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Living

TOP TACO NEW ORLEANS FESTIVAL SET FOR MARCH 23

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Forty New Orleans area restaurants are slated to compete at the inaugural **Top Taco** New Orleans festival on March 23 in Riverwalk's Spanish Plaza.

The big winners, however, might just be Crescent City taco and tequila lovers.

The restaurants will compete in four categories: top creative taco, top traditional taco, top creative cocktail and top Margarita. The festival attendees will select a people's choice award winner as well.

Confirmed restaurants — some expected, some a bit of a surprise — include: Arana, Blue Oak BBQ, Del Fuego, Canal St. Bistro, Chiba, Cowbell, Felipe's, Horn's, Jacques Imo's, La Casita, Mizado, Nacho Mama's, Patois, Rum House, Tacos and Beer, Velvet Cactus and Vincent's.

Live entertainment confirmed will include Los Pobocitos and Otra.

Top Taco New Orleans will feature mucho tacos that can be nibbled while festival-goers enjoy tequila cocktails featuring Sauza Hornitos, Patron, Tres Generaciones, Casa Noble, El Tesoro and Cointreau.

A portion of the proceeds will benefit One Heart NOLA, a charitable organization that raises money and awareness for New Orleans' foster children.

The event is described as "a collaborative effort by the team behind the highly successful **Top Taco** Denver and local restaurateur Shane Finkelstein." **Top Taco** Denver is a popular summer festival that began in 2013 in Colorado.

For details on tickets, visit TopTaconola.com.

"I've always wanted to do a taco festival," Finkelstein, festival director and proprietor of NOLA restaurant Nacho Mama's, said in a press release. "When I attended Top Taco in Denver a couple of years ago, I was really impressed by all of the incredible talent that participated and knew immediately this would be a great addition to New Orleans' festival scene."

"Combine all of the incredible chefs we have in our city with amazing tequila, great live entertainment and the Mississippi River as a backdrop and it is certain to be a memorable night," he said.

The event is sponsored by Southern Eagle Beverage, Hola Nola tortillas and Performance Food Group.

Another 10 restaurants will serve food in a VIP Lounge, aboard the Paddlewheeler Creole Queen, where guests can also sip at VIP tequila tastings and be entertained by Mariachi Jalisco US and Margie Perez's Latin band, Muevelo.

"I really wanted to blow people away with the VIP experience," Finkelstein said.

The family-owned riverboat, which serves as the site for charity events for CASA, the foster children advocacy group, is a natural fit to help raise money for One Heart NOLA. For more details, visit OneHeartNOLA.com.

The new taco festival is just the latest addition to the region's food festival calendar. In 2016, the inaugural Fried Chicken Festival and Beignet Festival were added to the roster.

Restaurants interested in participating, may contact Finkelstein at shane@toptaconola.com or 504.237.5667.



Araña Taqueria Y Cantina will be among the competitors at the Top Taco New Orleans festival. *File*