

AAA Inspector Picks: Favorite Comfort Food Restaurants

Whether you're hankering for home cooking or a warm welcome, places to enjoy down-home comfort food abound. AAA inspectors share what they love most about nearly 70 favorites across the U.S. and Canada. Enjoy a coast-to-coast sampling — from family-style Southern cuisine to finger lickin' barbecue.

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UNITED STATES

[A-D](#) ([▲ top](#))

ALABAMA

[John's City Diner](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Birmingham

A popular "down-home" eatery in the downtown historic district since 1944, this family-friendly joint was recently given a fresh feel by its new owners. The menu still includes mac and cheese, chicken and waffles and meatloaf smothered in mushroom gravy. Add a side dish like fried green tomatoes and roasted corn grits. To finish off the meal, the pecan pie sundae is a good bet.

[Niki's West Steak & Seafood Restaurant](#), AAA One Diamond, Cafeteria/Comfort Food, Birmingham

Specializing in Southern favorites, this popular spot has been run by the same family since 1957. Bring your appetite, because a trip through the cafeteria line could fill your tray with generous portions of catfish, breaded veal chops or Greek broiled chicken along with your choice of side dishes. House specialties include steaks, seafood and breakfast selections. Thanks to the reasonable prices for the home-style menu items, the rustic dining room is often packed with locals.

[Lambert's Cafe](#), AAA Two Diamond, Family Dining/Comfort Food, Foley

Rural American décor reinforces the relaxed atmosphere of this casual restaurant. Southern mainstays include chicken and dumplings, fried chicken and catfish, chicken pot pie, hog jowl and barbecued ribs, along with sweet potatoes, turnip greens and cornbread. Servers roam the dining room with carts filled with all-you-can-eat "pass arounds" like black-eyed peas, apple butter, fried okra, sorghum molasses and fresh hot rolls, which are tossed to customers.

[Martin's Restaurant](#), AAA FYI, Family Dining/Southern Comfort Food, Montgomery

Family-owned and operated since the 1930s, this very basic, no-frills family style restaurant is a Montgomery staple. Southern specialties include fried chicken, catfish, meatloaf, chopped steak and fried chicken livers, to name just a few. Sides include pickled beets, collard greens, fried okra, sweet potato casserole and cornbread. **Inspector tip:** Portions are large, so bring your appetite and save room for dessert.

[Sommer's Place](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Montgomery

This family-operated establishment has served the community for generations. Its walls are filled with caricatures of local patrons dating back to the 1990s. Order a la carte or choose the "meat and three" featuring a choice of fried chicken, country fried steak, chopped steak or tilapia and three sides such as black-eyed peas, collard greens, creamed corn, fried okra and apple-berry crisp. **Inspector tip:** On Sunday only lunch is served.

Dreamland Bar-B-Que, AAA One Diamond, Quick Serve/BBQ, Tuscaloosa

Visit Alabama's celebrated original Dreamland Bar-B-Que, the place to see and be seen, evidenced by layers of corner-to-corner autographs and photos on the walls. People come for the famous tangy taste of the smokin' fresh barbecue. Service is friendly and the menu is simple: It's ribs or nothin'. **Inspector tip:** If it's a home game weekend, 'Bama fan or not, be prepared for a crowd and arrive early.

ARIZONA

May's Counter, AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Tucson

Deep in the heart of the Sonoran Desert, near the University of Arizona, diners can find such eclectic eats as pretzel burgers, fried pickle chips and waffle-batter-dipped hot dogs. The owner and famed local chef Aaron May packs this lively, stylish diner with the collegiate set (and everyone else) with flat panel TVs and full bar featuring a bacon Bloody Mary and unique beers on tap. Breakfast is served all day, and the chicken and waffles is a local favorite. **Inspector tip:** Game days can get crazy, so arrive early to enjoy the fun, festive scene.

Pine Country Restaurant, AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Williams

Home-style comfort food is at the heart of this relaxed restaurant's menu, with items such as country fried steak, shepherd's pie, fried chicken and chicken strips. The dining room offers a homey setting with many craft decorations and even a small gift shop. **Inspector tip:** No meal is complete without a piece of the homemade pie.



CALIFORNIA

La Palma Chicken Pie Shop & Restaurant, AAA One Diamond, Family Dining/American, Anaheim

As you walk in the front door, the first thing you see is the pie shop. Fresh pies baked daily open your senses to the down-home cooking you are about to enjoy. To start your meal, try a cup of the chicken noodle soup. The fried chicken has crispy skin over moist meat, revealed on your first bite. Different roosters and chickens provide the décor, adorning every inch of free space. Seating includes tables and benches, with plenty of paper napkins to help wipe the deliciousness off your face.

Johnny Rebs', AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Southern, Bellflower

Upon entering the front red barn door, you are greeted by the staff. Choose your own table to sit at as you walk over peanut shells thrown on the floor. The menu offers an array of barbeque food with all the "fixins." For starters, try the fried pickles, not your typical variety, made with cornbread. The large menu offers an array of choice. **Inspector tip:** Look for the Tri Tip dinner featuring tender, thin-sliced meat with a side of barbeque sauce for dunking if you prefer.

Mel's Drive-In, AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Hollywood

American food at its best, amid a 1950s setting! Enjoy homemade corned beef hash, home baked chicken pot pie, juicy ground chuck burgers and a variety of fountain delights. Jukeboxes are on every table and checkered tiles make up the floor. The walls are decorated with collages of old black and white movies filmed in the area. An open U-shaped counter with a view of the kitchen offers stools you can spin on while waiting for your huge hamburger to arrive.

Sam's Hof Brau, AAA One Diamond, Cafeteria/Comfort Food + Sandwiches, Sacramento

The comfortable saloon-style décor with velvet burnout wallpaper hasn't changed much since 1959 when the cafeteria first opened. The landmark restaurant, well known among locals, offers great value and the aroma of fresh hand-carved meats prepared daily – including turkey, prime rib, roast beef and corned beef – served as either an entrée or sandwich. **Inspector tip:** A line forms at peak meal times, so arrive early or late.

Cafe Bakery & Restaurant, AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/International Comfort Food, San Francisco

This prototypical comfort food dining experience has a basic diner-like décor, no-nonsense but friendly servers, a line out the door and food quality close to mom's cooking. The always busy, family friendly restaurant has it all. The oxtail stew is especially delicious. Meals are served course style with dinner rolls, soup or salad and for a sweet ending, plain jello. Finish with a lemon tea or Hong Kong-style milk tea for the complete experience.

COLORADO

Lou's Food Bar, AAA Three Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Denver

Local chef Frank Bonnano, known for his Four Diamond Italian restaurant Mizuna, wanted to do something different when he opened this casual eatery that combines comfort food with more exotic offerings. Start with the lump blue crab cakes. Main entrees include hearty portions of fried organic chicken, pan blackened trout with fried green tomatoes and duck confit with a cornbread waffle. **Inspector tips:** Located in a residential neighborhood, the restaurant is generally quiet at lunch, a good time to stop for a savory French dip sandwich, Angus burger or soup du jour. Specialty cocktails and happy hour snacks make for an enjoyable night out.

CONNECTICUT

Darien Social, AAA Three Diamond, Gastropub/Comfort Food, Darien

American comfort food is served with a new age twist using local farm fresh ingredients. Lunches include wood-fired pizza, juicy burgers and country-fried chicken sandwiches. Memorable dinners include roasted cod stew and sage-rubbed chicken with pan gravy. More than 30 draught beers are rotated seasonally with new stouts, ales and lagers. The homey pub-like atmosphere is accented with black and white photos from the 1920s hung on exposed brick walls. **Inspector tip:** Passionate servers will guide you through the menus.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Georgia Brown's, AAA Three Diamond, Casual Dining/Regional American, Washington

The stylish restaurant in the heart of the city serves up contemporary Southern dishes with an emphasis on the Low Country of South Carolina. Menu choices include buttermilk fried chicken, country fried meatloaf, sour mash pork chops, cornmeal-fried catfish and twice-cooked pork shank with sweet potato cheese grits. Your taste buds will be pleased and your appetite satisfied. **Inspector tip:** Live jazz music entertains diners every Wednesday night, and valet parking is available nightly for dinner.



F-L (▲ top)

FLORIDA

Miller's Dutch Kitch'n, AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Comfort Food, Bradenton

Popular for its Amish-style cooking, the restaurant offers favorites like beef liver and onions, meatloaf, country fried steak, chicken and dumplings, ham, roast beef and beef pot roast. It's best known for wonderful in-house prepared desserts. Cream pies include coconut, banana, red raspberry, strawberry and peach. Baked pies include pumpkin, egg custard, Dutch apple, blueberry, blackberry, pecan, shoofly and mincemeat. There are many cakes to choose from as well. **Inspector tip:** A popular after-dinner pastime is wandering through the extensive gift shop with its variety of crafts, knickknacks and Amish-made furniture.

[Metro Diner](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Jacksonville Beach

In the heart of the city this local gathering place defines the phrase “comfort food.” Order classic American dishes such as meatloaf, pot roast and chicken pot pie, along with trendier items such as a pecan-encrusted big fish sandwich or fried chicken and waffles. Save room for the melt-in-your-mouth strawberry shortcake! The kitchen is open for breakfast and lunch, with both menus available throughout the day. **Inspector tip:** For lighter fare that won’t leave you hungry, try the popular Pittsburgh steak salad.



[Big Pink](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Miami Beach

Established in 1996 with the motto “Real Food for Real People ... Really” — in a city where pretense prevails — all items are value priced and “supersized.” Favorites include the Big Pink TV dinner daily special, Thanksgiving on a roll and a foot-long hot dog (made with Kobe beef, of course). The tables are packed in close, so don’t flinch when a neighboring diner asks for a smidgen of your peanut butter s’mores, especially during the wee hours on weekends when the masses dine until dawn. **Inspector tip:** Make room in your refrigerator for leftovers.

[Fred’s Southern Kitchen](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Comfort Food, Plant City

This local favorite features home-cooked Southern fare prepared from Johnson family recipes that are more than 50 years old. Enjoy fried catfish, fried chicken, chicken pot pie, meatloaf, chicken and dumplings, pot roast, roast turkey, baked chicken and country fried steak. Popular side dishes include collard or turnip greens, yellow squash, steamed cabbage, carrot soufflé, corn casserole, pole beans and okra and tomatoes. **Inspector tip:** The skillet cornbread and corn pudding are tasty.

[Barbara Jean’s Restaurants](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Southern Comfort Food, Ponte Vedra Beach

As one of two locations in Florida, this homey eatery is nestled up to a wooded scrub alongside the Intracoastal Waterway. The views are scenic, with the water offering a calming ambiance. While it’s tough to find true Southern hospitality in Florida, you’ll find it here. Favorites include meatloaf, turkey and dressing, pot roast, chicken-fried steak, pork chops and burgers. Many menu items are prepared from scratch in-house. **Inspector tip:** Be sure to finish off your meal with a homemade dessert, preferably the chocolate “stuff.”

GEORGIA

[Gladys Knight’s Signature Chicken & Waffles](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Southern, Atlanta

Good old-fashioned Southern specialties are served with a heaping helping of hospitality. Start out with some fried green tomatoes, a catfish basket or the collard green spring rolls. House specialties include Southern fried chicken, smothered chicken and blackened salmon. Other dishes include turkey wing, fried shrimp and blackened tilapia. A wide range of omelets and waffles are available for those who love breakfast foods. **Inspector tip:** For dessert, don’t miss the sweet potato cheesecake.

[Mary Mac’s Tea Room](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Southern, Atlanta

Opened in 1945, the tea room has been going strong ever since. The walls are lined with an impressive collection of photographs of famous people and celebrities who have visited over the years. Don’t be surprised if Jo stops by your table to say “thank you” and even offer one of her famed back rubs! First-time customers get a complimentary cup of pot likker (the liquid left behind after boiling greens) and corn bread. The menu is extensive, with far too many options to pick from, such as meatloaf, chicken and dumplings, fried oysters, sautéed chicken livers, beef turnovers, braised oxtails, fresh salmon, rainbow trout or shrimp and cheese grits. **Inspector tip:** Don’t leave without trying the homemade Georgia peach cobbler.



IDAHO

[Brick 29 Bistro](#), AAA Three Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Nampa

A 20-minute drive outside Boise, this restaurant has a nice vibe. For example, the only TV station allowed is a cooking channel. The pan-seared chicken breast in bourbon and cream with mushrooms and shallots is so good they can't take it off the menu without complaints. The Idaho Jo-Jo's are French fries served with horseradish louie sauce and blue cheese fondue. Gluten-free, vegan and vegetarian items are available. **Inspector tip:** The location in a restored Masonic Temple is lovely but can get loud.

ILLINOIS

[Table Fifty-Two](#), AAA Three Diamond, Fine Dining/Southern, Chicago

It may seem like an oxymoron to dine on comfort food amid leather seating and fine tableware in a 19th century former carriage house. The restaurant's centerpiece is an open hearth oven, visible from every part of the dining room. For years celebrity chef Art Smith has added an upscale twist to Southern-style eats like fried green tomatoes, shrimp and grits, jambalaya, fried catfish and fried chicken and waffles. The mac 'n cheese served in an iron skillet is popular, along with the braised collard greens with smoked turkey.

INDIANA

[Hollyhock Hill Restaurant](#), AAA Two Diamond, Family Dining/American, Indianapolis

Set back from the road in a historic "country cottage" style house, this institution has been serving up family-style meals for over 80 years. The famous Hoosier pan-fried chicken meal includes an appetizer, relish, homemade pickled beets, cottage cheese, apple butter and a signature head lettuce salad with house-made sweet vinaigrette dressing. Heaping sides of creamy whipped potatoes, buttered corn, seasoned green beans, country gravy and fresh bread accompany every meal. Other options such as steak and seafood are available, but the fried chicken is by far its most popular offering. The "country-style" cuisine offered here is the definition of Midwest comfort food.



IOWA

[Dixie Quick's](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Southern, Council Bluffs

Enjoy an artful take on comfort food. While the restaurant is attached to an art gallery, it's still so inviting and homey it could be your grandmother's living room. The menu of comfort foods with a Southern flair changes daily and is always written on a huge blackboard. Not much is better than Southern-inspired breakfast entrees like the chiliquillas and Dixie scramble, packed full of flavor that will warm you down to your soul.

[Iowa Machine Shed Restaurant](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Davenport

This tribute to farmers proudly displays agricultural décor including antique farming equipment, signs and photos. The menu abounds with the comfort foods families in this region have been raised on since the good old days. Start with the county fair onion rings or a bowl of Shed's hearty "world famous" baked potato soup. Next, stretch your suspenders with either the roasted stuffed Iowa pork chop or pan-fried chicken. Finish with the apple dumpling served with ice cream.

M-N ([▲ top](#))

MAINE

[Frog & Turtle](#), AAA Three Diamond, Gastropub/American, Westbrook

Off the beaten path but worth the effort, this eatery serves comfort food at its best. Offerings may include catfish fingers with a house-smoked chipotle sauce, grilled honey glaze ham with Maine baked beans and many other scrumptious delights. Sunday brunch has become a weekly tradition for locals — and the draw is EVERYTHING. Sample the house-made doughnuts, perfect for sharing. The eggs Benedict options are a must. A bloody Mary or mimosa is popular at brunch. The creative wine and beer menu has local and global selections.

MINNESOTA

[Keys Cafe & Bakery](#), AAA Two Diamond, Twin Cities Metro (nine locations)

This family owned and operated chain opened its first location in 1973 on Raymond Street in St. Paul. It is renowned for its made-from-scratch breakfast served all day and homemade comfort foods. The restaurant proclaims the comfort foods come from “recipes you grew up with.” Favorites are the oven roasted turkey dinner and sliced grilled turkey and Swiss sandwich. Your meal is not complete without something sweet from the bakery, like an enormous snicker doodle.

MISSISSIPPI

[The Round Table](#), AAA One Diamond, Family Dining/Southern Comfort Food, Columbia

The original owners of this 1915 historic home opened their doors in 1940 as their contribution to the war effort. They fed and housed workers from the local parachute production plant. Seven decades and four owners later, the tradition continues with family-style lunches. Huge round tables with lazy Susan turntables at the center are topped with heaping platters and bowls of traditional Southern comfort foods, continuously replenished. Neighbors and strangers alike dine together at the communal tables.

[Two Sisters' Kitchen](#), AAA One Diamond, Casual Dining/Regional Comfort Food, Jackson

As its name implies, two sisters operate this luncheonette located in a historic former residence built in 1902. It is open only for lunch and serves some of the best Southern cooking in town. Buffet service offers changing main dishes — fried chicken, country-fried steak and catfish — with just about any side Mama ever cooked.

NEVADA

[M & M Soul Food Cafe](#), AAA One Diamond, Casual Dining/Soul Food, Las Vegas

The family-operated restaurant is the definition of comfort with Southern favorites such as fried chicken, ham steak, catfish, hot links and corned beef hash. The diner-style black and white décor is basic, but every guest is greeted with a smile and complimentary corn bread pancakes.

NEW MEXICO

[Andele! Restaurante](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Mexican, Mesilla

This is the café for locals seeking the comfort of Abuelita's cocina (grandma's kitchen). Need a breakfast cure after a fun night out? Menudo and posole or huevos rancheros have that covered. Light or quick lunch? Try the house specialty, tacos al pastor (cut from the spit), with a trip to the salsa bar. If you have time for a lingering meal, any of the platos Mexicanos with a bucket of mini beers will satisfy the heartiest of appetites. All this in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere will make anyone feel the comfort of traditional Mexican home.

NEW YORK

[The Apple Tree Inn](#), AAA Three Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Brockport

Colonial country cottage décor prevails in this renovated farmhouse restaurant. A seat near the stone fireplace is a good spot to try the chicken pot pie topped with delicate, crusty phyllo dough baked golden brown and

served piping hot from the oven. A hearty soup, quiche of the day sided with a cold, crispy salad and house-made dressing are a perfect trio. Fresh baked desserts change with the season, focusing on local fresh fruits. The relaxed service style makes for an enjoyable, close-to-homemade dining experience, without the dishes.

[The Meatball Shop](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/ Italian Comfort Food, New York

What could be more comforting than a meatball? This popular little place in Greenwich Village serves up some of the best, whether it is straight ground beef, spicy pork, chicken or even veggie topped with tomato sauce, mushroom gravy or parmesan cream. You can up the comfort level even more by ordering them as meatball sliders. **Inspector tip:** Despite the many “ball” options, they keep it pretty simple and casual here; no reservations are taken, so arrive early to avoid a wait.

[Hattie's](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Southern, Saratoga Springs

Hattie's, a staple in the Saratoga area, is known for its home-style Southern cuisine. Classic menu offerings (many from recipes dating to 1938, the year Hattie's opened) dominate the menu. Choose Hattie's famous fried chicken, fried okra, hushpuppies and chicken & dumplings. Hattie's offers the best of two worlds: a taste of the South in the beauty of Upstate New York.

NORTH CAROLINA

[The Moose Cafe](#), AAA One Diamond, Family Dining/Southern, Asheville

Since this restaurant is located adjacent to the Asheville farmer's market, the cook makes sure the vegetables are at their peak when they are on your table. This is the original “farm to table,” before the concept became trendy. From the moment you're seated and served steaming, hot, flaky biscuits with servings of homemade apple butter, sorghum and honey, you'll know you've arrived at a real Southern cookin' restaurant. Sweet tea is brought to you in a mason jar, the fried chicken is eaten with your hands – and yes, fingers are licked!

Inspector tip: Enjoy a panoramic view of the Smoky Mountains as the homey restaurant is perched on a rise.



[Brigs Restaurant](#), AAA Two Diamond, Family Dining/Breakfast + Sandwiches, Durham

Nothing says comfort food quite like breakfast. In addition to fluffy stuffed omelets, enjoy dinner-plate sized pancakes in a variety of flavors like granola, pecan and cranberry-walnut, plus hearty skillet, scrambles and benedicts. With the lengthy menu, breakfast can be as comprehensive or simple as you like. Enjoy monthly seasonal specialties like apple-caramel waffles or pumpkin pancakes. **Inspector tips:** Choose from five locations in the Triangle and one in Charlotte. If you arrive at peak meal times, be prepared for a wait. The food is well worth it!

O-T ([▲ top](#))

OHIO

[Samantha's Sunny Corner Restaurant](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Canton

A mainstay for local casual dining, this crowd pleaser suits lunch-breakers, families, couples and more with something for everyone. Good old-fashioned cooking and friendly service is what you get at this simply appointed all-day diner-style establishment. Expect a good selection of straightforward comfort foods with entrees like steak, chicken, pork chops and scrod. The lunch menu is pared down to sandwiches, wraps and burgers and fresh, daily specials, carefully prepared and very affordable. Expect a wait during lunch.

Cap City Fine Diner & Bar, AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Comfort Food, Gahanna

This smartly-styled retro diner, appointed with mosaic tile floors, futuristic light fixtures and stainless steel walls, is an excellent place for generous portions of comfort foods. There are usually several soups available, but one can always expect steak and bean chili. A good choice for a hearty entrée is the meatloaf served in a stack with buttermilk mashed potatoes, topped with onion rings and served with barbecued gravy. Another delicious option is the Southern fried chicken served with green beans and buttermilk mashed potatoes. Worthy desserts include the “Seriously Big Chocolate Cake” and “24K Carrot Cake.”



OKLAHOMA

Hammett House Restaurant, AAA Two Diamond, Family Dining/American, Claremore

Recent remodeling with wallpaper borders and pictures adorning the walls provides a comfortable, relaxing feel. Country fried steak is hand-breaded and so tender you can cut it with a fork. It’s served with the gravy underneath the steak, which allows you to manage the amount of gravy you get with each bite. The double crust apple pie is served in a warm skillet and served a la mode with a brandy butter sauce. All pies are baked fresh daily and available by the slice or whole.

OREGON

Tad's Chicken 'n Dumplings, AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/American, Troutdale

This roadhouse has been serving motorists since the late 1920s. What began as a hot dog stand now serves chicken and dumplings, seafood, beef, pasta and salads. Located among the trees, in the summer most of the floor-to-ceiling windows are open, creating the feel of a tree house along the softly flowing Sandy River. In winter the trees feel more like a cocoon and the river shows more life and fury. With relaxed personable service, a warm crackling fire and some of the largest dumplings around, this is a great comfort spot. **Inspector tip:** Reservations are not accepted, but call-ahead seating is available and highly recommended.

PENNSYLVANIA

Honey's Sit 'n Eat, AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Comfort Food, Philadelphia

Enjoy a perfect blend of cozy, country décor, Southern hospitality and outstanding homemade recipes. The warm and inviting atmosphere includes a small diner-counter, chalkboard specials, casual artwork and an intimate dining area with tightly-packed wood tables and chairs. Breakfast is the busiest time with delightful options such as huevos rancheros, eggs Benedict, enfrijoladas, savory tofu scramble and giant buttermilk pancakes. Lunch doesn't disappoint either, with hearty, savory sandwiches and freshly baked desserts daily. **Inspector tip:** This establishment is cash only.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Hominy Grill, AAA Three Diamond, Casual Dining/Regional Southern, Charleston

Serving three meals daily, this Charleston “meat and three” mainstay has been pleasing locals and tourists alike for well over a decade. The staff serves up generous portions of regional Southern cuisine, all prepared

in-house using fresh local ingredients. Start your day with a biscuit and sausage gravy or a stack of buttermilk pancakes. For dinner, try some Charleston classics like she-crab soup, shrimp and grits, fried chicken or house smoked ribs. **Inspector tip:** Whatever you choose, don't skip a side of grits. You won't find better.

[Page's Okra Grill](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Regional Comfort Food, Mount Pleasant

Enjoy simple, no-frills "meat and three" Southern cooking in generous portions. The chalkboard menu lists all of the day's vegetables, meats and homemade desserts. Blue plate specials are available daily, and the burgers are freshly ground on premises. Basics include meatloaf, fried chicken and fish, fresh local vegetables, and mashed potatoes with gravy. Notable breakfast dishes include fried flounder and eggs. **Inspector tip:** Above all, pimiento cheese is king here. You'll find this awesome homemade concoction accompanying many dishes.

SOUTH DAKOTA

[Bracco](#), AAA Three Diamond, Casual Dining/International, Sioux Falls

Find an unexpected hodgepodge of international fare, heavily influenced by Island and Pacific Rim cuisine. Hearty offerings include brick over mac and cheese in a parmesan cream sauce and steak stroganoff served over a bed of egg noodles. Portions are substantial so you'll have plenty to share. Be sure to try the bananas Foster cheesecake with warm bananas that provide the ultimate pique in positive emotions. The food here not only delights, but invokes comfort, lingering and a sigh. Yeah, this is what comfort food is all about.

TEXAS

[County Line On The Hill](#), AAA Two Diamond, Family Dining/Regional BBQ, Austin

[County Line On The Lake](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/BBQ, Austin

The old speakeasy "on the Hill" provides spectacular 20 mile views of unbelievable sunsets, while the old lodge "on the Lake" has long been the destination to entertain out-of-town visitors. Each location serves a wide variety of barbeque favorites. New York strip steak is the specialty "on the Hill," and the unbelievable smoked prime rib is truly fabulous "on the Lake."

[Salt Lick Bar-B-Q](#), AAA One Diamond, Casual Dining/BBQ, Driftwood

[The Salt Lick Bar-B-Que](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/BBQ, Round Rock

"You can smell our pits from miles away!" With a slogan like that, you'd better deliver — and the Roberts family, with roots dating back to the wagon train days of the mid-1800s, surely does. The original location in Driftwood is always fun and popular, and the new location is at the Dell Diamond ballpark in Round Rock. Both serve brisket, pork and beef ribs, sausage, chicken and turkey. For lighter fare, barbeque sandwiches are available. Or if you want to tip the scale in the other direction, try the all-you-can-eat family style extravaganza! **Inspector tip:** The Driftwood location is cash only.

[Lili's bistro on Magnolia](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Comfort Food, Fort Worth

Locals are attracted to this cozy eatery for its signature gorgonzola fries. You'll also find classics like grilled cheese sandwiches, burgers and New York strip steak and creative interpretations such as a king ranch poblano, house nachos and green chile pork loin. The menu offers a variety of vegetarian options and is infused with more global items like the banh mi wrap, lamb pitas and Thai spiced dumplings. The dining room is rustic with exposed brick walls, comfortable banquets and booths and a separate wine bar.

[Black's Barbecue](#), AAA One Diamond, Quick Serve/BBQ, Lockhart

Family owned and operated since 1932, this is the oldest Texas barbeque continuously operated by the same family. That consistency ensures excellent smoked meats with tasty sides including deviled eggs, an option you won't find at many barbeque outlets. The entire staff works hard to ensure every meal is outstanding.

Kreuz Market, AAA One Diamond, Quick Serve/BBQ, Lockhart

Don't expect utensils to eat with because "that's what those things on the end of your hands are for!" Don't be looking for sauce, either, since these folks believe that sauce only covers up the flavor of the meat. And, they're right! Wonderfully slow smoked brisket, sausage, ribs, ham, turkey, pork chops and rib roast are all here waiting for you to sample.

Smitty's Market, AAA One Diamond, Quick Serve/BBQ, Lockhart

In the same location since 1900, this was the home of Kreuz Market for 50 years and, since then, operated by one family as Smitty's. You get up close and personal with the pits as you stand in line waiting to place your order, but it's worth the wait for the fabulous flavors they offer. Family-style picnic tables are always packed at this very popular spot.

Beto's Comida Latina, AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Regional Latin American, San Antonio

The simple exterior belies the cozy, unassuming and personable atmosphere inside. The rustic décor is muted, in contrast to the bright fiesta colors prevalent in this area. Many guests enjoy dining slowly, stretching out the evening to enjoy empanadas, Beto's specialty, consisting of baked and/or fried dough pouches stuffed with different types of fillings. Finish with a signature dessert empanada, like guava with cream cheese or banana with leche quemada, a Mexican candy made with brown sugar and pecans. Comfort food at its finest!

Louie Mueller Barbecue, AAA One Diamond, Quick Serve/BBQ, Taylor

Situated 45 minutes east of Austin on US 79, this 1949 barbecue stop is absolutely worth the trip. Experience some of the best brisket anywhere in a choice of two varieties. The "lean" cut has the consistency of steak while the "moist" cut is tender and juicy, literally melting in your mouth. If brisket is not your choice of the day, enjoy equally outstanding pork tenderloin, turkey, chicken, pork or beef ribs, sausage or even a rib-eye steak.

U-W (▲ top)

UTAH

Bryce Canyon Pines Restaurant, AAA Two Diamond, Family Dining/American, Bryce Canyon City

Guests unwind in a rustic setting with many antiques along the walls. The menu includes large cowboy steaks, fresh local trout and chicken fried steak. **Inspector tip:** If you have a weakness for homemade cream pie, try the coconut or banana.

VERMONT

American Flatbread, AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Pizza, Burlington

What says comfort more than pizza on a red and white checked cloth? Warmth emanates from a primitive wood-fired earthen oven in the corner of the dining room, where pizzas are expertly cooked with a mesmerizing show for those lucky enough to have a nearby table. True to the healthy lifestyle of many Vermonters, the restaurant uses local organic and seasonal products. **Inspector tip:** The restaurant is just a block from the Flynn Theater.



VIRGINIA

[Southside 815](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Regional American, Alexandria



On the edge of old town Alexandria, there's a friendly, neighborhood restaurant where the food will kindle memories of your family dinner. The kitchen cooks a variety of tasty Southern dishes such as Low Country shrimp and sausage served over creamy cheddar grits, homemade meatloaf made with ground beef, pork and veal covered with tomato bacon gravy and pecan chicken breast. All are served with mashed potatoes and a vegetable. The food can be heavy, but you'll leave feeling contented. **Inspector tip:** A plus is free parking in the garage around back.

[Tanglewood Ordinary Country Restaurant](#), AAA Two Diamond, Family Dining/Southern Comfort Food, Goochland

A leisurely drive down a country road leads you to a historic log cabin, c. 1928, the perfect setting for a home-cooked dinner served family style. On a busy night, sit a spell in a rocking chair on the porch and enjoy the country air. Fried chicken is the specialty, but you'll also enjoy barbecue, ham, roast beef and fried catfish. Country-style sides include cornbread stuffing, creamed corn, stewed tomatoes, biscuits and, of course, pies and cobblers.

Inspector tip: Everything is served in bottomless bowls, so enjoy all you want.



[Mrs. Rowe's Family Restaurant & Bakery](#), AAA Two Diamond, Family Dining/American, Staunton

Enjoy the early American décor and some of the finest comfort foods in the Shenandoah Valley. Choose from fried chicken, meatloaf, turkey or roast beef with gravy and homemade sides including applesauce and beans. The warmth just keeps coming with desserts like homemade apple, pecan and chocolate cream pies.

WASHINGTON

[The Alley Cafe](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Italian, Leavenworth

Tucked in an alley off the main thoroughfare, the summer patio is the perfect spot for a glass of wine and pasta. In winter, the interior's dark walls, gold accents, and velvet chairs add a cozy warmth to any evening. The menu is full of classic Italian dishes hot from "mama's kitchen." Creamy cannelloni, wild mushroom ravioli, fettuccini Alfredo and stacked lasagna are all made with homemade sauces. Add a basket of fresh Italian bread, sit back and relax with live music. The food and the ambiance here speak volumes to comfort!

[Laurie's Homestead Breakfast House](#), AAA Two Diamond, Family Dining/American, Seaview

What's more comforting than a warm breakfast cooked from scratch? More like grandma's house than a restaurant, this spot whips up hearty American breakfasts until 12:45 p.m. You'll be stuffed after a meal of pancakes the size of dinner plates, fluffy biscuits that could serve four or eggs that don't come just in pairs. Most meals require at least two plates to reach the table. **Inspector tips:** Reservations are not accepted, so dress warmly since a line forms early, extending to a covered outside area.



WYOMING

[Rendezvous Bistro](#), AAA Three Diamond, Casual Dining/Regional American, Jackson

Stop here for seasonal gourmet comfort food in a comfortable atmosphere, served with a sophisticated flair and presentations worth staring at. Find your favorite tantalizing daily special and mark the calendar; it might be the fried chicken on Wednesday or the seared scallops on Friday. If their take on carrot cake is on the menu, get ready for a treat. **Inspector tip:** The meatloaf is addictive, and seating can be tight.

CANADA

ALBERTA ([▲ top](#))

[Huckleberry's Cafe](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/International, Wetaskiwin

This is a great spot to nosh up on locally sourced foods. All of their sauces and vinaigrettes are completely natural and preservative-free, and everything is delicious. The décor is comfortable and homey with a Western design, and staff generally dresses in jeans to reflect the theme. The menu has worldwide inspiration, but signature dishes include corn-crust chicken and slow-roasted Alberta prime rib that can be paired with bunkhouse beans or wild herb salad. For a perfect finish enjoy huckleberry pie, of course.

ONTARIO

[Angie's Waterloo](#), AAA Two Diamond, Casual Dining/Canadian, Waterloo

A local favorite since 1962, this is a great place to enjoy real country hospitality and tasty home-style fare. The restaurant has passed down the family tree through the generations, and the fresh baked pies, breads and cookies are still made from scratch. The walls are covered with newspaper clippings of local events and family photos. Enjoy country breakfasts, fish and chips and daily specials in a place where time seems to stand still.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

[St. Ann's Church Lobster Suppers](#), AAA Two Diamond, Family Dining/Seafood, St. Ann

It's hard to believe lobster was ever considered poor man's fare! What began in 1964 as a way to retire a church mortgage has evolved into a summer tradition – with profits going to church-sponsored charities and programs. The very casual four-course meal includes homemade soup, steamed PEI blue mussels, a main course including the eponymous lobster, bread rolls and sides, beverage and a choice of dessert including lemon meringue pie. It's open only from mid-June to late September, closed on Sundays of course, but if you're in the area, it doesn't get any homier than this.

QUÉBEC

[La Binerie Mont-Royal](#), AAA One Diamond, Casual Dining/Quebecoise, Montréal

This bustling little diner in a trendy residential neighborhood has been around since 1940. The focus is on a straightforward, unpretentious presentation of French Canadian comfort foods such as feves au lard (baked beans), pea soup, tourtiere (spiced meat pie), stews, wieners and beans with maple syrup, cretons (a pate-like spread made from pork), sugar pie and pouding chomeur (unemployment or poor man's pudding). This is a working class eatery, so if you wear a suit people will wonder what you're selling or who you're looking for. **Inspector tip:** The daily specials are always worth noting since they include soup and dessert in the price.