

DINING, ENTERTAINMENT & NIGHTLIFE

POPULAR CUISINE

Tex-Mex has only been a household word in Texas since the mid-1900s, but this cuisine took shape many years ago as Anglo settlers and Texas ranchers attempted to recreate northern Mexican cuisine with their ingredients of choice. Dishes are heavy on the starch but provide pure bliss with a heavy mix of shredded cheeses, meat (vegetarian options too), beans, peppers, spices, and flour tortillas. Austin has no shortage of Tex-Mex restaurants, and a crowd favorite dish is [queso](#); melted cheese, seasoned and served warm as a dip for tortilla chips. Read about these iconic spots here: www.austintexas.org/austin-insider-blog/post/iconic-austin-tex-mex/

Traditionally, Texas **barbecue** (BBQ) involves slow cooking various meats for extended periods of time. Here in central Texas, the typical style of preparation is to rub the preferred meat with spices, then cook over indirect heat from pecan or oak wood in a pit. Annual competitions determine the top barbeque here in Texas, and many award-winning pit masters can be found right here in Austin. In fact, in 2015 Aaron Franklin of [Franklin Barbecue](#) broke ground as the first ever pit master awarded a James Beard Award. At many of these restaurants, visitors will experience laid back, cafeteria-style vibes and should can expect to get a little messy. Locals seem to know what's best, check out their favorites here: www.austintexas.org/austin-insider-blog/post/13-great-places-to-eat-bbq-in-austin/

Explore Austin's vibrant **mobile food vendor scene (food trucks)** – an inexpensive, popular way to dine with locals. Many food trucks and trailers have stationary locations around the city but be sure to check each truck's calendar for special pop-up dates and places. All over town, chefs are eschewing brick-and-mortar establishments and instead serving inexpensive, unpretentious cuisine whipped up in the back of refurbished Airstreams and concession trailers. The trend is so hot that officials estimate more than 1,000 mobile food vendors are in Austin. For more info, check out: www.austintexas.org/visit/food-and-drink/food-trucks/

CHEFS TO WATCH & RECOGNITIONS

James Beard Award finalists for 2017 include:

- Bryce Gilmore ([Barley Swine](#)) for Best Chef: Southwest
- Laura Sawicki ([Launderette](#)) semifinalist for Best Pastry Chef

James Beard Award finalists for 2016 include:

- [Launderette](#) nominated for Best New Restaurant
- Bryce Gilmore of [Odd Duck](#) and [Barley Swine](#) for Best Chef Southwest
- Grae Nonas of [Olamaie](#) for Rising Star of the Year

- Eater names [Kemuri Tatsu-ya](#) as one of the [12 Best New Restaurants in America](#) (July 2017).
- Kevin Fink of [Emmer & Rye](#) is named one of the [Best New Chefs](#) of 2016 by Food & Wine magazine (April 2016).
- [Uchi](#) places on Conde Nast Traveler's list of the [World's Best Restaurants](#) (September 2016).
- [Franklin Barbecue](#) charts at #8 on Yelp's list of the [Top 100 Places to Eat in US for 2016](#). [Uchi](#) and [Uchiko](#) place #59 and 97.
- Aaron Franklin ([Franklin Barbecue](#)) is awarded a James Beard Award in the category of Best Chef: Southwest in May 2015.

FOOD TOURS

For a fun and unique dining experience, check out a food tour from one of Austin's many local [tour companies](#), such as [Austin Eats Food Tours](#) or [Rocket Electrics Austin Food Tours](#). Both companies showcase the best of Austin's culinary scene and are guided by knowledgeable foodies.

FOOD RESOURCES

The city is home to a variety of other excellent dining guide resources, such as below:

- [Austin Monthly's 2017 Best New Restaurants](#)
- [Austin American-Statesman's 2017 Best Restaurants in Austin](#)
- [Austin Chronicle's First Plate 2017](#)
- [Do512's Best Food Trucks in Austin](#)
- [Eater Austin](#)
- [Austin Food Blogger Alliance](#)

ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICTS

Across Austin there many neighborhoods and entertainment districts, each with their own unique character and filled with many things to do, eat and drink. Check out these [videos](#) to experience a few.

South Congress (SoCo) District

Just south of Lady Bird Lake, "SoCo" is a vibrant and walkable Austin neighborhood packed with eclectic boutiques, murals, eateries and music venues. Pick up a pair of boots at Allens, or discover something new at Parts & Labour.

6th Street District

Stroll down Austin's most famous street for nightlife on Sixth Street for more than a dozen blocks of restaurants, bars and live music venues including Maggie Mae's, Parish, Midnight Cowboy and Shakespeare's Pub.

West Sixth Street Entertainment District

Head west on Sixth Street from Lavaca to Lamar to shop and dine at Austin's most iconic home-grown retailers, eateries and dives including the flagship Whole Foods Market, Waterloo Records, Ranch 616, Dirty Bill's, BookPeople and more.

Red River Cultural District

From big-name acts to local icons, Red River Street rocks with the sounds of the Live Music Capital of the World®. Stroll from venue to venue to tune into a diverse showcase of sounds. Dance the night away at Empire Control Room, dive into the local scene at the Sidewinder, see your favorite touring band at Mohawk or party it up at Cheer Up Charlies.

Rainey Street Historic District

Rainey Street has a laid-back vibe and is home to a row of converted bungalows that provide an only-in-Austin live music and bar experience. Roam the district to find local craft beers at Craft Pride, top shelf cocktails at Half Step, award-winning cuisine at Emmer & Rye, artisan sausages at Banger's and food trucks of every flavor.

Warehouse District

The industrial Warehouse District rests in the heart of downtown Austin. Sip on craft cocktails at upscale bars such as Peché and Garage, dance the night away on Rainbow Row at Oilcan Harry's or Rain, and relax with some local music at Cedar Street Courtyard or Speakeasy.

2nd Street District

Keep things local at some of Austin's newest retail shops and boutiques in the 2nd Street District. Upscale coffee-houses, wine bars and restaurants rest between favorites including Violet Crown Cinema, Eliza Page and the first brick-and-mortar ModCloth.

South Austin

South Austin is a fresh taste of old [Waterloo](#). A mix of quaint and contemporary houses, long-running vintage shops and eateries by some of the city's top up-and-comers populate this lively nook of town. Visit expansive Zilker Park, stop by the Long Center or ZACH Theatre for a performance or explore everything from coffee shops to art galleries on South First Street.

East Austin

Head to East Austin to experience one of the fastest-growing and most alternative areas in town. Roam East Sixth Street for quirky bars and graffiti-style murals, taste some of the biggest flavors in town on East Cesar Chavez and don't miss [Six Square](#), the city's African American Cultural District, for a tour of the city's most historic cultural attractions.

Central Austin

Just ten minutes north of downtown, near the sprawling University of Texas at Austin campus, Central Austin is quickly becoming home to some of Austin's best local eateries and shops. Cafes and vintage thrift stores rest comfortably between quaint neighborhood homes and bars along the North Loop and Burnet Roads.