ICONIC SAN FRANCISCO
WHERE INNOVATION AND DAZZLING SCENERY CONVERGE

TEAM BUILDING—WITH FLAVOR
SPICE UP AGENDAS WITH SCRUMPTIOUS CULINARY CLASSES

BLISSFUL CONFABS
RELAX AND RESET AT SERENE SPA RESORTS

california meetings + events

MEETINGSMAGS.COM // SPRING SUMMER 2025



Chic Oasis

PALM SPRINGS DELIVERS FOR SUN-SOAKED STRATEGY



Team-building cooking class with Tyler's Mystery Tours in Oakland

Cooking Up Collaboration

Cooking and mixology classes strengthen bonds and put a delicious spin on team building

BY NATALIE COMPAGNO & GREG FREITAS

» GREAT MEALS, LIKE GREAT EVENTS, require inspiration, creativity, and a dollop of collaboration. That's one reason corporate groups are trading trust falls for culinary classes. These hands-on experiences demand problem-solving, leadership, and teamwork—just like the workplace.

Culinary classes provide a natural setting for engagement. Employees work together to balance flavors, execute plans, and present their creations. From mixing cocktails and perfecting pizza to foraging for mushrooms, these activities spark creativity and allow colleagues to connect in a relaxed, fun environment.

Jennifer Good, who works in business development at Ethos Event Collective— a destination management company based in Deerfield Beach, Florida, with three California offices—points out that cooking classes make people feel calm and ready to jump in. "Culinary classes are perfect for a team-building experience," she says. "It's a familiar setting that allows participants to work with colleagues to learn new techniques they can apply at home." For planners seeking such classes in Sonoma County, Good says she frequently recommends Relish Culinary Adventures in Healdsburg.

Rohini Moradi found her calling as a bartender and then as CEO of The Cocktail Camp, one of San Francisco's leading bartending schools. "Our events are focused on building the team," she says. "We explore the foundation of building cocktails, and how that architecture ignites creativity and corresponds to office life."

At The Cocktail Camp, groups learn the methods of combining sweet, sour, and bitter tastes with base spirits to produce nuanced cocktails and mocktails. Moradi then sets the group loose to improvise within that framework. "We will have competitions where groups brainstorm which sour, which sweet, and which base spirit to substitute. Then everyone samples and votes for a winner," she says. "It is about collaborating with others, learning others' interests, learning how to convey what's important, and being able to express your creativity."

Cocktail classes like these seem to be the hottest vertical in culinary instruction at the moment. Tyler Welch of Tyler's Mystery Tours in Oakland discovered The Cocktail Camp when the demand for mixology classes rose. "I incorporate mixology classes into team-building by pairing high-energy, competitive challenges with a creative, social reward," he says. "First, we get teams moving—running, playing, and breaking down barriers. Then, we transition into creative social endeavors where they can unwind, collaborate, and bond over cocktails. It's the perfect way to engineer the social experience."

At Fogbird, a bar in San Mateo, owners Susan and David Hunsaker grew their class offerings organically. The duo started by providing public classes but soon took their courses to the meetings space. "People have a lot of fun, they make a mess, and they can laugh with each other," David Hunsaker says. During a

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE) Tyler's Mystery Tours, Michelle Ramirez Photography, Kassandra Van Dyke, Sydney Gavin, Nima Moradi



Charcuterie board-making class with Felici Events in Santa Barbara; Below, left to right: Fiery cocktail made at The Cocktail Camp in San Francisco; Paella and sangria at Prep Cooking Classes in Seal Beach; Mixology class setup at Fogbird in San Mateo

Fogbird class, groups learn to make three cocktails, with recipe cards and lasting memories as takeaways.

If mixology is the trend of the moment, then foraging might be the wave of the future. At Timber Cove Resort in Jenner just northwest of Santa Rosa, experts guide participants through tidal pools, forests, and meadows in search of seasonal treasures like wild mushrooms, sea greens, berries, and edible plants. More than a guided walk, this experience fosters patience, collaboration, and adaptability—essential qualities for today's business world. It challenges teams to slow down, sharpen their observational skills, and make strategic choices, mirroring the problem-solving mindset needed in any corporate environment.

After the foraging adventure, teams return to Timber Cove for a curated tasting led by the resort's Coast Kitchen culinary team. Participants see firsthand how raw, foraged ingredients can be transformed into gourmet dishes, reinforcing the value of creativity, resourcefulness, and innovation. The chefs share insights on how to integrate natural ingredients into everyday meals, offering a fresh take on sustainability and intentional consumption.

Of course, traditional cooking classes still have their place, and there is a strong focus now on social engagement and giving back, as well as on health and wellness. Back in Oakland, Tyler's Mystery Tours produces double the amount of food required at culinary events, then donates half to homeless encampments. In Orange County, one culinary program makes it a mission to educate groups on creating healthy meals.

Sydney Gavin is the owner of Prep Cooking Classes, a kitchenware and culinary class brick-and-mortar in Seal Beach, outside Los Angeles in Orange County. "We really love and specialize in doing team-building events," says Gavin, "You spend the first 20 minutes mingling with prepared appetizers at our boutique wine bar, and then you move over to the kitchen and we have a professional chef that walks you through full preparation." But if its specialty is team building, its passion is healthy food. She adds, "We will do butter and cream and bacon all day long, but what we actually feel good about and what we really like doing is teaching people how to prepare healthy, wholesome food."

Zohe Felici of Felici Events in Santa Barbara sees culinary team building through the lens of her family history. "I'm 100% Italian, so the kitchen is my happy place," says Felici. "Cooking is a team sport—especially when you're Italian. In the kitchen, communication is the secret sauce and everyone plays a role. Culinary classes crank up the creativity, turning teams into a think tank—only tastier. Leaders naturally emerge, strengths shine, and tasting that final dish [creates] a party in your mouth! Plus, nothing breaks barriers like cracking jokes over a hot stove. Cooking together is a surefire recipe for collaboration, camaraderie, and a seriously good time." **m+e**

- thecocktailcamp.com
- ethoseventcollective.com
- felicievents.com
- fogbird.co
- prepcookingclasses.com
- timbercoveresort.com
- tylersmysterytours.com





