

Eat & Drink

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



HOT TACOS

EVERY DAY IS TACO TUESDAY AT THESE 12 EATERIES. FROM CLASSIC TO VEGAN TO AUTHENTIC OAXACAN-STYLE AND SO MUCH MORE, IT'S TIME TO START YOUR GRAND TACO TOUR.

BY FRANCESCA FUREY

PHOTO BY OLGAMILITSOVA/ISTOCK

Burrito Burrito

Troy | burritosquared.com

Despite it not being named Taco Taco, this spot has mastered plant-based taco fillings. Go for the classic Roswell, filled with Southwest ground “beef” (spiced soy curls crafted in-house) and topped with house-made “queso” and a Frito chip crumble. For a more adventurous meal, try a Space Cowboy (pulled “pork,” Coca-Cola BBQ sauce, onion rings, Poblano slaw, and jalapeño garlic crema) or the UnFish (marinated and battered “fish,” red cabbage slaw, and roasted red pepper crema). The perfect go-with: a pineapple or tamarind Jarritos soda.

“Tacos have evolved from simple street fare into a culinary mainstay. What other food item can you get cheap, with unique and intense flavors and not break the bank?”

Matthew Sherry, executive chef at Hudson Taco

Café Maya

Wappingers Falls | Find them on Facebook

In an unassuming parking lot off Main Street, you’ll find a Mexican hotspot that Dutchess residents adore. The sister restaurant of Maya Café in Fishkill, their house-made, soft corn tortillas are a pillar for righteous and authentic tacos. You can’t go wrong with the popular tacos de camaron—three deep-fried tortillas filled with shrimp, black beans, lettuce, and pico de gallo, and topped with chile de arbol sauce and avocado. The Mexico City-style tacos (grilled chicken or steak, cheese, pico, guacamole, and cilantro) and tacos al carbon (two grilled skirt steak tacos rolled in a second layer of flour tortillas) are equally excellent.

Diego’s Taqueria

Kingston | diegostaqueria.com

A trip to the Stockade District isn’t complete without a stop at this modern taqueria with plenty of bar seating. For the best experience, get a taco box, which comes with two tacos and a side (plus guac for \$2). If you’re feeling authentic, try the juicy, soft al pastor—a roasted pork shoulder with



Hudson Taco



Gaby's Cafe

“My favorite taco is our fried fish taco with red cabbage slaw, guaca salsa, cilantro, and radish. It’s dynamite — packed full of flavor and melts in your mouth.”

Nick Mesce, owner of The Taco Project



Burrito Burrito

grilled pineapple, onion, and cilantro—or the barbacoa, with coffee and chili-rubbed brisket braised in Modelo Negra beer. Prefer a veggie-based bite? We’re fond of the smoky beet with caramelized onions, buffalo cauliflower wings, and the “Three Sisters,” with grilled zucchini and yellow squash.

El Azteca Mexican Deli

Poughkeepsie | elaztecamexican.net

If you’re looking for taco heaven, head straight to this outpost frequented by Marist College kids and foodies alike. Taco ordering is simple: choose between Mexican-style (cilantro, onions, radish, and scallions) or

Texas-style (Monterrey cheese, lettuce, pico, and crema drizzle), then load up with your choice of meat. Plant-based options like soy chorizo and al pastor or vegetable mixes are also available. Tacos can be served in soft or crispy tortillas and turned into a meal with rice and beans. El Azteca cooks up a killer birria taco (a fried taco with stewed beef coupled with a rich consommé) which was one of the hottest food trends in 2020.

El Cuñao Taqueria & Deli

Nyack | Find them on Facebook

If the 3,400-members-strong Nyack Eats Facebook group constantly raves about El

Cuñao, you know it’s *that* good. The tacos are relatively inexpensive and the recipes are inspired by the owner’s native Mexican state of Guerrero. We suggest diving into a trio of traditional tacos—options include al pastor, carnitas, cecina, chorizo, and carne asada. You can stick with the popular quesabirria tacos with Oaxacan cheese or order tacos placero, a large, handmade tortilla loaded with rice, Mexican home fries, and chorizo.

Gaby’s Café

Ellenville | gabyscafeellenville.com

In the foothills of the Gunks, there’s a small, family-run Mexican shop that’s been a local

stomping ground for over a decade. There are only six corn taco varieties to choose from, but they’re all amazing. For meat lovers, there’s the carne asada, carnitas, chorizo, or pollo asado. Pescatarians and vegetarians will enjoy de pescado (tilapia) or grilled vegetables. What makes these tacos special is the guac, house-made in a traditional molcajete and made spicy, medium, or mild.

Hudson Taco

Newburgh | hudsonsotaco.com

With over a dozen taco varieties and a front-row view of the Hudson, it’s no surprise Hudson Taco is a Best Tacos back-to-back

winner in our *Best of Hudson Valley* awards. In addition to the classics, you’ll find cola pork carnitas, Baja fish (lager-battered cod and slaw), General Tso’s (fried chicken, herb salad, pickled Fresno chiles, and yum yum sauce), HV pork belly (Chinese spareribs, Asian slaw, and Chinese mustard mayo), and mushroom & shishito (portobello, blistered shishito, and queso fresco blend). Low-carb eaters can order their fillings in bibb lettuce.

La Cabanita

Poughkeepsie | lacabinataoax.com

What if we told you a Oaxacan cocina is dishing out incredible tacos in a former,

PHOTO BY MELISSA HARRIS, SWEET MELISSA PHOTO

PHOTOS (FROM TOP TO BOTTOM) BY ALEJANDRO DURAN SANCHEZ, GABY'S CAFE; COURTESY OF BURRITO BURRITO



The Taco Project

85-year-old church? (Well... it's true!) In this historic setting, try a few (or all 10) authentic corn tacos, like al pastor, birria, carnitas, chorizo, grilled shrimp, and sole fillet. You'll find some other options that are few and far between in the Valley, including shredded chicken tinga in a chipotle and tomato sauce, slow-cooked beef tongue (lengua de res), marinated beef confit, and adobo-marinated pork cutlets (cecina enchilada). Every taco order comes with three tacos topped the authentic way—with fresh onion, cilantro, lime, and radishes.

Mexicali Blue
Wappingers Falls and New Paltz \ mexicali-blue.com

Gluten-free, blue corn tortilla shells? Count us in. This funky, fresh, Southwestern-inspired spot has tons of accolades from *Best of Hudson Valley* nods to a short rib burrito that Food Network named one of the best in the country. But Mexicali Blue is most known for their fresh and delicious fish tacos, with

stellar options like ahi tuna (teriyaki- and sesame-marinated tuna, cabbage, guac, wasabi aioli), bang bang shrimp (battered shrimp, coconut sriracha aioli, cabbage, and guac), and mango catfish (grilled Cajun catfish, cole slaw, jack cheese, and herb sour cream).

Sante Fe
Kingston, Tivoli, and Woodstock \ santefekingston.com

Since 1980, Sante Fe has been dishing out a small but mighty taco menu across the Valley. Four delicious but wildly different options will have you coming back to try them all. Start simple with the pulled pork (slow-cooked pork, caramelized onions, and white cheddar) and steak (grilled, marinated steak, sweet red onions, cilantro, lime, and white cheddar), or spice it up with authentic Oaxacan tacos—pulled achiote chicken and homemade mole poblano. Specials are constantly cropping up and you might be lucky enough to score the Philly cheesesteak, blackened scallops, lobster, or fried shrimp with Thai chili drizzle on the menu.

Taco Dive Bar
Peekskill \ tacodivebar.com

We're surprised that Food Network's *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* host Guy Fieri isn't all over this dive just minutes from the Hudson River. The white corn tacos are small, making them perfect vessels for taste testing the whole menu. The classic beef is a customer favorite—Amish natural ground beef with queso blanco, shredded romaine, and pico de gallo. Also worth trying: the fried, wild Gulf shrimp taco with creamy corn and red pepper tartar sauce, and the blackened, wild-caught cod topped with citrus, fennel, cabbage, and salsa verde.

Taco Project
Yonkers, Tarrytown, Bronxville, Pleasantville \ thetacoproject.com

This Westchester-based, fast-casual restaurant is pumping out fresh, yellow corn tortillas (from a Yonkers-based tortilleria) that are truly extraordinary. They dish up Cal-Mex style tacos—served two tacos at a time—with your choice of chicken, chorizo, fish, or steak. We're especially fond of the BBQ pulled pork (slow-cooked pork shoulder and caramelized onion), braised pork belly (sweet with pineapple glaze and pineapple salsa), and the more unusual tempura-battered shrimp topped with mango salsa and tomatillo sauce. If you like your tacos crunchy, an extra 50 cents will buy you hard shell substitutes.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RESPECTIVE BUSINESSES

“What makes a taco authentic are the ingredients and the marinades. Street tacos, for example, are usually cooked with pork lard. In our deli, we sell traditional Mexican meats: chorizo, steak, carnitas, and tongue. We add a little cilantro, onion, and lime on the side, and of course, red salsa.”

—Guillermo Zayas, chef/owner at El Cuñao Deli

Tacos with a Twist
GO BEYOND AUTHENTIC WITH THESE OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY, DELICIOUS OPTIONS.

BULGOGI BEEF TACOS
Crazy Bowlz, Kingston and New Paltz
Thin, marinated slices of beef sandwiched between soft- or hard-shell tortillas, with mango salsa, lettuce, sour cream, and cheese.

CHAPULINES TACOS
La Charla, New Paltz
Oaxacan-style, sautéed grasshoppers (you read that right) with avocado mash and salsa verde on corn tortillas.

CHICKEN ALFREDO TACOS
Mt Kisco Diner, Mount Kisco
Breaded chicken cutlets are deep-fried and used as the taco “shell,” then filled with angel hair pasta and alfredo sauce (bring a big appetite).

SMOKY BEET TACOS
Diego's Taqueria, Kingston
Brined and grilled beets are piled high on corn tortillas and topped with caramelized onion, arugula, and cilantro crema.

TUNA CRUDO TACOS
Butterfield, Stone Ridge
Crispy tortillas stuffed with fresh tuna, apples, and cabbage, with spicy Korean dressing drizzle and furikake seasoning (sesame and seaweed).



Butterfield

AL FRESCO

Food Trucks Get Fancy

With outdoor dining all the rage, more and more chefs are trading in brick-and-mortar kitchens for meals on wheels.

BY MICHELLE HAINER

Even before Covid wreaked havoc on the food industry, working in a restaurant was not for the faint of heart. “It’s a lot of late nights, little time off, and no holidays with family,” remembers John Castrovillari, who toiled away in the kitchens of Iron Forge Inn and Warwick Valley Winery & Distillery in Warwick and Café Luxembourg in New York City. So, what’s a passionate yet stressed out chef to do? Open a food truck, of course.

Castrovillari, now the co-owner of Pitchfork Barbecue & Biscuits in Pine Island, describes a food truck as being “financially accessible at an entry level.” After all, there’s no lease to sign or investors to entice to literally get rolling. Plus, mobile meals have come a long way from the grilled grub (think basic burgers and hotdogs) that once characterized the genre. With more and more trained chefs taking their craft to the streets, customers have their choice of everything from classic American comfort food like fried chicken biscuits to ethnic options like Venezuelan cachapas (corn pancakes). The Hudson Valley is home to many high-end food trucks. Here are three worth a stop.



The Bus at Salinger's Orchard
Brewster \ @thebus_atsalingersorchard



When Tim Salinger took over his family’s century-old orchard four years ago, he knew he wanted to up the outdoor food game. “We wanted fun food that fit our setting,” says Salinger, a former general manager at The Cookery in Dobbs Ferry. When he heard about a vintage bus for sale with a full-scale professional kitchen inside, he enlisted his friend and celebrated chef David DiBari (The Cookery, The Parlor), and the two opened The Bus at Salinger’s Orchard in September 2020. “We take deli classics and just go over the top,” says Salinger of the menu, which includes a bacon, egg, and cheese topped with hash browns and homemade

ketchup with gochujang sauce, and a fried eggplant cutlet served on a hard roll with lemon chili aioli. There’s also a fried chicken sandwich with spicy maple sauce, porchetta with apple chutney, and Japanese mayo and their famous potato wedges, which are tossed in rendered beef fat to give them an “umami burst of flavor,” says Salinger. This spring, DiBari and Salinger are hoping to utilize their new smoker (they make their own bacon), add a pizza truck, and expand their alcohol offerings. “We want to build an outdoor dining experience here,” says Salinger, “having fun with what we like.”