVID-19: the store suffered an approximate 50% revenue loss and 60% loss of staff, and it continues to face ingredient shortages. Catering for sometimes up to 500 employees has been a major aspect of CREAM's business, but since people began working from home, the demand for the catering service has slowed.

"It is crucial for us to have [catering] business come back first," Shamieh said.

Furthermore, CREAM's downtown San Mateo site was forced to shut at the start of the pandemic because there was difficulty paying rent. Fortunately, because each shop is independently owned and operated, the closure did not affect CREAM's other locations.

"Nowadays there is nothing solid or gold anymore," Shamieh said. "We just have to deal with it day by day, week by week, and see what comes up [next]."

Ultimately, CREAM will try its best to face challenges and continue serving other communities outside of San Mateo.

KEY

- Bobabia
- Suruki Supermarket
- All Spice
- Bay Watch
- Icicles
- 3 Bees Coffee
- Sibby's Cupcakery
- ≡ STREET CLOSED FOR OUTDOOR DINING
- HIRING

SIBBY'S CUPCAKERY

716 S. Railroad Avenue \$\$

Avid baker Sibby Thomsen opened Sibby's Cupcakery in 2004. Featuring two special flavors weekly and decorated cupcakes for every occasion, Sibby's has been praised in various publications including the San Francisco Bay Guardian, the San Francisco Modern Bride, Daily Candy, Lucky Magazine and more. From 2015-20, Bay Area Parent magazine readers voted it the Best Party Food/Caterer on the Peninsula.

Though Sibby's, classified as an "essential business," has remained open throughout the pandemic, the shop experienced around a 20-25% decline in business, which Thomsen attributed partially to the decline of typical celebrations like weddings and parties. While previously open six days a week with the exception of Mondays, Sibby's began closing on Tuesdays as well.

Following the pandemic, Sibby's has grappled with challenges such as ingredient shortages, a few customers unwilling to abide by mask or social distance guidelines and difficulty hearing customers' names through masks, a challenge the shop responded to by including name stickers on finished packages. Sibby's has also struggled to maintain the right indoor temperature for baking cupcakes as the requirement to keep windows open for ventilation creates drafts.

With 25 employees, Sibby's creatively assigns shifts to ensure no more than 10 workers are in the shop at any given time, as per the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines. Customers can order by phone and opt for curbside pickup or delivery. To combat the increased production costs caused by the pandemic, Sibby's will be increasing its prices this fall, for the first time in four years, by 15%.

While Sibby's is not currently hiring, interested applicants are welcome to send in a resume and cover letter.

THANK YOU TO OUR SOURCES

Bobabia, Suruki Supermarket, All Spice, Bay Watch, Pausa, 3 Bees Coffee, Sibby's Cupcakery and any other San Mateo business that contributed to our research.

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PAUSA

223 E. 4th Avenue \$\$

When Steven Ugur first inherited the restaurant Spietto from his father many years ago, he renamed it to "Pausa," meaning "pause" in Italian, in hopes that the restaurant would be a place for people to take a break, relax and enjoy dinner. A warm and elegant sit-down restaurant, Pausa serves traditional Italian food like wood-fired pizza, tigelle bread, housemade pasta, salads and s-lami.

When COVID-19 closures started, Pausa closed for a month and was forced to lay off nearly all of its staff. When it reopened, the restaurant reinvented itself by shifting to takeout and online orders. Because so much of the restaurant's appeal comes from its pleasant dining atmosphere, the transition was difficult.

Nonetheless, Ugur slowly began to rehire staff, and within a few more months, the restaurant was able to resume in-person dining. To ensure the health and safety of all customers, tables and dishes are thoroughly sanitized on a regular basis. Despite the setbacks it has faced in the past year, Pausa continues to strive to provide people a "pause" from their busy lives.

BOBABIA

271 Baldwin Avenue \$

A chic little establishment native to San Mateo, Bobabia is a bubble tea shop that was founded by Victor Win in 2014. It uses U.S. Department of Agriculture Organic Certified and Fair Trade Certified tea leaves and offers a variety of desserts including classic milk tea, smoothies, ice cream and seasonal items like Halo Halo and Matcha Affogato.

Unfortunately, Bobabia was hit hard by the pandemic and lost a significant number of customers. However, the business was able to rely on online orders. To preserve the quality of its products and avoid diluted drinks, Win recommends customers pick up their drinks instead of ordering deliveries. In addition, its staff has been busy developing new drinks, and Win says they may even sell beer and wine in the near future for customers 21-years-old and older.

3 BEES COFFEE

224 E. 3rd Avenue \$

Founded by Rafat Haddad in 2002, 3 Bees Coffee is a family-owned coffee shop located in the heart of downtown San Mateo.

"We started this as a small community gathering place where everybody comes [to] have coffee and meet each other," Haddad said.

He recommends its signature drinks, the cappuccino and latte, although it also offers light meals like burritos, pastries and empanadas. A special highlight of 3 Bees Coffee is its mini art gallery, which displays and sells the work of local artists.

Like other businesses, 3 Bees Coffee suffered a loss of customers and a shortage of staff during the pandemic's lockdown period. Its chain store in the San Mateo Public Library was forced to shut down. However, the city's setup of outdoor seating has helped 3 Bees Coffee adjust, and high vaccination rates makes Haddad feel safer. In the end, Haddad's primary vision for 3 Bees Coffee is to "provide good quality coffee with [the] best customer service."