

SPRING 2023

# RELISH

CITYVIEW'S GUIDE TO ALL THINGS DINING



## THE DISH

Food in the year of COVID 4.0

## IOWA'S OFFICIAL STATE FOODS?

We have nothing, officially. Why not?

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# RELISH

CITYVIEW'S GUIDE TO ALL THINGS DINING

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# Where are Iowa's official state foods?

We have nothing, officially. Why not?

**By Jim Duncan**

Most states have official state foods. Some have many. Alabama's got six — a state nut (pecan), fruit (blackberry), tree fruit (peach), dessert (Lane cake), legume (peanut) and vegetable (sweet potato). Oklahoma has an entire official state meal that includes 12 courses. That state's official state vegetable is actually some fruit — watermelon. Texas, of course, has 12 different foods that are official something or other. South Dakota has an official state “nosh,” the chislic, which is a skewer of meat, and an official dessert, kuchen, which is a dough pie filled with custard and fruit and topped with streusel. New Mexico's “official

state question” is “red or green?” which pertains to salsa on enchiladas.

All such designations yield dividends to the states that have them, mainly in tourism and marketing. In Iowa, we have nothing, officially. Why not? We are probably the state most associated with foods. Unofficially, we are the corn state, the pork state, the turkey state, the egg state and the soybean state. People travel from all over the world to forage for our morel mushrooms in spring and our ceps in autumn. They come to hunt our deer, pheasants, wild turkeys and even doves. There are bacon tours of the state, and we have even held bacon festivals that sold

out the Iowa Events Center. In August and September, Iowa's tomatoes are the envy of gourmets from coast to coast. We grow walnuts in all 99 counties. We are the nation's leader in humanely raised pig farming. We have as rich a history of immigration as any state, making our cuisine as catholic as anyone's.

RELISH proposes legislative consideration for one obvious official Iowa food category — the sandwich. Each of these possibilities are overly qualified for the job. All represent Iowa historically, agriculturally, culturally and in ways that the rest of America considers positively.



## Breaded pork tenderloin

Indiana has challenged Iowa for the right to call themselves the birthplace of the breaded pork tenderloin (BPT). They can show a menu that offers one by name earlier than any from Iowa. However, Cedar Rapids' large Czech and Slovak population predates any Hoosier menu listing by decades. Bohemians were working in Cedar Rapids by 1850. Since wiener schnitzel was a popular Bohemian dish, it is likely that immigrants to Linn County tried to duplicate it. Because veal was rare and expensive, it is likely they substituted pork, which was plentiful and relatively inexpensive.

Many of the Czechs who settled in Cedar Rapids worked in the Sinclair meatpacking plant. Owner T.M. Sinclair, an Irish immigrant himself, recruited them. According to Sherri Dagle House in "A Czech Community," it is "likely, letters written home by Sinclair employees accounted for the migration of thousands of other Czechs to Cedar Rapids." Schweinefleisch schnitzel likely was eaten as a sandwich by blue-collar workers in Iowa. By the late 19th century, that became the American way.

The BPT is the werewolf of sandwiches, a porcine shapeshifter. The pork is rarely tenderloin. Only B&B Grocery, Meat & Deli in Des Moines claims to actually use real tenderloin in their BPT. Usually, the meat is the much larger loin, or pork steak, or shoulder.

It is pounded for tenderization but to wildly various degrees. Because real tenderloin is tender in its own right, it needs little or no pounding. The tougher the meat, the more it is pounded and the thinner it becomes. Versions like those at Smitty's in Des Moines and Newton's in Waterloo are twice the size of their buns.

What else goes on the sandwich is up to the imagination. Some think lettuce and mayo. Others insist on banana peppers. Ketchup is considered necessary by some and anathema by others. Mustard, pickles and hot sauce are popular additions. Shredded cabbage and even shredded winter radish are almost essential accompaniments in Japanese restaurants, where BPTs are known as tonkatsu. Chinese places offer hot chili oil and soy sauce.



## Loose meat sandwich

Loose meat sandwiches have fewer forms but far more names. In Sioux City and Le Mars, they are known as "Charlie Boys" or "Tastees." In Cedar Rapids, they are called "Loosies." In Ottumwa, they are "Canteens." In Bondurant, they are called "Butlers." Maid-Rite was founded in Muscatine and spread all over the state. Paula's in West Des Moines calls their version "Made Right." Ross' Restaurant in Bettendorf calls them "Rossburgers." They are not called "Sloppy Joes." That is something else.

Hamburger meat is seasoned and cooked by steaming/simmering while it is being broken down. Sometimes fat is drained, sometimes not. Sometimes onions are added to the cooking, sometimes not. The sandwich can be ordered "wet," "dry" or regular in many places. "Wet" means the bun is soaked in fat and moisture run off. Sandwiches are served with a choice of mustard, raw onions, pickles and sometimes ketchup and hot sauce. They are usually served with a spoon because a bun cannot contain all the goodness.

They inspire road trips to Sioux City, where they were first served free at Happy Hour at Miles Inn, where the name "Charlie Boy" originated. Also in Sioux City, they are served at Taste Inn & Out with legendary onion chips, which are fried like onion rings but cut differently.

Others take loose meat road trips to Bondurant's Brick Street Market & Café, Marshalltown's Taylor's, Newton's Dan's, Le Mars' Bob's, Ottumwa's Canteen Lunch in the Alley, Cedar Rapids' Loosies, and Valley Junction's Paula's. Loosies and Paula's both also offer homemade pie selections, another disappearing Iowa icon.

Several of these places feature nostalgic horseshoe-shaped counter dining. These were part of all Maid-Rites in kinder, gentler times. They allow everyone to face everyone else and facilitate conversations. That was a very Iowa thing, a version of the democratic idea that we are all in this together.





## Taco

If Great Britain can proclaim chicken tikka masala as its national dish, then Iowa is a taco state. Mexican restaurants have led the state's new restaurant openings for a decade and have a much higher rate of success than other genre. Tacos have been a big deal in Des Moines since the 1960s. Tasty Taco makes a deep-fried flour tortilla version that wins awards. Its mother store is just a couple blocks from the State Capitol, too.

The main taco debates are flour or corn, and hard or soft (tortillas)? Then comes the main fillings: pastor, carnitas, chorizo from the pig; burger, cheeks, tongue, asada, tripe, birria or barbacoa from the cow or lamb; cactus or squash blossoms for vegetarians; white or dark meat chicken. Garnishes can be lettuce and cheese for American style, or radish, cilantro, lime and onions for Mexican style. Salsas are offered in three colors and as many as five styles, some very hot.

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## Bacon, lettuce and tomato

The BLT sandwich is our seasonal nominee. Sure, they can be served all year, but many assert that they reach almighty gloriousness in Iowa in August and September. That is homegrown tomato season, and the same rich, black topsoil that makes Iowa the king of corn and soybeans, produces the best tomatoes on Earth.

Tomato gurus like Larry Cleverley in Mingo and Bob Braverman in Johnson County grew an Iowa market for heirloom tomatoes that Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah had preserved from extinction. There is an incredible romance in ordering a BLT with a specific tomato. Listen to the seductive music of their names: Cherokee Purple, Green Zebra, Brandywine, Big Rainbow, Yellow Ox Heart.

In Iowa, bacon choices are even more diverse than tomatoes. State Historical Museum Curator Leo Landis, nicknamed Professor of Bacon, says he has visited 70 different Hawkeye state lockers in search of his personal favorite bacon. There are still several on his list. He says Iowa is blessed with so many bacon makers in large part because of our abundant deer population.

“A lot of those lockers survive off deer hunting season.”

BLT lovers aren’t as liberal as those of other sandwiches. Besides the big three essentials plus bread, they mostly just add mayonnaise or sometimes vinegar and oil dressing. Bread choices are marvelously improved from 30 years ago, particularly in Des Moines where La Mie’s French delights compete with South Union’s Italian wonders.

## Hot beef sandwich

The nation was led by a President and First Lady from Iowa during parts of the Great Depression. Herbert and Lou Hoover promoted dishes that stretched the budget with cheap additives. Corned beef and roast beef hash, chicken and noodles and hot beef sandwiches (HBS) were targeted because potatoes and flour were cheaper than meat. All those dishes are now often relegated to the nostalgia shelf.



The HBS is most comfortable these days in old-fashioned restaurants like Morg’s in Waterloo, Tommy’s in Davenport, Dottie’s Café in Dubuque, Crouse Café in Indianola, The Depot in Shenandoah, Robin’s Nest Café in Clarinda, Fort Colony in Fort Madison, Cook’s Café in Sheldon, Lakeshore Café in Storm Lake, Family Table in Spencer, Sioux County Livestock Co. in Sioux Center, Cook’s Café in Mason City, plus Drake Diner and The Dam Pub in Des Moines, and Machine Sheds in Urbandale and Davenport. (The writer admits he is a HBS addict and travels too much in Iowa.)

## Getting it done

The Iowa Legislature could schedule a vote on official state sandwich designation after a week, or month, of lunching with each nominee’s sponsor. The Pork Producers could serve BPTs, the Cattlemen’s Association could offer loose meat or HBS, Latino Heritage Festival could make tacos, and the Tourism Office could serve BLTs.

Sandwiches should only be the beginning. Let’s be more like Alabama and Texas and honor many foods. Consider a good legislative debate about desserts. Did you know that the brownie was discovered when a distracted (some say drunk) baker at Chicago’s Palmer House forgot to add yeast to a chocolate walnut cake recipe? The Palmer House still serves the exact same recipe. Iowa grows black walnuts in all 99 counties. The brownie could face off with apple pie. Iowa is home to incredible apple diversity. More than 900 varieties are growing in Winneshiek County alone. The state is also birthplace to the Jonathan, the most popular apple in America for decades.

Then there could be state soup faceoffs between squash (the acorn squash is indigenous to Polk County) and sweet corn. Or appetizer arguments, like onion rings (and chips) versus morel mushrooms. Or a soy food fight between tofu and edamame.

Plus, if the legislature is arguing about Iowa foods, it’s taking a break from its usual more adversarial state. Would that not be a good thing? ■



# Experiential hospitality — it's a thing

What's going on in the Des Moines hospitality industry that fits in this brave new prophecy?



Range Restaurant + Cocktail Bar gives customers simulated access to the world's best golf courses.

By Jim Duncan

Experience is the new gold. Just as Boomers replaced the Industrial Age with the Information Age, Millennials are supplanting the material girl with the experiential metrosexual. A new segment of the stock market has emerged to take advantage. “Experiential stocks” are picked to profit as consumers seek experience instead of merchandise for their Benjamins.

A Kansas City company represents the vanguard of this movement. EPR Properties is a trust that invests in amusement parks, movie theaters, ski resorts and other entertainment properties. Cruise lines, vineyards, charter schools, museums and casinos are also regarded as key parts of this movement. Some of the more daring plays of the group are the belief that movie theaters will thrive despite the competition of streaming services and that tourism is indomitable despite pandemics, wars and political repression. Both plays are based on the existential human need to experience, which needs company.

So, what's going on in the Des Moines hospitality industry that fits in this brave new prophecy? Obviously, we have some of the things that define the experiential sector — amusement parks and vineyards that double as entertainment venues for weddings and corporate parties. The latter also have tasting rooms, because the experience seeker doesn't drink alone. Some movie theaters now offer food and tavern experiences. We have theme parks and a casino with hotels and multiple dining options.

We also have more homegrown ventures that fit the category — steakhouses where the customer is also the chef, pick-your-own orchards and berry patches, and sports bars that include bowling, simulated golf and all manner of added amenities. Let's explore some local takes of experiential hospitality.

## Evolution of the sports bar

Sports bars were one of the original meeting places for dining and experience. Originally, they were created to simulate Las Vegas sportsbooks. Some even included bamboo newspaper racks with several daily papers, usually only sports pages. Some had ticker tapes, which evolved into electronic scoreboards.

Sports bars are ubiquitous in Des Moines now; only Mexican restaurants have added more new venues this century. Many specify teams they support and serve menus that appeal to their fans. Truman's is a Kansas City sports bar. Half a dozen places show Chicago love. Rico's is a Raider bar, which is as much a lifestyle as a team. Front Row is actively Hawkeye oriented.

Sweet Caroline's is named after the Cyclone game song. Most are more catholic. Others have niches with fans of other sports. Gerri's is big on NASCAR. Both Keg Stand and Royal Mile are soccer bars. At Royal Mile, the popular upstairs area is reserved for fans of the team who spent the most money there on previous occasions.

Sports bars serve remarkably similar menus in general. Wings, nachos, burgers, pizza and chili are prerequisites. Some get more interesting. Club Grille at Copper Creek is attached to a golf course. Range Restaurant + Cocktail Bar offers a steakhouse menu that includes prime, wagyu and bison offerings. They also have simulated golf with access to the greatest golf courses in the world.

Prairie Meadows Racetrack & Casino runs horses, camels, zebras and ostriches on a track of its own. Their sportsbook is Las Vegas class. Their AJ's Steakhouse is, too, with USDA Prime steaks, locally sourced foods and elegant trappings. One can get close enough to the horses in the paddock to smell them. When it completely reopens after pandemic controls, their Champions will again be the best buffet in Iowa. The casino now accommodates nonsmokers.

Pizza and buffets are experiential restaurant types because both are designed for sharing. Some sports bars specialize in pizza by style. Parlor in Beavertown is all about Detroit style, with cheese burnt into crusts. They also engage customers with shuffleboard tables. Woody's adds karaoke, a purely experiential invention, and live entertainment. Tullpa adds karaoke as well as a Peruvian dance club.

The Hall pushes experience in as many ways as any place. They have Hymns & Beer nights when people come to sing church music while drinking. Rock, Paper, Scissors tournaments have drawn the attention of Gov. Kim Reynolds, who showed up to play without her usual bodyguards. Bingo nights and trivia contests, both with large prizes, draw big crowds. All the indoor seating is at picnic tables to encourage people to share experiences. They have whole pig roasts for the same reason.





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Hunting might be a lonesome endeavor, but wild game feasts are anything but that. Cyd Koehn of Cyd's Catering specializes in preparing wild game for hunters who like to share. She has cooked beaver, elk, bear, elephant, kangaroo, Cape buffalo, springbok, alligator, crocodile, wild turkey, wild goose, wild javelina, birds of many feathers, and "more kinds of deer than I knew existed."

One of the most difficult things she ever had to find?

"I was in Arkansas cooking for fishermen and hunters. I thought it would be easy to just go buy basics like butter at the local market. I had to drive 40 miles; apparently margarine is so much more popular in Arkansas that butter is a rare species."

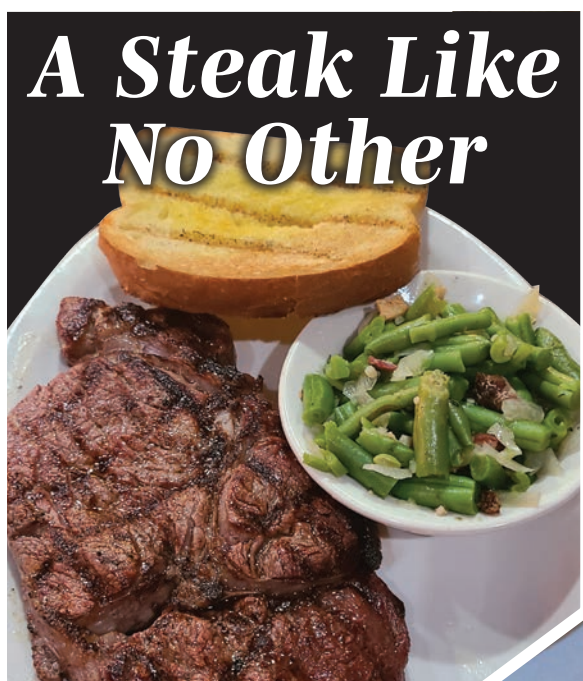
Like movie theaters and independent bookstores, bowling alleys are coming back. It's not just nostalgia. The alleys have been reviving themselves by embracing the experiential zeitgeist. Before a tragic fire took them down, Plaza Lanes had added volleyball courts that simulated beach ball, arcades, expanded dining and full sports bar opportunities. Gameday Lanes in Merle Hay Mall is a "state-of-the-art" bowling facility with a full arcade, pool tables and table service dining. Families can buy packages that include everything offered, and late nights are lit up with "cosmic bowling" and a happy hour that runs till midnight.

Except for narcissistic types, romance is experiential, wherever



Heart of America built a Machine Shed and a hotel at the entrance to Living History Farms.

you find it. That's why restaurants have so many two-top tables. Other restaurants follow the belief that romance is that which transports the diner to another time or place. Hessen Haus is German to its Black Forest core, with the best German menu in all Iowa, including Manning where street signs are in German. Royal Mile has a menu of English pub fare. Mullets is Dixie hearted. High Life Lounge and Drake Diner are set in middle America, 60 years ago. Proudfoot & Bird has an underground speakeasy that revives the Roaring Twenties.



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Jasper Winery's summer concert series runs Thursdays throughout the summer, located two blocks west of Gray's Lake, on the south side of Waterworks Park.

## Wine

Wine is just fermented grape juice until you share it, then it's an experience. Iowa wineries are doing just fine, not because of the state's terroir, climate or history, but because people need to experience wine with others. The more the merrier, whether you are counting people or glasses. Tasting rooms are essential to wineries. Cooper's Hawk has taken that thinking to a new level. It makes its own Illinois wine and sells it exclusively in its restaurants, wine rooms and bars. They have more than 500,000 wine club members. They sell food to pair with wine, not the other way around. Their new place in Clive is a marvel of "build it and they will come" thinking.

Wineries also realize lots of their income by doubling as event centers. Lots of brides like the idea of getting married in a vineyard, and Iowa wineries accommodate them with beautiful lodges, cellars and even B&Bs to pair with the vineyards. Koehn, who has catered weddings at a dozen central Iowa wineries, praises them all. The best?

"I hate that question. There are so many that are superb, romantic, professional hosts. Jasper does stand out; they are right in Des Moines and they have everything a caterer needs, even tents."



Buffets, like this at Kathmandu, are experiences to share.

## Do it yourself

One of central Iowa's original experiential dining ideas was the "cook-it-yourself" steakhouse. Rube's in Montour promoted this with their own herd of cattle. Today, they even sell their steaks to other steakhouses. The "cook-it-yourself" idea was so popular that people from Des Moines, and even Chicago, drove to Montour on weekends, so much that the restaurant expanded to the point where it now takes up an entire square block of downtown Montour. They also have a place in Waukee and another in the Meskwaki Hotel and Casino in Tama. Iowa Beef Steakhouse in Des Moines is of the same tradition. Few customers prefer to let an expert chef cook their steaks compared to the numbers who want to stand over a pit of coals and watch the searing while listening to the sizzle.

Vines to Wines in Sherman Hill helps winemakers make their own wine, without any mess.

## Next?

What else can restaurants do to be more experiential? It would take more labor, but bringing back the tableside Caesar salad is a move in that direction. That marvelous creation from Mexico, not Italy, is still practiced far more often south of the border than north. It's interactive theater with the diner watching raw eggs, olive oil, anchovies, mustard, garlic, Worcestershire sauce and lemon juice dress their fresh lettuce and its very best friends. It's been a lost art in Iowa since the 1960s. Dining in the dark could be revived. The Des Moines Social Club tried to promote that because blind dining is a heightened sensual experience.

Maybe, as Oscar Wilde said, "Experience is simply the name we give to our mistakes." Or maybe we should trust our blind faith in dining experiences. After all, as Mark Twain said, "A man who carries a cat by the tail will learn something he can experience in no other way." ■



St. Kilda's seared salmon,  
fingerling potatoes, cherry  
tomatoes, spinach, shallots and  
two poached eggs.  
Photo by Sofia Legaspi Dickens

# AROUND THE WORLD

**By Sofia Legaspi Dickens**

Pork tenderloins, sweet corn on the cob, apple pie with ice cream... Homegrown food hits the spot, but for times when you want to broaden your tastebuds' horizons, we've gathered 25 area restaurants offering cultural cuisine. There are many more we couldn't include without a much bigger magazine, but for those who'd like to embark on a food trip, here's a start. Bon appetit!

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the dinner table.



1

### AUSTRALIA: St. Kilda Cafe & Bakery

12695 University Ave., Suite 140, Clive  
300 S.W. Fifth St., Des Moines  
stkildadsm.com

Named after owner Alexander Hall's Australian hometown, St. Kilda offers healthy breakfast and lunch options, served daily until 4 p.m. Bread is baked fresh each day at its Valley Junction branch.

2

### BURMA: MinGaLaBar Burmese Kitchen

8134 Douglas Ave., Urbandale  
mingalabarkitchen.com

We'll bet this is unlike any Asian food you've had before. If you want a little bit of everything, try the Zakaw Htamin: crispy fried beef, pork belly slices, eggplant with dried shrimp, mixed veggie salad, shrimp paste, rice and soup — served on fresh banana leaf on a bamboo tray.



Zakaw Htamin at MinGaLaBar. Photo by Sofia Legaspi Dickens

3

### BRAZIL: Brazil Terra Grill

2800 University Ave., Suite 405, West Des Moines  
brazilterragrill.com

Founder Kleber de Souza founded Brazil Terra Grill on the foundation of good food, family and friends. The astonishingly hearty portions of churrasco (grilled meats) don't hurt, either.

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4

**CUBA: Ceviche Bar**

223 E. Walnut St., Des Moines  
cevichebardsm.com

Offering what they claim to be the only authentic Cuban sandwich in Des Moines, this Cuban eatery specializes in ceviche and specialty cocktails like the Canchanchara and Cuba Libre.

5

**ECUADOR: Mi Patria**

1410 22nd St., West Des Moines  
mipatriadsm.com

The first and only Ecuadorian restaurant in Des Moines opened in 2011, with recipes passed down through generations of the Miranda family. Here, you'll find authentic Ecuadorian food like llapingachos (stuffed potato patties) and fritada con mote (pork tips with corn, rice, bean stew and plantain).

6

**EL SALVADOR: La Cuscatleca**

1240 E. 14th St., Des Moines and 2580 Fleur Drive, Suite 101, Des Moines  
lacuscatlecasouth.com

For delicious Salvadorian dishes served daily, check out La Cuscatleca. CITYVIEW's Food Dude would suggest you sample their famous pupusas: stuffed cornmeal pancakes served with curtido (cabbage slaw).



Camarones al Ajillo at Mi Patria. Photo by Digital Jose

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**ETHIOPIA: Gursha**

2316 University Ave., Des Moines  
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Here, traditional Ethiopian dishes are prepared with fresh ingredients. Try one of many hearty varieties of wot (stew), tibs (pan-fried sliced beef or lamb) or sambusa (flaky dough stuffed with spices, meat or veggies).

8

**FRANCE: Django**

1420 Locust St., Des Moines  
djangodesmoines.com

"Offering everything you love about French cuisine without the attitude," promises the brasserie-style eatery, which serves French classics like steak frites, beef bourguignon and, yes, escargots.

9

**GERMANY: Hessen Haus**

101 Fourth St., Des Moines  
hessenhaus.com

Let's be honest — you're probably not here for the food. But if you're looking to be transported into an old-world German bier hall, complete with 50 imported beers on tap and the occasional live polka music, then you've come to the right place. The menu of German fare includes schnitzel, wurst, spaetzle and much more.



Happy hour at Django includes a la carte oysters and shrimp, cheese and charcuterie platters, small plate appetizers, wine, beer and martinis. Photo courtesy of Orchestrate Hospitality

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10

**GREAT BRITAIN: The Royal Mile**

210 Fourth St., Des Moines  
 royalmilebar.com

On top of British beers and an extensive Scotch list, this British pub offers a full menu of favorite English dishes like bangers and mash and shepherd's pie. Breakfast is served on weekends.

11

**GREECE: Olympic Flame**

514 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines  
 olympicflamedesmoines.com

Olympic Flame has been a long-running East Village favorite since 1988. The flame is more than the name: Order an appetizer of saganaki (fried cheese), and it'll be flambéed right before your eyes. For an extra cultural experience, stop in when the restaurant hosts a belly dancer each Friday evening.

12

**HAWAII: Alohana Hawaiian Grill**

802 S.E. Oralabor Road, Suite 128, Ankeny  
 alohanahawaiiangrill.com

There's nothing like the rich cultural fusion of Hawaiian cuisine. Favorites include saimin (noodle soup), mouth-watering grilled meats and a Hawaiian favorite: Spam musubi, with rice and nori (dried seaweed).

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**INDIA/PAKISTAN: Lzaza Indo-Pak Cuisine**

1409 23rd St., Des Moines  
 lzazaindopakcuisine.business.site

Tucked away near Drake University is a hidden gem on the ethnic food scene, serving up fresh breads, flavorful stews and vibrant entrees for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Their popular lunch buffet runs 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily.

14

**ISRAEL: Maccabee's Kosher Deli**

1150 Polk Blvd., Des Moines  
 maccabeeskosherdeli.com

Jewish and kosher-practicing people don't account for Israel's entire population, it's true, but for a truly welcoming experience, Macabee's Kosher Deli is a unique local favorite. Tucked within a Judaic resource center, the deli is staffed by Rabbi Yossi Jacobson and his family.



Phoenix Roll with tempura shrimp, cucumber, mixed greens and spicy tuna mix, topped with seared salmon, garlic mayo, jalapenos and sriracha. Photo courtesy of Sakari Sushi Lounge

15

**ITALY: The Latin King**

2200 Hubbell Ave., Des Moines  
 latinkingsdm.com

More than 75 years of Italian tradition are on the menu at The Latin King, dubbed an "East-side Institution." Favorites like chicken spiedini (skewers) and tiramisu have been enjoyed in the villa-style restaurant by countless customers.

16

**JAPAN: Sakari Sushi Lounge**

2605 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines  
 sakarisushilounge.com

Searching for the best sushi in Des Moines? Look no further — plus, find tempura and other entrees straight from the wok and grill. Sakari Sushi Lounge was voted Best Local Sushi and Best Local Japanese Food in CITYVIEW's Best Of Des Moines readers' poll for 2023.

17

**KOREA: DZÔ Korean BBQ**

2611 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines  
 dzokoreanbbq.com

It's about time Des Moines had its own Korean BBQ. Patrons can fire up meats like kalbi, bulgogi and wagyu cuts on their tabletop grill, or order mouth-watering entrees and sides already cooked for them. DZÔ opened its doors in December last year.



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Eatery A's Spanish Octopus includes chorizo, yukon gold potatoes and bagneto verde. Photo by Sofia Legaspi Dickens

18

### LEBANON: Open Sesame

313 E. Locust St., Des Moines

[opensesameiowa.com](http://opensesameiowa.com)

Aromatic. Complex. Spicy. Flavorful. Those are just some of the ways to describe the Lebanese food served at Open Sesame's colorful and intimate location in the East Village.

19

### MEDITERRANEAN: Eatery A

2932 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines

[eateryadsm.com](http://eateryadsm.com)

If you're looking for more than gyros and falafel, Eatery A serves elevated Mediterranean-inspired cuisine in a former Blockbuster video store — although you wouldn't be able to tell from the tasteful interior. Pizza and sides are fired to perfection in their wood-burning oven.

20

### NEPAL: Kathmandu

7229 Apple Valley, Windsor Heights

[ktmrestaurant.com](http://ktmrestaurant.com)

At Kathmandu, "each dish represents flavor, pleasure, affection and essence." The restaurant's specialties, to name a few, include variations of momo (dumplings), thupka (noodle soup), sekuwa (barbecued meat) and more familiar Indian dishes like biryani and tikka.

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Panka's Causa De Pollo includes mashed potato, layered with a homemade chicken salad and avocado. Photo courtesy of Panka

21

### PERU: Panka

2708 Ingersoll Ave., Suite 200, Des Moines  
[pankadsm.com](http://pankadsm.com)

Panka offers a taste of rich Peruvian history through authentic cuisine cooked with lots of love. Mariela Maya opened her dream restaurant just before the pandemic, thriving against all odds. Tip: Maya's newest culinary pursuit offering "a unique Peruvian twist to the classic rotisserie chicken" is located at 3018 Forest Ave., Des Moines.

22

### PUERTO RICO: Puerto Rico Restaurant

6611 University Ave., Unit 101, Windsor Heights  
[puertoricoiowa.com](http://puertoricoiowa.com)

They say they dish up the best Puerto Rican food in Iowa, but you'll need to decide for yourself. One popular traditional meal is pernil: slow roasted pork shoulder served with gandules (pigeon peas), tostones (fried green plantains), rice, salad and a special sauce.

## WORTH THE SCHLEP SINCE '82

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Kao Soi at Silk Elephant is a northern Thai favorite that includes egg noodles in special coconut curry broth, topped with crispy noodles and minced green onions. Photo by Anna Carrion



Customers of Vietnam Cafe can dine at its location in the Merle Hay Mall food court or order carry out. Photo by Sofia Legaspi Dickens

23

### THAILAND: Silk Elephant

2410 S.W. White Birch Drive, Suite 108, Ankeny  
silkelephantnoodlesnrice.com  
Explore traditional Thai flavors in modern elegance at Silk Elephant. This newer restaurant serves up soups, curries, noodles, stir fry and rice galore. Our top picks: Duck Bacon Wontons to start, followed by Crazy Peanut Chicken or Kao Soi soup, then Silk Tea with boba.

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### VIETNAM: Vietnam Cafe

3800 Merle Hay Road, Des Moines  
facebook.com/VietnamCafeMHM  
Tucked away in the food court in Merle Hay Mall, Vietnam Cafe delivers big flavor in the form of steaming pho (noodle soup), bahn mi (baguette) sandwiches, bun thit nuong (noodle bowls) and more Vietnamese comfort foods — plus Chinese favorites. Always served with a warm smile from owner Brenda Tran.

25

### WEST AFRICA: Home Touch Kitchen

1552 E. Grand Ave., Suite D, Des Moines  
facebook.com/HomeTouchKitchen  
Jollof rice, cassava leaf soup, fufu and more. Before immigrating to the United States in 2001, owner Nathan Bohn lived in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. For homemade Afro-Soul food, head to Home Touch Kitchen. ■

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# Food in the year of COVID 4.0

By Jim Duncan

The semi year pushed food to the frontal lobe of collective consciousness. Our government moved to wean the public off energy independence two years ago, but few felt the pain until the price of eggs, milk, bread and hamburger soared to all-time highs. The weaning was halted briefly after trial balloons to ban gas ovens were shot down. Key Democrat U.S. Senator Joe Manchin, and every chef on Earth, fired that pistol.

As the semi year closed, the commodity exchanges reflected the anxiety of the nation, where 27% of the population was reportedly “unable to tolerate a thousand dollar emergency.” In February, the weather in India threatened to push sugar prices to all-time highs, while bird flu viruses in America riled egg and chicken wing prices, and coffee prices soared mostly due to demand-driven shortages. Market analysts speculated that the pandemic closures created caffeine obsessions.

But the past is a nervous prologue for what could be happening in April if the Saudi Arabian government follows through with its threat to sell oil on a market untied to the U.S. dollar. That scares the hell out of producers of all commodities. Buckle up.

## THE GOOD NEWS

**30 Hop**, **Lindo Jalisco**, and **Naughtea** opened in Ankeny, and **Backpocket Pin & Pixel** in Johnston... Jacob Demars opened **Barbarian**, a Sunday-only dining room in Kinship Brewing in Waukee... **Gusto Pizza Bar**, **Sprocket's** and **DZÔ Korean BBQ** opened on Ingersoll, just down the street from **HomeGrown**, a Wichita-based breakfast chain, and **Big Grove Brewery**, which itself opened a season earlier... **Grimaldi's**, a legendary pizza joint with an iconic store under the Brooklyn Bridge, announced plans to build five restaurants in Iowa. Their pies are from coal-fired ovens. Their press release mentioned Iowa City, Ames, Waukee and Ankeny as targets... **Tullpa**, **Panka Peruvian Chicken** and **Uchu** opened, giving Des Moines four Peruvian restaurants. Tullpa also doubles as a dance club. Panka Peruvian Chicken roasts birds on a charcoal-fueled rotisserie... **Karis Capital** (Naples, Florida) pledged a third of the \$450 million needed to construct a meatpacking plant in Mills County... **Maxie's**, the closest thing Des Moines has had to a supper club, was saved from closing by a buyer who wanted to keep the place just as it is. Nostalgia has protective gods.

## THE BAD NEWS

**Proof**, one of the core restaurants that made Des Moines a great food town, closed. COVID, labor shortages and inflation were cited for their demise. Four of the city's all-time top chefs — Carly Groben, Tony Lemmo, Sean Wilson and Diego Rodriguez — all passed through the kitchen of Proof and/or its sister café Dough/Host... **Wisco Grub & Pub** closed, leaving walleye, smelt, karaoke and cheese curd fans in a Lake Superior dreamt darkness... After 14 years and “Chicago's Ten Best Restaurant” status (Chicago Tribune), **The Bristol** closed after New Year's Eve. Owner John Ross is a Des Moines guy who opened the trend-setting **Sage** in Windsor Heights.

## BRING ON THE PURPLE YAMS

Kim Severson of the New York Times wrote an extensive story about what **food trends to expect in 2023**. Among the things she mentioned: brining; cocktails garnished with seafood like crab, oysters and uni; more extensive uses of kelp; teff, fava and lupin beans for sustainability; chicken skins as an appetizer; air frying for affordability; purple yams (ube); a nostalgic revival of piano bars; holly tree tea; sotol (a tequila brother from another mother); Nigerian cuisine; Japanese food fusion with more than just Peruvian; communal gestures like listing names of entire staffs on menus; and the category of “regenivore,” which takes enviro-friendly food to new levels... Eater magazine called egg yolk omelets the most surprising food story of 2022.

## HYPOCRISY OF THE SEMI YEAR

Despite pleas by Maine's liberal governor, federal agencies moved to **shut down lobster fishing** because environmentalists claimed it could potentially injure whales. No whale has ever been killed or injured by lobster nets in Maine... After eight humpback whales washed up dead on the Jersey shore, federal agencies refuted claims by fishermen that the whales were being killed by offshore windmills that chased away all their usual food sources.

## NEW STUFF WE LIKE

Zoup soups and bone broths are excellent upscale products, comparable in packaging and taste testing with **Rao's**. They are sold at Walmart, Target and online at [www.zoupbroth.com](http://www.zoupbroth.com)... **Buona**, “Chicago's original Italian beef,” is now selling kits via overnight delivery at [shop.buona.com](http://shop.buona.com). They include frozen roast beef slices in jus, hot giardinera and half loaves of bread... “**Serendipity**,” by Eataly founder Oscar Farinetti, tells stories about how many of the world's greatest foods were discovered by accident... “**From Scratch**” by David and Jon Moscow searches the world for the best and worst ways to raise basic types of foods. ■





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