**WEIN&DINE’S CHICAGO QUICK GUIDE**

[**Asian**](#goat) **|**[**Brunch**](#dove's) **|** [**Burgers**](#Cheval) **|** [**BYOB**](#Irazu) **|** [**Central/Latin/South American**](#Lena) **|** [**Cocktails**](#arbella) **|** [**Deep-dish pizza**](#Malnatti) **|** [**Doughnuts**](#Firecakes) **|** [**Fancy hot dogs**](#Lower) **|** [**Fried Chicken**](#roost) **|** [**Indian**](#Cumin) **|** [**Italian**](#Monteverde) **|** [**Lunch Spots**](#arts) **|** [**Microbreweries/Taprooms**](#Revolution) **|** [**Miscellaneous**](#Tola) **|** [**Poke**](#FireFin) **|** [**Ramen**](#Wasabi) **|** [**Rooftop Bars**](#Drumbar) **|** [**Seafood**](#GT) **|** [**Small Plates**](#miso) **|** [**Steakhouses**](#Bavette) **|** [**Sushi**](#Toro) **|** [**Sweets**](#Mandy) **|** [**Tacos**](#margaritas) **|** [**Thin crust pizza**](#millennials)

**Small plates**

* **Mott St.:** (Wicker Park) Mott St. is the closest I could come to having a favorite restaurant. Its menu is divided into small plates, medium plates and large plates that are all designed to share. Their food is definitely fusion, but has a lot of East Asian influence. The vibe is very cute and intimate with an edgy feel to it, and they have a wonderful wooden patio with hanging plants and ivy. Must orders: The everything wings, the oyster mushrooms in a miso broth, the bread, the stuffed cabbage and the burger. The burger is very unique and is a phenomenal burger; however, you can only order it from 6-7 pm, or any time if you’re sitting at the bar.
* **Avec:** (West Loop) Avec is also small plates with more of a Mediterranean influence. It originally started as a wine bar, so their wine list is robust. The restaurant is an oblong wooden box essentially and it’s all community seating with long wooden tables. There is always a decent wait here as you can’t make reservations. But, it’s definitely worth it. They change their menu seasonally, but a few things are always on the menu and are must-orders: The focaccia, the dates and the pork shoulder.
* **Steadfast:** (Loop) Steadfast is brand new in Chicago and comes from a well-known restaurant group. It’s similar to Mott St. where there are several sizes of plates all designed to be shared, including a charcuterie menu. This is a little more upscale in terms of small plates, and the dishes are all extremely tasty, but also all look like a work of art. Their cocktail program is also very renowned, and again, their drinks are beautiful. Must orders: The bread basket, the duck and the grilled short rib.

**Italian**

* **Monteverde:** (West Loop) Monteverde comes from a very renowned chef in Chicago, she was the runner up on Top Chef and earned three Michelin Stars as executive chef of a very upscale Chicago restaurant. She opened Monteverde last year, and it is incredible. It’s classic Italian inspired dishes, but with a modern twist. All of the pastas are made from scratch, and you can watch them make the pasta in the middle of the restaurant. The food is also designed to share here, but you can order individually as well. The ambiance is rustic Italian meets trendy Chicago. Must-orders: It’s hard to go wrong here, but you have to at least have two pasta dishes. Again, this is a menu that changes often depending on the season. Also the melone e ham is amazing. The arancini are pretty well known there (fried rice balls). Definitely order dessert because their desserts are phenomenal.
* **Formento’s:** (West Loop) Formento’s is more classic Italian, but it’s more upscale and is executed really well. Anthony Bourdain has been known to dine here on occasion, so it’s obviously good. I haven’t eaten there enough to say the must-orders, but I can say that their meatballs are delicious.

**Burgers**

* **Au Cheval:** (West Loop) This is a very famous French restaurant known for their burger. Their burger has been consistently voted the best burger in the country. If I’m being honest, I think it’s a little overrated, but people get really upset when I say that. This is also a restaurant that does not take reservations, and there will be a very long wait. Must-orders: Obviously the burger + bacon and egg. The menu says single, but a single is actually a double, so just be warned. Also, the General Jane’s fried chicken is amazing. The rest of the menu is very French and pretty heavy.
* **Small Cheval:** (Wicker Park) Small Cheval is Au Cheval’s fast-casual sister restaurant. You order at the counter and sit down to eat in their small communal dining area or out on their great patio. They only serve several things here: 1) Au Cheval’s burger 2) Fries 3) Milkshakes 4) Booze. Because you order at the counter, you never really have to wait for a table, so if you want to try the “famous” burger, but don’t want to wait for hours, then go here.
* **BopNgrill:** (Rogers Park and Lakeview) BopNGrill was featured on Food Network’s Diners, Drive-ins and Dives for their duxelle burger. It has truffled mushrooms, sundried tomatoes, smoked gouda and a togarashi mayo on it. It’s phenomenal. It’s a hole in the wall super causal spot where you order at the counter. The original is pretty far north, but they just opened a second location on Belmont. Must-orders: The duxelle burger obviously and the kimchi fries. If you go on the weekend, get the philly cheesesteak eggrolls – they run out quickly, though.

**Asian**

* **Duck Duck Goat:** (West Loop) This is Stephanie Izard’s most recent restaurant. Stephanie was a Top Chef winner and owns one of the most famous restaurants in Chicago, Girl and the Goat. She’s always had a ton of Asian influence in her cooking, so she decided to open a Chinese restaurant. The dishes are modeled to be pretty authentic, but, coming from Stephanie Izard, of course they have their twists to them, and they’re insanely delicious. The vibe of the restaurant is very cute; you feel like you’ve been transported to a little restaurant in China. You should make a reservation if you go here, it’s unlikely you’ll be able to walk in. Must-orders: Duck egg rolls, jiazo (beef short rib and bone marrow potstickers), any of the slap noodles, any of the fried rice dishes.
* **Imperial Lamian:** (River North) Imperial Lamian is a relatively new Chinese restaurant. There is only one other location and it is in China. They have a very unique way of making noodles, and that’s by stretching them out with their hands into long strands. You can watch them do it in the restaurant. They have these (relatively trendy) soup dumplings – you can get them in a variety of flavors; they’re very yummy. The décor is also super cool. Must-orders: Soup dumplings, the pumpkin puffs (they’re adorable and they’re stuffed with duck), the jasmine tea smoked ribs (so much meat on the bones), and the braised pork belly la mian (the noodles).
* **Yusho:** (Logan Square): Yusho is like Japanese fusion small plates; modeled off of Japanese street food or skewers. It’s a small restaurant, but very homey. They have several ramen dishes, but I wouldn’t go for their ramen. Must-orders: The octopus, the 2x fried chicken, and the mushrooms ( they’re huge and meaty and delicious, and I’m not even a mushroom fan).

**Central/Latin/South American**

* **Lena Brava:** (West Loop) This is the acclaimed Rick Bayless’s newest restaurant. He owns many famous restaurants in Chicago: Frontera, Topolobampo, XOCCO, etc. Lena Brava is based off of traditional Mexican coastal cuisine – so it’s a lot of sea food. It literally transported me back to Mexico when I ate there. The food is so flavorful, and honors classic Mexican preparations, but with a Bayless twist. Must-orders: Definitely get a ceviche, aguachile or coctele – ask the waiter to recommend one or two. Get the hiramasa and 100% get the striped bass. It’s phenomenal. It’s butterflied and grilled, then slathered with your choice of sauce. It serves two people, but isn’t overwhelmingly large at all.
* **Tanta:** (River North) This is a longstanding favorite of mine in Chicago the past four years or so since it opened. It’s an upscale – well, trendy rather – Peruvian restaurant with a very vibrant environment. If you’ve never had much Peruvian food, this is definitely the place to have it. They also have classic Peruvian cocktails on tap. Must-orders: Gosh, this one is tough because everything is delicious, and it’s all meant to be shared. The waiters are really wonderful here about helping you order, so definitely ask for guidance. I’d say definitely get a cebiche (they’re so fresh). Definitely get at least one causita (whipped potatoes with toppings) and one niguiri nikei (almost like Peruvian sushi) – these are both super traditional Peruvian bites, and they’re all delicious, so it’s really a personal preference on which ones to order. If you’re very hungry and want to be impressed, order the whole fish (also very traditional Peru). The chaufa aeropuerto is delicious, and the lomo soltado is also a very typical Peruvian dish (basically beef stir-fry over fries). Get the El Chingon to drink! Or a pisco sour if you want a super traditional drink.
* **La Sirena Clandestina:** (Fulton Market) Also one of my favorite restaurants. This spot is super intimate and cute. It’s a Brazilian restaurant that’s dark and sultry and has an incredibly delicious menu. They have empanadas of the day and the flavors are always changing, but I would definitely recommend ordering at least one. The rest of their menu items are very large, but they’re so good, so I would still each order your own dish. Must-orders: The kale salad. I’m not even a salad person, and this salad is delicious. The dressing is light, but creamy at the same time and is perfect with the kale. The Moqueca – it’s essentially like a Brazilian seafood stew over rice. It is one of the most flavorful dishes I’ve ever had. It’s phenomenal. The Feiojada – Basically a whole bunch of meat, but prepared beautifully, and of course, with a ton of Brazilian flavors.
* **El Che Bar:** (West Loop) El Che has only been open a month, and was opened by the same people who own La Sirena. Needless to say, the food is extremely flavorful. The restaurant also has a dark interior, but a more modern feel to it. The kitchen is exposed, so it’s open up to the dining area, and they use a very rustic, open flame that is huge – it’s quite the spectacle! The menu sections start of with smaller plates then get larger as you go down the menu, but everything is really created to be shared. It’s a very meat-heavy menu. Their cocktails are also very unique and tasty. The servers there are incredibly knowledgeable and friendly. Because the restaurant is hot and new, you definitely need a reservation. Must-orders: The pickled melon and shrimp salad, the sweetbreads, the lamb ribs, the salmon, the pork chops.

**Cocktail bars**

* **Arbella:** (River North) This cocktail bar is owned by the same people who own Tanta. The décor is fun and trendy and dark, and the cocktails are extremely innovative, but tasty at the same time – which is sometimes tricky. For example, they use a lot of nitrogen to freeze drinks right in front of your eyes (which creates a lot of smoke). They also have a drink that tastes just like peanut butter and jelly, and it’s served in a jam jar. I’m not well acquainted enough to say what to order, but definitely sit at the back bar and ask the bartender for recommendations – he is incredibly enlightened and can make you anything you want.
* **Three Dots & a Dash:** (River North) This is a tiki bar, and they go all out with the them. You have to get to the bar through a back door entrance in an alleyway. It’s dimly lit and you literally feel like you’ve walked onto a Polynesian island. The drinks all come in crazy tiki glasses, with beautiful garnishes – they all look like a work of art. They’re very tasty, but are VERY strong, so beware. It’s definitely a really fun experience. They have a sister bar in Logan Square called Lost Lake, which is essentially the same concept, but a little less crowded.
* **Estereo:** (Logan Square) This is a new cocktail bar that sits on a corner and is all open air, with big garage windows that open outwards. They play old vinyl records of Cuban music and all of their drinks are tropical, but simple. You feel like you’ve been transported to Cuba when you take a seat here.
* The Aviary: The Aviary is a very well-known cocktail bar in Chicago. It’s quite nice, and is difficult to get into without a recommendation – unless you go very early or very late. Each drink here is literally like a science experiment/work of art. For example, they have a drink that comes inside of a glass bottle with a sailboat inside. There’s one that comes with a giant ball of ice that is filled with an old fashioned-like drink, and they bring you a slingshot to break the ice, which then forms your perfect drink in your glass. Needless to say, it’s an awesome experience. The drinks are pretty pricey, and are very strong.

**Brunch:**

* **Dove’s:** (Wicker Park) Dove’s was been written up as one of the best new restaurants in America. It’s tex-mex, which seems interesting for brunch, but it’s very tasty. It’s decorated like a retro diner from the ‘70s, and is teeny tiny – so there’s normally a wait. Must-orders: Definitely get the avocado toast. The rest is up to you, but you can’t go wrong. Very popular items: chicken fried chicken and the enfrijoladas.
* **The Publican:** (Fulton Market) The Publican is owned by a very famous restaurant group and has a very renowned chef. It’s modeled like a German beerhall, with long wooden, communal tables. The menu is very meat heavy, but extremely flavorful and elevated – almost fancy. Must-orders: Saturday and Sunday have different brunch menus, so make sure you check to see which you prefer. Again, everything is great, so it’s hard to go wrong, but definitely pick something meat-centric (which will be easy to do).
* **Boho House:** (River North) Boho is an Eastern European restaurant, which is pretty rare in the finer dining scene in Chicago. The chef is very talented, and the food is flavorful and beautiful. The restaurant décor is also very well thought out – with a lot of rustic wood, ornate tiling and artwork. Must-orders: The open-faced pork schnitzel sandwich.
* **MAD Social:** (West Loop) MAD Social is almost like upscale bar food, but really over the top and delicious. The restaurant has a bar vibe to it – lots of wood and very open. Must-orders: The chicken and waffles are the best chicken and waffles I’ve ever had. The waffles are like twice fried churros – they’re incredible.
* **Little Goat:** (West Loop) This is one of Stephanie Izard’s restaurants (Girl & the Goat, Duck Duck Goat). It’s called a “diner,” but essentially the only diner-like quality is that it’s very causal. Like most of Izard’s menus, this menu has a lot of Asian influence and is very unique. It’s almost like Asian American fusion comfort food. They do take reservations, which is nice, and they’re normally pretty easy to get. Must-orders: The Bullseye French Toast – it’s French toast with an egg baked into and then fried chicken and strawberries on top. Sinful, right? Also, the Los Drowned – it’s one of the best sandwiches I’ve ever had. It’s like a French Dip sandwich but on flavor steroids.

**Steakhouse**

* **Bavette’s:** (Loop) In the sake of being transparent, I’ve yet to make it to Bavette’s. Sad story. Just haven’t had an occasion to go yet. But it’s hands down most foodies’ favorite steakhouse in Chicago. It’s very intimate, and they have all of the classics you’d want in a steakhouse, but everything has a little more character. And they execute their menu very well (from what I hear). Must-order: Steak frites.
* **Switf & Sons:** (Fulton Market) Swift & Sons is a very trendy steakhouse in an old meatpacking warehouse that has been completely renovated. It’s a beautiful space and is a popular spot for company dinners. They like to describe themselves as a “premier steakhouse with a modern twist.” And I would say that’s accurate. Their menu is pretty straightforward, but the food is very artfully crafted and executed very well.

**Ramen:**

* **Wasabi:** (Bucktown) Wasabi is essentially like Japanese small plates, but I think their main star is their ramen. Ramen has been a big trend in Chicago over the past several years, but I think it’s really difficult to find a ramen that’s truly flavorful and unique. Wasabi’s ramen outshines all of the rest in my opinion. Their broth is jam packed with flavor, and it really comes through in every bite. It’s also a cute, dimly lit restaurant that’s BYOB, which is wonderful! Must-orders: Any of the ramen, of course. The pork belly buns are also quite tasty. Their sushi is nothing to write home about.
* **Oiistar:** (Wicker Park) I feel similarly to Oiistar in that it’s one of the few ramen spots that actually packs a ton of great flavor into their ramen bowls. Ramen is the main focus, and their ramen bowls are HUGE. It’s a very small, dark Japanese parlor-esque spot. Must-orders: Any of the ramen.

**Rooftop bars:**

* **Drumbar:** (Streeterville) This is a swanky rooftop bar near the loop. It’s off of the Mag Mile – almost hidden – so it never gets too crowded. It’s got a library/loungey feel to it, and the drinks are very well crafted and are tasty. They have fire pits outside if it’s cold.
* **J. Parker:** (Old Town) J. Parker is a little more removed from downtown, but still has a nice view of the skyline and of the lake. It’s pretty to go up there when the sun is still out so you can admire the water. It’s a little more casual, but it does get very crowded at night, and there is normally a line to get up. The drinks are decent.
* **Raised:** This is a newish rooftop in the Renaissance Hotel. It’s interesting that it’s considered a “rooftop,” because it’s really only two or so stories up. However, it does have a unique view of the river and the skyscrapers, as you’re looking up at them. The ambiance is swanky casual, and they have a lot of space. They also have huge heating lamps (that look like actual lamps) in case it’s cool out.
* **Cindy’s:** (Loop) Cindy’s is the rooftop bar/restaurant at the Chicago Athletic Association Hotel. The whole building used to be…an athletic club, shocker. They’ve kept the décor and theme, and the building is an actual hotel now with several restaurants and bars on each floor. Cindy’s is the on the roof and has a great view that overlooks Millennium Park and the lake. They have an indoor and outdoor area. The drinks are pretty good. The food; however, only comes in very large, meant-to-share plates, and it’s not that great. So only go for drinks.
* **GreenRiver:** (Streeterville) GreenRiver is a very unique rooftop for several reasons. One, it’s inside of the same building that houses Northwestern Hospital, so you have to go into the hospital to get to it. It’s odd – but not as bizarre as you’d think. Second, it has a very unique view due to the fact that it’s so far east. It’s a really beautiful view of downtown, and the outdoor patio is huge and wraps around the entire side of the building. Their drinks are a little on the pricey side, but they’re good. The food is okay. Again, mainly would go here for drinks and the view.

**Sushi:**

* **Toro:** (Lincoln Park) Toro is one of my most favorite sushi spots in the city. It’s a tiny hole-in-the-wall sushi spot that always has a wait, but it’s well worth it. The sushi is extremely fresh and the owner, Mitch, is always behind the sushi bar personally crafting sushi and greeting his regulars. If you sit at the bar, he’ll normally give you a free sampling. A lot of the rolls are named after his regulars, which speaks to how personal the experience is. It’s BYOB as most sushi places in the city are. Must-orders: Sushi is definitely a personal preference, but my go-tos are the Tipsy Trixie, El Fuego, the “O”, the Ahi Salad…honestly, they’re all great so you can’t go wrong.
* **Seadog:** (Wicker Park) Seadog is also one of my most favorite spots for sushi – I used to eat here several times a month. The rolls here are very large and are really innovative – unlike anywhere else I’ve ever been. They’re a little on the pricy side, but they’re very flavorful and the restaurant is Michelin recommended. It’s pretty small and the acoustics are poor, but there is a nice back patio if the weather is warm enough. Must-orders: The Sea Monster – this roll is so large that you almost can’t breathe when you’re eating it. Sounds terrifying, but it’s insanely delicious. It has everything imaginable in it, which at first also intimidated me. But once I tried it, it became one of my most favorite rolls of all time. The Seadog Tower, the Secret Garden and the Midnight Sundae are some of my other go-tos.
* **Yuzu:** (West Town) Yuzu is relatively new and is currently at the top of my list for sushi in the city. It’s by far the freshest sushi I’ve had in Chicago. Similar to Seadog, the rolls are very large and are unique. The really cool part about Yuzu is that each roll is truly a work of art – they use different colored sauces and draw beautiful pictures on the sushi boards. It’s quite the display, and tasty, too – which sometimes isn’t the case when items tend to be showy. Must-orders: You really can’t go wrong. I like the rainbow roll because it’s so fresh and allows me to taste a wide array of fish. One warning, when they spicy tuna, their tuna is actually quite spicy, so be careful. It’s very tasty, though!

**Fried chicken:**

* **The Roost:** (Wrigleyville and River West locations) Obviously being from Memphis, we are fried chicken snobs. And this fried chicken is amazing – not just for Chicago, but for fried chicken in general. They’re known for their chicken biscuit sandwiches. It’s a casual place where you order at the counter. Must-orders: Chicken biscuit sandwich (or hot chicken).
* **Gus’s** – (Fulton Market) Obviously Gus’s reigns from Memphis. It’s the same one (technically) – they’ve opened a franchise here. It’s the same menu and of course insanely delicious, but it’s just not the same as having it in Memphis. But it’s there if you’re craving it. Must-orders: The chicken, duh. Any kind you like.
* **The Budlong:** (Lakeview) Budlong is also a place that takes its inspiration from Tennessee. Their whole thing is focused on Nashville hot chicken. The chicken is spicy, but not too spicy, and is very moist on the inside, with a nice – not too heavy – fried coating. They serve it with a piece of white bread and pickles, of course. But apparently they have a chicken sandwich that is also phenomenal. Must-orders: Anything with the chicken.
* **Crisp:** (Lakeview) This is a Korean fried chicken spot. It’s very small and casual – you order at the counter, and they bring your food out on cafeteria trays. You can order wings or tenders, and then you pick your sauces that the chicken will be coated in. You can have the chicken tossed in the sauce, or you can get it on the side. And you can have more than one sauce – even if you have them coated, you can have half in one sauce and half in the other. Must orders: The chicken, obviously. My favorite sauce is the Seoul sassy.

**Lunch spots:**

* **3 Arts Club:** (Gold Coast) 3 Arts Club is actually a café inside a Restoration Hardware store/showroom. It’s in a huge, historical building with lofted glass ceilings, a fountain, a chandelier and plants. It’s a phenomenally beautiful setting to have lunch in. However, the food is also insanely delicious – which I’ll be honest, surprised me. It’s a pretty simple, straightforward menu, but everything is great. It’s best to go during the week for lunch; on the weekends, there’s normally a solid two or three hour wait. But if you get there and there is a wait, you can order a drink (coffee, tea or alcohol from the café and can walk around the five floors of showrooms. Must orders: The buratta, the RH scramble, the truffled grilled cheese.
* **Goddess & The Grocer:** (Several locations) This is a great spot where everything is extremely fresh and simple. It’s essentially a little grocery story, but they make sandwiches, hot entrees, salads, and items to take home and pop in the oven. You can pick up pre-prepared items, or you have them made fresh. You can take your food to do, or eat in-house. They also have wine, beer and a ton of delicious baked goods. Must-orders: There are so many different directions to go here, but I’ve heard their schnitzel sandwich is amazing. You can’t really go wrong.
* **3 Greens Market:** (River North) This is an awesome spot for lunch if you’re looking for a lot of casual, delicious options. They have a huge salad bar that is incredibly creative and stocked full of delicious items. You get a tray and serve yourself. They also serve the famous Small Cheval hamburgers and cheeseburgers, and they have a pastrami shop – both of these items you have to order at the counter. Must-orders: The pastrami sandwich. It.is.life.changing.
* **Revival Food Hall:** (The Loop) Food Halls are a trendy thing in the food world right now, so of course Chicago had to follow suit. Revival has 16 restaurants you can order food from – they’re some of the tastiest, most popular fast-casual spots in the city. And they range from pizza, to fried chicken, to poke, to baked goods. The décor is also very cool – industrial chic with large, round, clear bulbs hanging from the ceilings. Sort of an overall modern, clean feeling. Each restaurant has it’s own vibe and a countertop where you can sit to eat. Or, you can sit at a communal table or private table. Must-orders: This is tough because it really depends on your what you’re in the mood for. I’d say if you’ve never had poke (and you like raw fish), definitely have Aloha Poke. Get the Fat Shallot if you’re in the mood for a delicious, innovative sandwich.

**Sweets:**

* **Sweet Mandy B’s:** (Lincoln Park) Oh this is a special place! Sherrie, the pastry chef, is incredibly talented and creates the most amazing sweets ranging from Nutela poptarts, to flourless chocolate mini cakes to sweetie pies (a cookie sandwich with icing in between two sugar cookies), to the Just Dough It (a cookie sandwich with raw cookie dough between two chocolate chip cookies). It’s decorated all in pastels and is very cute. Must-orders: Again, this is totally up to your preferences in sweets. You really cannot go wrong. The Just Dough It is insane, but is only available on the weekends.
* **Hoosier Mama:** (West Town and Evanston) This is my most favorite pie shop ever. I’m not even a big pie person, and this pie is insane. The location on Chicago Avenue is teeny tiny, but the one in Evanston is a decent drive. They have a daily selection of pies that you can get by the slice, or you can get a whole pie or small pie. They also have sandwiches, soups and salads. Must-orders: The pies change daily, but if they have the passion fruit merengue pie – GET IT. This pie is the pie that changed my mind on all pies. The passion fruit custard is super tangy and tart, and the merengue is made perfectly and is just sweet enough to balance out the passion fruit. So so good. The chocolate chess pie is also phenomenal – it’s so chocolatey and dense, it reminds me of flourless chocolate cake.
* **Bang Bang Pie:** (Logan Square and Ravenswood locations) Bang Bang is a pie shop, but they also have biscuit sandwiches, potpies and grits. The Logan Square location is small inside, but they have a great patio. The Ravenswood location is brand new. There’s normally a line out of the door at the Logan Square location, but it moves quickly. Must-orders: Honestly, I don’t go here for the pie, I go for the biscuit sandwiches. Their biscuits are amazing. Get the avocado biscuit, they basically put an entire avocado on top of it. If they have the honey pie, get it. That’s their signature pie, and it’s simple, but so well done.
* **Alliance Bakery:** (Wicker Park) Alliance Bakery has been around for a while and is a staple in Wicker Park. They’re more of a classic bakery – with macaroons, tarts, cupcakes, brownies, éclairs, etc. They have a bourgeoning wedding cake business, too, with a tasting room attached to the bakery. Must-orders: I love their croissants, they have these huge stuffed croissants – my favorite is the ham and cheddar or turkey and Swiss. They’re also very well known for their macaroons.

**Deep-dish pizza:**

* **Lou Malnatti’s:** (Numerous locations) There’s a ton of argument surrounding the best deep dish. My favorite is Lou’s and that’s because of their crust and amount of cheese they use. They’re famous for their butter crust, which is oh so good. And I love their pizza because they do not shy away from the cheese. Must-orders: Any deep dish.
* **Pequod’s:** (Lincoln Park) Pequod’s is a close second in terms of my favorites. It’s not very well known in the city, unless you’re a true deep-dish aficionado. They use cast-iron pans and line them with cheese, so when the pizza bakes, the crust comes out caramelized. It’s pretty unique and quite delicious. Must-order: I always go pepperoni deep dish, but again, your preference.

**Thin Crust Pizza**

* **Parlor Pizza Bar:** (West Loop and Wicker Park) Parlor is a pretty popular bar in general for millennials, so it can be sort of a rambunctious crowd at the West Loop location, the Wicker Park one is much more family-oriented. Their pizzas; however, are very unique and extremely tasty. They also have a good beer list and very yummy appetizers. It’s overall just a really restaurant that goes above and beyond your standard pizza joint. Must-orders: The crazy bread. It’s called that because it’s insane – it’s basically garlic bread with marinara and pepperoni baked in between the slices, and then a ton of mozzarella melted on top of it. Also, get the Burrata be Kidding me – it’s a white pie with fresh mozzarella, burrata, baby arugula, lemon vinaigrette and a white truffle oil. The flavors are insane and work so well together, and it’s so delicious that I could eat the entire pie by myself (I actually have).
* **Coalfire:** (West Town and Lakeview locations) Coalfire’s pizzas are cooked in a big coal-fired oven, of course. The crust is very thin and comes out almost charred because of the oven, which is tasty. They’re known for the dollops of fresh ricotta they put on their pizzas. Must-orders: The charcuterie plate is unlike any charcuterie I’ve ever had. It’s beautiful, it’s loaded with meats and cheeses and nuts and jams, and it’s very satisfying. The half order is giant, so if it’s just two of you, stick to the half. In terms of pizzas, their most popular is the Lasagna: mozzarella, sausage, sweet red peppers, whipped ricotta, basil and garlic.
* **Piece** (Wicker Park): Piece is a thin crust favorite in Chicago, but they’re really unique, because they’re also a microbrewery. Their pizzas are huge – they come out on large baking pans. On Sunday’s they have a great take-out deal, you can get a large pizza and a growler of beer for $25. Must-orders: I think the best deal is to just BYO pizza.

**Breweries/Microbreweries/Taprooms**

* **Revolution:** (Logan Square) Revolution has a large selection of beers on tap at their brewery. It’s a lively environment, and their food is actually pretty good. It gets rather crowded though on weekend evenings. Must-orders: Any of their beers, their burger.
* **Lagunitas:** (Pilsen) Most of Lagunitas beers are pretty hoppy, but they’re very well liked in Chicago. Their most famous is probably A Little Sumpin’ Sumpin’. Their taproom/brewery is HUGE – it spans multiple blocks. They have free tours on the weekends that run every hour from 1-6 pm. Must-orders: Personal preference.
* **Hopleaf:** (Andersonville) Hopleaf has been written up as one of the best beer bars in the country. Their beer list is unique and expansive. The décor of Hopleaf almost feels like a winter lodge or tavern; it’s very cozy. Their food is also really delicious. Must-orders: Any of their beers, the mussels.

**Tacos:**

* **Big Star:** (Wicker Park) Big Star is a Chicago staple. They have a wonderful patio and possibly my favorite margaritas in the city. The tacos are like street tacos, so they’re small and cheap, and you order them individually. They’re all full of flavor. There is always a huge wait – around two hours or so. But, they have a walk up window you can order food from and sit outside and eat. You just can’t order alcohol on that side. Must-orders: Guacamole, taco al pastor, taco alambre de res.
* **Federales:** (West Loop) Federales is pretty new and was the hot spot to go this summer for a drink outside. It’s all open air and is a vibrant (and loud) scene. It has a dark, industrial feel with large, communal tables. I assumed because it was such a hot spot to get drinks post-work that their food wouldn’t be anything special, but I actually am a big fan. Must-orders: The nachos, carne asada tacos, beef brisket tacos.
* **BIG & littles:** (Several locations) Big & littles is a mish-mash of all sorts of yummy food you’d want after you’ve been drinking – so think tacos, burritos, burgers, etc. However, it’s not drunk food – it’s actually very tasty and they put a unique spin on standard items. It’s BYOB, which is always great, and you can order take-out, delivery or eat it there. It’s very casual – you order at the counter. Must-orders: The Samurai taco, the raw ahi tuna taco, truffle fries. They’re also extremely famous for their soft shell crab po’boy, but I’ve never had it.

**Seafood:**

* **GT Fish & Oyster:** (River North) GT Fish & Oyster is like seafood small plates. All of the dishes are very well thought out – they’re beautiful and delicious. The décor is trendy and makes you feel like you’ve been transported to the East Coast. It has a nautical sort of feel, but refined, almost like a seafood steakhouse. Must-orders: It’s been a long time since I’ve been, so I can’t say here. But whatever you choose will most likely be yummy.
* **Cold Storage:** (Fulton Market) Cold Storage is a restaurant inside of a restaurant (Swift & Sons). It used to be an old meatpacking facility and storage locker. They spent 12 years thawing the place out, and then turned it into a steakhouse, which is pretty neat. All of Fulton Market is considered the meatpacking district. Cold Storage is very small – there are probably only eight high-top tables or so, and then a semi-circle bar that seats 16 or so. Must-orders: Seafood tower, smoked whitefish dip, octopus.
* **The Angry Crab:** (Wicker Park and Arcadia Terrace) This is one of the most flavorful meals I’ve ever had in my life. The whole concept here is pretty cool – you pick out the seafood you want, the sauce, the spice level and any add-ons (corn, potatoes, sausage, etc.). It’s like a giant seafood broil, and they serve it all to you in the broil bag. The tables are lined with parchment paper, you get bibs, wet napkins and a shell cracker. Needless to say, it gets very messy. Must-orders: Choose whatever seafood you prefer, but definitely get the maniac sauce – it’s a combination of all of the sauces, and it is so flavorful and delicious that I could literally drink it. Make sure you order some bread to sop the sauce up with. Spice level is also up to you, but it gets pretty spicy pretty quick, so keep that in mind.
* **Snaggletooth:** (Lakeview) This small storefront focuses on house-cured fish. Their main draw is their smoked fish pastrami served on bagels. Their open-faced sandwiches are both tasty, but also beautiful. The place itself is very small, and you order at the counter. The décor is very quaint, like a backyard garden. They also have old-school drip coffee. Must-orders: the o.g. lox, the pastrami trout.

**Fancy hot dogs**

* **The Duck Inn:** (Lower West Side) The Duck Inn is a corner tavern off the beaten path in the southwest side of Chicago. It has a cute gastro-pub feel to it. They’re famous for their duck dish, which serves two. If you’re going to order it, make sure you call before to make a reservation and let them know you want the duck – otherwise, they sell out. Their menu takes bar food classics and puts an innovative twist on them – a lot of emphasis on duck, too, of course. They have a good dinner menu, but a great brunch menu as well. Must-orders: The duck fat dog. Seriously I have dreams about this dog. It’s “Chicago-style” technically, but it’s on steroids in terms of flavors.
* **Belly Shack:** (Bucktown) This is a fast-casual spot underneath the Western Blue Line station. The menu is a fusion of Korean and Latin American flavors, and everything is packed with flavor. Must-orders: The Belly Dog – it’s one of the most unique hotdogs, and most flavorful hotdogs I’ve ever had. It’s an all-beef hotdog served in the same style bun a lobster roll comes in. And it’s topped with egg noodles and pickled green papaya. It sounds very strange, but it’s phenomenal. The tostones are also wonderful – tostones are smashed, fried plantain chips and they’re served with a chimichurri sauce.

**Indian:**

* **Cumin:** (Wicker Park) This is my most favorite Indian restaurant in the world – and I’ve even been to India. It is so good that I essentially refuse to eat at any other Indian restaurant, because no other can compare. The portions are huge and everything is seasoned perfectly. The meats are tender, the service is great. Must-orders: The vegetable samosa, chicken tikka masala, garlic naan.
* **Pub Royale:** (Wicker Park) I like to describe Pub Royale as Indian comfort food/bar food. It’s more casual, it’s a little more Americanized, a little bit greasier. The ambiance is super cute – it’s almost like a little gastro pub from India – colorfully decorated and dimly lit. The beer list is made to look like a schedule board in a train station. Must-orders: The burger. Seems weird to order a burger in an Indian restaurant, but it’s a really great burger. It doesn’t really have any Indian influence, it’s just a yummy cheeseburger. Also the buttered paneer and the doughnut.

**Doughnuts**

* **Firecakes:** (Several locations) I’ll just preface by saying that I am not a huge doughnut person. But if I were to choose, Firecakes is definitely my favorite. Their doughnuts are very fresh and are airy and fluffy, as opposed to dense and cakey. They have classic flavors and some fun ones, too. Must-orders: Vanilla iced – it’s a huge doughnut, almost the size of my head, and it has little edible vanilla beads on top that give a little crunch to the doughnut. I’m normally a chocolate girl, but I like this vanilla doughnut because the icing really isn’t that sweet.
* **Doughnut Vault:** (West Loop is main location, but they’re sold all over the city) This is probably the most famous doughnut place in Chicago. They’re known for their old-fashioned doughnuts, and they’re done really well. Standard to old-fashioned doughnuts, they’re much more dense and cakey. They also have some unique flavors like lemon poppyseed. Must-orders: Their pistachio old-fashioned is one of their most popular.

**Poke**

* **FireFin:** (The Loop) Poke is super trendy in Chicago right now. Poke is a Hawaiian dish that is essentially large cubes of raw fish – like salmon or ahi tuna – served on top of rice or a salad. It’s a very fresh, relatively healthy dish. FireFin is my favorite poke spot in the city. It’s a fast-casual spot where you order at the counter. FireFin is unique because they serve a lot of their bowls on a purple rice, which is a heartier rice. Their fish is fresh, their sauces are flavorful and their toppings really add to the bowls. Must-order: The Tuna on Fire bowl with a purple rice base.
* **Aloha Poke:** (Several locations): Aloha Poke is the same concept as FireFin, except it came first, and is a little more popular. The main difference is that Aloha Poke is more of a build-your-own bowl place, whereas FireFin has premade preparations for you to choose from. Personally, I prefer FireFin, but they’re both great. Must-order: Ahi tuna crunch.
* **Booze Box:** (West Loop) This isn’t actually a poke restaurant, it’s a Japanese restaurant that’s very small and dark and is underground, beneath a hotel. You get to it through a back alley. It’s very mysterious, but is a cute spot. Most people go here for drinks, and it gets quite crowded. But their food is very good and goes overlooked. Must-orders: Spciy tuna rice bowl (this is the poke bowl. It’s delicious, but is rather spicy), chicken karaage (Japanese fried chicken).

**Unique BYOB:**

* **Irazu:** (Bucktown) Irazu is a Costa Rican spot that was featured on Food Network’s Diners, Drive-ins and Dives. It’s a cute BYOB spot with murals painted on the walls and a great patio. It’s cash only, but they have an ATM in case you forget. Must-orders: The chifrijo – this is like a fried rice dish with fried pork, avocado, jalapenos, black beans and linzano sauce, which is a delicious typical Costa Rican sauce (sweet and savory, a little spice). The pepito with steak, and the oatmeal milkshake – just oatmeal, no additional flavors.
* **90 Miles from Cuba:** (Logan Square) Also featured on DDD, this spot is known for their traditional Cuban dishes. They have a large patio and are also BYOB. Must-orders: Ropa vieja, Cuban sandwich, maduros.
* **Chilam Balam:** (Lakeview) This is a quaint little Mexican restaurant that you would never notice unless you knew it was there. Tucked away underneath a few other shops and restaurants, this small spot offers innovative Mexican small plates. They’re BYOB, but the best part is that they make these fresh virgin sangria and margarita mixes. So if you bring a bottle of wine or tequila, they’ll bring you a pitcher of the appropriate mix. They have a mix for both red and white sangria. Must-orders: Ribs, flautas, guacamole.

**Miscellaneous:**

* **Café Tola** (Lakeview) Café Tola is an empanada shop. It’s teeny tiny – literally the size of a closet. It’s pained bright purple and the side of it always has some relevant mural – like Frida Khalo in a Blackhawks jersey (when the Hawks were in the playoffs). I’ve had a lot of empanadas in my life, I’ve never had a better empanada than Café Tola’s ever. No others compare. They’re fried, but they’re not greasy. They dough is just perfect – it’s not too heavy, it’s flakey and delicious. They change their flavors every day, but I haven’t had a single one that I don’t like. I used to live across the street, and I used to go daily. It was a problem. They also have my favorite coffee, which is Metropolis coffee. There’s no room inside – you can barely stand in line in there. But they have a little seating area outside, or you can just take them to go. Must-orders: As I mentioned, they change daily, but my favorites if they’re there are: the pintos and cheese (sounds super basic, but it’s just so cheesy and good), the chicken salsa verde, and the black bean, goat cheese and plantain empanada.