

Dining Discoveries in Philly

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics soon will descend on the City of Brotherly Love for FNCE. Sure, the historical sites in this city are enchanting, but you'll really fall in love with Philadelphia's own unique dining scene. We asked local foodies about the best places to dine for our annual guide.

By Sharon Palmer, RD

Shrimp
cocktail at
Butcher and
Singer



Tucked away in the historic streets of Philadelphia, where movie actor Will Smith, the late Grace Kelly, and journalist Ed Bradley once strolled, dozens of eateries contribute to a unique dining sensibility that's more about casual open spaces, personal experiences, and com-

forting food than pretentious, glittering dining rooms. Quintessential Philadelphia dining now takes in a range of familiar eateries, from food trucks and authentic sandwich shops to third-generation Italian haunts and neighborhood bistros.

Carolyn Wyman, a local food expert who hosts the Taste of Philly Food Tour (www.tasteofphillyfoodtour.com) at the Reading Terminal Market, says, "Philly always has been a cheesesteak and hoagie town, but with gentrification of the city, we're getting upscale pizza, burgers, fried chicken, and hot dogs—we didn't have this before; other cities take this for granted. Now we have more choices, such as ethnic food, street food, and BYOBs [bring your own bottle]. We're more of a hipster, 'East Coast Portland' dining city; the young population is affecting the dining scene."

Yet in this same town—miles away from established food meccas such as San Francisco and New York City—you'll find an impressive array of glamorous, buzzworthy restaurants founded by award-winning, celebrity chefs. "Philadelphia is certainly gaining a reputation as a food city, especially with names like Stephen Starr, Marc Vetri, and Jose Garces generating a lot of media," says Jack Graham, a Philadelphia food buff who directs continuing education for *Today's Dietitian*.

And then there are those Philly restaurants that fall somewhere in between, from old world pubs and ethnic eateries to farm-to-table BYOBs. "Philly continues to be a contender as a top restaurant city. Gastropubs and BYOBs are exploding," says local dietitian Deanna Segrave-Daly, RD, LDN. The end result: There's something for everyone in this food town. If you're up to it, you can have a completely different culinary experience every night of the week.

Casual Grub

If you're coming to Philly, one thing's for sure: You've got to enjoy a classic sandwich for one meal, Wyman says. She recommends Primo Hoagies (128 South 11th Street, 215-925-4500, www.primohoagies.com) for a hoagie. And Segrave-Daly adds, "I recommend skipping Geno's or Pat's, the two most famous joints, and hitting Jim's Steaks on South Street (400 South Street, 866-899-8197, www.jimssteaks.com). Visit the Reading Terminal Market ... [a] year-round farmers' market right next to the

convention center. Hit DiNic's at Reading Terminal and get a roast pork, broccoli rabe, and provolone sandwich. Ordering a soft pretzel off a street cart is another true taste of Philly."

But there's much more to Philly than hoagies and sandwiches. This town has filled in the gap of missing casual eateries with a plethora of establishments that provide creative, delicious foods without the fanfare and price tag, allowing the masses to experience great food. Just take Philly darling Federal Donuts (1219 South 2nd Street, 267-687-8258, www.federaldonuts.com), which has received glowing reviews in *The New York Times*. This plain little shop sells donuts and fried chicken—but not just any old donuts and fried chicken. A limited supply of hand-crafted flavored donuts, such as Indian cinnamon and vanilla-lavender, are produced early in the morning, and then the kitchen turns its production over to fried chicken, whipping up specialties such as Za'atar spiced chicken. "There's a line out the door—it's a tiny little place," Wyman says.

It sounds quirky, but consider the fact that Federal Donuts is the brainchild of Mike Solomon, the James Beard award-winning chef of upscale Zahav (see page 35). An award-winning chef running a donut and fried chicken stand on the side—you can't get more Philadelphia than that.

If you're on the quest for one of the best pizza experiences of your life, you just might find it in Philly. Wyman suggests trying a few of her favorites: "Marra's (1734 East Passyunk Avenue, 215-463-9249, www.marraone.com) is one of the oldest pizza restaurants in America. Stephen Starr's Pizzeria Stella (420 South 2nd Street, 215-320-8000, www.pizzeriastella.net) has great pizza; they went to New



Haven and New York to study pizza. Barbuzzo (110 South 13th Street, 215-546-9300, www.barbuzzo.com) is run by partners in work and life, and their pizza is among the greatest in the city,” Wyman says.

Barbuzzo’s owners, chef Marcie Turney and Valerie Safran, are credited with transforming a once-dilapidated block into an eclectic dining and shopping experience with the addition of three other establishments: Lolita (106 South 13th Street, 215-546-7100, <http://lolitabyob.com>), a modern Mexican BYOT (bring your own tequila); Jamonera (105 South 13th Street, 215-922-6061, www.jamonerarestaurant.com), a Spanish tapas and wine bar; and Grocery (101 South 13th Street, 215-922-5252, www.grocery13.com), a market and catering company.

Both Debra King, MS, RD, LD, who helped scout Philly restaurants for the Vegetarian Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group executive committee, and Nichole Quartuccio Ring, RD, who works for HealthyDiningFinder.com, recommend Blackbird Pizzeria (507 South 6th Street, 215-625-6660, www.blackbirdpizzeria.com), a “totally vegan pizzeria with lots of traditional flavors, such as pepperoni, sausage, and mushrooms, but all meat free,” King says.

Mobile Feasts

While the food truck market already has reached its climax in New York City and Los Angeles, it’s still exploding in Philadelphia. “Food trucks have gone upscale, and they’re in fun new places,” Wyman says.

Hop onto the food truck bandwagon with a long list of notable vendors who sell inventive, affordable food, such as Lucky Old Souls, a burger truck that features local grass-fed beef (www.luckyoldsouls.com) and malted black pepper or salted caramel milkshakes, and The Dapper Dog (www.thedapperdog.org), which offers—you guessed it—hot dogs but with creative toppings such as macaroni and cheese and provolone and tomato sauce.

Here’s a sampling of the food trucks that received a thumbs up from Uwishunu, the official tourism blog of Philadelphia:

- Yumtown (twitter.com/yumtownusa) serves local, humane farm foods such as PB&J (pork belly, pumpkin butter, chile jam, and tostones).



Korean-Japanese food at Koja

PHOTO COURTESY OF M. KENNEDY FOR GPTMC

- Kung Fu Hoagies (twitter.com/kungfuhogies) offers vegetarian and vegan fixings such as tofu banh mi and BBQ “beef” hoagies.
- Cucina Zapata (twitter.com/Cucina_Zapata) tosses together Thai and Mexican flavors in dishes such as Captain Crunch-crusted tilapia tacos.
- Koja (twitter.com/kojafoodtruck) packs Korean-Japanese standouts such as spicy pork bulgogi, soba noodles, and tofu stir-fries.
- Pitruco Pizza (www.pitrucopizza.com) offers wood-fired oven-baked pizza pies featuring toppings such as roasted eggplant and braised radicchio.
- HubBub Coffee (<http://hubbubcoffee.com>) helps you get your caffeine fix with Stumptown espresso drinks and yummy baked goods.
- Call Me Cupcake (www.theyummycupcake.com) dishes up luscious cupcake variations, including carrot cake and strawberry lemonade.

Philly’s busiest chefs also are adding food trucks to their repertoire. Jonathan Adams, executive chef of the highly praised gastropub Pub & Kitchen (see page 35), teamed up with Damien Pileggi, an artisanal coffee expert, to create the mobile coffee shop Rival Bros Coffee (www.rivalbros.com/the-truck). And even local celebrity chef Jose Garces has an upscale, bottle cap-covered food truck called Guapos Tacos (www.guapostacos.com), featuring innovative yet simple Mexican food, such as duck barbacoa tacos.

If you want to go food trucking, Wyman suggests visiting LOVE Park at City Hall, where the food trucks tend to congregate, and Night Market (www.nightmarketphilly.org), which organizes food trucks to converge on selected neighborhoods. Visit its website to learn where the Night Markets will be scheduled during your visit. In addition, The Food Trust (www.thefoodtrust.org), a nonprofit that promotes access to



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DAPPER DOG

The “Broccoli Rabe” by The Dapper Dog

nutritious foods, helps organize food trucks that use fresh, local, organic food. To get the real buzz on the whereabouts of Philly's famous food trucks, check out any food truck's website or Twitter feed.

Food trucks are such fixtures in Philadelphia cuisine that some have opened restaurants in fixed locations. Nomad Pizza (611 South 7th Street, 215-238-0900, www.nomadpizzaco.com) is a perfect example of a fabulous food truck gone restaurant. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* raves about the Neapolitan pizza and organic salads served at the restaurant and the Nomad Pizza truck—a beautifully restored 1949 REO Speedwagon truck with a wood-fire brick oven—which still roams Philly's streets.

Digging the Soil

As in most sophisticated food towns, farm-to-table dining is alive and well in Philadelphia. It's almost taken for granted that the best chefs in town know their way around a farmers' market and have forged deep bonds with local farmers. You see a dedication to fresh, local produce in a spectrum of eateries, from food trucks and ethnic hole-in-the-walls to BYOBs and white tablecloth establishments. "Lots of restaurants are doing sustainable, local cuisine," says Fran Cassidy, RD, a former Philadelphia resident.

However, it's likely no restaurant does seasonal produce better than Vedge (1221 Locust Street, 215-320-7500, www.vedgerestaurant.com), a new vegan restaurant operated by chef/owner husband-and-wife team Richard Landau and Kate Jacoby. "We've carved out a vegetable genre; we're not pitching our restaurant as 'vegan,' even though it is. It's a vegetable restaurant," Jacoby explains.

The national praise for Vedge, which serves up delicacies such as smoked eggplant and cauliflower with cured olives, is surprising in this cheesesteak town. Jacoby credits the restaurant's popularity to a newfound familiarity with seasonal produce. "People are using farmers' markets more; they're not afraid of a rutabaga or different colored radishes." She says the Lancaster Farm Fresh Cooperative, which organizes distribution from local farms, has helped Philadelphia chefs feature fresh, seasonal, local produce on their menus.

The Farm and Fisherman (1120 Pine Street, 267-687-1555, www.thefarmandfisherman.com) also does a great job of highlighting local food, Cassidy says. The small, unique restaurant sources sustainable, ethically

Stephen
Starr's
Morimoto
cuisine



— PHOTO COURTESY OF STARR RESTAURANTS

raised foods to create the foundation for farm-fresh dishes such as beet and blueberry salad and poached farm eggs with lima beans, civet mushrooms, chard, and bacon.

A Star Is Born

Philadelphia has its own set of star chefs and restaurateurs who have forever changed the landscape of the city's dining. At the top of the list is Stephen Starr, who opened his first club, Grand Mom Minnie's, at 21 and since has been a driving force behind some of the city's top trend-setting culinary experiences, according to Segrave-Daley.

If you ask a Philadelphia local what his or her favorite restaurant is, don't be surprised to hear that person name a Starr restaurant, such as Buddakan or Morimoto. Starr's restaurants go beyond offering stunning food;



Modern
Mexican
cuisine
at Alma de
Cuba

— PHOTO COURTESY OF STARR RESTAURANTS



Mexican American cuisine at El Vez

— PHOTO COURTESY OF STARR RESTAURANTS

they're culinary adventures thanks to his vision for creativity, design, setting, and attitude that inspires each restaurant—whether it's a giant gold Buddha peering over the guests or über-modern furniture lining the dining room. Starr Restaurants (www.starr-restaurant.com) include Alma de Cuba (1623 Walnut Street, 215-988-1799), offering modern Mexican fare; Buddakan (325 Chestnut Street, 215-574-9440), serving inspired, modern Asian cuisine; Continental Restaurant and Martini Bar (138 Market Street, 215-923-6069); El Vez (121 South 13th Street, 215-928-9800), where “Mexican American meets East LA in a Tijuana Taxi”; Jones (700 Chestnut Street, 215-223-5663), a comfort food lounge; Morimoto (723 Chestnut Street, 215-413-9070), serving contemporary Japanese cuisine; Pod (3636 Sansom Street, 215-387-1803), a sleek contemporary Pan-Asian eatery; and Butcher and Singer (1500 Walnut Street, 215-732-4444), one of *Philadelphia* magazine's Top 20 restaurants, serving steaks and chops in an old Hollywood setting.

Jose Garces, an American chef born to Ecuadorian parents, has made his own impact as a Philadelphia celebrity chef. He's been a media and critic favorite since he won the title of Iron Chef in the second season of the Food Network's TV show *The Next Iron Chef*. “Jose Garces has emerged as a celebrity in the Philadelphia food world. Each of his restaurants is outstanding,” Graham says. “Garces Trading Company (1111 Locust Street, 215-574-1099, www.garces trading company.com) is particularly noteworthy because it's in walking distance from the convention center and has a cafeteria feel to it, but the food is unbelievable.”

Indeed, some of Philadelphia's finest are under Garces' domain (www.garcesgroup.com), including Amada (217-219 Chestnut Street, 215-625-2450), an authentic Andalusian tapas bar; Tinto (114-116 South 20th Street, 215-665-9150), a Basque wine bar and restaurant; Distrito (3945 Chestnut Street, 215-222-1657), a restaurant that pays homage to the vibrant cuisine of Mexico City; Chifa (707 Chestnut Street, 215-925-5555), a Latin-Asian restaurant; and Village Whiskey (118 South 20th Street, 215-665-1088), an American bar with more than 80 whiskies and bar snacks.

Marc Vetri is also a rising star on Philadelphia's culinary horizon. Trained in Italy, his first eponymous restaurant (Vetri Ristorante, 1312 Spruce Street, 215-732-3478, www.vetri ristorante.com) has been lavished with praise. Mario Batali called it “possibly the best Italian restaurant on the East Coast.” The eatery earned Vetri a James Beard award in 2005.

Since then his newer restaurant, Osteria (640 North Broad Street, 215-763-0920, www.osteriaphilly.com), with its selection of homemade pastas and wood-grilled meats, has picked up James Beard awards of its own. “Marc Vetri now has a stable of restaurants. His original fine dining is intimate—seven or eight tables maybe—and is my favorite of the city,” Graham says. “However, he's opened Amis (412 South 13th Street and Waverly, 215-732-2647, www.amisphilly.com), Osteria, and Alla Spina (1410 Mount Vernon Street, 215-600-0017, www.allaspina philly.com). As a grouping, these are my favorite places in the town.”



— PHOTO COURTESY OF JASON VARNEY

Middle Eastern fare at Zahav

PHILLY DINING RESOURCES

Local Faves

Philly natives all have their favorite hot spots. Many list Meritage Restaurant & Wine Bar (500 South 20th Street, 215-985-1922, www.meritagephiladelphia.com) as a favorite. Graham calls it “my go-to restaurant—I eat there once a week. They have great service and affordable prices.” Meritage showcases Chef Anne Coll’s unique culinary vision for American cuisine, which you can glimpse in dishes such as her grilled quail with lavender-soy honey and crispy cheddar polenta.

Locals also favor Parc (227 South 18th Street, 215-545-2262, www.parc-restaurant.com), a bistro that screams Parisian brasserie ambience and dishes up charming bistro food, such as onion soup gratinée and steak au poivre. It’s also a great spot for people watching.

A Kitchen (135 South 18th Street, 215-825-7030, <http://akitchenphilly.com>), with its flavorful, simple food and natural wines, has received recent attention from local gourmets and food critics. Try the spaghetti with Nova Scotia mussels as proof of one of its flavorful dishes.

Gastropubs Galore

Another delightful facet of the Philadelphia culinary scene is the gastropub craze. And one of its reigning stars, according to locals and critics alike, is Jonathan Adams’ Pub & Kitchen (1946 Lombard Street, <http://thepubandkitchen.com>), where you’ll find one of the best burgers in town as well as United Kingdom-inspired gourmet pub food, such as bangers and mash and fish and chips. You can feast on this grub in wooden booths on plank tables that provide a perfect neighborhood bar vibe frequented by the young and hip.

Locals also rave about Resurrection Ale House (2425 Grays Ferry Avenue, 215-735-2202, www.resurrectionalehouse.com), which offers 12 draft beer taps, one beer engine, and an impressive selection of bottled beers along with tasty menu offerings, such as savoy spinach with white bean purée and sherry vinegar.

Check out these resources while attending this year’s Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo to help plan your Philadelphia dining experience:

Philadelphia and the Countryside, Restaurants and Dining

www.visitphilly.com/restaurants-dining

Gayot.com, Philadelphia Restaurants

www.gayot.com/restaurants/search-in-philadelphia.php

Philadelphia.com, Philadelphia Restaurants

www.philadelphia.com/restaurants

Citysearch, Philadelphia Restaurants

<http://philadelphia.citysearch.com/find/section/philadelphia/restaurants.html>

10 Best Philadelphia Restaurants

www.10best.com/Philadelphia/Restaurants

Philadelphia Magazine

www.phillymag.com

Trip Advisor, Philadelphia Restaurants

www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurants-g60795-Philadelphia_Pennsylvania.html

Philadelphia’s Best

www.philadelphiasbest.com

Philadelphia Restaurants

www.philadelphiarestaurants.com/top10.cfm

Philly.com

www.philly.com/philly/food

EATER

<http://philly.eater.com>

Philadelphia Weekly

www.philadelphiaweekly.com/food

Foobooz

<http://philadelphia.foobooz.com>

Uwishunu

www.uwishunu.com

Eclectic and Ethnic

If you crave exotic flavors, you’ll feel right at home in Philly, where you’ll find a variety of ethnic food neighborhoods such as Chinatown and the Italian Market as well as traditional cuisines from around the globe.

In particular, Philadelphia is known for its authentic Italian fare. Take a ride to South Philly’s Italian section for a real dose of humble ristoranti that serve classic, Italian dishes. “In terms of South Philly Italian places, I’d recommend Le Virtu (1927 East Passyunk Avenue, 215-271-5626, www.levirtu.com), which is the best from a food standpoint and a must-try,” Graham says. “The Saloon (750 South 7th Street, 215-627-1811, www.saloonrestaurant.net) is where everyone over 50 is wearing a jacket, and you get old-school steak and Italian fare. Dante and Luigi’s (762 South 10th Street, 215-922-9501, www.danteandluigis.com) and Ralph’s (760 South 9th Street, 215-627-6011, www.ralphsrestaurant.com) are sort of touristy but are authentic Italian places with colorful, real-life stories attached to them.”

Another fan fave is Tequilas (1602 Locust Street, 215-546-0181, www.tequilasphilly.com), where “David Suro has developed his own tequila brand, which is paired with excellent food and atmosphere,” Graham says.

“Visit Chinatown for many Asian options beyond Chinese, like Burmese, Malaysian, Thai, and Vietnamese,” Segrave-Daley suggests. Chinatown (www.phillychinatown.com), located north of Market Street between 9th and 11th streets, is full of affordable Asian eating experiences.

Asian restaurant favorites include Han Dynasty (108 Chestnut Street, 215-922-1888, www.handynasty.net), which has won the praise of Philly critics for dishes such as mapo tofu with minced pork and rabbit with peanuts in chili oil. King recommends Singapore Kosher Vegetarian Restaurant (1006 Race Street, 215-922-3288, www.singaporevegetarian.com) for various creative meatless dishes such as seitan fish with veggies and rice. And



— PHOTO COURTESY OF G. WIDMAN FOR GPTMC

Graham recommends Zama (128 South 19th Street, 215-568-1027, zamaphilly.com) for “the best sushi in town.”

Tashan (777 South Broad Street, 267-687-2170, www.mytashan.com) reflects inspired Indian flavors in a small plate menu with offerings such as Snake River farm Naga beef sumi with cucumber-peanut relish.

Philly’s ethnic restaurants also have garnished serious accolades and awards, such as Zahav (237 St James Place, 215-625-8800, www.zahavrestaurant.com), which tops many best Philadelphia dining lists. This Middle Eastern culinary experience includes dishes such as royal trumpet mushrooms with watercress and garlic purée and Moroccan chicken with almond bulgur.

Estia (1405-1407 Locust Street, 215-735-7700, www.estia-restaurant.com), a Greek Mediterranean restaurant, is a favorite of former Philly native Kate Myerson, RD, who says, “Their Chilean sea bass is to die for.”

Bring on the BYOBs

If you’re in Philly for any length of time, you must experience one of the city’s most unique culinary features: the BYOB phenomenon. Springing up as a solution to the unusual state liquor system, scores of small, quaint, affordable BYOBs have taken over the streets, often operated by husband-and-wife teams who offer fresh, authentic food you can pair with your own bottle of wine. “A number of high-quality BYOBs have opened since the early 2000s and allowed chefs to showcase their talents in small-scale, food-focused restaurants,” Graham says. “These smaller BYOBs are representative of the culture of the dining scene in Philadelphia, where small spaces and open kitchens bring the diner into the food preparation experience.”

Melograno (2201 Spruce Street, 215-875-8116, www.melogranorestaurant.com) receives praise from locals and

critics as one of the best BYOBs in Philly for its inspired dishes such as prosciutto and zucchini semolina gnocchi with butter sage sauce. The old-world Italian cuisine of Mercato (1216 Spruce Street, 215-985-2962, www.mercatobyob.com), with rustic fare such as grilled artichokes and pyramid pasta, is one of Segrave-Daley’s favorite BYOBs. *Philadelphia* magazine calls Fond (1617 East Passyunk Avenue, 215-551-5000, www.fondphilly.com), with its contemporary American cuisine, one of the best restaurants in the city. The highly acclaimed Koo Zee Doo

(614 North 2nd Street, 215-923-8080, www.koozeedoo.com) serves traditional Portuguese cuisine. And the highly rated Bibou (1009 South 8th Street, 215-965-8290, www.biboubyob.com), offers classic French fare such as pan-seared foie gras with poached pears.

Refined Dining

If you’re in the mood for a special night on the town in an elegant city restaurant, you won’t be disappointed. Several fine-dining establishments are firmly positioned on the best dining lists of the city. At the top, you’ll find Lacroix (210 West Rittenhouse Square, 215-546-9000, www.lacroixrestaurant.com), a sophisticated French restaurant at the Rittenhouse Hotel. “For traditional fine dining, Lacroix is the best in the city,” Graham says.

Water Works Restaurant and Lounge (640 Water Works Drive, 215-236-9000, www.thewaterworksrestaurant.com) may be a bit touristy, but its location behind the Philadelphia Museum of Art is absolutely exquisite. Go for the experience as much as for the food.

Eat Well in the City of Brotherly Love

A world of culinary discovery awaits you in Philadelphia, so take time to sample its diverse palate. Check out a food truck for lunch, sample a classic hoagie, take in the Italian Market, and don’t forget to grab a bottle of wine on your way to one of the city’s charming BYOBs. One thing’s for sure: You’ll become enamored with Philly’s unique, personal culinary style, and you’ll be tempted to return again soon for another gastronomic date for adventure.

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