



Photo: Bonjwing Lee Photography

Foraging, Cycling, Cooking and More at GourmetFest

BY RENEE BRINCKS

The Relais & Châteaux GourmetFest comes to Carmel in March and offers guests the chance to forage for mushrooms, enjoy wine tastings and cooking demonstrations.

This March, when the Relais & Châteaux GourmetFest returns to Carmel, some attendees will explore the Santa Lucia Preserve with park ranger Chuck Bancroft. As they discuss local geology, plants and wildlife, they'll also hunt for Chanterelle mushrooms. Following the foraging walk, guests will learn to clean and preserve their finds over a mushroom-centric lunch.

"Last year, we had 100 guests for the walk. The weather was absolutely gorgeous," says Bancroft, whose tours take participants through redwood groves, along creeks and into open meadows. "We collect edible mushrooms, but also other samples that show the differences in characteristics and help identify individual species."

The foraging event is one of approximately 20 on the four-day GourmetFest schedule,

which also features cooking demonstrations, wine tastings, cycling tours and a black truffle-caviar dinner.

L'Auberge Carmel owner David Fink launched the culinary celebration in 2014 to bring respected winemakers, chefs and members of Relais & Châteaux, an international association of exclusive hotels and restaurants, to a local stage.

Five years in, Bancroft often welcomes repeat guests.

"The numbers have increased with each new year," he says. "There's a camaraderie and an appreciation for the incredible variety of things we find!"

For tickets to the sixth annual Relais & Châteaux GourmetFest, March 14 to 17, please visit gourmetfestcarmel.com.