

## SHORTCUTS AT LARGE



Photo: Kelli Uldall

### Walking Tours Offer a Taste of Monterey

BY RENEE BRINCKS

**Nicole Estabrooks manages Monterey Bay Food Tours, which allows guests to discover culinary destinations. They also offer an online store and a culinary pop-up.**

As the manager of Monterey Bay Food Tours, Nicole Estabrooks introduces guests to local culinary secrets: think pop-up dumpling parties, granola made by monks and beloved family-run restaurants.

"We focus on hidden gems and off-the-beaten-path places that you wouldn't necessarily find if you were just visiting," she says. "About half the people on our tours also live locally, and most say, 'I had no idea this was here!'"

Monterey Bay Food Tours Founder Casey Aguilar launched her business with a start-up grant from California State University, Monterey Bay. Pairing history and architectural highlights with samples from downtown cafes, breweries and wineries proved a successful recipe. Demand for the company's Old Monterey

outing soared, and a seafood-focused Cannery Row stroll was introduced just before COVID-19 paused outings.

In response, the food tour team built an online store featuring regional flavors and organized a culinary pop-up with Franklin Street Collaborative. Such efforts will continue as pandemic restrictions ease and the company restarts its regular and custom walking tours.

"You can go to a chain restaurant anywhere, but it's the small businesses that make Monterey special. The pandemic has shown that those small businesses really need our support," says Estabrooks.

For Monterey Bay Food Tours information, and to view the company's online marketplace, please visit [www.montereybayfoodtours.com](http://www.montereybayfoodtours.com).