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St. Louis Restaurant Guide: 2026

This version of our Guide is our first since Covid-19. Rather than provide a comprehensive rating of restaurants, it focuses on a subset of restaurants that meet the following criterion: we would especially miss this restaurant if we were to move away from St. Louis. This is not, in particular, a list of the "best" St. Louis restaurants. One facet of this is that we list some restaurants even if we have to navigate the menu in order to get a meal that we really like.

Here are some other sources for restaurant information.

- Feast Magazine.
- Sauce magazine.
- St. Louis Magazine.
- St. Louis Post Dispatch

The reviewer for the Post Dispatch, Ian Froeb, maintains a list of the100 Best St. Louis Restaurants (behind a paywall, unfortunately). We don't agree with him on everything, but our tastes tend to be similar to his and we find him especially helpful for discovering restaurants such as Afandi Kitchen (below).

And of course there's Yelp and so forth. Our restaurant listings below provide links to Yelp listings.

NOTE: Our geographic orientation is "relative to Washington University." So a "40 minute drive" means a 40 minute drive from Washington University.

Dinner

- Afandi Kitchen. Uyghur. Favorites are the laghman noodles (we usually default to the brown sauce laghman), the leek dumplings, the stir fried naan with lamb slices (a huge dish, on the salty side), and the ox tail soup.
- Mai Lee. Vietnamese. They opened when we first moved to St. Louis and now they are a St. Louis institution? Get the Banh Xeo (sort of a savory crepe) and the Banh Hoi Bo Nuong (assemble your own grilled cubes of beef plus veggies and sauce wrapped in rice paper).
- Balkan Treat Box. Chef and co-owner Loryn Nalic is the 2026 winner of the James Beard award for Best Chef Midwest. Get the beef pide. We also like the cevapi, even though they tend to roll out of the bread. Also check out Telva at the Ridge, by the same owners.
- Carl's Drive In. Smash burgers and other items. A time machine. Tiny, with two counters facing a central cooking area. Know what you want on your burger before you order: Ketchup? Mayo? Pickles? Lettuce? It's on you to get the toppings that you want. The burgers are on the small side (which we prefer); you may need to order two. Root beer comes in frosted mugs.

- Corner 17. Chinese. What sets this apart, for John, are the Sichuan wings. The wings are flats, mostly chopped in two, with occasional gristle and bone shards. One of John's favorite dishes anywhere.
- Ed's Delicatessen. A 40 minute trip. Worth it. Our favorite versions anywhere of many classic sandwiches. They are happy to split orders, which means we have room for dessert. The deconstructed carrot cake is one good option.
- Menya Rui. Japanese. Dinner only. Eclectic, hip, cramped. Ramen, karaage, and … that's about it. Line up before they open.
- Noto. Italian. You'll need a reservation. Everything we've had is good, but we always order the Margherita pizza, which is classic Neapolitan. We've known Noto since it was a food truck. If Noto were closer (it's a 30 minute trip) and an easier reservation (it's one of the toughest reservations in the area), we'd eat there almost every week. Instead, it's more like birthdays or out-of-town guests, if we like them enough.
- Pappy's Smokehouse. BBQ. Our personal choice for pork ribs. There are a number of other quality BBQ places in the area. Two that we'll note. Bogart's Smoke House has burnt ends if you're lucky and meaty baked beans. SugarFire Smoke House has a nothing succeeds like excess menu and our favorite brisket (although we tend to find brisket variable everywhere we've been, including here). We've not found any place in St. Louis for good BBQ beef ribs, alas.
- Parker's Table. Sandwiches from Salume Beddu and some salads. Also a speciality grocer. This is Suzanne's connection for Chinotto.
- Pizzeria da Gloria. Pizza. You'll probably need a reservation. They use a Neapolitan oven but it's not a classic Neapolitan pizza. What puts da Gloria on our list is that on Fridays during Lent, and only on Fridays and only during Lent, they offer a clam pizza. We feel disloyal for saying this, but we like the da Gloria clam pizza better than the New Haven originals. The agrodolce in the Brussels sprouts (a side order) is good for mopping up with the pizza crust.
- Robin. Casual fine dining. One of the NYT best 50 restaurants for 2025. We haven't always seen eye to eye with the NYT lists, but we agree with this choice. Also a 2026 finalist for James Beard best new restaurant. Especially good with trout. Menu is four courses with two choices per course. Root Food + Wine is a similar restaurant, in a cute old home, but a bit of a drive.
- Tiger Soup Dumplings. (Two locations). Xiao long bao and a few other items (like spicy wontons, cucumber salad). Get the pan-fried pork xiao long bao.

Other

- Ted Drewes. Frozen custard. How could this not be on the list? Almost synonymous with St. Louis eating, even though originally from Florida. If you want small, order "micro."

We hope to update this list regularly if we find some place we want to add (or delete).

John Nachbar
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