

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

What to eat in Orlando

Hint: It isn't a giant turkey leg at Walt Disney World

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Orlando is the Land of the Giant Turkey Leg no more. (If you've ever been to a Walt Disney World theme park, you'll get that reference; a turkey leg the size of your kid's head is a theme park dining staple.) You want James Beard award-winning and nominated chefs? Orlando is loaded with them.

The foodie frenzy began with the arrival of top toques Wolfgang Puck in 1997 (Wolfgang Puck Grand Café), followed by Emeril Lagasse (Emeril's Orlando, Emeril's Tchoup Chop), Roy Yamaguchi (Roy's), Melissa Kelly (Primo), and Todd English (Bluezoo.) The recent influx of James Beard award-winning chefs include Masahuru Morimoto (2015), Rick Bayless (2016), Art Smith (2016), and Norman van Aiken (Norman's, 2003 and the newly-opened restaurant, 1921.) Add local chefs James and Julie Petrakis of the Ravenous Pig, Kathleen Blake of The Rusty Spoon, and Scott Hunnell of Victoria & Albert at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa — James Beard nominees all — and you've got 13 current Beard award-winning and -nominated chefs, representing 17 restaurants among them. (And more to come: Tatted everyman Guy Fieri has a hand in Planet Hollywood Observatory, coming in 2017.) Wallethub.com named Orlando the "best foodie city" in the nation in 2016.

"It's just exploding," says Orlando food blogger and author Ricky Ly of tastychomps.com and "The Food Lovers' Guide to Orlando." "When I came to the city in 2003, it was Olive Gardens everywhere." (Darden, the chain's parent company, is based here.) Since then, food trucks came onto the scene, and people started experimenting, he says. Now, "there's an energy here," Ly says. "People want to try new things, and they're looking for the more authentic experience outside of the theme parks."

Felix Vega of **Urbain 40** (www.urbain40.com), a buzzed-about new eatery on Orlando's Restaurant Row, credits a convergence of factors for the city's culinary bounty: the growth of the theme parks, hordes of convention-goers looking for good dining options, and, primarily, the influx of people from all over the world. "We now have direct flights from places like Dubai and Columbia," Vega says. "Easy access draws people here, and people need to eat."

Inside the theme parks, dining has become a major draw. Disney Springs, an upscale dining and shopping zone at Walt Disney World, opened in 2015 and is now home to restaurants by Bayless (Frontera Cocina), Morimoto (Morimoto Asia), and Smith (Homecoming Kitchen.)

A dedicated foodie could pop over to Disney Springs and make it a DIY James Beard sampler. We'd start with dim sum at **Morimoto Asia** (www.patinagroup.com), or simply some ramen and a beer. Then, we'd pair an avocado margarita (goes down like a smoothie) with shrimp mojo de Ajo, one of the exceptional regional specialties of Mexico at **Frontera Cocina** (www.frontera.cocina.com). For dessert, Smith's **Homecoming Kitchen** (www.homecomingkitchen.com) offers a beguiling menu of confections you probably don't make at home, like "shine cake" made with real moonshine, hummingbird cake, or a basket of donuts (also offered as an entree, with buttermilk-brined fried chicken).

To explore the myriad glories of the local food

scene, you'll need to head outside of the theme parks, though. Orlando is a city of neighborhoods, and they all have some dining gems. We're talking food that would draw us back to the city, even if Mickey and Co. decamped to Cincinnati.

"I want to do food that is approachable, but that [diners] can't go home and make themselves. I think that's where the food scene is going right now," says Jacob Woolf of **SLATE** (www.slateorlando.com), one of the city's youngest executive chefs (he's 31). Located on Restaurant Row, a collection of eateries on Sand Lake Road, SLATE is becoming a go-to spot for main courses like brisket (with a brown sugar chili rub) and pumpkin gnocchi. The brunch here is phenomenal; the standout dish for us, among several we sampled: pork spoonbread, a hearty medley of slow-braised pulled pork, cornmeal spoonbread, and smoked BBQ sauce, topped with two eggs sunny side up. And, although the menu at SLATE changes a few times a year, it's always worth asking if there's any duck prosciutto on hand.

Another standout on Restaurant Row is **Urbain 40** (www.urbain40.com), where the back of the room faces a giant fountain. With its 1940s flair (thus the name), this American brasserie-with-a-European-tilt — and a French chef — draws a mostly local crowd. Sunday brunch is a big draw (who can resist a bottomless flute of champagne?), but Urbain 40 hasn't won a slew of awards based on bubbly alone. This scratch kitchen turns out a seriously crave-able dish that wowed even seafood-snobbish New Englanders: plump PEI mussels, skillet-roasted with drawn butter and lemon. It's a simple dish, but perfectly delicious. Urge your dining companion to order the spaghetti Bolognese, another winner that led to the crowning of Urbain 40 as "best new restaurant of 2016" by Florida Trend magazine. They also do a worthy bread pudding, with croissant and caramel sauce.

Ah, dessert! We'd be remiss if we didn't give a major shout-out to **Gideon's** (www.gideonsbakehouse.com), where we discovered the best cookie ever. Baker Steven Lewis — also known as "Cookie Jesus" because of his long, brown hair and devotion to baking — draws fans who wait as long as an hour for his wondrous confections. They're four bucks a pop (customers are limited to six cookies at a time) and each is a big lump of ugly but incredibly tasty cookie. And they're so gooey, "some people claim they're better on day three," Lewis told us. But who can wait that long? A cookie at Gideon's is a great excuse to visit the **East End Market** (www.eastendmkt.com) in Audubon Park, a hipster enclave in Orlando. The market, set in a former church, is an incubator for local food vendors and artisans. East End Market is a smallish space, with about 10 businesses total, but it wouldn't be out of place in, say, Cambridge, with its live music, local focus, and out-

door seating.

There's even a monarch butterfly habitat. We came home with locally made sauces, soaps, and a half-eaten cookie.

If you ask Orlandoans where you should eat, the most-mentioned name will be **DoveCote** (www.dovecote-orlando.com). It's located in downtown Orlando, an area few tourists ever see unless they're going to a sporting event. But in just a couple of months, DoveCote has drawn diners to the Bank of America building to see what Chef Clay Miller is up to. Miller, whose credits include Norman's, French Laundry, and Daniel, ups the ante on Orlando dining with his nouveau brasserie. We didn't visit for dinner, so can't comment on raved-about dishes like steak frites and pork terrine, but we can vouch for the selections at brunch. Most memorable: the Croque Madame with house-made ham and the gibassier, a light-as-a-kiss Provencal pastry flavored with anise seed and orange liqueur.

Add the tantalizing array of independent Asian eateries in the Mills 50 district, and you'll easily understand why writer Ricky Ly is ready to update

his Orlando food book. "We've got a lot of new restaurants opening this year. . . . Orlando is becoming a dream town for food lovers."

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PHOTOS BY DIANE BAIR FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Pink deviled eggs at SLATE.



Caprese salad at Urbain 40.

HERE

DON'T MISS THIS VERMONT MUSIC FESTIVAL

Get tickets now for Grace Potter's Grand Point North music festival in Burlington, Vt., Sept. 16 and 17. The festival, organized by Higher Ground, takes place at Waterfront Park and features "local favorites, regional and national bands, and expertly crafted local food, drink, performance, art, and mayhem," says Potter, the festival headliner and show curator. Other performers will be announced this spring. The festival includes an art installation called Grand Point Weird that's curated by Potter's sister, Charlotte Potter, who works at Virginia's Chrysler Museum of Art. Early bird and VIP tickets have already sold out, but two-day tickets are still available for \$79. 802-652-0777, www.highergroundmusic.com.

A SWEET GETAWAY IN THE GREEN MOUNTAIN STATE

Get a taste of the maple syrup-making process at Vermont's Inn at Manchester, a 21-room family-owned property located between the Taconic and Green mountains. Enjoy a behind-the-scenes look at the process and sample local products during the special Maple Getaway package, good anytime through April 15. The deal includes accommodations for two, full breakfast, a tour of the Sugar Shack, a quart of maple syrup and a half-pound

of the inn's pre-made buttermilk pancake mix to take home, and a discount on all products at the Sugar Shack. Rates start at \$195 per night, double occupancy. 802-362-1793, innatmanchester.com

THERE

HOTELS PROMOTE THE SECRET TO HAPPY LIVING

Three New York hotels have embraced the Danish concept of hygge, a feeling of contentment and well-being, and the idea of making ordinary things meaningful. The hotels, including the Kimpton Hotel Eventi, The Kimpton Muse Hotel, and the newly renovated Kimpton Ink48 Hotel, now offer a Hygge (pronounced hoo-gah) Concierge. Through this service, guests can select amenities to create a pleasant in-the-moment experience. These amenities include artisanal teas, essential aromatherapy oils, fresh flowers, an in-room yoga mat, and access to a pillow library and a curated library of books (ask for "The Little Book of Hygge: Danish Secrets to Happy Living"). Or enjoy guided meditation or yoga at the Shinyo Center for Meditation and Well-Being

(guests receive a discount). Room rates start at \$299, not including amenities, which range from \$10 (slippers) to \$220 (Frette bathrobe). 800-546-7866, www.kimptonhotels.com

SAVOR SEATTLE'S NEW CHOCOLATE TOUR

Take a new interactive tour of



the Seattle Chocolates factory, and get a behind-the-scenes look at chocolate making and a chance to sample the goods. The Experience Chocolate tour marks the first time in the company's 25-year history that it has opened its doors to the public. Learn about the history of chocolate and the cacao plant in the Chocolate Classroom, get a bird's-eye view of the bustling factory, and discover how to create a truffle, as you watch how it's carefully crafted, poured, molded, shaken, and then run through a chocolate waterfall before being cooled. Then experience the Tasting Room, where you can nibble on fresh chocolates and suggest new flavors. Tours run Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., for anyone 6 and older. Admission \$10 per person. www.seattlechocolates.com/tours

EVERYWHERE

AN APP THAT HELPS YOU ID BIRDS

A single bird species can have hundreds of different songs, and birds, like people, have many different accents — just like New Englanders. Maynard-based Wildlife Acoustics has created an app that can identify birds by their song. The company has teamed up with North American birding expert David Sibley to create Song Sleuth. This app records a bird's song and presents possible matches. You can then cross-check those matches using the built-in David Sibley Refer-

ence, which includes illustrations, information about each bird's habits, habitats, and migration patterns, and sample recordings that you can compare with the spectrograms of your recording. This enables you to positively ID your bird, and hone your birding skills. The app, which just launched, costs \$9.99 on Apple's App Store (Android version in the works). www.songsleuth.com

A LOW-KEY, HIGH-TECH BAG

Pacsafe's new Vibe travel backpacks can protect your belongings and information from even the craftiest thief. The comfortable, well-designed bags come with puncture-resistant zippers, proprietary slashguard material and straps (so no one can slice open your bag or cut the straps), and an RFID-blocking pocket that protects the personal information on your chip-enabled passport or credit cards. Use the clever PopNLock security clip to release one of the shoulder straps and attach the bag to a table leg or other sturdy spot. Thanks to Pacsafe's new RooBar Sport locking system, the interlocking zipper pulls fit together like puzzle pieces and then quickly clip onto a simple, secure lock that's built into the bag. Stow the backpack straps and carry the bag by a sturdy handle, and stash your laptop in the internal padded sleeve. The bag ranges from 20 to 40 liters, and \$89.95 to \$139.95. 206-722-7233, www.pacsafe.com

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