FOOD & DRINK IN CHICAGO

There’s more to Chicago cuisine than hot dogs and deep-dish pizza. In fact, the Windy City is one of America’s best – if not the best – food cities right now. After you’ve had your fill of Chicago’s signature specialties, try out some of the city’s most exciting restaurants and bars.

× EAT

**Alinea** Seafood $$$
With three Michelin stars, Alinea brings on multiple courses of molecular gastronomy. Dishes may emanate from a centrifuge or be pressed into a capsule, à la duck served with a “pillow of lavender air.” Alinea schedules prepaid bookings two to three months in advance via its website. » alinearestaurant.com; 1723 N. Halsted St.

**Bad Hunter** Vegetarian $ The atmosphere here is bright and plant-adorned, and so are the dishes. Think wood-grilled carrots and fennel with pistachio-green chili pesto and avocado crema, and the legendary “beet tartare.” » badhunter.com; 802 W. Randolph St.

**Big Jones** American $$ Warm, sunny Big Jones puts sustainable “Southern heirloom cooking” on the map, mixing dishes from New Orleans, the Carolina Lowcountry and Appalachia. Locals flock in for the seasonal menu that includes chicken, crawfish étouffée and shrimp. The decadent, biscuit-laden brunch draws the biggest crowds. » bigjoneschicago.com; 5347 N. Clark St.

**Doughnut Vault** Bakery $ This teensy, chandelier-clad shop is indeed in a vault – an old bank vault – with room for only a handful of people. The glazed doughnuts (vanilla or chestnut) are the beauties here, giant and fluffy as a pillow. The line moves fast. » doughnutvault.com; 401 N. Franklin St.

**Gibson’s** Steak $$$ There is a scene every night at this local original. Politicians, movers, shakers and the shaken-down swirl the famed martinis and compete for table space in the buzzing dining room. The steaks are as good as they come, and ditto for the enormous lobsters. » gibsonsteakhouse.com; 1028 N. Rush St.

**Girl & the Goat** American $$$ Chef Stephanie Izard’s flagship restaurant rocks. The soaring ceilings, polished wood tables and cartoon-y art on the walls create a convivial atmosphere. On the menu are unique small plates, such as catfish with pickled persimmons. » girlandthegoat.com; 809 W. Randolph St.

**Irazu** Latin American $$ Chicago’s unassuming lone Costa Rican eatery turns out burritos bursting with chicken, black beans and fresh avocado, and sandwiches dressed in a heavenly, spicy-sweet vegetable sauce. Wash them all down with an arepa (a slurpable oatmeal milkshake). For breakfast, the arroz con huevos (peppery eggs scrambled into rice) relieves hangovers. » irazuchicago.com; 1865 N. Milwaukee Ave.

**Kai Zan** Sushi $$ If you crave an adventurous and inspired sushi experience more than dining in a nightclub-like space, make a reservation at this charming little jewel box of a restaurant on an unassuming block in Humboldt Park. » eatatkaizan.com; 2557 W. Chicago Ave.

**Lou Mitchell’s** Breakfast $ A Route 66 relic, Lou’s brings in locals and tourists for breakfast. The waitresses deliver fluffy omelets and thick-cut French toast with a jug of syrup. They call you “honey” and fill your coffee cup endlessly. » laumitchellarestaurant.com; 565 W. Jackson Blvd.

**Parachute** Korean $$ Michelin-starred Parachute puts an American spin on Korean street-food classics – with dishes such as mackerel and barbecued onion bibimbap (mixed vegetables and rice). The ambience is like a dinner party in your friend’s retro-cool kitchen. There are only 40 seats, so reserve ahead; you can do so 30 days in advance. Walk-ins fare best before 6 p.m. » parachuterestaurant.com; 3500 N. Elston Ave.

**Qing Xiang Yuan** Dumplings Dumplings $ The name doesn’t lie: it’s all about dumplings in this bright room under bamboo lanterns. They come steamed by the dozen, with more than 30 fillings, including lamb and coriander, ground pork and cabbage, and sea whelk and leek. Bite into one and a hot shot of flavor erupts. The restaurant is upstairs in the Richland Center food court. » qxydumplings.com; 2002 S. Wentworth Ave., Suite 103

DON'T MISS

On a Chicago Pizza Tour, you won’t be chomping just the city’s signature deep-dish pizzas, but also stuffed, tavern-style and Neapolitan pies, too. The 3½-hour tours are by bus or on foot, and take in four pizzerias, with all food included in the price (from $60; chicagopizzatours.com).
Topolobampo/Frontera Grill Mexican $$$
Chef-owner Rick Bayless stirs up pepper sauces and other jump-off-the-tongue Mexican creations. His isn’t your typical taco menu: Bayless uses seasonal, sustainable ingredients for the wood-grilled meats, flavor-packed mole sauces, chili-thickened braises and signature margaritas. Though they share space, Topolobampo and Frontera Grill are actually separate restaurants. Topolo is sleeker and pricier, while Frontera is more informal. » rickbayless.com; 445 N. Clark St.

DRINK
Arbella
Named for a 17th-century ship full of wine-guzzling passengers, Arbella is an adventuresome cocktail bar. Spirits from around the globe – from rye to rum, pisco to mezcal – make their way into the drinks. Park yourself at a dark leather banquette, under sparkly globe lights, and taste-trip the night away in one of the city’s warmest, coziest rooms. » arbellachicago.com; 112 W. Grand Ave.

Delilah’s
A bartender rightfully referred to this hard-edged black sheep of the neighborhood as the “pride of Lincoln Avenue,” a title earned for the heavy pours and the best whiskey selection in the city. The no-nonsense staff knows its way around a beer list, too, tapping unusual domestic and international suds. Cheap Pabst longnecks are behind the bar as well. » delilahschicago.com; 2771 N. Lincoln Ave.

Half Acre Tap Room
Half Acre was one of the leaders of Chicago’s craft brewing movement, concocting the deliciously happy Daisy Cutter Pale Ale and selling it in cans. The beer earned a cult following, and the guys opened the Half Acre Tap Room at the source. Local beer fanatics practically live in the exposed-brick and rustic-wood space, downing mega-strong brews. » halfacrebeer.com; N. Lincoln Ave.

Happy Village
Jolly and unapologetically divey, with cheap, noncraft beer, Happy Village earns smiles for its fierce table-tennis matches, starry vine-covered patio and a tamale vendor who seems to appear just when you need him most. Cash only. » 773-486-1512; 1059 N. Wolcott Ave.

Huettenbar
Pay homage to Lincoln Square’s German roots at this kitschy, wood-paneled stalwart. The ambience is straight out of the Black Forest. So are the beers flowing from the taps. A crisp kölsch from Frankfurt and a seat by the open front windows on a warm night, and you’re practically a local. » huettenbar.com; 4721 N. Lincoln Ave.

La Catrina Cafe
Activists and artists congregate here for the roomy window seats, bottomless cups of coffee and funky art exhibitions. It’s a come-one, come-all kind of spot, perfect for a Mexican hot chocolate and a Frida Kahlo–face cookie. A colorful mural marks the entrance. » 312-532-6817; 1011 W. 18th St.

Lost Lake
Hipsters love a good tiki bar, so Lost Lake popped up in Logan Square to meet the need. Take a seat under the bamboo roof by the banana-leaf wallpaper, and swirl a Mystery Gardenia or other tropical drink made from one of the 275 rums behind the bar. » lostlaketiki.com; 3154 W. Diversey Ave.

Simon’s
An Andersonville mainstay since 1934, Simon’s is a dimly lit musicians’ watering hole. The jukebox rocks an eclectic menu ranging from Robert Gordon to Elastica to Television to the Clash. A giant neon fish holding a martini glass marks the spot. Cash only. » 773-878-0894; 5210 N. Clark St.

Spoke & Bird
The South Loop has been begging for a leafy patio like the one at Spoke & Bird, amid the cool old manors in the Prairie Avenue Historic District. Relax with a local brew and nifty café food, such as the sweet parsnip muffin or lamb barbecue sandwich. » spokeandbird.com; 205 E. 18th St.

Toni Patisserie and Cafe
Toni is a European-inspired patisserie with an inviting atmosphere that provides a cute refuge for a glass of wine. The cafe has a small list of French red, white and sparkling wines to sip at the close-set tables while you try to resist the éclairs, macaroons and tiered cakes. It has seasonal specials and also sells bottles for take-out (handy for park picnics). » tonipatisserie.com; 65 E. Washington St.

CHICAGO CHEFS TO KNOW

Stephanie Izard
Gaining fame as the first woman to win the Bravo network’s Top Chef reality competition, this sustainable farm-to-table fan’s Girl & the Goat, Little Goat and Duck Duck Goat are West Loop landmarks.

Rick Bayless
He’s everywhere: on TV, cooking at the White House, and tending the garden where he grows herbs for his eateries: Xoco, Topolobampo/ Frontera Grill and Cruz Blanca.

Grant Achatz
He made “molecular gastronomy” a culinary catchphrase at the stratospherically priced Alinea; his other hot spots include Next and Aviary.

Paul Kahan
The son of a Chicago smokehouse- and deli-owner, this classically influenced chef makes waves at Dove’s, Big Star Taqueria, Avec and others.
WHERE TO STAY

for urban bohemians
Acme Hotel $$
The Acme’s indie style comes at affordable rates. The rooms mix industrial fixtures with retro lamps and mid-century furniture. ➤ acmehotelcompany.com

for nostalgic
Alise Chicago $$$
The Alise’s 1890s design woos architecture buffs. Public areas have art deco-style lights, filigree railings and mosaic-tile floors. ➤ staypineapple.com

for budget sleeps
Fieldhouse Jones $
This hostel-hotel occupying a vintage, red-brick dairy warehouse offers quality rooms and sociable common areas. ➤ fieldhousejones.com

for socializing
Freehand Chicago $
Rooms at this super-hip hostel-hotel have warm woods and bright tiles. Everyone mingles in the groovy Broken Shaker bar. ➤ thefreehand.com/chicago

for space
Guesthouse Hotel $$$
Former condominiums have been converted into huge suites, each with a full kitchen, washer-dryer and private balcony. ➤ theguesthousehotel.com

for eating out
Longman & Eagle $$
Check in at the Michelin-starred tavern downstairs, then head up to one of six wooden-floored, vintage-stylish accommodations. ➤ longmanandeagle.com

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