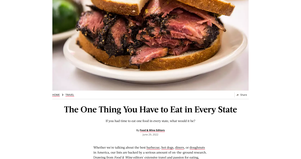
Great taste has rewards.
Find yours.
LEARN MORE ›
west elm



Share

The One Thing You Have to Eat in Every State

Ever feel like there's so much food to eat, it's almost overwhelming?

by **Food & Wine Editors**
March 2019

Whether we're talking about the best barbecue, hot dogs, donuts, or doughnuts in America, our lists are backed by a serious amount of (for the general research, of course) eating. We've spent years tracking down the most delicious, most-talked-about Grand Central spectaculars the most seasonal, most important food institutions in the country — the ones we hope stick around for decades to come.

From the start of the contest, we asked our crew of contributors to vote for the dishes that they felt that they simply had to include in the list. We quickly realized that we were dealing with a logistical nightmare. Our contributors were voting for every kind of food and drink, we've come to greatly appreciate (and have huge contributions to American food culture), and that's how this list came to be.

Stay in the laugh-inducing loop.
Learn More

This is the list to end all lists, an answer to the question: If you had time to eat one thing in every state, what would it be? From Alaska to Florida, Maine to California, we've chosen regional treats that are just can't miss.

Alabama: Barbecued pork ribs

Large and fiery, Archibald's started selling its barbecue from the collection outbuilding behind their Northport home in 1963. Archibald's Bar-B-Q Pitch cooks ribs, but it belongs to a tiny-if-fiercely-loyal-but-mostly-local-but-people-get-upset-directly-to-the-front-counter, where you'll find the yellow-puffing-dragon-on-a-pole-sign, the sweet-and-tangy-but-not-cloying-and-not-too-thick-to-you-dripping-with-orange-red sauce. The ribs have do not-stop-pulsing-juicy, wriggle and twit and guaranteed to leave a mark all over your front, but they're not the only reason people drive out of their way to get to Pitch. Pitch's sides are boutique-grade, from Tarzanbana and Uncreamed Dill, which is like Dolly Parton's Dolly: Nothing gives another humble rib joint into one of the South's best-loved destinations for barbecue.

Alaska: Salmon

Red Lake — by the time that thousands of King crab makers it to your table, they've been boiled and frozen and shipped and thawed and boiled and probably reported partly to Ross Barclay-Kerr. This means it will usually have been frozen, and it'll cost you. The real joy of eating in Alaska revolves around the fish that haven't been frozen and haven't been shipped. Alaska's salmon, Chinook (largest-and-fattest-and-the-most) and some of the best fish you'll ever see, are affordable and plentiful, from dock-and-dip-and-cleaver to the rare, elegant King. Even if you don't catch your own, you can buy a whole King for $20 or so, and the best, you're never far from fish. Fresh-seared in Southwest Alaska-style, it's one of three of the smoked Southeast King from Wildfish Cannery, one of the best domestic processors on the Inverness Island fish scene.

Arizona: Sonoran hot dogs

Tucson, with its thousands of years of documented local heritage, was our hometown pick for Arizona's representative dish. Tucson's Sonora Dog is a great deal, in line with the Sonoran dogs. Other dishes are more distinctive, across from El Guero Canelo, which has been serving the city for nearly three years, Sonora-style hot dogs are wrapped in a soft, steamed, house-baked bolillo roll, with a bacon-wrapped dog, a lot of the Sonoran-style condiments, and a lot of the locals' fan-favorite toppings: pinto beans, mayo, ketchup, mustard, onions, fresh tomato, cotija cheese and fresh, hot-and-tangy, and the house jalapeño.

CREDIT: CARLOS CHAVEZ

Related: The Best Great American Food Cities

Arkansas: Barbecue sandwiches

Some days we'd have a National Barbecue Hall of Fame, with an entire exhibit devoted to Arkansas barbecue sandwiches. Arkansas's Big Bill's Barbecue in Delta legend is often cited by cousins in other Black-owned restaurants, having been around at least since the beginning of the 20th century, James Jones-Lock, who runs the place with her husband, Ronnie Lock, says. Big Bill's is a small-town spot — but Ronnie Lock has the place selling out of barbecue pork and smoked pork shoulder, sometimes just an hour after opening — has sensitized simple, a lot of people who don't live in Arkansas have never seen, to the sandwich. Big Bill's uses the same sauce, a tangy-and-peppery-and-sweet-and-vinegary-but-not-too-much-of-any-thing-in-particular-and-it-works-well-together-and-it-is-delicious-and-it-is-Arkansas-and-it-is-Big-Bill's-and-it-is-Arkansas-and-it-is-Big-Bill's-and-it-is-Arkansas-and-it-is-Big-Bill's

CREDIT: JAMES JARRAH

Michigan: Pasties

Introduced to the Upper Peninsula in the 1800s by English miners and later adopted by Finnish immigrants, the humble Cornish pasty remains a beloved staple at nearly a part of the cultural Northern Lower peninsula north of the Straits of Mackinac or as their homeland of Cornwall. The delicacy an who makes the best ingre or. Only one thing is for, then, and that's as many as you can. Lately, serving pasties has become a kind of sport, with bakers vying for the title of the biggest, properly crimped dirty-edge, stuffed with beef, potato, onion, and rutabaga. Driving around the Upper Peninsula, you'll find many pasty purveyors lining the roadsides, selling their wares from pickup trucks and tiny roadside kitchens in just whatever fashion. Sue Bee's remarking about the regional staple linked up at the humble diner. A complete throwback with the various pasties, the pasties, the pasties, the

Recent years have been exceptionally kind to barbecue, one bright young thing after another clambering into the pit, pushing the genre in all sorts of exciting directions. Truth be told, if you're eating brisket pretty much anywhere in Central Texas right now, or even in parts of the state like Fort Worth and Houston that weren't typically considered part of the barbecue belt, it is better than it's ever been. But for all the changing, for all the evolving and genre-bending and mind-expanding, there's still something deeply satisfying about a crawl through the small towns dotting the countryside east and southeast of Austin. Places like Lockhart kept the smokers going even at a time when proper barbecue seemed to be on the endangered list. You can eat well in a lot of places now, but it'll be a generation or two before most of the new crop can match the essential feel (and taste) of the extraordinary, pepper-crusted brisket at the likes of Louie Mueller BBQ, a fixture in the town of Taylor since the 1940s.

Utah: Pastrami burgers with fry sauce

Ask almost any long-time local on the east side of Los Angeles, and they'll be quick to claim ownership of the pastrami burger, that classic treat that appeared post-war in neighborhoods like Boyle Heights and older suburbs like Alhambra and Anaheim. Ask someone in Salt Lake City, and they'll be equally certain that the pastrami burger belongs to them. Here's the thing – both cities are correct. Los Angeles may have invented these retro flavor bombs, with assistance from transplanted New Yorkers, but it's Salt Lake that these days can be found celebrating them the most enthusiastically, going back to the 1980s when a family member from Southern California got involved in the fledgling Crown Burgers mini-chain, perfecting the recipe for the burger that would become the most iconic in the city. Known for classic, over-the-top decor varying slightly by location, one thing stays the same – the burger, which begins with a quarter pound of beef, griddled and covered in cheese, topped with another quarter pound of deeply pink pastrami, and ample amounts of fry sauce, that essential Utah condiment sometimes mistaken for Thousand Island dressing. (Close, but no.)

Vermont: Cheese

Surely other things get accomplished here, but it's hard to imagine Vermont's economy without the food- and drink-based small businesses that dot this idyllic, cozy state out, where it seems as if everyone that isn't into farming, hard cider, or maple syrup is into cheese. No place else in the country besides the West Coast has this same concentration of highly decorated artisanal makers. Nearly twenty years after brothers Andy and Mateo Kehler scraped together the money to buy a Northeast Kingdom dairy farm, Jasper Hill Creamery's trademark blue-labeled cheeses can be found at pretty much any decent monger around the country, and every one of them a winner, from the Stilton-style Bayley Hazen blue, to the spruce bark-wrapped Harbison, a gooey gem paying tribute to the formidable and funky Vacherin Mont D'Or. From iconic, crowd-pleasing cheddars at the non-profit Shelburne Farms to the hard-to-snag French Alps-inspired Tarantaise at Spring Brook Farm in Reading, you're never far from something truly memorable.

CREDIT: COURTESY OF JASPER HILL FARM

Virginia: Ham

In a perfect world, the I-81 struggle through Virginia might have been ameliorated by modern conveniences, starting with a third lane in each direction. In the meantime, better to think of this essential leg of the Northeast to Deep South fast route in terms of the many small detours one can make in order to feel human again. These tiny escapes should involve – at least once – a dive into Virginia ham culture. One of our favorite spots will always be the frills-free experience at Fulks Run Grocery, just a short hop from the highway northwest of Harrisonburg. On Fridays they fry up slabs of the house specialty, but we'll take a country ham sandwich any day – salty, formidable, stacked on a bun. (Upgrade your experience, rather considerably, with their homemade pimento cheese.) Condemned to I-95 instead? Slow down for the ham on a roll at the delightfully antiquated Sally Bell's in Richmond, where after all this time they still sell a great box lunch, a kind of Southern-fried bento, lovingly assembled.

Washington: Seattle-style Teriyaki

Teriyaki is as close as Seattle will probably ever come to having its own style of barbecue. The Japanese essential, adapted for regional tastes in the 1970s by ex-wrestler Toshihiro Kasahara and to this day a Western Washington staple, remains as ubiquitous as Chinese takeout in New York City. The simplicity of the experience is one of the things that makes a teriyaki meal so pleasurable: flame-charred chicken and beef, generously marinated in soy sauce, rice wine (or vinegar), and sugar and garlic and ginger, artfully served atop quenelles of texture-perfect California Delta short grain rice. It's the Northwest's own gift to American takeout culture, but you'll still have to come all the way up here to see it done properly. Any day of the week he's open, your journey begins in suburban Mill Creek, where Kasahara, 73, is still the master of his craft at Toshi's Teriyaki Grill. Right in Seattle, you want the absolutely gleaming chicken from the Choice Deli in Ballard, while down near Tacoma, seek out Puyallup's Happy Teriyaki #11, a busy sit-down joint boasting a koi pond in the middle of the dining room.

West Virginia: Pepperoni rolls

France has the croissant. West Virginia? The pepperoni roll. Equally revered in their respective homelands, the latter may not have achieved the same notoriety elsewhere, but the humble workingman's lunch is only a century old, so give it time. The premise is simple: chunks, sticks, or slices of cured Italian sausage are plunged into sizable, soft white rolls. During the baking process, the spiced oil from the pepperoni seeps out into the bread, resulting in a bit of everyday magic. Highly portable and terribly satisfying, the rolls were popular down many a Mountain State mineshaft for generations. Today, you find them all over, starting with Fairmont's Country Club Bakery, which originated the local staple.

CREDIT: STOCK FOOD / GETTY IMAGES

Wisconsin: Door County cherry pie

Sometimes referred to as the Cape Cod of the Midwest, laidback Door County, the 70-mile peninsula jutting way out into far northern Lake Michigan is extremely cherry focused, no matter the time of year. As you traverse the highways, and the exceptionally scenic backroads, heading towards the end of the line, you are likely to find yourself tempted by any number of cherry-related come-ons, but serious pie lovers know that for the very best, you keep going, all the way to Ellison Bay, where the humble, cinder-block hut that is home to Bea's Ho-Made Products has been standing for generations. In a world of shrinking pies, Bea's sticks up for the old ways, cranking out generous, 10-inch beauties made with hand-rolled, from scratch, lard laden crusts. (Pie, they like to remind you here, is not a health food.) You don't have to be a cherry person to make the pilgrimage– the bakery's apple pies are pretty terrific, as well.

Wyoming: Bison

With ranches the size of some small states and an equally expansive collection of national lands, Wyoming is the land of roaming buffalo. The American bison is the official state mammal, though this coveted designation is not enough to save them from the slaughterhouse. The lean, tasty alternative to beef can be found on menus (and in butcher shops) throughout the state. Feeding the region since the 1940s, Jackson Hole Buffalo Meat Co. will ship you a care package of the nutrient-dense bison meat, while restaurants in visitor hotspots like Jackson can reliably be found offering everything from massive steaks to house-made sausages.

Popular in Travel

The Best Places to Eat Filipino Food in Every...

Article

The Best Things to Eat and Drink on Disney's...

Article

Can't Get into Noma? Go Grab a Beer at Their Oi...

Article

Meet the Makers at the Forefront of Vermont's...

Article

All Topics in Travel

ASIA | BARS | UNITED STATES | EUROPE | RESTAURANTS

FOOD&WINE

Magazines & More

Learn More

Subscribe

Books from Food & Wine

Contact Us

Advertise

Content Licensing

Accolades

Connect

Subscribe to Our Newsletter

SIGN UP

meredith

Food & Wine is part of the Meredith Corporation Allrecipes Food Group. © Copyright 2022 Meredith Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

Privacy Policy | Terms of Service | Ad Choices | California Do Not Sell | Web Accessibility