

BITE OF PHILLY

Cheesesteaks exist as a symbol of the working class, a paragon of democratic virtues all stuffed inside an authentic Amoroso roll. Nothing makes a Philadelphian madder than a misrepresentation of the cheesesteak. But how can an avid hoagie-consuming tourist find a decent cheesesteak?

Defining the Perfect Cheesesteak

This question isn't as simple as it may seem at first. Cara Schneider, a member of the Department of Tourism, puts it this way: "The art of cheesesteak preparation lies in the balance of flavors, textures, and what is often referred to as the 'drip' factor." That famous drip factor—the amount of grease—is what sets the average cheesesteak apart from the superb one.

The good news is that there are literally thousands of places to find a good cheesesteak. "When you are in Philadelphia, you can get a cheesesteak just about anywhere," says former Philadelphia resident Kade Riley. "Almost every corner store and pizza shop sells cheesesteaks."

Now that you know what makes a great cheesesteak, it's time to master the art of ordering, eating, and knowing where to buy one.

How to Order

At Pat's King of Steaks, ordering correctly is crucial. Pat's is the originator of the cheesesteak and is arguably the most famous seller in Philly. Here, customers are regularly sent to the back of the line if their ordering style isn't up to par.

But don't worry: ordering a cheesesteak is a skill that can be mastered. First, decide how many cheesesteaks you want. Second, choose your cheese. At most places, you'll be able to choose from American, whiz, or provolone cheese. Third, decide if you want onions.

To order, simply put all three together, thusly, as indicated on a sign at Pat's: "One whiz wit" or "two provolone witout." And take note: calling the sandwich a Philly or a Philly cheesesteak will instantly peg anybody as an outsider. Always refer to the sandwich as a steak or a cheesesteak.

—Bekah Claussen

Here are the five most popular places with their prices and a star rating assigned by *Stowaway*, along with a brief description of their pros and cons. If you are feeling adventurous, duck into any corner store and give their concoction a try. You just might find your favorite cheesesteak masterpiece.

GENO'S ★★★ \$9.50

Geno's sits across the street from Pat's, and the two shops wage a neighborly war over the quality of their cheesesteaks (and the number of customers who swing through their doors). Still, Geno's suffers from the same problems that Pat's does—too many tourists and not enough condiments.

PAT'S KING OF STEAKS

★★★★ \$8.50

The experience is really what you're paying for here. You'll get an okay cheesesteak, but it'll be served with a generous side of Philly attitude and a blast of neon lights. Keep in mind also that Pat's is often inundated with tourists, there is limited variety, and it's sometimes difficult to get what you actually want.

GOOEY LOUIE'S

★★★★★ \$6.95

The cheapest cheesesteak on this list by far as well as the biggest. Fortunately for hungry cheesesteakers, Gooney Louie's also consistently delivers some of the best cheesesteaks in Philly. Make sure to bring some friends; you'll want to share these enormous sandwiches.

JIM'S STEAKS

★★★★★ \$7.45

With three locations throughout the city, Jim's Steaks is one of the easiest shops to find. Their friendly service and low-stress environment make Jim's a favorite of natives. To top it all off, Jim's steaks have some of the best flavor in town. Lines aren't usually long here, but expect the South Street location to be the busiest.

