



Jax Bread Co.

Hot Buns! And Other Bakery Delights

LET'S VISIT A HALF-DOZEN LOCAL SHOPS ACCLAIMED FOR WARM, CRUSTY PERFECTION.

BY JEFFREY SPEAR

There's nothing like freshly baked bread—its irresistible aromas, alluring textures, complex flavors and irrefutable pleasures baked into every loaf. Of course, you'll want to know where to find these earthly delights in Northeast Florida. While supermarket bakeries have replaced most of the independent bakers, their offerings pale in comparison. Fortunately, there are a small number

of dedicated chefs and artisanal bakeries around town that offer the allure, warmth and comfort of irrefutably superior, freshly baked breads, pastries and sweet treats.

Originally specializing in Guatemalan baked goods, the **St Gabriel Bakery** offers an overwhelming selection of traditional and contemporary breads and pastries, all based on recipes from Central America, Mexico

and other parts of the world. Best known for their crusty sourdough breads, available in several varieties, you'll also find not-to-be-missed specialty items including pan de queso (Mexican orange bread), volovan (puff pastries with savory fillings, derived from the French vol-au-vent) and conchitas (an iconic Mexican sweet bread). If you like your bread still warm to the touch, everything is on the shelves, fresh from the oven, by 10:30 AM.

Just down the road is **The French Pantry**, a retail bakery and considerably larger commercial operation that caters to local restaurants. It's also one of Jacksonville's most iconic lunchtime destinations, renown for its many creative sandwiches and decadent layer cakes. Offering more than 35 different breads, all baked daily, a few of the most popular include their signature pesto cheese rolls, sourdough bread and focaccia. As with most bakeries, arriving early (around 10:30 AM) is recommended, giving you access to the greatest variety. Many of the bakery's offerings can also be purchased from its second storefront and restaurant located in St Augustine.

If you're looking for New York-style bagels, **Jax Bread Co.** is for you. Offering all the varieties you'd expect including salt, onion, poppy seed, cinnamon raisin, Asiago and even spinach Florentine, the "everything" is the most popular. They also make a mean French sourdough (pain au levain), possessing a darker crust and a slightly milder tang that sets it apart from its American counterparts. If you're feeling adventurous, don't miss their signature African sweet bread, a South African creation that's soft, buttery and medium sweet (something between a Hawaiian sweet bread and Japanese milk bread), perfect for morning toast with jam or grilled cheese sandwiches.

Sometimes, a trip to the bakery should include a little time for a cup of coffee, a freshly baked treat or even more for breakfast or lunch. If you agree, **Community Loaves**, located in the heart of historic Murray Hill, offers freshly baked breads, an assortment of pastries, and plenty of cafe space to kick back and relax. While they offer a variety of breads throughout the week including country white, rosemary & garlic (a customer fave), whole wheat, and bagels, you'll want to check their bread schedule to see what else may be available. The widest selection will be found when their doors open at 8 AM, especially on the weekends.

Another place to enjoy a casual cup of coffee or meal while shopping for freshly baked breads and pastries is **1748 Bakehouse**. Located in the heart of Springfield just north of downtown, this cozy community bakery offers sourdough breads, English





1748 Bakehouse



Le Petit Paris

muffins that enjoy a cult-like following, and an impressive selection of croissants, pies and other sweet treats. You'll also encounter a selection of gourmet gift items as you enter the shop. If you're looking for more, you'll find focaccia, pumpernickel and baguettes under their tent at the Riverside Arts Market (RAM) on Saturdays, starting at 10 AM. Of course, it's always best to come early no matter which destination you choose.

Nothing says traditional French bakery like

warm, freshly baked baguettes. When you visit **Le Petit Paris**, especially if you arrive between 8 AM and 2 PM, the signature French baguettes are being pulled straight from the oven every 25-30 minutes. You'll also find a large selection of pastries including croissants, macarons and other treats, all available for your enjoyment at home or on premises. Most come for the baguettes, then linger in the cafe for a quick morning pick me up, casual breakfast, relaxing lunch with friends or even a

restorative glass of French wine paired with tasty nibbles at the end of the day.

It's clear that every bakery has its specialty. For some, it's a dense and tangy sourdough, while others have loyal patrons clamoring for bagels, baguettes and English muffins.

Undoubtedly, they all offer an enticing variety of eye-catching, sweet and savory baked goods. Your best bet is to visit them all, arriving early, letting your senses be your guide. ✨