



EAT YOUR WAY AROUND THE USA

The ultimate foodie hotspots across the USA,
as chosen by the locals who know them best

Words **Katie McGonagle** Illustration **Scott Jessop**



Deep-dish pizza by the slice in Chicago, cream cheese-slathered bagels and lox in New York, Southern soul food in Memphis and hipster poke bowls in Hawaii – these icons of Americana are every bit as recognisable as the Grand Canyon or the Statue of Liberty. Yet behind every well-known dish that is famous the world over, there are dozens more that only in-the-know local residents can recommend.

That's why we've gone to the true experts in eating American-style – from chefs, farmers and fishermen to winemakers, historians, cookbook writers, tour guides and more – to tell us the stories that lie behind these foodie favourites and find out which dishes deserve to be better known.

There's more than just food on the table too, as we delve into the country's history, music, culture and geography along the way to find out

how these factors are inextricably linked to the culinary scene. We look at those dishes that bring together traditional, Indigenous ingredients with immigrant-influenced flavours from around the world in a way that only the USA can.

With the latest US Census Bureau statistics showing that Americans spend more on meals out at restaurants than on grocery-store shopping, there are plenty of places to give these dishes a try. We have searched out recommendations for the best spots to chow down alongside the people who know what's really worth putting on their plate.

So, if you've ever wondered why New Mexico is deemed to be the 'chile' capital of the world, why Maine is mad about lobsters, how Cajun cuisine came to the fore in Louisiana, or why a simple Key lime pie can get sweet-toothed purists so fired up, find out the real stories behind the USA's top foodie hotspots in the words of those who have given them the ultimate taste test. ▶





• Tacoma

WASHINGTON

OREGON

MONTANA

NORTH DAKOTA

IDAHO

WYOMING

SOUTH DAKOTA

CALIFORNIA

Foodie
USA

NEBRASKA

• Oakland

• Monterey

NEVADA

UTAH

COLORADO

KANSAS

ARIZONA

Oklahoma City

OKLAHOMA

• Tucson

NEW MEXICO

TEXAS

West, Texas •

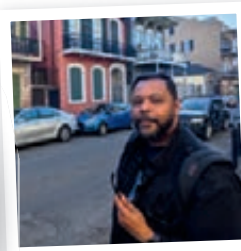
San Antonio

MEXICO





Jazzy jambalaya in New Orleans



The culinary profile of New Orleans, Louisiana, is a testament to its rich and diverse history. With influences from former French and Spanish rule and an array of immigrant cultures, its cuisine is a melting pot of flavours you won't find anywhere else in the United States. At the top of the must-try list is *jambalaya*, a type of spiced rice.

"The history of jambalaya came from a dish brought over from the African continent called '*jalafa*,'" explained local historian and tour guide Ric Coleman. "Of course, there was no smoked sausage and there certainly wasn't any pork in it. Many of the people that brought it over were practising Muslims. Essentially it is a lot of vegetables and spices. *Jalafa* rice was often enjoyed in the north [of Africa]; in the south, they added pork, seafood, a blend of beef and chicken and it became jambalaya."

That's not the only African influence on the Louisiana city. The spicy stew known as gumbo, which contains a combination of prawns, okra and chicken and is served with rice, was also brought over from the African continent. Coleman added: "It has a Cajun influence – from the [French colonists] who came from Nova Scotia and settled in New Orleans. They picked up what Indigenous people were doing; they picked up what Africans were doing and they took that and made it their own."

Words Ree Winter

Tasty NOLA
(this page;
clockwise from top)
New Orleans' French Quarter
offers up tastes and music aplenty;
guide Ric Coleman knows his way
around a good gumbo; jambalaya is a
blend of cultural influences



Crab-cracking in Chesapeake Bay



The Chesapeake Bay region, and most notably the coastal states of Delaware, Maryland and Virginia, is ground zero for seafood dishes on the East Coast. For the region's culinary calling card, look no further than the Maryland-style crabcake, a delicacy made with

all-lump blue crab, no filler and the lightest of seasonings, served either broiled or fried.

For the most authentic crabcakes, head to Annapolis, Maryland's quaint capital, which was also once the nation's capital for a brief period during the Revolutionary War. Work up an appetite with a tour of the United States Naval Academy, the Maryland State House (the oldest continually operating state house in the US) and a stroll through the waterfront historic district. Then find out why Annapolis is a treasure trove of seafood joints where crab-cracking is not only a cultural tradition but also a rite of passage for anyone visiting.

Try the jumbo crabcakes at Boatyard Bar and Grill, a sailor's bar with a nautical vibe to match, or the award-winning crabcakes at O'Leary's restaurant. For a true Chesapeake Bay experience, head to Cantler's Riverside Inn, where the crabcakes are matched only by the views of the waterfront.

Words *Katie Riley*



Rediscover Indigenous ingredients in Oklahoma

Fruits of the sea (this page; clockwise from top left) The carapace of the Chesapeake blue crab can measure up to 23cm across; Wichita Mountains took its name from the Native American people who inhabited Oklahoma; food historian Loretta Barrett Oden; Maryland's sailing and fishing history has informed its cuisine; writer Katie Riley loves a good crabcake

Oklahoma has long been a centre for Native American cultures, and is home to 39 different Indigenous groups – many of whom were forced to move from their traditional homelands in the east and build a new life. Cut off from their usual ingredients, they had to reshape their foodways, leading to the emergence of survival foods such as fry-bread. Today, things are changing again as more Native Americans return to Indigenous farming practices, now that almost half of Oklahoma is recognised as Native American land.

Thirty Nine Restaurant, inside the First Americans Museum, is aiming to fill in the blanks in this lost food history. It is led by chef and food historian Loretta Barrett Oden, a member of the Potawatomi people, who is working to recognise traditional ingredients from the homelands of the 39 tribal nations, as well as what they now hunt, forage and grow in Oklahoma, from the three sisters crop of corn, beans and squash to possum grapes that ripen in the fall.

“So much of the food of the world originated in the Americas – like potatoes, tomatoes, chocolate – but left these shores, impacted the cuisines of the rest of the world, then came back in another identity, like Irish potatoes and Swiss chocolates,” said Oden. Now she wants to reclaim their origin: “I want the story of our Indigenous foods to come to the fore, because each and every one of them has a beautiful story to tell.”

Words *Fiona Chandra* ▶





Southern hospitality in the Panhandle

Primanti Brothers in Pittsburgh



Pittsburgh is home to Heinz, French fries on salad and steaks that are charcoal-black on the outside and pink in the middle, but the Steel City's culinary history has a few surprises in store – not least the big banana explosion of 1936, when a ware-

house of bananas spectacularly combusted.

“It literally rained bananas throughout the area,” explained food tour-guide Sylvia McCoy, founder of ‘Burgh Bits and Bites. “It was a devastating year for Pittsburgh because they had already had the great St Patrick’s Day flood. The banana company was on Smallman Street in the Strip District. They used gases to ripen the fruit, and someone either flicked a switch or lit a match and the gases ignited, causing a huge explosion that destroyed the steeple on the church next door.”

The area’s hard-working history also gave rise to another of the city’s culinary icons – the Primanti Brothers sandwich. “Primanti’s was started from a wooden cart selling sandwiches on the street,” added McCoy. “A lot of dock workers got one good meal a day, and they wanted to make it as substantial as possible, so the brothers figured they’d cram as much as possible between two slices of bread – hence the French fries, coleslaw, meat and cheese – because they wanted to feed those workers a good meal.

“Pittsburgh was a very blue-collar city – now it has transitioned to having top universities like Carnegie Mellon and medical and tech companies. It had a reputation for being really dirty, but people are surprised by how green it is.”

The big bite (this page; clockwise from top left) The Primanti Bros’ famous sandwich was first made in 1933; the history of Pensacola’s blues musicians is written on its walls; Jean Pierre N’Dione is the co-owner of the legendary Five Sisters Café; food and music go hand in hand at Five Sisters; much of the cooking in Pittsburgh is rooted in its blue-collar past, as visitors discover on food tours; Sylvia McCoy’s ‘Burgh Bits and Bites offers tours of Pittsburgh’s food scene and history

On the western fringes of Florida’s Panhandle, Pensacola is the final stop on the Mississippi Blues Trail, bringing together Southern hospitality and soul food in the city where greats like BB King, Sonny Boy Williamson and Ray Charles once took to the stage.

The Five Sisters Café is set in Pensacola’s Belmont-DeVilliers neighbourhood, once a centre of blues and jazz music for the area’s Black community. It carries on that legacy with live performances and by serving up Southern soul food cooked according to old family recipes.

“It’s preserving the cultural heritage of the neighbourhood,” said co-owner Jean Pierre N’Dione. “Music and food are part of the culture. Wherever you find good music, you’re going to find good food. There is just no way to separate them; they both feed your soul.”



Artichoke adventure in California

Monterey County, about 180km south of San Francisco, is known for its scenic stretches of Pacific Coast Highway and legendary Pebble Beach Golf Links. But food lovers will find the destination as delicious as it is easy on the eye thanks to its favourite crop: the artichoke, introduced to California during the 19th century by Italian immigrants.

The Golden State declared it the region's official vegetable in 2013, and Monterey County now grows nearly two-thirds of the world's supply. A new 40-stop trail through the county is dotted with historic sites, shops and small farms brimming with all things artichoke.

"My family has a long history of farming artichokes in Monterey County, starting with my great-grandfather over 100 years ago," said Mike Scattini, owner of Scattini Family Farms. "My family are fourth-generation artichoke farmers. Since the introduction of artichokes to Monterey County, the area has become the number-one producer worldwide. We are very proud to be a part of this history and to continue our heritage."

Dare to try artichoke in a cocktail at Monterey's Cella Restaurant & Bar, in the delicately fried 'crocchettes' at Little Napoli restaurant or in the ice cream served at Monterey's annual Artichoke Festival. Nearby Castroville is now home to the world's largest artichoke statue, and has even proclaimed itself the 'Artichoke Centre of the World'.

Words Kimberley Lovato



Home grown (this page; clockwise from top left) Kimberley Lovato shares her passion for artichokes; Little Napoli's 'crocchettes'; Mike Scattini surveys his crop; Pezzini Farm Stand has a wealth of artichoke preserves and treats; Castroville takes its artichokes seriously; get your street food from the Choke Coach





Lobster fishing in *Maine*



Being presented with a bib, a mallet and a set of instructions on how to crack your first full lobster is a must for any visitor to New England, and nowhere is more synonymous with this seafood classic than Maine.

“Lobstering is incredibly important to us for our way of life, our culture and our community,” explained Monique Coombs, director of community programmes for

the Maine Coast Fishermen’s Association, whose husband and two children are in the fishing trade. “The lobster industry in Maine is incredibly sustainable, in part because it’s owner-operator run, which means the person who owns the licence to fish has to be on the boat, so it’s full of small family fishing businesses that share a deep connection to the environment and the ocean. It’s intrinsically tied to our identity. Some lobstermen are 17th or 18th generation – it’s been part of our history since Maine was founded.”

Visitors can get out on the water with local operators like Rocky Bottom Fisheries in Portland to have a go at hauling traps, or learn more about the history at the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath. “Go to the restaurants in coastal communities,” added Coombs. “Not the fancy restaurants; the ones where you just sit at a picnic table and eat fried clams and lobster meat while you watch the boats passing by.”

The ultimate lobster dinner (this page; clockwise from top left) Portland Lighthouse is an iconic sight for Maine’s fishermen and visitors alike; Maine holds a giant annual lobster festival every August; Monique Coombs and her fishing family; Monique works at the Maine Coast Fishermen’s Association, helping to keep lobster fishing in Maine local



Washington, DC's half-smoke sandwich



Since 1958, the Washington, DC lunch counter Ben's Chili Bowl has been serving visitors its signature 'half-smoke' – a half-beef, half-pork sausage sandwich – which has become a symbol of resilience in the American capital.

Ben's has proved a stalwart throughout the decline and revival of U Street in the Shaw neighbourhood, a historically Black district, and has drawn famous figures such as Martin Luther King Jr, Barack Obama and Pope Francis through its doors over the years.

This area is home to Howard University, one of America's best-known historically Black colleges, and it was a former-student, the Trinidad-born Ben Ali, who founded this popular restaurant. Since his death in 2009, his wife and children have continued the local tradition of making the restaurant's signature sandwich.

"It means a lot that we are able to serve our community," said Ben's co-founder Virginia Ali. "It's an honour having my family join me in the business to make this possible. And it's been a beautiful experience to have been able to survive these past 65 years."

Ben's has borne witness to the urban blight that pushed the neighbourhood into dereliction, until the arrival of an underground metro station and city-wide investments in the 1990s that spurred new business and sparked Washington's resurgence. It is a revival to be celebrated when the restaurant marks its 65th anniversary this August.

Words William Fleeson



Kansas City's best barbecue

All about the meat (this page; clockwise from top left) Virginia Ali prepares one of Ben's Chili Bowl's famous half-smoke sandwiches; Q39 restaurant has its roots in championship barbecue competitions; the Kansas City skyline and statue of The Scout – a memorial to the local Native American peoples who lost their lives to American expansion; Philip Thompson of Q39 loves the city's distinctive style of barbecue; Ben's Chili Bowl has survived in DC since 1958

"When people come to Kansas City, the first thing they want to do is try its unique style of barbecue – that's what we're known for," said Philip Thompson, executive chef at midtown restaurant Q39.

"Everywhere has its own style – Texas, the Carolinas, Memphis – but Kansas City barbecue started in the early 1900s with the arrival of Henry Perry [who opened the city's first barbecue restaurant]. Kansas City then became a melting pot of different styles that made old-school names like Gates BBQ and Arthur Bryant's Barbeque famous."

Their signature flavours – sweet, sticky molasses-based sauces and a preference for the 'burnt ends' of beef brisket – put Kansas City on the map, according to Thompson, for whom this is more than just a meal. "Everybody is brought together by barbecue – it's food but it's also a pastime." ▶





Back to the beginning (this page; clockwise from top left) San Francisco's Oakland is greener than you expect, with beautiful redwood parkland on its doorstep; kolache has become an unlikely breakfast favourite in the towns of Texas' Czech Belt; Sharmistha Chaudhuri knows the secret of a good kolache; sausage-filled klobasnek rolls have a distinct pig-in-a-blanket vibe about them; chef Crystal Wahpepah wants to educate communities and organisations on the health benefits of Indigenous foodways

Eat Indigenous food in Oakland



To the east of San Francisco's Bay area lies Oakland, where redwood forests sit side by side with a bustling city full of historical and cultural diversity. It has one of America's oldest Chinatowns, settled after the Gold Rush, and some 100 years later it became the

birthplace of the Black Panthers and a vital part of the Chicano Movement; social justice runs deep here.

But long before 1960s counterculture and the Gold Rush, the area that is now Oakland was home to Indigenous people. Now chef Crystal Wahpepah is celebrating that cultural heritage through food.

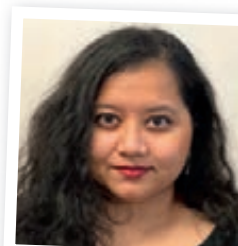
Wahpepah is a member of Oklahoma's Kickapoo people, and grew up in Oakland on what was traditionally Ohlone land. In 2021, she opened her Indigenous restaurant, Wahpepah's Kitchen, in the city's Fruitvale neighbourhood, serving the food that she had grown up with but had never before seen in Oakland's diverse restaurant scene.

"It's something that's always been missing, especially here in Oakland," Wahpepah said. "I love to be creative with Indigenous ingredients, and it's an honour to represent when it comes to our foods."

The seasonally changing menu features dishes made entirely with ingredients from Native American producers like Northern Ute blue corn, wild mushrooms and bison, but Wahpepah is also using the restaurant to educate people about Indigenous food traditions and reclaim native food sovereignty, so you'll come away with a full stomach and a better understanding of the diversity and vitality of Oakland's Indigenous cultures.

Words Kristin Conard

Go West in Texas



The small town of West might seem little more than a pit stop on the drive along the I-35 from Austin to Dallas, but this quaint Czech-influenced spot is abuzz at breakfast time. Not to be confused with West Texas, 'West, comma, Texas' is *the* place for the most divine kolaches, a sweet pastry filled with fruit preserves that has become the breakfast staple of the state.

Texas' food culture is a mix of immigration, assimilation and tradition, converging to create a unique blend of flavours, and kolaches are part of this story. Czech immigrants arrived from Moravia in the 1880s to settle in West and its nearby towns, now known as the Czech Belt; the kolaches they bought with them quickly gained popularity.

Evolving over time, today's hybrid Czech-Tex fillings are just as popular as the traditional poppy and prune variety. The *klobasnek*, a savoury pig-in-a-blanket version said to have been invented by the now-closed Village Bakery in West, even has its own fan following.

Slovacek's West, Gerik's Ole Czech Bakery & Deli and the Little Czech Bakery are among the many kolache joints here, each unique in atmosphere and taste. Stock up before leaving for some delicious road-trip munching.

Words Sharmistha Chaudhuri





Key lime controversy in Florida



Meringue or whipped cream? Graham-cracker or pie crust? It's hard to imagine a simple dessert whipping up such frenzied debate, but Floridians take their Key lime pie pretty seriously – even if it started out as a far simpler affair with roots in one of the area's oldest industries.

“Before synthetic sponges, most sponges in the US were harvested in Key

West, so the fishermen would go out on skiffs for days at a time,” said David Sloan, cookbook writer and author of *Key Lime Pie: An Intriguing History of Key West's Native Dessert*.

“They would bring sweetened condensed milk – the nutrition of milk with the preservative of sugar – and, of course, limes, because people knew the value of eating fruit. They would crumble up day-old Cuban bread into a coffee cup, loosen it with condensed milk and squeeze lime on top, and that would have been the earliest version of Key lime pie – more of a Key lime pudding!”

While the oldest recipes can be traced to the late 1800s, these days, you can sample a classic dish in colourful diners like Blue Heaven on Key West, just a few minutes' walk from the Ernest Hemingway House, or on sailing tours from Stock Island, pitching up at a sandbank for fresh conch followed by dessert. But the best Key lime pie? “The one you're about to eat,” according to Sloan. ▶

A Keys icon (this page; clockwise from top) The pier at the beach in Key West is the perfect spot to stop for a piece of pie; limes were brought by fishermen on long trips and eaten with condensed milk; Key Lime Republic store has Key lime pies for those on the move; Graham cracker or pastry base – it's a controversial topic; David Sloan loved Key lime pie so much that he wrote two books about it



Chicago's culinary creations



Chicago is a city of big shoulders and big appetites, where iconic dishes reflect its history as the 'hog butcher for the world' and a rich immigrant experience expanded its residents' taste buds. Chicago's many diverse neighbourhoods offer culinary delights from all corners of the world.

Fat Johnnie's Famous Red Hots invented the 'mother-in-law', a sandwich that promises to fuel either a long afternoon on the job or a long afternoon nap. This mouthwatering sarnie consists of a Chicago-style hot *tamale* topped with chili in a steamed hot-dog bun and loaded with mustard, relish, pickles, tomatoes, sport peppers and a dash of celery salt. Some say it was inspired by the *torta de tamal*, a *bolillo* (Mexico's version of the baguette) filled with a Delta-style hot tamale.

Along Chicago's Paseo Boricua, the central avenue of the city's officially recognised Puerto Rican neighbourhood, you can find many cafés hawking another Chicago invention: the *jibarito*. This sandwich packs thinly sliced, seasoned skirt steak, lettuce, onions and garlic mayo between two flattened and deep-fried plantains in place of bread.

Then there's Greektown, located just west of the downtown Loop, which invented one of the hottest eats in town. Its take on saganaki is a square of kasseri cheese that has been drenched in brandy and flambéd tableside. Find it at Greek Islands on South Halsted Street, where the waiters still shout "Opa!" as they light the cheese then douse the flames with the squeeze of a lemon.

Words Amy Bizzarri



City of the big influences
(this page; clockwise from top left) Chicago-based writer Amy Bizzarri can taste the many cultural influences on the city's cuisine; the ritual of adding *metaxa* (Greek brandy) to saganaki and flambéing the cheese was started by restaurateurs in Chicago; the city was once known as the 'Hog Butcher for the World' because of its huge meat-processing industry, though the closing of the famous Union Stockyards in the 1970s put an end to that moniker



Try sweet treats in Vermont



Maple syrup is the pride of Vermont, the small, forested state in the north-east corner of New England. Colonists were boiling sap from the time of their first arrival, and the Abenaki people were cultivating maple trees long before that.

Syrup goes best with pancakes, of course, but there's an even simpler option that you'll only find here: sugar on snow. Simply put, this is hot maple syrup poured over a bowl of clean snow laddled from any fresh bluff. That might sound like a recipe for little more than maple-flavoured water, but properly prepared sugar on snow has a gooey consistency, like taffy.

Many Vermont sugar houses make this confection in their own kitchens, but in the popular town of Cabot, Goodrich's Maple Farm serves this local delicacy all year long, even hosting parties that draw scores of sweet-toothed visitors.

"Sugar on snow is a delightful, unique and very sweet Vermont tradition," said the farm's co-owner Ruth Goodrich, whose family has resided in the region since the early 1800s. "All the family have fond memories of these treats. People love it, especially in the fall."

Words Robert Isenberg



Black history and bourbon in Kentucky

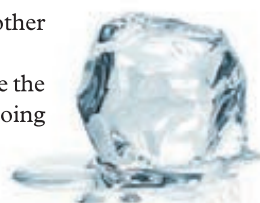
The Kentucky Bourbon Trail winds its way around more than 40 of the state's distilleries, big and small, but there are hidden stories to discover behind those quietly ageing casks. The Kentucky Black Bourbon Guild was set up in 2018 to educate people about bourbon, diversify the workforce and, according to co-founder Gathan Borden, to "uncover the untold story of African Americans and their contributions to the whiskey industry".

"Bourbon has been made here since before it was even a state," Borden explained. "When you look at old photos of distilleries, you see African Americans in the back, but often there were no records kept. Now the industry wants to help tell that story, so brands are going back and digging into their archives."

A visit to Louisville's Evan Williams Bourbon Experience includes the story of Tom Bullock, the first African American to create his own book of cocktail recipes, while the Frazier History Museum dives into the background of bourbon-making across the state – though Borden's tip is to combine the bourbon trail with Kentucky's other famous pastime: horse racing.

"Do a distillery tour then go to the races – those are the two things Kentucky is known for, and you're not going to get that experience anywhere else."

Sweet and sour mash (this page; clockwise from top left) Kentucky's Bourbon Trail passes countless horse farms and acres of bluegrass; Ruth Goodrich has a sweet tooth; Vermont is magical in autumn; sugar on snow is a New England classic; Gathan Borden of the Kentucky Black Bourbon Guild; the origins of Jim Beam bourbon date back to the late 1700s, when Jacob Beam started distilling corn into a sweeter kind of whiskey





Taste local wine in Oregon's scenic landscapes

Best known for its misty forests, hip cities and craggy coastline, Oregon is also home to exceptional wine country, which is packed with wild beauty. About an hour from the city of Portland, you can taste a world of wine – from albariño to zinfandel – in the Columbia River Gorge, a show-stopping river canyon that meanders by moss-draped cliffs and abundant waterfalls.

“The landscape is as enchanting to explore as the wines are captivating to make,” said Kris Fade, co-founder of Analemma Wines. Perched high above the Columbia River, the property is a patchwork of orchards, vineyards, lavender plantings and gardens.

You can taste a flight of these wines while overlooking the vineyards or find them featured at restaurants in the nearby town of Hood River, which draws adventurous souls for sports ranging from windsurfing and kiteboarding to mountain biking and hiking.

“Our vineyards are surrounded by wildflowers found nowhere else in the world, and the possibilities for exploration are endless,” explained Fade. “Rowena Crest is up the road from our winery – it’s one of the most photographed wildflower trails in the state and one of my daily rituals.”

Words Kerry Newberry

A spicy proposition (this page; clockwise from top left) Harvesting ‘chiles’ in the fields outside Hatch; the orchards and vineyards of Oregon make a trip from Portland a surprisingly rural affair, especially at Analemma Wines, east of Hood River, where winemaker Kris Fade can be spotted tending the vines; Melva Aguirre knows a thing or two about ‘chiles’, having gone from picking them to opening her own restaurant; Village Market has a dizzying array of spicy condiments; stop by Melva’s Pepper Pot in Hatch for a burrito alongside the town’s workers



Feel the heat in Hatch



New Mexico is the self-proclaimed chilli capital of the world, where restaurants ask the official state question: “red or green?” and insiders who want both reply “Christmas”.

The small village of Hatch is the state’s chilli (spelt ‘chile’ here) centre, and while tourists get their fix at Sparky’s – chowing down on Hatch green-chile cheeseburgers surrounded by kitschy Americana statues like green-skinned aliens and Colonel Sanders – the local cognoscenti and chilli farmers eat at Pepper Pot, where owner-chef Melva Aguirre is one of their own. She was a field worker, restaurant dishwasher and assistant cook, and eventually bought Pepper Pot restaurant.

“The farmers remembered me from my field days and contracted me to cook 500 breakfast burritos daily for the workers,” said Melva. After a good lunch alongside the local farmers, walk around Hatch to visit shops selling all things ‘chile’: spices, fruit preserves, wine, beer and salsas; Village Market’s dedicated section covers two entire walls.

Words Judith Fein and Paul Ross



Alamy; Shutterstock; Paul Ross; Blaine Frazier



Take the tamale trail through Mississippi



Mississippi's Tamale Trail parallels the Delta Blues Trail, offering visitors an interesting take on the Mexican staple while learning about the early years of the blues and listening to bands that keep the beat alive.

"The Tamale Trail offers an opportunity for culinary tourists to travel across the state, guided by local foods that offer an unexpected history of Mississippi. More than Black and White, the history of the state – especially the Mississippi Delta – is a multicultural one," said Mary Beth Lasseter, associate director of the Southern Foodways Alliance.

"A guided tamale tour reveals how traditional Mexican tamales have been adapted by Mississippians," continues Lasseter. "At the same time, the trail leads tourists on a road trip through towns like Clarksdale, Cleveland and Indianola to learn about the blues."

The trail starts in Clarksdale in the north, where it's said blues legend Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil

at a crossroads. When in town, try the tamales at Abe's Bar-B-Q, then get your blues fix at places such as the Bluesberry Café where musicians like Watermelon Slim belt out haunting stories of life in the Delta.

Next up, Cleveland is an unlikely place for a museum connected to Hollywood, but it was a good choice given Mississippi's music history. The Grammy Museum is next to Delta State University, an institution known for its music programme, and offers a fascinating, interactive experience delving into the history of the Grammys. Cleveland is also home to Dockery Plantation, thought to be the 'Birthplace of the Blues', where Robert Johnson and David 'Honeyboy' Edwards once played.

Indianola, another stop on the Tamale Trail, is where fans of modern-day blues legend BB King pay homage to his life and visit his grave. King was born and raised in this small patch of Mississippi, and he chose to locate his museum in the old mill where he once worked. When hunger hits, grab a final plate of tamales at Pea Soup's Lott-A-Freeze nearby.

Words Anne Braly

One hot tamale (this page; clockwise from top left) A young bluesman plays the Ground Zero Blues Club in Clarksdale, home to some of the most noteworthy blues festivals in the US; following the Tamale Trail unlocks a world of history and flavour; BB King was a blues legend who never forgot his roots in Indianola, where his museum lies; Mary Beth Lasseter works at the Southern Foodways Alliance, which created the Tamale Trail; a bundle of tamales wrapped in corn husks





Detroit's hot dog debate



It's no secret that hot dogs are an American staple. However, in Detroit, every bite into this simple meal reveals decades of history. Coney dogs were popularised across the Midwest by immigrants arriving in the US through New York.

"For about a century now, generations of Detroiters have been devouring thousands and thousands of Coney dogs,"

explained Katherine Yung, author of food history book *Coney Detroit*.

"In the headquarters of the American auto industry, these beanless chili hot dogs have long provided a quick, satisfying and inexpensive meal for factory workers and others. Coney dogs are Detroit's signature food."

Walk in those factory workers' steps on a tour of the Ford Piquette Avenue Plant Museum to see the original Ford Model T and other vehicles made on a full stomach. Nearby is Eastern Market, the country's largest historic market district, filled with local food vendors, stunning graffiti murals and the hard-to-miss yellow awning of Zeff's Coney Island, which has been hanging over this hallowed diner since the 1970s.

After exploring downtown highlights like Campus Martius and the Spirit of Detroit statue, stroll to the American and Lafayette Coney Island shops to let your stomach settle Detroit's most famous Coney rivalry and finally decide which hot dog is best.

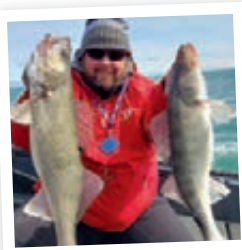
Words Bryan Shelmon

Gone to the dogs (this page; clockwise from top) The Detroit Industry Murals is a series of frescoes by the Mexican artist Diego Rivera that depict the city's industrial heritage, which has had a huge effect on its cuisine; Dwight David Eisenhower II (grandson of President Eisenhower) was famously pictured eating a hot-dog at a family picnic in the 1950s; the simple magic of a Coney dog; Detroit's Eastern Market is packed with great places to eat; Katherine Yung has even written a book on the history of the city's famous foodstuff





Wisconsin's Friday-night fish fry



Friday-night fish fries are a state-wide Wisconsin culinary tradition. Cod, walleye, lake perch or even bluegill – each fish comes either beer-battered or lightly breaded; seasoned or not. On the side you'll usually get coleslaw and fries or a baked potato. A fish fry in

a supper club is almost a Wisconsin rite of passage.

This culinary tradition was born within the area's large Catholic immigrant community, who traditionally abstained from meat on Fridays during Lent, and was clearly abetted by the state's 15,000-plus lakes.

"From an early age, everyone in Wisconsin learns how delicious fish can be when prepared correctly," said Pat Kalmerton, a professional fishing guide from Highland, Wisconsin. "So fishing becomes more than just a sport, hobby or passion. It's a way of life. Friday-night fish fries are where we celebrate our love of fishing, by gathering with friends and family over plates of freshly caught fried fish."

Each restaurant adds its own personal touch to this beloved culinary tradition. The Delta Diner in the small northern Wisconsin town of Delta serves up deep-fried Great Lakes perch with potato pancakes on the side. In the Mississippi-front city of Lacrosse, in central Wisconsin, the Hungry Peddler's fish fry is paired with house brew Peddler Brau. And at the Old Fashioned Tavern and Restaurant in Madison, the state capital, diners can choose from fried cod, perch or walleye, which arrives tableside accompanied by a house-made lemon-and-caper tartar sauce and, of course, an old fashioned – a whiskey-based cocktail garnished with orange zest and a cherry.

Words Amy Bizzarri



Friday I'm in love (this page; clockwise from top left) The Friday-night fish fry in Wisconsin has its roots in the city's large Catholic community; Tucson restaurant Tumerico dishes up a choice menu of Latin-style vegan food; the saguero cacti that dot the deserts around Tucson can grow up to 12 metres high and have fruit that tastes like strawberries; chef Wendy Garcia is excited by the Latin flavours flooding into Tucson; wash your fish fry down with a classic old fashioned in Madison; Pat Kalmerton offers guided fishing tours in Wisconsin



Tucson's 23 miles of Mexican food

It would be hard to find a city in the US that doesn't have a few good Mexican spots up its sleeve, but Arizona's Tucson takes its affinity for its near neighbour to a whole new level with its designated 23-mile (37km) area of Mexican food. It helped earn UNESCO recognition for Tucson as a Creative City of Gastronomy, as it brings together flavours from across Latin America.

"I've seen the changes in Tucson over the years," said chef Wendy Garcia of vegan Mexican restaurant Tumerico. "The foodie scene has been growing a lot. You'll find not just Mexican dishes, but also food from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Bolivia. All these people moving to Tucson are bringing a lot of diverse flavours to the city."

"I was born in Mexico [but] Tucson is home for me; it's my community. We have some really good ingredients – cactus, flour tortillas – and we're really passionate about what we do, so that's what's putting Tucson and its 23 miles of Mexican food on the map." ▶





Tex-Mex in San Antonio



San Antonio is famous for the 1836 Battle of the Alamo, a pivotal moment in the Texan fight for independence from Mexico, but it's also one of only two US cities to have been designated a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy (along with Tucson; see p189).

Not as spicy as you might think (this page; clockwise from top left) Tex-Mex was popular among Tejanos (Mexican American inhabitants of southern Texas) for years before it spread to the masses in San Antonio; Tacoma is home to 47 Asian Pacific communities, which has had a huge influence on the city's cooking; chef Jan Zoleta Parker shows off some of her creations; San Antonio's River Walk is packed with shops and spots to eat; Julia Rosenfeld leads visitors on culinary-themed explorations of San Antonio with Food Chick Tours

While borders were being disputed, culinary walls were being torn down. People native to these lands, as well as the Tejanos and Anglo settlers that followed them, were swapping recipes, giving rise to what is known as Tex-Mex.

"As you get to know the people who have lived their whole lives here, you begin to understand how food and history are interwoven," said local food expert Julia Rosenfeld, owner of Food Chick Tours.

"Stephen Crane, who wrote the novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, talked about dining in San Antonio in 1895. His quote was: 'The food tastes like pounded fire brick from Hades'," Rosenfeld added with a laugh.

"*Chili con carne, tamales, enchiladas, chili verde, frijoles.*" Anybody who read that in 1895 thought it's all gonna be spicy, and it isn't necessarily."

Simple recipes soon evolved into a world of chili, *fajitas* and *enchiladas*, dishes now common around the world that can trace their heritage to Tex-Mex and San Antonio. "You cannot be in San Antonio without feeling the voices from the past, and you taste it as well," finished Rosenfeld.

Words Jeremy Long



Filipino fusion in Tacoma

Tacoma, Washington, shares the same airport as its more famous neighbour, Seattle, making it easy to reach a city that perches elegantly on the shores of Puget Sound, has unfiltered views of Mount Rainier and even claims its own slice of old-growth forest at Point Defiance Park. Meanwhile, the theatre and museum districts offer everything from Broadway musicals to artwork from internationally acclaimed glass artist Dale Chihuly, a Tacoma native.

That variety is reflected in its food too, with fresh Pacific Northwest ingredients and Asian Pacific-influenced cuisine everywhere – mirroring the 47 Asian Pacific countries represented in the heritage of the local population. No one epitomises this fusion better than chef Jan Zoleta Parker, owner of Jan Parker Cookery, who combines Filipino culture with local ingredients.

"Working at the Proctor Farmers' Market gives us a first glance at what Washington state has to offer. There is a very supportive community for farmers and a desire for fresh and seasonal food among its residents. It's a privilege to have access to such a bounty of produce and have a relationship with local farmers," said Parker.

Words Peggy Cleveland





America's iconic hamburger in New Haven

They got it right when they created New Haven, Connecticut, the first planned city in America. It often feels more like a walkable neighbourhood than an urban centre; one filled with art, culture and architecture that ranges from Yale University's towering Gothic spirals to world-class art museums, energetic music venues and an annual International Festival of Arts & Ideas.

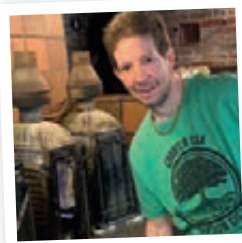
New Haven is known for innovation. Charles Goodyear, the creator of vulcanised rubber, was born here; the town also takes credit for the frisbee and the lollipop. It's where Eli Whitney designed the cotton gin; where Samuel Colt developed the automatic revolver; where John Fitch built the first steamboat; and – reputedly – it was where the first hamburger in America was made.

Louis' Lunch was established by Louis Lassen in 1895. It is now run by his great-grandson, Jeff Lassen, who explains how the iconic burger began.

“My great-grandfather started out by serving steak dinners. In 1900, a customer came in who was in a rush. My great-grandfather thought: how can I expedite this? He put the ground steak between two slices of bread.”

When asked how many burgers had been served since then, Lassen says it's impossible to tell. “Quite a few – I can attest to that.”

Words Caryn B Davis



Birth of an icon (this page; clockwise from top left) New Haven claims to have been the birthplace of the hamburger; long before settlers first arrived at Plymouth Harbour, oysters were a staple of the Indigenous people that lived in Massachusetts; Karla Murphy leads tours with Island Creek Oysters; back when the Pilgrims first arrived, oysters were so plentiful that they could pick them by hand; Jeff Lassen of Louis' Lunch; hamburgers have been a favourite on the restaurant's menu since 1895



Oyster shucking in Massachusetts



Far from a typical tourist trip, an excursion to Island Creek Oysters in Duxbury, Massachusetts, offers a look at the 21st-century operation of an oyster farm, an industry that has sustained the coastal community on Cape Cod Bay since British settlers first set foot there.

Located 15km north of downtown Plymouth, Duxbury offers historic locations in a less touristy setting. Sites of significance include the Alden House Historic Site, where a cooper from *The Mayflower* – the ship that brought the Pilgrims from England to the New World in 1620 – lived with his family; Myles Standish Monument State Reservation, dedicated to one of the leaders of the Plymouth Colony; and the Old Shipbuilders Historic District, a 116-hectare section of town flanked by over 200 historic homes and businesses, including Island Creek Oysters.

In addition to a tour of the oyster hatchery and nursery, an Island Creek Oysters visit includes a boat ride across Duxbury Bay to the planting grounds and a lesson in shucking. As experience coordinator Karla Murphy explains:

“Our captains will bring you out onto Duxbury Bay and we will break down the oyster's journey from when it leaves the hatchery up until it makes it onto your plate.”

Words Lisa Matte

