

 THE ALL-AMERICAN FOOD ISSUE!

Mpls St Paul

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Best Restaurants for All-American FOOD



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2008
SUPER LAWYERS
- P. 233



SANDWICHES

BLT

Late summer is prime season for pleasure, patio dining, and a big ol' BLT. But not just any BLT. David Rosengarten, in his book *It's All American Food*, rightly calls attention to a common foil: dry, coarse toast. On this assignment's tasting trail, many perfectly acceptable contenders were DQ'd when just one element fell short—typically, it was throat-scratching bread (we now prefer it buttered on the outside and griddled), lifeless tomatoes, or sloppy assembly. A good BLT is all integrity and simplicity—juicy, ripe tomatoes, crisp lettuce, and freshly fried bacon on good bread with the right slathering of mayo. It's easy to do, or so we thought.

★ **Good Day Café** GDC's solid rendition has double-smoked bacon and French peasant bread and also includes avocado. Extra points for the delicious fries served with a side of black pepper mayo! 5410 Wayzata Blvd., Golden Valley, 763-544-0205

★ **Moose & Sadie's** Fischer Farm bacon fried to perfection with, depending on the season, red leaf lettuce and sweet, fresh tomato on homemade oat bread. It's manageable, compact, and 100 percent craveable. 212 3rd Ave. N., Mpls., 612-371-0464, mooseandsadies.com

★ **Saffron** Get thee to Saffron's happy hour for Sameh Wadi's mini BLT. It's a little out there—house-cured lamb bacon, tomato jam (fresh tomatoes mashed up with a touch of honey and black onion seed), arugula, and tarragon aioli on challah—but Wadi adheres to the basic principles of integrity and composition. 123 N. 3rd St., Mpls., 612-746-5533, saffronmpls.com

GRILLED CHEESE

This simple union of bread and melting cheese is a buttery, salty gateway to childhood memory; it's often the first meal we cooked ourselves. American grilled cheese began as a British "toastie," an open-faced broiled affair; we created a two-faced grilled deal. Whether made of Wonder Bread and Kraft singles or hearth-baked sourdough and artisan cheddar, a good grilled cheese

should ooze a teardrop of filling at the first crusty bite, as do these fine, varied renderings.

★ **Hell's Kitchen** Slices of tangy sourdough crusted with Parmesan with sharp white Vermont cheddar, Swiss, and fontina cheese inside are griddled (with not a little butter) to create a crackly crisp shell covering molten ambrosia. This is heaven-sent, straight from Hell. 89 S. 10th St., Mpls., 612-332-4700, hellskitcheninc.com

★ **Highland Grill** This mild-mannered American grilled cheese packs a surprise. Its punchy cheddar and creamy chive-flecked Cotswold are brightened with tangy homemade chutney on nicely grilled (not too greasy), chewy sourdough. 771 Cleveland Ave. S., St. Paul, 651-690-1173, highlandgrill.com

★ **La Belle Vie Lounge** Grilled cheese is the hors d'oeuvres du jour in the most elegant lounge in town. Sip a perfect ginger mojito and nibble these butter-griddled cave-aged-Gruyère-and-jambon-royal nuggets. Carbs and grease never looked (or tasted) so good. 510 Groveland Ave., Mpls., 612-874-6440, labellevie.us

PATTY MELT

The ultimate American food icon is the hamburger, a German immigrant's paean to the chopped steak of his homeland. It's not surprising that the origins of the patty melt, a hamburger served inside a grilled cheese sandwich, are so hotly contested. As one Web poster put it so eloquently, "a cheeseburger with sautéed onions on toasted rye bread is not a patty melt." According to several experts, William "Tiny" Naylor created the patty melt—a hamburger patty covered with melted Swiss cheese and sautéed onions served on griddled rye bread—sometime in the 1940s or '50s at his chain of SoCal coffee shops, Tiny Naylor's. Today, however, the cognoscenti say the burger must be placed between two slices of American cheese sans onions and the whole sandwich must be griddled, not broiled or composed.

★ **Convention Grill** The grill serves a superb melt, though we hear some

come for the fries or malts. 3912 Sunnyside Rd., Edina, 952-920-6881

★ **St. Clair Broiler** This classic St. Paul diner's patty melt leaves your fingers wet with griddled buttery goodness. 1580 St. Clair Ave., St. Paul, 651-698-7055, stclairbroiler.com

★ **Milda's Café** Milda's serves more old-world American classics than we can count, almost all of them memorable. The melt is beefy and cheesy, everything you could ask for, with a pile of fries a mile high. 1720 Glenwood Ave., Mpls., 612-377-9460

REUBEN

For a sandwich as conceptually simple as corned beef and Swiss on rye with sauerkraut and Russian dressing (Thousand Island to some), it seems there are lots of cooks claiming it as their own. Did Arnold Reuben invent it in 1914 or in 1927 at his eponymous deli? A more recognizable version comes from Omaha's Central Market, where owner Reuben Kulakofsky birthed the first griddled corned beef, Swiss, and kraut concoction. The only verifiable version credits Fern Snider with putting together the sandwich in 1956 for the National Restaurant Association's sandwich contest, which she won handily. High-quality, fatty corned beef, tart barrel-aged kraut, a homemade Russian dressing, and true rye bread, all crisped on the flat-top, are what make this sandwich—not its birth certificate.

★ **The Brothers Deli** A killer Reuben can be had at Brothers. Great corned beef and all the right touches, from the piquant kraut to the Russian dressing—and the best pickle in town comes on the side. 50 S. 6th St., Skyway Level, Mpls., 612-341-8007, thebrothersdeli.com

★ **Cecil's** As frustrating as Cecil's can be for true deli fans (everything is so close to the way it should be!), the Reuben here is spot-on. Great flavor and easy to eat, with loads of corned beef and kraut. 651 Cleveland Ave. S., St. Paul, 651-698-0334

★ **Good Day Café** This newcomer

serves great American classics and its Reuben is clean, bright, and superbly generous. 5410 Wayzata Blvd., Golden Valley, 763-544-0205

SUBMARINE

Basically a meal devised for efficient handling and dissemination, there's something awfully Soviet about this American staple. It goes by many names, but the big three genres of The Worker's Sandwich are the Boston submarine (named by Navy Yard workers for the shape of the elongated roll), the New Jersey/Philadelphia Italian hoagie, and the New York hero, all popularized by proletariat who needed to chomp down their calories during short, pre-union lunch breaks. Chain subs are ubiquitous in the Twin Cities, so we don't really approach the glorious sandwiches of our comrades to the East—fresh, crisp bread, robust toppings, seriously dressed.

★ **Broders' Cucina Italiana/Cossetta's Italian Market & Pizzeria [tie]** This is as close as you're going to get to an Italian hoagie or hero from a deli in Hoboken or Little Italy. (And it's not all that close.) *Broders'*, 2308 W. 50th St., Mpls., 612-925-3113, broders.com; *Cossetta's*, 211 W. 7th St., St. Paul, 651-222-3476

★ **Cup and Cone** Authenticity is a dubious metric for an item loosely defined as "anything that comes between two long pieces of bread," but there's something old-fashioned, at least, about the subs served at this soft-serve hut. They come on a nice soft roll, generously stuffed with cold cuts, and wrapped in heavy white butcher paper. 2126 4th St., White Bear Lake, 651-426-1498

★ **Jersey Mike's** Yes, it's a chain in a strip mall, but at least it's a chain that hails from the Sandwich Motherland. The cheese steak hoagie with grilled onions, peppers, and provolone is decent, but the Italian hero, with provolone, ham, prosciutto, capicola, salami, and pepperoni, is the winner. 2704 Hwy. 88, St. Anthony Village, 612-362-7827, jerseymikes.com