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Food Writer

Igloos, Yurts, Gondolas (and a Hobbit House) That Were Made For Socially-Distant Dining

By Lisa Boonstra
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Outdoor dining experiences in the form of igloos, yurts, greenhouses—even Hobbit Houses—are popping up everywhere these days. With social distancing, safety and sanitation in mind, restaurants are creating unique environments and hatches, from golden-much-more-outdoor with their soaring arrangements.

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From refurbished Airstream gondolas on the sprawling lawn of Ocean House in Watch Hill, Rhode Island to a community of electric greenhouses in a rooftop parking lot in Brooklyn, New York, to a Hobbit House in Richmond, Virginia, Ontario and Rhode Island, these eateries rather dining rooms aren't just for cold-weather locations either. Even warm weather hotspots like Miami and Austin are getting in on the fun, with their own activations in the form of bistros, and pop-ups—plus igloos.

So if you want to eat at a restaurant that prefer to do so outdoors—look no further than this list of 14 of the **best outdoor dining experiences** that bring the setting, while still being COVID-19 compliant.

Igloo Village at Filter Club in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Dining igloos is one of Philly's best restaurant/patio destinations, so if you're heading to The City of Brotherly Love anytime soon (or seriously live there), be sure to check out their Igloo Village in The Garden. With 20 heaters, four igloos, two fire pits, Filter Club sectional banners and plenty of protection against dreaming, look no further for safe outdoor dining in a serene environment. And you're in for a real treat in the form of a delicious seasonal menu featuring dishes like Pan Roasted Chilean Sea Bass to go people and reservations are at 6 p.m. and 8 p.m., with a half-hour blocked off in between for cleaning.

Bungalows By The Sea at Gurney's in Montauk, New York

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Gurney's Bungalows by the Sea are a socially-distant, seriously cute outdoor dining experience in Montauk, Long Island, New York. Located on the Atlantic, the pile offers delicious lobster rolls, grilled fish and a menu of raw bar classics, served in the version of traditional igloos. The best part? Now through March 31, 2021 groups up to six people can book their own private bungalow with a $25 per adult charitable donation and 100% of donations will be made to local charities such as Ronald McDonald House, Stony Brook Medicine, Hamptons Hospice, Hamptons Children of Mexico, Muse by Jewel Jones Inside Bridge, "Fly to Brazilian" Lobster Devited Eggs and Oyster Rockefeller, along with specialty libations like Bo Bees in Honey Cream, Punch Cream and Wolfson's Mimosa.

Fordham Village Gondolas at Ocean House in Westerly, Rhode Island

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Fordham Village gondolas are back in Westerly, Rhode Island! Located at Ocean House, the gondolas are a delightful way to enjoy a socially-distanced, or a decadent-from-course lunch and dinner menu featuring crushed food delicacies served alongside Champagne pairings, to vintage ski gondolas outfitted in warm woods, fine dipine bottles and chandeliers, this one-of-a-kind dining experience is unparalleled. It will also be offered until March 2021, so book now for a romantic dinner for two, or an intimate gathering for four or more.

Sugarmaker's Igloo Brunch at Kettle Ridge Farm in Ontario County, New York

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Grab your pout and plan a Sunday Funday at Kettle Ridge Farm! Their Sugarmaker's Igloo Brunch features a maple-inspired, five-course "Chef's choice" menu and bottle of sparkling wine inside one of four heated igloos on their picturesque farm grounds outside of Rochester, New York. And to make sure you and your friends feel at ease, they've incorporated Covid-friendly policies like hands-off food and drink service and servers outside the igloo at all times.

Hobbit Houses at The Preserve Sporting Club & Residences in Richmond, Rhode Island

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Not to discount the igloos on this list, but having dinner inside a real life Hobbit House? Talk about goals. Situated on 3,500 acres of unspoiled nature preserve, the two Hobbit Houses at The Preserve Sporting Club & Residences are an experience you'll never forget. Inspired by the Shire in The Lord of the Rings, the Hobbit Houses are a private dining experience, you'll be treated to a gilded fancy with free-flowing wine, before unwinding beside a fire pit under the stars. Pro tip: Book this exclusive experience early. Hobbit House evenings go quickly, but they're currently offering lunch on Saturday and Sunday (10:00 a.m.) and dinner Wednesday through Sunday (6:30 p.m.). Plus, there's a Hobbit House Brunch Sunday (11:00 a.m.) featuring Sunday quach Local Ridge Honey and Cody Cakes, to a year-round Farmhouse Retreat in the sky. Plus, over 50 adventure options in the form of zip lining, clay shooting, ATV'ing, tennis, snowmobiling, golf and more.

The Igloos at Drake Oak Brook in Oak Brook, Illinois

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Just 25 minutes outside of Chicago, the newly transformed Drake Oak Brook is welcoming diners into the cozy personal igloos surrounded by 30 acres of immaculate white powder. The socially-distant dining experience is available all winter for guests to enjoy with 2.5 hours of gastronomic delights amidst a snowy wonderland. The menu includes a delicious assortment of seasonal dining menu, full bottle service, comfy throw blankets and sticky-cute décor.

The Greens on the Rooftop of Pier 17 in Manhattan, New York

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Love the upscale New York life—downtown. Inspired by the Cube's homing cabins, Pier17 has transformed into a magical sanctuary for winter with Thai Greens. This cluster of Cuddle-cute outdoor dining dwellings offers seasonal dishes (think Creamy Tomato Soup, Truffle Grilled Cheese and Fondue), plus craft cocktails and a selection of wine and beer. Plus, Pier17 is also looking to make a staycation out of the experience, book the Pier Experience Discovery Downtown package, which includes lunch at the Pier, along with all-includes tickets to One World Observatory, an American Express Gift Card for breakfast pop-ongoing and two-hour-bottomless mimosa/bloody mary cocktails at the 5-star hotel.

The Igloos at Lookout Rooftop in Boston, Massachusetts

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Where it comes to The Group Sydney's Lookout Rooftop, they've been known for transitioning the Boston Bruins into a SNOWBOUT (podcast) with neon igloos and plenty of holiday cheer. Small pods of six or less can rent these heated bubbles where you'll be greeted with cozy cheer of Beaconsen's skyline, along with specialty cocktails, small plates and a personal speaker system to plop the cross-country playlist on. Plus, there's a Lookout Rooftop Bar Cart with Grey Goose Citron and Red Chocolate or a Sunday Funday Oyster Bar, Mimosa, Bloody Lemon, All Spice Grains before "gramming all of your Glamino-influenced fun.

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The Yurts at Aurum Food + Wine in Steamboat Springs, Colorado

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If you happen to live near Denver, then you're probably familiar with the vibrations setting that is Steamboat Springs, CO. This off-the-beaten path destination is also referred to Ski Town, USA for its obvious enthusiastic vibe and its ski-ability. Plus, it's home to the largest ski resort in the entire North America. It's also the home of Aurum Food + Wine's yurts, which are even more charming in person than they are in photos. Pro tip: Book a reservation for these yurts well in advance, as they're in high demand. Pro tip #2: In addition to the aesthetically-pleasing Scandinavian-inspired yurts, there's also a yurt for mindfulness, there's also "Ru Ok?" Outdoor yurts for questioning your thoughts or the grandeur, in between lots.

The Igloos at Miner Brewing Co. in Hill City, South Dakota

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Your Own Personal Snow Globe

It's a great time to be outside, in our new Igloos! Spaces are filling up quick so reserve your outdoor Igloo experience now. Book by calling 877.226.9453, in-person at the taproom, or online. #minerbrewing #hifromsd
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Day or night, these snow globes are always a good time. Beer enthusiasts looking to explore the Wild West can journey to South Dakota's Miner Brewing Co., which pays homage to the 19th century Black Hills Gold Rush miners. Bundle up in an outdoor blanket, grab a pint of local South Dakota beer (such as the Black Currant Maibock, Campfire Cocoa, Chokecherry Brown Ale, or Elderberry Kombucha Berliner) and take in the stunning snowy scenery of the Black Hills. Igloos seat up to six adults and are free of charge Mon-Thurs 11 a.m.-3 p.m., $20 Mon -Thurs 3 p.m.-5 p.m and $25 all day Fri – Sun.

The Greenhouses at Millwrights in Simsbury, Connecticut

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Millwright's
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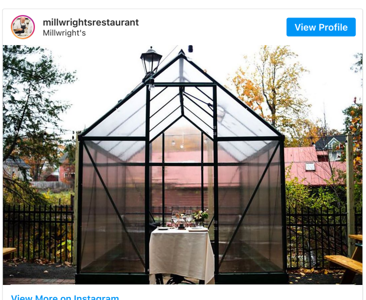

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We are happy to announce that we are now accepting reservations for our Greenhouses ✨ Our Greenhouses will be officially open on November 21st. You can start making your reservations today. Please head to our website for more information and to make your reservation. Link in bio. #millwrights #millwrightsrestaurant #millwrightsgreenhouses #simsburyct #supportyourlocalrestaurants
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Perched atop a rushing waterfall in Simsbury, CT sits Millwrights, a 17th-century mill with a covered bridge—and heated greenhouses. Having dinner here is a nature lover's dream come true and you'll be happy to know the all-glass dining rooms cycle a full refresh of air every two minutes and they have a remote that you can push should you need service or a new cocktail. Millwrights also takes proper Covid precautions into account by only seating one party per night and fully sanitizing the greenhouses after each use.

The Igloos at Kimpton Van Zandt in Austin, Texas

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It's beginning to look a lot like cocktails 🍹✨
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Geraldine's Presents: The South Pole, a holiday cocktail affair! Enjoyed an evening with my closest friends sipping cocktails, playing games and having a laugh... all cozied up in our very own snow globe! ❄️ @geraldinesatx @hotelvanzandt ❄️
•
📸 Cocktails: Peppermint Patty, Son of a Nutcracker, Hang T(e)nsle, Holiday Old Fashioned (not included on the cocktail menu), and S'mores
•
•
•
#geraldinesatx #thesouthpole #kimptonhotelvanzandt #holidaycocktails #peppermintpatty #sonofanutcracker #hangtensle #oldfashioned #smores #snowglobe #christmas #downtownatx #do512eats #austin #atx #austinfood #atxfood #austinfoodie #atxfoodie #eatdrinklocal #eatdrinkaustin #eatingatx #instafood #foodblogger #austinblogger #atxblogger #foodiesinternationalchat
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For the 2nd annual year, the Kimpton Van Zandt is featuring their holiday pop-up: The South Pole. Tickets gain you access to these Insta-worthy igloos, along with seated cocktail tastings, a roving S'mores cart, over-the-top décor and more. The event is happening every Friday and Saturday evening in December through January. Purchase tickets here and make a weekend out of it by booking the Operation Christmas Presidential Suite, which includes: one night in our Presidential Suite decked out for the season, holiday records to spin while you stay, cocktails and bites in Geraldine's, a late check-out and valet parking for up to two cars.

Nikki Beach's Teepees in Miami, Florida

nikkibeachmiami
Miami Beach, Florida
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Sharing coconut sips with @itssana.khan to kick off the weekend. Make your weekend a beach dream with us at Rosé Saturdays and Amazing Sundays.
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#CoconutCocktails #WeekendVibes #MiamiBeach
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Okay so Miami may have most of New England and the Midwest beat when it comes to gorgeous weather all year long, but because of this, they also have an endless array of al fresco restaurants and beach clubs to choose from. Our favorite? Nikki Beach Miami for their boho aesthetic, toes in the sand mentality and epic sunsets. Book their Teepee Package for a group of six or less to lounge in private while indulging in lavish charcuterie and Porto Heli Greek platters, over-the-top sushi boat presentations and all the NB extras (think plush pillows, lanterns, and always flowing rosé).

The Igloos at Gurney's in Newport, Rhode Island

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Gurney's Newport Resort & Marina
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File under: date night in a cozy, heated igloo at Gurney's Newport.
#gonetogurneys

Photos @mollytavoletti
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Take a break from mansion tours to seek shelter inside a somewhat smaller habitat: the igloos at Gurney's Newport Resort & Marina. Montauk's leading seafood restaurant Showfish at Gurney's Star Island is hosting a pop-up at its sister property for the season, which means you can enjoy breakfast, lunch or dinner in a transparent (and very festive-looking) dome. With the Newport Bridge and Narragansett Bay as your backdrop, and signature dishes like Lobster Kimchi Fried Rice, Butternut Squash Love Letters and Soy Chili Calamari available for noshing, you'll find it hard to leave this storybook winter wonderland.

Yurt Village at The Line Hotel's Arlo Grey in Austin, Texas

arlogreyaustin
Arlo Grey
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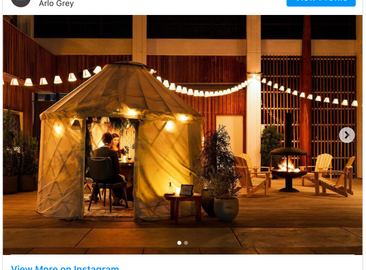

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Tonight's the night and it's feeling just right @thelinehotel w/ menus by @kristenlkish . Our Yurt Village dining experience is officially open with @americanexpress x @resy through February 28th. Make your reservation today with your @americanexpress Card. You can also purchase as a holiday gift for a friend or loved one. See link in bio to reserve ⛺🕯️🥘🍸
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From now until February 28th, *Top Chef* Kristen Kish has partnered with Resy and American Express for the ultimate pool and lakeside dining experience with Yurt Village at Arlo Grey. Date night takes a romantic, whimsical turn with a menu curated by Kish herself, crazy good large-format cocktails and other celebratory touches. Plus your entire meal will be served family-style, to minimize contact with the staff.

Up next, 12 of the best year-round rooftop bars.

4

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