WANDERLUST IS A REAL THING. HUNGER IS A REAL thing. And in a year when you couldn’t stand to look at your Instant Pot anymore and had to delay that vacation to Paris, when you craved something more than travel shows and take-out, the most satisfying way to feed the need for a journey was to go to a restaurant, feel taken care of, and try at least one thing from the menu that you’d never had before.

The transportive power of food, the soul-stirring nature of hospitality—real things, too. This is all to say that in these not normal times, we need both the normalcy and the escape of restaurants now more than ever.
esmeralda
ANDOVER, VERMONT

The day begins with dirt, fire, stones. Then, once the morning fog has burned off, chef JuanMa Calabro, owner Maria Rondou, and chef Victor Quiñones pull the sheep and goats from the nearby woods, and immediately we asked for another, and some extra milk teas, too. We did the same with the simple charred calabaza with pineapple and even got another epic paella with chicken, lauded with a chili-maple fish sauce for the road. Chef Kevin Tan’s dishes are an exploration not only of Vietnamese cuisine but of maximum creatavability. 907 Wharf Street SW — K.S.

MOON RABBIT
WASHINGTON, D.C.

When the fish sandwich arrived—a catfish fillet, delicately fished in the middle, crunchy on the outside, seasoned with turmeric and lemon grass, hugged by a pillow of curry milk bread— it was devoured, and immediately we asked for another, and some extra milk teas, too. We did the same with the simple charred calabaza with pineapple and even got another epic paella with chicken, lauded with a chili-maple fish sauce for the road. Chef Kevin Tan’s dishes are an exploration not only of Vietnamese cuisine but of maximum creatavability. 907 Wharf Street SW — K.S.

ROSELLA
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Earth-friendly sushi is Rosella’s calling card. You won’t find large-cotton-footprint items flown in from a Tokyo fish market here. A white fish from local and sustainable sources, like scallops from Montauk— is worth snipping a sear for in the jewel-box-sized space, it’s everything else on Rosella’s tight menu that leaves the bigger impression. Fish, given, inside the heads, is a briny, soul-warming broth reminiscent of the ocean. The spicy XO sauce conjured from shellfish is so umami-rich, you’ll wish you could take a bottle home and make everything better. 137 Avenue A — K.S.

PEARL RIVER DELI
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

There’s a bit of magic happening at Pearl River Deli, in Los Angeles’s Chinatown, where you’ll find chef Johnny Lee’s soulful, intensely flavorful take on Cantonese cuisine. His char siu (left) features pork collar cooked sous vide, then roasted, so that it’s simultaneously juicy and chewy. The Maccau pork chop lo mein is studded with creamy, umami-infused mayo and topped with a bunch of sliced tomatoes, onion, and garlic spiked with capers—a nod to the Portuguese influence on the region. 636 North Pai Street — O.M.

GAGE & TOLLNER
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

A resurrected restaurant can be a Dr. Frankenstein’s monster of something Christlike. Chef SohU Kim’s gleaming second coming of Brooklyn’s historic steakhouse is, praise be, the latter. Walk through the door and the mirrored, fabric-walled dining room opens before you much as it did in 19/9, when the restaurant first opened. (It closed in 2018.) The team has added much of what made G&T so beloved, including favorites from the eighties, when culinary giant Edna Lewis was head chef. Like the shawarma wrap (above), creamy as ever and laced with rice. But this isn’t just historic—steakhouse classic. Kim’s major twist is grass-fed steaks that, under their handsome charred skins of charring reveal great tenderness. 372 Fulton Street — J.O.B.
When the fish sandwich arrived—a catfish fillet, delicately flaky in the middle, crunchy on the outside, scented with turmeric and lemongrass, hugged by a pillowy curry milk-bread bun—it was devoured, and immediately we asked for another, and some extra milk bread, too. We did the same with the simple charred cabbage with pineapple and even got another epic ga chien fried chicken, layered with a chile-maple fish sauce, for the road. Chef Kevin Tien’s dishes are an exploration not only of Vietnamese cuisine but of maximum craveability. 801 Wharf Street SW —K. S.