

THE DISTRICT'S LEADING RESTAURANT GUIDE

gourmet dc

**Historical
Georgetown
restaurant
reopens**

**Delicious
Italian Dishes
done with a
twist**



Discover the culinary gems of Washington, DC! Our nation’s capital is not only a hub of political activity but also a food lover’s paradise, boasting a vibrant and diverse restaurant scene that caters to every palate. Whether you’re a foodie seeking the latest culinary trends or simply looking for a delicious meal, DC’s restaurants have something for everyone.

Tantalize your taste buds with a wide range of international cuisines. From upscale French bistros to cozy Italian trattorias, you can embark on a global culinary journey without leaving the city. Savor the flavors of Japan with the freshest sushi and sashimi, or dive into the bold and spicy dishes of Mexico. DC’s international restaurants are known for their authenticity and attention to detail.

For those seeking classic American fare, the city offers iconic eateries where you can indulge in juicy burgers, tender steaks, and crispy fried chicken. Be sure to try the famous half-smoke, a local specialty, and don’t miss the chance to dine at historic restaurants that have been serving delicious dishes for generations.

If you have a taste for adventure, explore the thriving food truck scene that lines the streets of DC. These mobile kitchens offer a diverse array of gourmet treats, from gourmet tacos to artisanal ice cream sandwiches. It’s a delightful way to sample unique flavors while taking in the city’s sights.

Washington, DC is also home to a growing farm-to-table movement, with many restaurants sourcing their ingredients locally. You can enjoy dishes made from the freshest, seasonal produce and support local farmers in the process.

And let’s not forget the incredible waterfront dining options along the Potomac River. Enjoy a romantic dinner with a view of the iconic monuments, creating an unforgettable dining experience.

No matter your culinary preferences or budget, Washington, DC’s restaurants offer a delectable array of choices. So come hungry and explore the flavors of our nation’s capital – a culinary adventure awaits you in every corner of the city!

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Georgetown’s Historical Underground Tavern

Hey, fellow Hoyas! Just so you know, the long-running salad-topped pizza has been scratched and the 99 Days Club has yet to be revived at the Tombs, the all-American tavern below the formal 1789 restaurant in the shadow of Georgetown University.



Closed in March 2020, the 60-year-old study break reopened in March. Rest assured, the rest of the experience pretty much mirrors whenever you were last in the basement watering hole, reached by steps as steep as “The Exorcist” stairs nearby. The rowing references are everywhere — on the walls, painted atop the tables, emblazoned on the servers’ blue T-shirts reading “Crew” — and, truth be told, your first sniff of the place remains the amalgam of cleaning solution and spilled beer.

Changes, meanwhile, are mostly for the better. Pounce on the chicken pot pie fritters.

Never been to the Tombs? Here’s what you’re missing: A timeless bar and warren

service you might recall from visits to any of the 10 other restaurants in the popular Clyde’s Restaurant Group, known for its hospitality. The hostess seems genuinely glad to see and seat you, and the waiter volunteers the WiFi password without of rooms, elevated pub grub and the kind of service you might recall from visits to any of the 10 other restaurants in the popular Clyde’s Restaurant Group, known for its hospitality. The hostess seems genuinely glad to see and seat you, and the waiter volunteers the WiFi password without your even having to ask. Dishes might be auctioned off at the table, but they never take long to reach you.

More than any other college-adjacent restaurant in town, the Tombs is as linked to its school as John Thompson Jr. and Hoyas basketball. The pub’s landlord is no less than Georgetown University.

The Tombs’ culinary caretakers include Adam Howard, the new executive chef of the formal 1789, and Chris Benitez, who serves as sous-chef downstairs. Howard is responsible for adding to the menu those chicken pot pie fritters, a legacy of his time at Family Meal in Frederick. A



lot of work goes into the little bites. The chicken is brined before it’s roasted and shredded; a roux binds poultry with the peas and carrots. Japanese breadcrumbs form the golden crust. Each bite feels like a complete dinner. Swanson, eat your heart out. Benitez, an Arlington native whose family is from El Salvador, has also tapped into his background, previously serving pupusas and fish tacos.

The menu bridges the appetites of students, professors and tourists who may have read about the institution. Guess

what the kids like best? According to both chefs, the bestseller is chicken tenders. Laugh if you want, but the fat fingers of super-juicy chicken sporting craggy bronzed coats are finger-licking good, more so after a dunk in honey mustard sauce. Familiar flavors rule here — the menu also lists mac & cheese bites — but they tend to be better than your average bar fare. At once crisp and creamy, the pasta cubes are punctuated with bacon and red pepper, dusted with parmesan and cooled down by a ramekin of ranch dressing, tinted pink with sriracha. The Tombs should submit a patent.

Summer sent the chili, so loaded with ground beef and beans you could eat it with a fork, on a sabbatical. In its place is a Mexican-style chicken soup with a broth that swells with chicken flavor, a fan of avocado and a garnish of thin fried tortilla strips.

The dish, created by Benitez and ignited with jalapeño, deserves a long run.

Half a dozen salads encourage you to eat your vegetables; go green with sugar snap peas and shaved celery — plus radishes, almonds and a creamy poppy seed dressing



A Dive into DC's Delicious Singaporean Spot

Chefs have all sorts of tricks up their sleeves for impressing diners with looks alone. Show me a customer who doesn't smile at the sight of a drink trailed by smoke, a dessert ignited tableside or a steak knife plunged into the center of a \$65 sandwich, and I'll show you a jaded restaurant-goer.

There's nothing on the menu at the new Jiwa Singapura in McLean to suggest that the chili crab is the most interactive dish on the menu. When you order the \$38 main course, no one tells you what comes first. Let me do the honors: Everyone at the table gets a little wooden box, inside of which await a fancy black bib and matching plastic gloves.

"Huh?" participants typically wonder in unison.

Then it dawns on the foodies in attendance: Without protection, hot snow crabs doused with lava-colored chili sauce equal a big mess. After recipients of the extravaganza have had a go at the sweet-spicy crab, which they dispatch with a metal cracker as well as their hands, they roll off the gloves and remove the bib. A server erases any remaining specks of sauce or crab on the table with a wet cloth.

The only remaining evidence of the feast, accompanied by milk buns a server calls "Chinese doughnuts," are the looks of contentment on those who dueled with it.

The talent (and sense of humor) behind the showy crab — and so much else at Jiwa Singapura — is Pepe Moncayo, 44, the Barcelona native behind *Cranes*, a fine-dining, Spanish-Japanese restaurant in Penn Quarter. Before he arrived in Washington in 2018, Singapore was home for a decade. "I planned to stay a year," to open a restaurant in the luxe Marina Bay Sands hotel at the request of his mentor, the late Catalan master Santi Santamaria, Moncayo said during a recent phone conversation. Instead, he met his wife, had a child and "became part of a Singaporean family."

The name of Moncayo's new restaurant, which unfolds in Tysons Galleria, translates to "the soul of Singapore," and it introduces a rare taste of the super-clean city-state where food is a national obsession. Moncayo had a chef in mind to lead Jiwa Singapura, but when that didn't pan out, he took the helm of the open kitchen, fronted with marble and animated with a crew of 20 and the leap of flames from the woks.

As in so many restaurants about which I could copy and paste the words "dishes are meant to be shared and come out as they're ready," a server also lets us know that the beef rendang, a dry curry made with coconut milk, takes 30 minutes.

The one dish every staff member insists you try is salted egg shrimp, a small plate. "It's the chef's wife's recipe," diners are



told. Lightly sauteed shrimp show up coated with a puree of brined duck eggs and evaporated milk, showered with scallions and fried shallots. Garlic and Thai chiles in the seasoning give each bite a racy edge. From just a half dozen or so ingredients, a delicious personal statement. The chef credits Aishah Moncayo — "my boss everywhere," he jokes — with keeping his food true to its inspiration. (His wife serves as general manager.)

Has she tasted the chicken skewers? Save for their chunky rich peanut dip, other places do the street food snack better. However, no restaurant in my orbit offers a steamed fish cake to rival Jiwa Singapura's otah. ' "

Packaged like a gift in banana leaves, the pale orange mash of dorade bound with eggs pulses with lemongrass and chiles and eats like a dense custard. A garnish of threadlike fried shirashu (baby anchovies) gives each spoonful a light crackle and

distinct umami.

If there's one dish you'll find just about anywhere in Singapore — hawker stalls, hotels and restaurants of all stripes — it's chicken and rice, a dish introduced by long-ago Chinese immigrants from Hainan Island off the mainland's southern coast. Abroad, the chicken is poached and hung to dry on the street. Moncayo says "they'd shut me down" if he followed suit; instead, he sous-vides the chicken for a similarly velvety effect. The chicken is sliced, draped with a gravy of soy sauce, sesame oil and chicken stock, and garnished with cured cucumbers. The other half of the pleasure is the accompanying rice, cooked in both chicken broth and fat — hence the creamy mouthfeel — and fragrant with ginger and pandan leaves. Bright dots of chili sauce on the plate add both eye and tongue candy — spark — to the assembly.

The guides here are terrific, good at making recommendations.



World Trip

Up for a road trip? Let me suggest two places, one of which requires some serious patience. All you have to do is repeat after me and break bread in some of my favorite places to eat right now.

Rice Paper

For some of us, it's all about the numbers at this family-run Vietnamese restaurant in Eden Center.

If I'm in the mood for soup, I know 84 will reward me with catfish, okra, cilantro and juicy chunks of pineapple in a sweet-sour broth tweaked with tamarind. When I've got noodles on my mind, 51 brings me a bowl of fine vermicelli carpeted with pickled radish, shrimp, folds of charred pork, julienne cucumber and breezy mint. "Add the fish sauce and mix it up," a server coaches recipients. We do as we are told and delight in the crowd of flavors and textures. Chopped baby clams, onions and laksa leaf, or Vietnamese coriander, make a jumble of smoky, stir-fried pleasure framed by sturdy rice crackers freckled with black sesame seeds. Say "9," and the dish is yours.

It's a good sign to hear so many customers speaking Vietnamese in the snug, 50-seat dining room, dressed with aqua booths and banquettes and tables a shade of lemongrass. Diners can count on the friendly staff to make recommendations and warn against taking spring rolls home, out of concern the supple rice paper wrappers will go dry.

I never find Rice Paper, frequented by locals and tourists alike, at rest. Expect a line at high noon, for instance, despite all the competition nearby. Lam tips off me — and thus you — with the best time to visit: 3 to 5 p.m. weekdays, she says.

6775 Wilson Blvd., Falls Church. 703-538-3888. ricepaper-tasteofvietnam.com. Open for indoor dining and takeout. Entrees, \$15 to \$63 (for shareable oxtail soup).

Charley Prime Foods

The latest from veteran restaurateurs Jackie Greenbaum and Gordon Banks can be anything a diner wants it to be: date night, family reunion, a single adventure. Designed as a fancier version of Bar Charley in Washington, Charley Prime Foods actually joins ideas from all the owners' establishments.

Set sail with stumps of crisp sticky rice plied with shredded roast pork, finished with Korean barbecue sauce, or a salad so big and beautiful, it ought to be in pictures. Ask for "Ode to Spago," a happy fusion of cabbage, wonton crisps, chicken poached in coconut milk and lemongrass and ... you get the idea. The bounty is delicious.

The menu casts a wide net without going all Cheesecake Factory on its audience. Think roasted salmon, chicken Milanese and a French dip sandwich rethought with shaved lamb and harissa aioli.



A section billed "Here's the Beef" seduces steak lovers with cuts for every budget, and the kitchen's care and attention extend to french fries cut in-house and kids' menus featuring smaller portions of adult selections.

9811 Washingtonian Blvd., Gaithersburg. 240-477-7925. charleyprimefoods.com. Open for indoor and outdoor dining and takeout. Dinner entrees, \$18 to \$65.

The Crab Claw

Chomping at the bit as we wait for the barn-size landmark to open on St. Michaels Harbor, dozens of us are entertained by the pre-show sight of servers slicing a grove of lemons and securing giant sheets of paper to picnic tables with the help of masking tape. You want to show up early for lump crab cakes, crab imperial and steamed hard-shell blue crabs.

Maryland crab soup is loaded with its sweet signature, but also tomatoes, corn and serious heat. Broiled or fried, the delightful crab cake, veined green with what appear to be herbs, arrives in a soft potato bun with sweetly fresh coleslaw, made right here, and french fries. The fried chicken is respectable but upstaged by its sidekicks (love the mustardy potato salad). Go big and ask for the treasure chest of steamed spiced shrimp, mussels and oysters rounded out with boiled potatoes, corn on the cob and drawn butter — a picnic for Poseidon.

304 Burns St., St. Michaels, Md. 410-745-2900. thecrabclaw.com. Open for indoor and outdoor dining. Sandwiches, \$12 to \$29; entrees, \$24 to \$43.

Jaleo

Thirty years after it served its first tapa, this Spanish oasis from chef-humanitarian José Andrés is as fresh as ever. Diners walk in to what always feels like a fiesta (a masked bull head on the wall near the bar helps) and sit down to multiple menus listing dozens of drinks and small plates.

For help in winnowing the many choices, I asked the trailblazer behind the script to pick three tapas he considers crucial to understanding Jaleo, which juggles 600 or so covers a day. One is gazpacho, the chef's wife's recipe, spiked with sherry and poured into a bowl of minced cucumbers and green peppers at the table: an invigorating liquid salad. The other is garlic shrimp, pearly sauteed seafood ramped up with chile de árbol. Even simpler, but just as sublime, is airy-crisp pan de cristal imported from Barcelona and slathered with crushed beefsteak tomato. So much

Promoting the Spread of Knowledge and Discovery



Smithsonian

Italian Dishes Served Like Never Before



This much I can promise: No one goes home hungry after dinner at Obelisk.

The antipasti alone at the Italian standard-bearer is as filling as entire meals are at some of the competition.

Dinner in the narrow townhouse in Dupont Circle, so discreet it doesn't bother with a sign outside, begins subtly enough. A little bowl of herbed olives materializes while you're perusing the five-course, handwritten menu. Once your order is taken, a plate of burrata shows up, along with skinny housemade breadsticks from a wooden buffet in the center of the dining room. You take a taste of the cheese from Puglia, glistening with fruity Ligurian olive oil and sparked with cracked pepper, and it's as if you're eating the combination for the first time. Except, burrata has been the introduction here since I started reviewing for The Post, which says something about the enduring appeal of premium ingredients and the comfort of routine.

A plate of greens gets dropped off. "Puntarelle," a server says, introducing the crisp hollow stalks of a vegetable that Romans gravitate to in winter. The pleasantly bitter salad is slick and delicious with anchovy vinaigrette. On the heels of the greens are a couple folds of smoke-perfumed duck garnished with pickled sour cherries, red on red. I'm marveling at the dance between the fowl and the fruit when some suppli interrupt the performance. Like the burrata, the fried-to-order balls of Arborio rice and mozzarella cheese taste a breed apart from so much suppli out there. The proportion of crisp-soft rice to stretchy cheese is ideal, and, like the puntarelle, a Roman holiday.

"Don't eat any more bread," I caution my dining companion — this, after I wolf down a second piece of crusty sourdough. (Critic, heal thyself. Or MYOB.) Experience tells me I need to pace myself at Obelisk, but it's been so long since my last visit, I feel like I'm catching up with an old friend and, well, rules are meant to be broken.

Any moment now, I expect my first course. The kitchen has other ideas, specifically creamy lobster salad on a finger of toasted bread — a single, glorious bite that plays up the flavor of the sweet seafood.

Never been to Obelisk? You're missing, ahem, a lot. Veteran restaurateur Peter Pastan brought the idea to life in 1987 and eventually sold the 27-seat business to longtime employee Esther Lee in 2016. (Pastan is the talent who had us lapping up Neapolitan



pizza when he rolled out 2 Amys in 2001.)

Raised in Columbia, Md., Lee strikes a modest pose, referring to herself as "a kid from the suburbs" who went on to graduate from the Culinary Institute of America in 1995. Like her former boss, she eschews attention. She figures the only reason some people know about Obelisk is because her servers insisted she post a few photos on Instagram. The younger faces I've noticed in the restaurant might be the result. "They think they're discovering something," says the chef with a laugh. Otherwise, the clientele tends to be "pure Washington," as in "unflashy." No bros, in other words.



Lee, 51, has changed so little of the familiar recipe, any tweak seems like a big deal. For as long as I can remember, the drill has been five courses, with a few choices per course, in a setting that's simply dressed with a band of mirrors at eye level, affording every diner a view, and some strategically placed framed drawings and small obelisks. The room shimmers more these days, thanks to a copper-painted ceiling and silver fabric on the banquettes, but otherwise, it's the same cozy enclave I recall from years ago. Unlike at so many restaurants now, no one is told how long they can stay. How very Italian of Obelisk. Pastan is no longer a presence, but his presence is felt. "He saw what other restaurants were doing and did the opposite," says Lee, who subscribes to the same, steady-as-she-goes theory.

Lee says she's thought about cutting back on the flotilla of snacks, "but then I think, you don't have to eat everything!" Easier said than done when the crumbs of the antipasti are brushed away and your choice of pasta lands on the green-and-gold place mat. A little leaning tower of lasagna features chestnut pasta and roasted chestnuts, bound in rich bechamel and cheese, hinting of speck (smoked ham) and scented with sage. Your dining companion has stopped talking to you because his gnocchi draped with duck ragu is demanding his full attention. Unlike in some places, the mouth-melting orbs taste of potato, not flour. Of course you switch plates. Of course you can't declare a favorite. Both pastas are prizes.

Your choices might not be mine, for the simple reason Lee changes her menu every week.

Can you squeeze in some cheese? Yes, you can. The plate is a changing trio of small tastes, a constant of which is housemade

DC's New Navy Yard Eatery

The breakout star of Any Day Now, the new all-day cafe from chefs Tim Ma and Matt Sperber, is the breakfast sandwich swaddled in a housemade scallion pancake.

“We thought if we sold 50, we’d pat ourselves on the back,” on opening day June 1, says Sperber, 32, Ma’s business partner and chef de cuisine. “By 11:30 we were sold out.” At the same time the next day, all 150 sandwiches produced by the Navy Yard kitchen were gone. Shortly after 10 a.m. that Saturday, Ma went outside to tell a hungry crowd there was nothing more to sell after the restaurant made 217 hot pockets. By Sunday, Any Day Now pumped out nearly 300 orders — before noon.

“It was a blessing we didn’t anticipate,” says Sperber, and the chief reason for pushing back dinner service until late July. The sandwiches, which start with a labor-intensive dough and get filled with steamed egg and a choice of bacon, sausage or kimchi, live up to the frenzy. In my experience, crackle gives way to tender egg and melted cheese, a sensation enlivened by a dip in the accompanying garlic-chili soy sauce. Recipients are truly sorry when the last sesame-oiled crumb is dispatched. The only reason I didn’t get back in line for a second round is because the sandwiches are griddled to order, they take about 10 minutes — and I had a lunch reservation on the horizon.

Lots of fans have trumpeted the praises of the Taylor Swift of sandwiches. I’m here to tell you evenings offer plenty of entertainment, too.

Dinner was actually my first visit to the restaurant, which follows ABC Pony in its space. Little on the menu at Any Day Now reads unusual; lots of places serve tuna tartare, barbecue spare ribs and burgers. I tasted the combination.

— American Son, Kyirisan, Water & Wall and Maple Avenue, among others — gave

them to Sperber for reference, and told him to apply his own story to whatever dishes he envisioned for Any Day Now. Sperber, who left the Salt Line in Ballston to work with Ma at Lucky Danger, Ma’s American Chinese takeout, is a New Jersey native whose favorite childhood food memories embraced family trips to diners.

Which is how Any Day Now’s atypical tuna tartare came about: Sperber wanted to both riff on a classic tuna melt and offer an alternative to beef tartare. Diced tuna is bound with mayonnaise, miso, cold-smoked egg and blue cheese, which imparts a meaty note, and spread across a raft of toast, which is finished with a carpet of minced scallions and pickled mushrooms — perfect ping. For sure, the combination is different. But intriguing, too, and an example of the “polished casual” approach Sperber says he is aiming for here.

Servers steer customers toward certain dishes by flagging their inspiration. The cucumber salad, a waiter says, “is like a gyro.” Sure enough, the small plate gathers all the makings for the Greek staple: chunks of cucumber arranged with merguez and feta cheese, both made in-house, along with fresh mint and sourdough croutons for contrasting texture. The salad sits on a puddle of toum mixed with tahini and eats like a gyro — a gyro sent to finishing school, that is.

Sperber says he loves honey walnut shrimp served at Chinese restaurants. His version swaps in fried calamari, which he scatters with black walnut crumble and arranges with broccoli, typically a garnish. Instead of serving the vegetable steamed, though, he chars it, for depth of flavor, but also to give it a more prominent role.



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