

Walnut Creek

Get a jump on seasonal shopping in the chic North Main boutique district

THE OH-SO-APPROPRIATE strains of Madonna's "Material Girl" float out of a shop. While you wait for a cappuccino, a pretty fashionista asks who designed your handbag. That's downtown Walnut Creek, where North Main Street overflows with designer threads, deluxe consignment shops, and diverse eats. Go to score gifts for friends or the perfect party frock for you, and enjoy a stroll and a glass of wine amid the preholiday bustle.

EAT Breads of India & Gourmet Curries

A menu of regional Indian dishes that changes daily makes this an ideal lunch stop. Don't miss the fresh tandoor-puffed breads. **INFO:** \$; closed Mon; 1358 N. Main St.; 925/256-7684.

Havana Cuban Cuisine Invoke the tropics with mojitos, California-Caribbean plates—from halibut ceviche to a Cuban sandwich—and a beach-shack-gone-smartly-upscale dining room. **INFO:** \$\$; 1516 Bonanza St.; 925/939-4555.

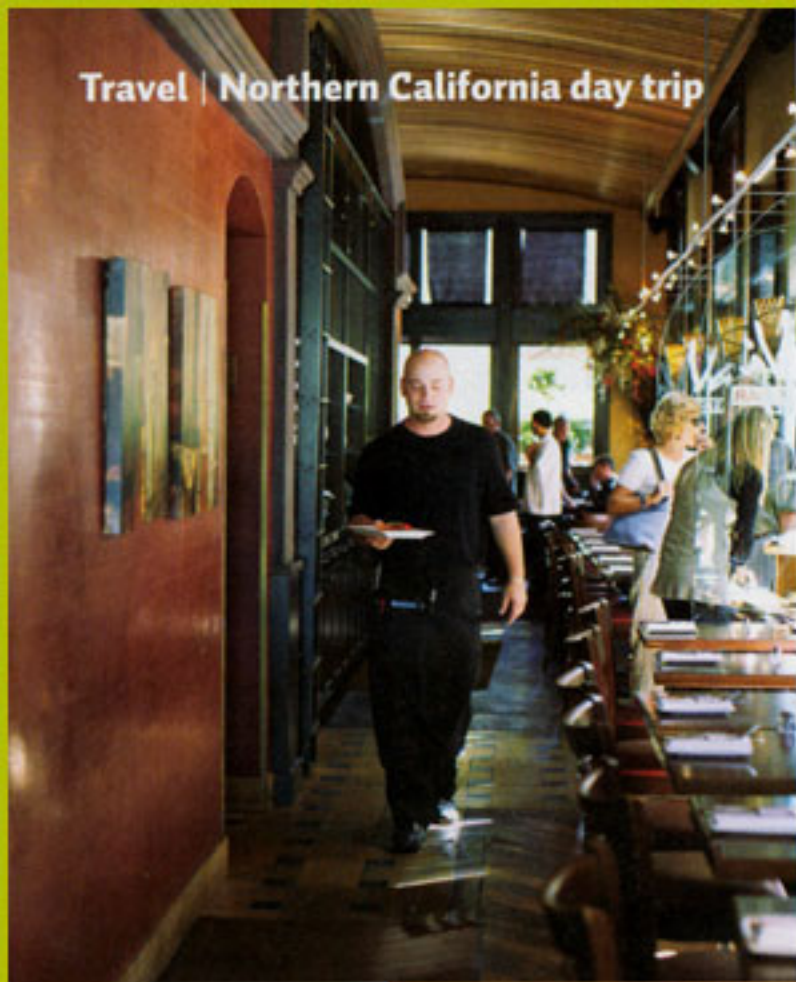


Getting there

Walnut Creek is at the junction of I-680 and State 24. From I-680, exit N. Main St. and follow signs to downtown. Or take BART; a handy free shuttle runs from the station to the shopping district.

Happening now

Just blocks from the browsing, downtown's Civic Park, at the corner of Civic Dr. and Broadway, mutates into a twinkly ice-skating rink each November. To get into the spirit of winter, lace up your skates and show off your best moves. Even if your double axel is rusty, it's still fun to watch the skaters twirl. **Opens Nov 8; from \$10; 1375 Civic Dr.; iceskatewalnutcreek.com or 925/935-7669.**



ABOVE At Va de Vi, diners can eat in the dining room, at the "chef's counter" with front-row views into the kitchen, or on the deck.



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N. Main St.; 925/932-8122.

Samantha Lee The girly decor—crystal sconces, silver-metallic flooring, and robin's-egg-blue tables with marble tops—is as glamorous as the denim and cashmere at this local fave, recently relocated and expanded to include mod party dresses and housewares. **INFO:** 1388 N. Main St.; 925/935-5502.

SIP Va de Vi Guess the mystery flight, or taste from the iconoclastic lineup at this wine bar, which also offers small plates, perfect for dinner or as a reviving mid-shopping snack. **INFO:** \$\$; 1511 Mt. Diablo Blvd.; 925/979-0100. —KATE WASHINGTON

