

Eat & Drink

FOOD AND BEVERAGE TRENDS, NEW RESTAURANT REVIEWS, PLUS THE BEST PLACES TO DINE IN AND TAKE OUT.

In
The
Mood
For

MEXICAN

Whether you're craving Oaxacan-style street food, spicy guac and chips, or a perfectly made margarita, you'll find excellent, authentic fare at these 12 regional restaurants.

By Francesca Furey



Café Maya and Maya Café

Wappingers Falls and Fishkill

Find them on Facebook

Chances are you've driven past the unassuming parking lots of these sister restaurants. But we urge you to step inside: the interiors are festive with colorful murals and mariachi bands on select days. Aside from the fun vibes, the cafés serve up some of the best Mexico City-style tacos around. **For starters** Try the sopa de tortilla. This classic soup has a zesty broth made with tomatoes, onion, and garlic, and is topped with chicken, avocado, and, of course, fried tortilla. Or go the fiery route with uber-popular diablitos—crunchy cheese-stuffed jalapeños. **Main ideas** We're partial to the tacos de camaron: three lightly fried tortillas filled with grilled shrimp, fresh slaw, and pico de gallo. The chile de arbol sauce is excellent. **Drink up** Both spots whip up mean frozen margaritas. (Who cares if it's winter?)

El Azteca Mexican Deli

Poughkeepsie

elaztecamexican.net

A self-proclaimed

"neighborhood meeting place," El Azteca is beloved by transplants from Mexico and local foodies alike. Check the front door for a list of daily specials. And vegans take note: they're using more plant-based ingredients—like soy chorizo—in dishes. **For starters** Creamy guacamole with diced tomatoes and onions served in a molcajete. El Azteca admits, "our authentic guacamole is a hit!"

Main ideas Choose from one of two best-sellers: the enchiladas verdes (chicken,



Mariachi Mexico

beef, or cheese in corn tortillas with tomatillo sauce) or torta de milanesa (breaded chicken, black bean spread, guacamole, lettuce, and mayo piled on telera, a Mexican wheat bread).

Drink up While there's no hard liquor, there are aguas frescas—horchata (rice milk and cinnamon), jamaica (hibiscus), and cucumber lime are the most popular.

El Jalapeño Charro

New Windsor

eljalapenocharro.com

This is one fun spot. The staff is lively, sombreros line the jewel-toned walls, the bar is never not stocked, and it's always popping during the Cinco de Mayo. (Hint: make your reservations now.) They've introduced several street food items like tacos de birria—fried, cheesy beef tacos that you dunk in rich consommé—and addictive churros stuffed with caramel and paired with ice cream. **For starters** Regulars rave about the aguacate relleno—an avocado filled with fresh ceviche. It's light and an ideal choice for those who want to save room for entrées.

Main ideas There are plenty of excellent options, but if you're really hungry go all

out and order the molcajete charro: steak, grilled chicken, chorizo, shrimp, fried cheese sticks, and grilled cactus topped with tomato sauce, caramelized onions, pico de gallo, avocado, and cheese with a side of rice and beans.

Drink up Margaritas are a must—there are over 20 varieties. But if you have a yen for something different, the Torito is a combo of frozen classic margarita, red sangria, and Corona.

El Paso Los Contreras

New Windsor

Find them on Facebook

As most foodies know, the best spots tend to be off the beaten track. The New Windsor-Newburgh area is a mecca for Mexican food—and El Paso Los Contreras is a winner. You'll find authentic ingredients (like tongue) and every tortilla is made by hand. The carnitas are fresh until El Paso's closing time at 6 p.m.

For starters The salsa roja is simple but delicious and served with house-made tortilla chips. If you're looking for something heartier, split a savory steak milanesa torta with a friend—or save half for later (a win-win scenario).

Main ideas Rumor has it, locals flock here at lunchtime two or three times a week for burritos that burst with flavor. The bistec burrito, complete with crema, lettuce, and guac, is a favorite.

Drink up Horchata, a dairy-free agua fresca made with semi-creamy rice milk and cinnamon, is a good choice.

Juanita's Kitchen

Nelsonville

juanitaskitcheny.com

Tucked along Hudson Highlands State Park and slightly north of Cold Spring, Juanita's prides itself in generational cooking. From



Juanita's Kitchen

tortas to tamales to molletes (an open-faced beans and cheese sandwich), each dish from their rotating menu embraces traditional roots. "For customers, new and returning, we make it a point to introduce them to authentic Mexican food—from all states of Mexico," says owner Juanita Rincon.

For starters Order guac and pico de gallo for the table. Then sample crispy empanadas. Juanita's cranks out multiple styles, such as cheese, beef and cheese, chicken, chicken and cheese, and chorizo con papas.

Main ideas Tacos suave, or soft tacos, are perfect and always on the menu. Chicken, steak, chorizo, or roasted veggies are tucked into warm corn tortillas and topped with lettuce, onions,

cilantro, radishes, and either salsa verde or salsa roja. **Drink up** There's no bar (yet), but the seasonal agua frescas are made fresh and in-house. Hibiscus, watermelon, and pineapple are a few can't-miss flavors.

Cocina La Cabañita De Oaxaca

Poughkeepsie

lacabanitaaoax.com

First and foremost, La Cabañita stocks some of the best varieties of Mezcal

and tequila. But don't visit just for the bar. The Pinelo-Cardenas family has served up amazing eats from Mexico's food capital for two decades. All the meat is slow-roasted and melts in your mouth, thanks to techniques passed down over generations. Stop by on weekdays from 4–6 p.m., for two-buck tacos.

For starters Order a Tour of Oaxaca. The delicious platter combines the best of Oaxacan street food—flautas, savory sopes, quesadillas, molotes (corn pastry), and paste de frijoles (black bean dip).

Main ideas Pozole will warm you right up. La Cabañita's version of the traditional stew is made with a punchy chile guajillo broth, white hominy corn, cabbage, and served with a lime wedge and tostadas. You can add chicken or pork. (We suggest the latter.)

Drink up Ever heard of a mezcalita? It's a margarita with a Mexican twist (mezcal instead of tequila).

Popular flavors include tamarind, passionfruit, and mango. They also serve michelada (Oaxacan mezcal mules) and stock plenty of Mexican beer.

La Puerta Azul

Salt Point

lapuertaazul.com

You can't miss this stuccoed tower and its puertas azul (blue doors) along Route 44. Inside is a bustling, hacienda-style eatery

serving authentic Mexican with a modern twist. Some standouts include apple and mango quesadillas, blackened mahi-mahi tacos, and slow-roasted pork and corn tortilla enchiladas.

For starters Check out the appetizer crossover you never knew you needed: Camarones a la parilla—grilled tiger shrimp nestled on a crispy onion ring topped with guac, pico de gallo, and chipotle aioli.

Main ideas The burritos are amazing—especially the carnitas or grilled veg. Here's a hint: Order it chimichanga-style (super crunchy) and ask for a side of house-made habanero sauce.

Drink up Though margaritas are always tempting, switch things up with a piña picante (you can thank us later). Tequila, triple sec, muddled jalapeño, pineapple, and fresh lime—so good! (The fruit-infused mojitos are a close second.)

Las Mañanitas

Brewster

lasmananitasrestaurant.com

This Putnam gem is TikTok famous: head over to @thedrinkrunner and you'll discover over 330,000 people follow Victor Mejia, a waiter who sprints tall stacks of plates and drinks across the restaurant. Called "Las Man" by Brewsterites, the restaurant overlooks the East Branch reservoir and has a sweeping yard that's perfect for hosting families and fun celebrations. But during winter, the interior with its vaulted ceiling and stone fireplace is warm and cozy.

For starters Las Mañanitas labels their guac "legendary," so you know you have to try it—it's mixed up right at your table. Or go with el aguacate: a whole avocado stuffed with crab meat and shrimp. **Main ideas** Once you hear (and smell) the sizzling

PHOTOS (TOP TO BOTTOM) BY MARA ZEMGALIE/ADOBE STOCK; COURTESY OF JOANA HERRERA

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) BY KATRIN BJORK; PIXAHUB/ADOBE STOCK; BAIBAZ/ADOBE STOCK

fajitas at surrounding tables, you'll definitely want one. If you're in the mood for steak, get the mucho macho—grilled skirt steak with chipotle sauce.

Drink up This spot has enough cocktail options to fill the entire magazine. But if we had to pick one, it's the dirty margarita: half frozen marg and half red sangria. It's the best of both worlds—and it's gigantic.

Mariachi Mexico

Armonk

mariachimexico.biz

Sister-owned, farm-to-table Tex-Mex? We'll be right there. Mariachi Mexico's seasonal menu highlights the bounty of local farmers markets and incorporates plenty of fresh vegetables. Make sure to order the delicious guac with house-made tortilla chips.

El Azteca Mexican Deli



For starters Any of their antojitos (i.e. "little cravings") are super satisfying. We especially like the frito (off-the-cob elote—grilled and seasoned corn—with mayo and cotija cheese) and tetelas (stuffed, triangle-shaped corn masa).

Main ideas Tacos, tacos, tacos! Tacos de bistec—grilled skirt steak, caramelized onions, and queso fresco—and de pollo



en chipotle—marinated chicken, pickled onion, and cilantro—are incredible. Vegetarians will love enchiladas de queso y vegetal: Monterrey and goat cheeses with farm-fresh veggies, tomatillo salsa, greens, radish, and queso fresco garnish.

Drink up Fresh-picked mint makes the mojitos special. They also serve Mexican-style beer from Baja Brewing Company, a microbrewery in Los Cabos and Baja California Sur.

Oaxaqueña Triqui

Albany

oaxaquenatriqui.com

If people flock from all over to this little gem in the Capital Region—you know it must be good. The small kitchen serves up big flavors (and portions) thanks to the passionate local Mexican family that runs it. There's a tiny grocery in the back where you can pick up drink mixes, beans, and sauces. Make sure to follow their Facebook page—daily lunch and dinner specials and new dishes are posted often.

For starters Go for sopes—a classic street snack consisting of a fried masa base layered with savory toppings like tinga (shredded chicken in a tomato, chipotle chile, and adobo sauce), chorizo, cecina (dry-cured beef), and campechanos (braised flank steak).

Main ideas Order the tlayuda—trust us. A thin, house-made tortilla is fried, layered with a variety of savory ingredients (beans,

chorizo, marinated pork, and cecina), and topped with shredded lettuce, pico de gallo, avocado, and Oaxaca cheese.

Drink up For a light and creamy sip, get the horchata. There's also fresh mango juice and plenty of Jarritos (fruity Mexican soft drinks) to choose from.

Tequila Sal y Limon

New City, Piermont, and Suffern

tequilany.com

Rockland County locals couldn't get enough of Tequila Sal y Limon in Suffern—so then there were three! An insider tip: the crab dishes are fantastic here. Some fan favorites include the mariscada (see below), crabmeat tostadas, and an excellent guacamole and crabmeat dip in a crispy corn tortilla shell. Bonus: During weekday lunch, select specials are under \$10.

For starters Tamales are a Mesoamerican dish of cornmeal and a protein, which is then wrapped in corn husks and steamed. Here, there's juicy chicken or beef topped with tomato sauce, cheese, and your choice of red, green, or house-made mole.

Main ideas Seafood reigns supreme. The mariscada (a hybrid of paella and stew) shows off the restaurant's shellfish mastery: plenty of clams, octopus, shrimp, and crab are sautéed with mushrooms and onions. Enjoy it with the creamy poblano pepper sauce.

Drink up Most of the margaritas on the menu are decorated with a Mexican flag-colored salt rim—how fun! Two popular versions: strawberry jalapeño and the Cadillac (top-shelf tequila and Grand Marnier).



SEA OF LOVE

Are oysters an aphrodisiac? Maybe—they contain a lot of zinc, which boosts levels of dopamine and testosterone. There's no scientific proof but that's OK, we love them anyway. If you do, too, consider preparing them at home as part of your Valentine's Day dinner. We asked Ralph Bello, executive chef at Newburgh's Primo Waterfront, for advice to up your shell game.

By Megan Wilson



Preparing oysters at home seems scary. How to start?

I recommend buying a mesh safety glove, so if you slip with the oyster knife, you don't puncture your hand—trust me, it's not a pretty injury. You could also use a

thick kitchen towel folded over a few times. You need a special oyster knife; there are a few different types such as the Boston, which is long and narrow, or the New Haven, which is short and stout—it's a matter of preference.

Tool in hand—how do you crack them open?

If you're looking at the oyster as a teardrop, you want to place the knife at the tip. Rather than try to force the knife through, if you have the right angle and give it a slight turn, the shell should pop open easily. While you can hold the oyster in your hand when shucking it, beginners should place it on a table for stability and safety.

How can you tell if the oysters are fresh?

Here's a little trick: Before you open the oyster, hold the shell up to your ear and give it a little shake. If it feels heavy and you can't hear anything rattling around, that's a good sign that the oyster is alive, plump, and full of juice. But if it rattles—like how a burnt-out lightbulb would—it might be dried out and almost dead. There's always the smell test, too: When you shuck an oyster, if it has a strong, rotten odor, don't eat it.

What's the best way to serve oysters?

I like them prepared pretty classic—raw with some mignonette sauce, or a with a little bit of lemon juice and hot sauce. But if it's cold out, I love roasting them in the broiler topped with a bit of butter; try using an apple- or garlic-flavored butter if you want to get fancy.

PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) BY BAIBAZ/ADOBE STOCK; KHORZHEVSKA/ADOBE STOCK; MAHONY/ADOBE STOCK

PHOTOS (TOP TO BOTTOM) BY GRESE/ADOBE STOCK; VIKTORIYA89/ADOBE STOCK

COLD COMFORT

On the chilliest days, there is nothing more soothing than a big mug of hot cocoa. Here are three way-better-than-Swiss Miss versions—from classic to spicy to spiked just right.

“Klassisk” Hot Chocolate

Yields four servings
From HÅKAN Chocolatier, Beacon

INGREDIENTS

- 4 oz. dark chocolate (70 percent or higher)
- 3 oz. milk chocolate
- .75 oz. cacao powder
- 20 oz. whole milk or alternative milk
- Whipped cream, marshmallows, and/or spices, for garnish

PREPARATION

1. Chop the dark and milk chocolate into small pieces. Then combine the chocolate pieces with cacao powder.
2. Add milk to a large saucepan and warm over medium heat to 170°F.
3. Add the chocolate mix to the milk and whisk until fully incorporated.
4. Serve with toppings of your choice.



DRINK OF THE MONTH



Mexican Hot Chocolate

Yields four servings
From Verdigris Tea & Chocolate, Hudson

INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups whole milk or milk alternative
- 8 tsp ground, spiced chocolate (like MarieBelle New York's Aztec dark hot chocolate or two Taza chocolate discs)
- Whipped cream and cinnamon, for garnish

PREPARATION

1. Heat milk in a large saucepan over medium heat until just below a simmer and then stir in the chocolate. Once dissolved, return to low heat and whisk to create a frothy texture.
2. Garnish with whipped cream and cinnamon.

Boozy Hot Cacao

Yields four servings
From Cooper's Daughter Spirits, Claverack

INGREDIENTS

- ¾ cup hot cocoa mix of your choice
- 4 tsp Nutella (leave spoon in glass)
- 4 oz. Cooper's Daughter cacao maple vodka
- Mini marshmallows, whipped cream, grated dark chocolate, for garnish

PREPARATION

1. Fill four 16-ounce mugs with hot water, leaving half an inch room on top.
2. Add 3 tablespoons of cocoa mix, 1 heaping teaspoon of Nutella, and one ounce of vodka to each mug, and stir until thoroughly combined.
3. Top each mug with mini marshmallows, a dollop of whipped cream, and freshly grated dark chocolate.

REVIEW

KITTY'S RESTAURANT & MARKET

Café by day, restaurant by night—Kitty's brings new life to Hudson's waterfront. **By Matt Moment**

From its brief but superb menu to its bright, minimal interior—Kitty's is elegantly simple. So, it makes sense that the restaurant emerged from a simple idea. “[I wanted] a good cup of coffee and some train snacks on my way to the city—and a nice dinner when I got back,” says owner Ben Fain, who figured that Hudson locals and visitors would agree.

Fain graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with an MFA in sculpture, but branched off into real estate after moving to Brooklyn. Even as he was caught up in city life, Fain always kept an eye on the Valley and yearned for “ways to connect back to nature and community.” That’s when he discovered the region’s burgeoning culinary scene. “A lot of my peers are creating their own



spirits up here, like Tim, Anna, and Dave from Left Bank Ciders, and Rachael Petash from Current Cassis. Their passion is contagious.”

Following his friends’ footsteps, Fain purchased a vibrant red building near Hudson’s Amtrak station. Kitty’s opened its doors in September 2020 and has swiftly become a staple.

By day, the eatery functions as a market

café, serving up breakfast sandwiches, coffee, pastries, and “spinning chicken”—a whole or half chicken “coated in a paprika-forward spice mix, dry brined for two days, and roasted in our standing rotisserie oven,” says Robert Howay, Kitty’s culinary director. Patrons

can also pick up staples in the grocery section including produce, pasta, sauces, spices, and fresh bread—or grab a premade meal.

Starting at 5 p.m. on weekdays (and 10 a.m. on weekends), a restaurant comes alive. For dinner, start with one of the excellent apps such as lamb tartarski, a Polish-style tartar with hand-ground lamb, mustard, anchovies, beets, capers, and red onion, or go for fried oyster mushrooms served up with eggs, pimento cheese, jalapeño-and-honey-pepper bacon, and sauerkraut.

Kitty’s entrees (called “big plates”) combine Americana comfort food with central and eastern European flavors, according to Howay. There’s pork schnitzel with cucumber and ranch dressing; steelhead trout topped with fennel, celery, and lemon; pastrami-spiced lamb and schmaltzed potatoes; and chkmeruli, a Georgian dish of chicken in

garlic sauce. Kitty’s pork is from Kinderhook Farm in Valatie, and Hudson Valley Fisheries supplies the trout. Pair the mains with a veg-forward small plate such as butter beans, grilled carrots, or Hakurei turnips.

As for drinks, Fain recommends the 50/50 Martini, which layers Cap Corse Blanc apéritif, orange bitters, and a lemon twist over dry gin. Another hit is “The Oldest Fashioned,” made with rye whiskey from Taconic Distillery.

Kitty’s recently launched a weekend brunch that could give dinner a run for its money: The buttermilk biscuit sandwich—topped with a fried egg, cheddar cheese, gochujang mayo, and crispy potatoes—is a best-seller. The wedge salad is also delicious—with cherry tomatoes, Rogue Creamery blue cheese dressing, bacon, and a quail egg.

Reservations are recommended, but walk-ins, especially those “fresh from the train,” says Howay, are always welcome. In addition to the restaurant and market, Kitty’s maintains a community fridge and partners with Little Free Library, a nonprofit that encourages neighborhood book exchanges.

Kitty’s Restaurant & Market
60 South Front Street, Hudson
kittysHUDSON.com |
518.267.6369



HOW SWEET IT IS

Like her perfect pastries, Auzeais Bellamy always rises to the occasion. After honing her craft as a sous chef at NYC’s famed Bouchon Bakery, she founded Blondery, a circa-2016, Brooklyn-based cloud bakery offering blondies, layer cakes, and even dog treats. (Cloud kitchens are shops with no physical location that take orders online or by phone.) Last November, Bellamy established Blondery’s first storefront (and headquarters) on Peekskill’s Main Street. The bakery serves up eight core blondie flavors (including pecan and salted caramel, butterscotch and cocoa noir Brooklyn blackout, and birthday cake) plus seasonal varieties alongside Peekskill Cookie Company, a new branch of Blondery that operates under the same roof. —Megan Ashcroft



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RESPECTIVE BUSINESSES