

In a normal year, Southern California's tribal-owned casinos are New Year's Eve destinations: restaurants serve decadent meals, concert venues bring in big stars and some properties even break out the fireworks.

This year, the mood will be much different at most of Southern California's casinos because of the [novel coronavirus pandemic](#) and new stay-at-home orders issued by California that effectively grounded nonessential travel between the hours of 10 p.m. and 5 a.m.

The stay-at-home orders have forced the temporary closure of many businesses, but Southern California's tribal casinos have a measure of sovereignty that allows them to stay open and have events if they choose. When it comes to New Year's, some casinos have significantly modified their New Year's Eve offerings [while others have canceled them completely](#).

"I would say that this is a toned-down version of what we normally do," said Lindsay Grant, director of marketing at Augustine Casino in Coachella.

Grant said that in previous years, Augustine has hosted an extremely popular New Year's Eve buffet and that the casino would invite many of its top VIPs and comp their meals.

This year, the casino has been more focused on managing capacity. Grant said the casino expects reduced business levels because of the stay-at-home order, but it also is also taking steps to control crowds. Fewer of those invites to VIPs went out this year and the casino's restaurant Café 54 started taking reservations to manage capacity.

Instead of a buffet, the casino is offering a three-course dinner at Café 54 with tables set apart and a masked-up musician playing guitar but not singing.

Elsewhere in the casino, the changes that Augustine [put in place in June](#) will still be visible. A number of chairs have been pulled off the floor so guests can distance; table games have been removed; temperature checks are conducted for visitors and employees; and the casino will

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close in the early morning hours for deep cleaning.

Elsewhere in the Coachella Valley, the Agua Caliente Casinos appear to be planning some of the activities that they do in a normal year. Websites for each of the properties — in Rancho Mirage, Palm Springs and the [newly opened casino in Cathedral City](#) — all advertise New Year's Eve events that include DJs, cash giveaways, party favors and dining and drink specials.

Fireworks, part of the normal festivities at the Palm Springs property, will not happen this year, according to an email from a casino spokeswoman.

Morongo Casino, Resort & Spa in Cabazon will give out free masquerade masks and will also have food specials.

Other casinos are not actively promoting any New Year's Eve events. Websites for Casino Pauma; Fantasy Springs Resort Casino; Harrah's Resort Southern California; Resort & Spa; Soboba Casino Resort; Spotlight 29 Casino and Tortoise Rock Casino did not show any New Year's Eve promotions or events as of Tuesday, Dec. 15.

San Manuel Casino in Highland will have food and drink specials but didn't appear to advertise any events or entertainment on its website.

Some casinos took the step of canceling all their events months in advance. Such was the case for Pechanga Resort Casino near Temecula, [which announced in late October that it was canceling its New Year's Eve events](#) as well as concerts scheduled for the first three months of 2021 due to the pandemic. The Temecula area resort typically holds numerous New Year's Eve events simultaneously that attract thousands.

Here's a look at some of the activities still planned for New Year's Eve at area casinos this year:

Agua Caliente Casinos (Rancho Mirage, Palm Springs and Cathedral City)□

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All three casinos are having New Year's Eve events that include DJs, cash and free play giveaways, party favors and dining and drink specials, according to their websites. Rancho Mirage will have an added element: a Champagne bar on the casino floor.

Information: 888-999-1995, aguacalientecasinos.com

Augustine Casino

The Coachella Valley casino will have a 3-course dinner with soup or salad; choice of choice of surf and turf, sea bass, prime rib or chicken; pie a la mode dessert bar and glass of Champagne. \$42.95. Reservations encouraged and should be made by calling 760-391-9504 through Dec. 28.

Information: 760-391-9500, augustinecasino.com

Cahuilla Casino Hotel

Some of the Anza casino's promotions include party favors for all starting at 7 p.m. Dec. 31 and a balloon drop at midnight. Between midnight and 1:30 a.m., five random drawing winners will each win \$1,000 cash, according to its website.

The website also notes that the casino's Ribbonwood Grill will have a dinner for two that includes a crab and avocado cocktail, Caesar salad, porterhouse steak Oscar and creme brulee for dessert. 4-10 p.m. \$79.

Information: 951-763-1200, cahuillacasinohotel.com

Morongo Casino, Resort & Spa

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The Cabazon complex will offer food specials on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. Good Times Café will feature surf & turf with prime rib and shrimp, garlic mashed potatoes, asparagus, au jus, horseradish and chocolate bomb cake from 11 a.m.-3 a.m. (\$32.99 per person) and Pit Stop Diner at the old Casino Morongo building will have surf & turf with lobster tail and grilled New York steak, a salad, roasted garlic mashed potatoes, asparagus and a white chocolate mocha cheesecake from 8 a.m.-midnight (\$21.99 per person).

On New Year's Day only, Sideline Bar & Grill will have "The 21 Burger" which comes with crispy onion, jalapeño bacon, lettuce, tomato, grilled pineapple, mayonnaise, sriracha aioli and teriyaki sauce from 11 a.m.-3 a.m. (\$14).

Information: 951-849-3080, morongocasinoresort.com

Pala Casino, Spa & Resort

The Northern San Diego County resort will have entertainment at its Center Bar from 1 p.m.-1:30 a.m., according to its website.

Information: 877-946-7252, palacasino.com

San Manuel Casino

The Highland area casino will offer food specials on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. Its food court will serve a slow-cooked prime rib sandwich with garlic fries from 11 a.m.-1 a.m. (\$19), Rock & Brews will feature a petite filet of beef with caramelized onion lobster mashed potatoes, asparagus and béarnaise sauce from 11 a.m.-9 p.m. (\$32.95) and George Lopez's Chingon Kitchen will offer beef barbacoa with refried white beans, Spanish rice and beef consommé from 11 a.m.-1 a.m. (\$17). San Manuel is not offering table service currently but meals can be ordered to-go.

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Information: 800-359-2464, sanmanuel.com

Read more <https://www.pe.com/2020/12/22/new-years-eve-how-southern-california-casinos-are-and-arent-celebrating>