THE ULTIMATE CHICAGO RESTAURANT GUIDE, ACCORDING TO A LOCAL FOODIE

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I lived in Chicago for almost 5 years and let me tell you -- this city’s culinary scene continues to sweep me off my feet. I don’t care what any coastal folks say... I believe that Chicago has the best food in the United States. Chicagoans know good food. This is a city for eaters! There are always delicious new places to discover in Chicago and only the best can survive in a city as foodie as this.

What I realized about the restaurant scene in Chicago is that it is impossible to keep up with. There are thousands of places to try, so you have to find the trusted sources like foodie locals to help you discover the gems. While I love exploring new restaurant openings on a regular basis, there are the tried-and-true places that I genuinely love and go back to over and over again. I think there is something to be said about asking a local which places they actually eat at.

What You'll Find In This Post

**This is the Ultimate Chicago Foodie Guide**

**Breakfast + Brunch**

[**Roister**](http://www.roisterrestaurant.com/)

Part of Grant Achatz’s culinary empire in Chicago, Roister is an open concept restaurant with a massive kitchen right in the center with a wood fired oven that makes the whole restaurant smell like a campfire. Sit at the bar for a table side view of the cooking action! Dishing up casual American food with a twist, the menu can read unusual to the unsuspecting but is all sorts of delicious. Their fried chicken sandwich is the best I’ve ever had, thanks to the perfectly light and umami flavored cornflake batter. Make sure to order the foie gras candy bar dessert — it is life-changing.

[**Cellar Door Provisions**](https://www.cellardoorprovisions.com/)

Located in an unassuming nameless building on Diversey Ave, Cellar Door Provisions is a hidden gem in the Logan Square neighborhood. The bright but tiny café gets crowded quickly because it is only open for brunch Wednesday-Sunday. Despite the wait, it is absolutely worth coming. In my opinion, their pastries are the best in the neighborhood! The croissants are seriously amazing, and paired with fresh drip coffee, this is a great spot to read a newspaper or have a slow start to your morning. The menu is tiny (like 5 items) and rotates daily.

[**Honey Butter Fried Chicken**](https://www.honeybutter.com/)

Slightly out of the way compared to the other places on this list, Honey Butter was one of the first Chicago brunch spots I discovered and it is well worth the drive. I have been a loyal customer ever since! As the name says, their specialty is fried chicken prepared on its own or as chicken sandwiches, biscuit sandwiches and lots more. Their affordable menu and cheerful patio creates a warm ambiance that fits perfectly with their delightful assortment of southern comfort dishes. If you get the bloody Mary, it comes with a chicken wing!

[**Find My Complete Chicago Brunch Guide**](https://www.traverse-blog.com/chicago-brunch-restaurant-guide/)

[**Dove’s Luncheonette**](http://www.doveschicago.com/)

Perfectly styled as a vintage diner, Dove’s Luncheonette has been a brunch staple on the Chicago food scene basically since it has opened. Tucked under the Blue Line CTA tracks in Wicker Park, I order the same thing every time — the fried chicken and gravy. Serious comfort food, the fried chicken is impeccable with a perfectly crunchy and flavorful dredge and topped with their house made sausage gravy, peas and sautéed capellini onions.

**Tacos**

[**Antique Taco**](http://www.antiquetaco.com/)

Personally, I love Antique Taco! This is my go-to spot for tasty tacos in my area, both because they are delicious, but also because I dig their vibe. Antique does an amazing job with branding, and their[Instagram feed](https://www.instagram.com/antiquetaco/) alone gets me inspired and hungry at the same time! Their taco menu has quirky and creative flavor combinations, like their Indian-inspired sweet & spicy chicken or Ribeye with arugula, and I definitely recommend getting one of their drinks. Their agua frescas are sooo good and refreshing! They’ve got a few locations around the city now, but the one in Wicker Park is the original, and you can even get them to cater your next special event! My friends had Antique at their wedding shower and everyone loved it!

[**Big Star**](http://www.bigstarchicago.com/)

One of my favorite hang out spots in Wicker Park, Big Star always has a lively vibe and dishes out some seriously good Mexican street food. Housed in a revamped gas station, the floor-to-ceiling sliding doors open up to a massive patio especially in the summer. It is a cool venue, and if you go on a weekend or when there is nice weather, expect a wait. Their margaritas and tacos are the most popular items, and I am a big fan of their Al Pastor and De Panza tacos. If you’re lucky enough to get a table, I would recommend spending a few hours hanging out (and people watching!) while ordering tacos and snacks as you go!

**Burgers**

[**Au Cheval / Small Cheval**](https://smallcheval.com/)

For the father of all famous burgers in Chicago, look no further than Au Cheval. Many critics recognize it as one of the best burgers in city and the waiting list alone is proof that they're right. You can expect to wait for upwards of three hours for a burger at West Loop's famed Au Cheval. It is 100% worth it, but in case you don't have the time, try one of their fast casual outposts: Small Cheval.

I find the Small Cheval burgers to be \*nearly\* as good as the ones at Au Cheval but with hardly any wait. You can find a few stand alone spots around the city, like the one in Logan Square, or inside Aster Hall, [**one of Chicago's best food halls**](https://www.traverse-blog.com/best-chicago-food-halls/). The perfectly melted cheese, yummy garlic aioli and char-griddled stacked patties are mouth watering and incredibly satisfying. This is one of my husband's forever favorites in Chicago, and we can't visit the city without a stopping by.

[**Moonlighter**](https://www.themoonlighterchicago.com/)

Sam and I have visited Moonlighter more than any other restaurant in our neighborhood -- maybe that’s because we lived across the street from it. Or maybe its because its a genuinely great spot! The sports bar meets expertly curated beer pub vibes are spot on thanks to their rare sour ale beer list and perfect patio, which is accessible all year round with fire places to keep you warm. Their burgers are effing delightful too! I always order the Coronado while Sam is a fan of the classic Moonlighter.

Pizza

Pequod’s

For a real local’s only Chicago deep-dish secret, a visit to Pequod’s is required. It has an almost cult-like following and is largely seen as the most respected local deep-dish spot in Chicago. The deep-dish at Pequod’s is unique because it has a crispy caramelized crust on the outside. The secret? Baked cheese on the outside. It gets this gorgeous brown color and crisps nicely, adding a welcomed texture and crunch. There are only two Pequod’s locations, one in Lincoln Park and one out in burbs, so you might want to make a reservation to guarantee yourself a spot.

[**Get a Full List of the Best Pizza in Chicago**](https://www.traverse-blog.com/actually-useful-chicago-pizza-guide/)

Paulie Gee’s

I am a sucker for a good wood-fired pizza and in Logan Square, Paulie Gee’s is unabashedly the best spot for tasty slices. Perhaps my favorite pizza place in the entire city of Chicago, Paulie Gee’s is the real deal. They offer perfectly cooked Detroit-style pizza as well as bubbly Neapolitan-style pizza (more on that below) from their custom built wood-fired pizza ovens. I think their topping selection is just the best. They offer an ever rotating assortment of locally-sourced, seasonal ingredients tossed on top of their awesome dough in creative combinations. Their main dining room is open until 11pm and then they switch to the late night menu until 2pm.

**Asian Food**

[**High Five Ramen**](http://highfiveramen.com/)

In my opinion, High Five is dishing up the best ramen in the city of Chicago. This tiny basement restaurant only holds 30 people and there is ALWAYS a wait (I've waited over 3 hours). Thankfully, the staff know this, and have a great system. After you put in your name, head upstairs to Green Street Meats for beer, food and entertainment while you wait. Once you're called, get ready for an awesome experience. Their broth is rich and full of flavor, their noodles are the perfect texture and there is just the right amount of toppings. It's SO worth the wait.

[**HaiSous**](https://www.haisous.com/)

While Vietnamese cuisine might not be what you most associate with brunch cuisine, HaiSous in Pilsen might change your mind. This stylishly designed restaurant showcases homey Vietnamese flavors mixed with commonplace American breakfast ingredients to create this amazing fusion that works together beautiful. Featuring a variety of modern and traditional techniques, such as clay pot cooking, the creative brunch menu features specialties like Vietnamese omelets, prawn rice crepes, and  fried chicken wings. If all of these sound delicious, try their brunch tasting menu for about $25!

[**Rangoli**](http://www.rangolitogo.com/)

The number one food that I miss from living in Chicago is Rangoli. **Hands down**. This is the best Indian food I've eaten in my life, including while traveling in India. I love Rangoli so damn much! The thick, rich gravies are absolutely packed with flavor. The spice level here is high, but the reward is totally worth it. My mouth is watering just thinking about how much I want this Indian food. We almost always get take out, but Rangoli does have two dine-in options in Bucktown and Lincoln Park. I've had nearly everything on the menu and a few favorite dishes worth mentioning  are the Chicken Korma, Paneer Tikka Masala and Chicken Chettinad. Don't forget their amazing garlic naan on the side.

[**KaiZan**](http://www.eatatkaizan.com/)

Located in a totally unremarkable building on a mostly uninhabitated area between Humboldt Park and Ukranian Village, KaiZan is one of those places only a local is going to tell you about. You'll need to make a reservation weeks ahead of time for their sushi and omakase tasting menus. Run by two brothers with experience in other Chicago eateries, they craft sophisticated and creative dishes that are paired with myriad sauces, flavors and textures. You'll find lots of non-traditional sushi, nigiri, and yakitori all crafted with precise details and impeccable ingredients.

**Date Night Restaurants**

[**Daisies**](https://www.daisieschicago.com/)

I discovered Daises WAY too late. I think this is the most underrated restaurant in Chicago! Specializing in seasonal, rustic Italian cuisine, Daisies makes their incredible pasta fresh each day, and you’ll find yourself slurping down the bowl in a few short minutes, ready to order another round. It is SO good. I wish I could describe how amazing the pasta is, but I can’t seem to find the words. So I’ll give you this little story...The first week that Sam and I ate at Daisies, we wound up coming back three more times that same week because we were so mind blown about their amazing pasta and veggie dishes.

[**Sushi Dokku**](http://sushidokku.com/)

Arguably the best sushi in Chicago, Sushi Dokku is a splurge-worthy place to get some amazing maki, nigiri or sashimi. I personally love their 2 piece nigiri bites, of which I have had nearly all of them. I actually crave them. I'm a huge fan of the Madai, Tuna Truffle and Zuke Sake but I honestly think they are all delicious. If the upstairs restaurant is full or you forgot to make a reservation, head down to their speakeasy bar, Booze Box, which offers the full food menu. You can also sample some of Sushi Dokku's creations in Urbanspace, downtown Chicago's[**most creative foodhall concepts**](https://www.traverse-blog.com/best-chicago-food-halls/).

[**Giant**](https://www.giantrestaurant.com/)

I have been singing the praises of Giant for a long time -- their globally inspired small plate menu is spectacular. You need to make a reservation at least one month in advance, but sometimes up to 2 or 3 months depending on the size of your party or day of your visit. Every dish at Giant has minimal description on the menu (like 2-3 ingredients described) and then it comes in all its maximalist glory. Some of my favorite dishes are the uni shooters, braised eggplant and buttered seafood pasta, but I’ve honestly had the entire menu and loved every.single.dish. This place is really good for special occasions.

[**Alinea**](https://www.alinearestaurant.com/)

If you follow fine dining restaurants, you have almost undoubtedly heard of Grant Achatz and his 3 Michelin Star restaurant, Alinea. His fascinating story was featured on the Netflix documentary show 'Chef's Table' season two. Chef Achatz lost his ability to taste due to cancer, and had to teach himself to relearn flavors. Alinea's approach to food is avant-garde, surprising, and molecular gastronomy focused. The menu changes a few times a year, but some of the dishes he is most known for stick around. You can also sample some of the highlights at Achatz's cocktail bar,[**Aviary**](https://www.theaviary.com/).

A dinner at Alinea is an expensive endeavor ($300/person minimum) so [save this for a special occasion](https://www.traverse-blog.com/beginner-guide-michelin-star-restaurants/). But you will not be disappointed. This restaurant feels like food theater, guiding its guests through a series of courses each more elaborate than the next. The end result is one of the most memorable and delicious meals of your life! Get a behind the scenes glimpse into my experience at Alinea with my YouTube video all about it:

[**Rose Mary**](https://www.rosemarychicago.com/)

One of the hottest new openings in 2021 for the Chicago restaurant scene is Rose Mary. On a corner in West Loop’s hot Fulton Market, this was the best new eatery that I tried during my visit to Chicago this fall. Specializing in Croatian cuisine, the menu is a modern, flavor-forward approach to a lesser-known style of food – and it crushes it. I loved everything that I had here, and the staff was exceptionally friendly and helpful in picking out a good assortment of dishes. The menu changes seasonally, but there is a wide selection of vegetarian, fish and meat options. I especially loved their house made tortellini stuffed with a eggplant, red pepper, and sundried tomato puree. Reservations are essential and should be made well in advance.

**Dessert in Chicago**

[**Bang Bang Pie Shop**](http://www.bangbangpie.com/)

A hole in the wall shop, Bang Bang Pie Shop is a quirky spot for a laid back breakfast or dessert. They’ve got a seasonal menu of savory and sweet pies, as well as house made biscuit sandwiches throughout the day. All made from scratch, the creative combinations of flavors they feature makes Bang Bang’s pies so unique. I tried the sweet honey pie, which was one of the best cheesecakes I’ve ever eaten, albeit rich! For breakfast, I also tried the avocado biscuit, which was mildly seasoned and the biscuit was perfectly flaky. Get there early (or late) because there is a steady stream of patrons throughout the morning, especially on the weekend.

[**The Freeze**](https://www.facebook.com/TheFreezeChicago/)

If you’re looking for a nostalgia-inducing spot that truly captures the history and diversity of Logan Square, you can’t beat soft-serve purveyor The Freeze. Their shop has been open since the 1950s and it cranks out three flavors of soft serve, which you can order as concretes, dipped cones, shakes or malts. Our favorite thing to order is a “Boston” which is a milkshake topped with a sundae and served with a straw and a spoon so you can simultaneously drink and eat your frozen treat. The endless customizable options are indulgent and delightful, making each visit to this neighborhood icon an adventure. Lines can get long on the weekend, but it always moves fast.

[**Portillo’s**](https://www.portillos.com/)

When my cousin got married, she had Portillo’s chocolate cake for her wedding cake. That’s how delicious it is. I’m not even kidding, this chocolate cake is super good. It is rumored that the secret ingredient that makes their cake so moist is mayonnaise. Whatever it is, I love it. I randomly get cravings for Portillo’s chocolate cake and there is one dangerously close to my office. For $4, I don’t think there’s a better way to indulge a chocolate craving!

[**Want more dessert recommendations? Read my Chicago dessert guide**](https://www.traverse-blog.com/chicago-dessert-guide/)

[**Stan’s Doughnuts**](http://www.stansdonutschicago.com/)

If you ride the Blue Line CTA train in the morning, I can almost guarantee that you have smelled the doughnuts from Stan's on your commute. Located just under the Damen CTA Stop, Stan’s Doughnuts offers Chicago's most famous fried treats to make your morning more tolerable. They’ve got a mixed selection, including traditional cake varieties, cream filled, sprinkle topped and berry stuffed. I’m a huge fan of the old fashioned doughnuts, and the lemon pistachio or blueberry are my favorites.