

## These 10 Sacramento-area bars are serving up some seriously good snacks

By Jackson Observer  
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In these dark days of winter, with the holidays (and, possibly, extra family in town) upon us, a festive night at a cozy, convivial bar – or two – holds extra appeal. (If you really need to get away from those relatives, maybe make it three stops.)

Sacramento's craft-bar scene has boomed in recent years, and we have always been rich in dives and neighborhood joints. And where there are bars, there will be bar food.

Bar snacks, in our view, are a food category unto themselves: salty, crunchy, crispy, savory, spicy, maybe more than a little greasy, and not exactly something you'd order or attack with the gusto it deserves on a first date.

A great bar bite has enough heft to soak up a bit of booze, works with both beer and cocktails, and is equally welcome at happy hour, when dinner is still a few hours away, or at the end of the night when you end up at a dive for one last round.

(By the way, a word of advice for dive-bar drinking: Always know your go-to drink for places that don't have that fancy beer list or a mixologist on staff. Mine is Maker's Mark on the rocks, a pleasant enough brand that even the deepest dive usually stocks.)

Delicious bar snacks pop up everywhere from the trendiest bars to the unlikeliest-looking neighborhood tavern. Here's a roundup, in no particular order, of 10 of favorite bar snacks from around the Sacramento area.

Some of these bars have larger menus, but this roundup sticks to appetizers – with a heavy emphasis on the fried – at places that define themselves more as bar than restaurant. Cheers!

- The lumpia (\$9) at the Round Corner come as a surprise. The kitchen is unobtrusive at this serious pool bar with cheap shots and cheaper beer, but once you figure out the fluorescent-lit door behind the bar is where you order, you're set. The slender Filipino spring rolls, filled with peppery pork and fried to crunchy mahogany brown, are so excellent you might not want to share. (Luckily, the friendly cook taking your order might throw in a few extra.) Get them with the sweet chili dipping sauce – and be prepared to add a new last-round spot to your dive-bar repertoire. They're that good. \$9. (2333 S St.,)

Jalapeño poppers at Kick'n Mule Kate Washington

- Jalapeño poppers are often a boring, bog-standard freezer item – but not at the big, splashy new bar Kick’n Mule, which has an unlikely supermarket-plaza location in the far western reaches of West Sacramento. The jalapeños may be the primary source of the kick of the bar’s name; they’re slightly tamed with cream cheese, but amped up again by the duskier spice of chorizo, complemented by a salty-crunchy, perfectly fried breading and blue cheese dipping sauce. This brash new sports bar specializes in creative takes on Moscow mules, and this is a bar snack (\$9) that will keep you gulping your cold drink – if only to tame their welcome fire. (2901 West Capitol, West Sacramento,)

#### The pizza pocket at Holy Diver

- Pizza is a classic choice for a late-night nosh, so by serving up pizza pockets, the dark downstairs bar at Holy Diver (a newish all-ages music venue from the same team as Ace of Spades) hits a lot of sweet spots: nostalgia, gooey cheese, heftiness. Each pocket (\$7) has flaky, golden puff-pastry-like crust surrounding fillings that include both pizza-classic (sausage and green pepper, our favorite combo) and inventive (bacon, chicken, and jalapeño with cream cheese). Our only complaint: The crust could be a little crispier. If you haven’t had a pizza pocket since middle school, nurture the memory by heading to Holy Diver to scarf one down and watch the ceiling vibrate in time with the show upstairs. Holy Diver (1517 21st St.)

- Heat, tang, crunch and protein to sustain you through another drink: all of these combine in the excellent hot wings at the Limelight, an East Sac stalwart that looks divey from the outside but has a big carved wood bar and a classic Cheers-ish vibe. (It’s also a sleeper hit for brunch.) The wings (\$10.50) come with a choice of sauces and can be either wet or dry: We say live it up, destroy those napkins, and get them doused in the classic hot sauce that turns them brick red all over. They might be a little messy, but they’re satisfying as can be. (1014 Alhambra,)

#### Flautas at Golden Bear Kate Washington

- Cheesy, substantive flautas at the Golden Bear are a highlight of a new happy hour and late-night menu, served from 4-7 and after 10. (In between those hours, the regular menu offers tacos and more.) Fresh fried and stuffed with tangy cotija cheese, they’re a boon to vegetarian bar-snack lovers. (Carnivores may want to go for the bacon-wrapped hot dog.) The flautas (\$7) come with a bonus hit of fresh veggies (cool lettuce, crunchy carrots and radish) and enlivening pickled jalapeños, adding crunch, zing and temperature contrasts – all a great match with one of the bar’s margaritas or one of the rotating taps. (2326 K St.,)

- Hidden in plain sight on Franklin just below Broadway, the Hideaway is justly renowned for its burgers (just one of the sliders is enough for lunch), a menu loaded with raunchy puns and an eclectic rockabilly vibe. The nosh to beat there, for our money? Just-greasy-enough, thick-cut onions rings (\$5) with housemade ranch dressing, fragrant with a strong hit of dill. Crunchy, salty, and impossible to stop eating, they’re the perfect pairing with a pint. Did I mention they are beer battered with Olympia beer, giving them extra dive-bar cred? (2565 Franklin Blvd,)

- Once a dive, now upscaled with a distinctive hipster maritime theme, West Sacramento’s quirky Sail Inn makes a mean, smoky clam chowder and mixes a stiff drink. We love to accompany the latter with the zingy, light-textured jalapeño cheddar hush puppies (\$8) – an unassuming-looking sleeper hit on a menu loaded with more over-the-top options like a brisket-topped Frito pie. The little golden globes of the hush puppies may look humble, but their fried goodness is addictive, especially with the bright lemon-caper tartar sauce. (1522 Jefferson Blvd, West Sacramento,)

- The typical bar snack skews a little bit down and dirty; just witness this list. But there's an exception to every rule, and the duck confit tots (\$9) at Shady Lady may be fancy, but they're basically perfect. We know, we know, they're filled with duck confit, served on a fancy plate anointed with harissa mayonnaise and topped with duck cracklings, but they hit all the marks –they're fried, they gesture to the cafeteria nostalgia of tater tots, they've served with something spicy, and they're not even a little bit healthy. Sold. (1409 R St.,)
- The bar is dark, the drinks are strong and cheap, and the menu is tempting at Elixir, a Southside dive par excellence where we (and many others) love the most popular appetizer, carnitas tacos (\$6.25). The kitchen keeps them simple, with rich pork made in house, a showering of crunchy, sharp onions, and baskets of hot sauces on the bar for you to dress your own. What more do you need? (1815 10th St.,)
- Sometimes we all need a break from the fried. That's where the spicy, savory Filipino chicken skewers served up at Jungle Bird come in. Made from rich, tender chicken thighs and soaked in a sticky soy sauce with a sneaky hit of heat, they complement both the tropical vibe and the tropical drinks perfectly – and offer the hapless drinker a little pure protein to counterbalance even the strongest mai tai. (2516 J St., Sacramento,)

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