

# Restaurants

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## Fish for a King

**Tsar Nicoulai Caviar Café** FERRY BUILDING MARKETPLACE (AT MARKET ST. AND EMBARCADERO), S.F., (415) 288-8630. \$\$, 11 A.M.–6 P.M. TUES.–FRI. AND SUN., 8 A.M.–6 P.M. SAT. VALET PARKING. WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE. ★★

What better fit for the Ferry Building than a restaurant that celebrates the spirit of indulgence while making concessions to your ecoconscience? Much of this tsar's caviar is raised on the owners' farm outside Sacramento, but the dollops of osetra still seem precious when served on buckwheat blini that vanish as swiftly as sturgeon from the wild. More substantial—but less exotic—options include a smoked salmon sandwich with whipped Mascarpone and sturgeon sausage with red pepper coulis and a scattering of apple chips. The sausage turns out to be oddly ordinary, but not the truffled scrambled egg, delivered in its shell with a crown of crème fraîche and California Estate osetra. It has the taste and texture of a delicacy. As if caviar itself weren't esoteric enough, Tsar Nicoulai presents ahi and sturgeon sashimi (with whitefish caviar) atop a fishbowl in which a live fish flits about. Whether you find this off-putting or merely offbeat, odds are you'll find Tsar Nicoulai a pleasant place to educate your palate—unless you order the sake and oyster shooters, which are so intensely infused with whitefish caviar that the experience of slurping them feels like an assault. ● **JOSH SENS**

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Photograph by Maren Caruso