

Winnipeg Free Press

A taste of heaven in the Twin Cities

Minneapolis a food lover's paradise

By: Shel Zolewich

Updated: September 20

<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/subscriber/travel/general/story/4228547p-4869341c.html>

Winnipeg Free Press

As a tourist destination, Minneapolis has no shortage of temptations. For sporting types, there's top shelf entertainment from the Minnesota Wild hockey, Twins baseball, Vikings football and Timberwolves basketball teams. For shoppers, there's the allure of the giant Mall of America, IKEA and the Albertville outlet mall just outside of town. And for families, there are more than a few water parks, a first-rate zoo and the sprawling Valleyfair amusement park.

But if there's one group of vacationers that seldom gets mentioned in the mix, it's the foodies, and for us, the temptations of Minneapolis simply can't be conquered.



The rooftop patio at Stella's Fish Café is the place for hip gatherings.

From venerable old favourites like Manny's Steak House (now relocated to the posh W Hotel) to the hummus-stacked cases at Emily's Lebanese Deli, this city provides a staggering breadth of choice for any foodie interested in local cuisine (like the Juicy Lucy), unique locations (Bryan Lake Bowl is part alley and part great restaurant) and just plain great food.

This year, three out of the five chefs nominated for the prestigious James Beard Foundation Awards (Time magazine called them the Oscars of the food world) in the Midwest category hailed from Minneapolis. They were Isaac Becker for 112 Eatery, Tim McKee for La Belle Vie and Alex Roberts for Restaurant Alma. Be sure to add these to your list for your next visit.

Here's a sampling.

Stella's Fish Café

1400 W. Lake Street

stellasfishcafe.com



Restaurante el Huachi

612-824-TUNA

You can't help but notice the party going on atop one of Uptown's busiest joints. The rooftop patio at Stella's Fish Café appears to be the place for hip gatherings in this happening part of town. It's always packed. If the party scene isn't your thing, there's plenty of space in the lower two floors to sample the fare at this trendy seafood spot.

If you're looking for a romantic dinner, this is not the spot. The atmosphere is rambunctious and you'll have to get used to the noise level, which, at times, makes dinner conversation a little strained. The main floor offers a peek into the kitchen but for an up close view, book the chef's table that puts you smack dab in the action. There's no additional charge and the friendly hostess said the table is often treated to complimentary appetizers and desserts.

The menu at Stella's changes daily to feature fresh fish, seafood and especially oysters. Fans of clam chowder won't be disappointed by the offering here. It's a small serving (\$3.95 for the cup) but what it lacks in size makes up for in the rich, bacony flavour and a not-too-goopy broth. Appetizer crab cakes arrive on a bed of wilted spinach drizzled with a thin but buttery sauce. The pair of cakes are packed with crabmeat and pan fried to perfect crispiness. Again, the serving is small and pricey at \$14.95 but well worth the flavour reward.

While starters might be on the small side, the entrees are definitely not. Barbecued shrimp and andouille sausage (\$18.95) come on two giant skewers the length of my arm (no kidding). Eight extra-large shrimp are tucked between sweet sausage chunks, green and red peppers and onions. Everything is glazed with a tangy barbecue sauce and nestled on a bed of mashed potatoes. The salmon Oscar entrée (\$25.95) is equally as impressive with a creamy medley of seafood over a generous salmon filet, mashed potatoes and lots of grilled asparagus.

Hell's Kitchen



Feast for Two

89 S. 10th Street

hellskitcheninc.com

612-332-4700

This downtown breakfast and lunch spot bears no affiliation with the television show of the same name. There's no one yelling obscenities (not that we could hear anyway) or throwing plates. Instead, the staff is as friendly as can be, the atmosphere is easy and the food will have you planning a return visit.

Even midweek, you'll have to wait for a table but not for long. Once seated, your oversized cup will be filled (and refilled often) with strong, hot coffee. Start with the Mahnomini Porridge (\$3.75 a cup and \$7 a bowl), a concoction of wild rice, roasted hazelnuts, dried blueberries, cranberries, heavy cream and maple syrup. It'll keep you fuelled for that long day on the trapline or wherever your occupation takes you.

The house specialty is lemon ricotta hotcakes (\$9.25) topped with fresh berries and a dusting of sugar. The staff encourages diners to try it without the maple syrup. The richness of the ricotta and the zest of the lemon make for a delicious meal. However, if your sweet tooth beckons, slather on the syrup for a truly decadent breakfast. Scroll through the menu for other exotic offerings, including the shrimp and crab cake with poached egg (\$12.95) or Wellington Benedict, made with duck liver pâté and white truffle oil (\$15.25).

Breakfast is served Monday to Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. Weekend brunch runs from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Mercado Central

1515 E. Lake Street

meradocentral.net

612-728-5401

There's a good chance you'll be the only gringos and gringas at the market on any given day. And that's a good sign, because it means this place is as close to authentic as it gets. Mercado Central is a two-storey market at the corner of Lake Street and Bloomington Avenue in the south end of the city offering clothing, toys, electronics, books, jewelry, groceries and an entire row of indoor taco stands.

You may be familiar with the words tacos, burritos, enchiladas and tamales but don't expect the same items you can find at Mexican fast-food joints. For example, the carne asada tacos (\$1.75) come on small, soft flour tortillas, warmed and arranged flat on a plate. They are topped with strips of seasoned beef, cilantro, chopped white onion and sliced radishes. Tamales -- a steamed cornmeal bundled wrapped in a corn husk -- come with rice and beans on the side (\$5.75 for two tamales).

We ordered a little bit of everything from a stand called Restaurante el Huachi, including a plate of chips, guacamole and salsa (be careful, even the mild isn't so mild), taco de pezcado (fish tacos), taco de asada (beef tacos), tamales and a couple of bottled drinks (the Jarrito brand) and the bill came to less than \$20. Most menus are in Spanish but it's easy to muddle your way through ordering, thanks to super-friendly cooks and helpful patrons who are more than willing to translate while you point. Seating is food court style.

Famous Dave's

Multiple Locations

famousdaves.com

You can't help but become speechless and motionless when your dinner arrives on an upturned garbage can lid. Not a pretend garbage can lid but a real, galvanized and full-sized lid. You won't be motionless for long as the aroma of those barbecued ribs makes its way to your nose. Time to dig in.

Famous Dave's has more than 160 locations throughout the United States but it all started in Minneapolis, which explains the numerous outlets that dot the city and its suburbs. It's a barbecue place with the comfy atmosphere of a roadside joint in rural Tennessee. But back to the garbage can lid. This is called the Feast for Two and includes a half rack of ribs (which is closer to a full rack), half a roasted chicken, a mound of saucy pulled pork, coleslaw, fries, beans, corn on the cob and cornbread muffins. Two people will have to be close to starving to empty the lid. All this for less than \$34.