

Meagan Lacy

Circle City eats

A culinary guide to Indianapolis

Before I moved to Indianapolis three years ago, my West Coast friends and colleagues threatened me with grim descriptions of Midwestern cuisine.

“Prepare yourself for an all beige diet,” they said.

Sensing their prejudice, I rejected their assessment and, naturally, wanted to prove them wrong. Luckily, I am a librarian *and* a devoted eater. I had no problem beginning my research.

The following list of establishments represents three years of dedicated, empirical inquiry into the Indy dining scene—and some of my most satisfying work. Unfortunately though, not everything is centrally located. Plenty of good grub is to be had downtown, but some of these culinary gems require a trip in the car or taxi fare. I have arranged these lists in terms of distance from the convention center. For each category, I try to designate those venues within walking distance first. Also, each dollar sign represents \$10—the approximate cost of a visit.

Restaurants

- **Café Patachou (0.2 miles, \$-\$\$):** Whether you order the omelet, croissant French toast, or broken yolk sandwich, you will feel like you are eating in Technicolor. Personally, I prefer the simplicity of a couple slices of yeasty cinnamon toast and a cup of coffee. But, whatever you order, it won't disappoint.

- **Maxine's Chicken and Waffles (1 mile, \$):** I'll admit, the first time I went to Maxine's, I was a little dubious of its location: a Citgo Gas Station. But don't let that discourage you. Maxine's is good eating. Really, the name says it all—just note that the sweet potato waffle is also an option!

- **India Garden (1 mile, \$-\$\$):** The weekday lunch buffet at India Garden is always banging. Hungry Hoosiers go for flaky Naan, Palak Paneer, and Chicken Tikka Masala. The Chicken Makhni—Tandoori chicken in a spicy tomato gravy—and Matar Paneer—green peas in a mild spice sauce—are good à la carte options.

- **Bazbeaux (1 mile, \$-\$\$):** Their version of a Quattro Formaggio is Romano, cheddar, mozzarella, provolone, mushrooms, *bacon*, and gooey spoonfuls of ricotta. Enough said.

- **Yats (1.5 miles, \$):** I haven't met anyone who doesn't like Yats, a local chain that serves generous portions of Cajun-style stews over rice and toasted buttered bread. Their menu is the very definition of comfort food. Popular dishes include creamy Chili Cheese and Curry Mushroom Etouffees, Maque Choux, and Drunk Chicken. If you're lucky enough to arrive on a day that they are offer-



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ing their homemade peanut butter pie, indulge. Immediately.

- **City Market (1 mile, \$):**

It is my gastronomical opinion that butterscotch is a too often neglected ingredient. Thankfully, there is **Circle City Sweets**, which bakes butterscotch brownies at its tiny

storefront inside the City Market. If, like me, you prefer a little dinner with your dessert, balance your blood sugar with one of their gourmet soups or salads. Also in the City Market: **Three Days in Paris** (savory and dessert crepes), **Papa Roux** (specializing in Po-Boys), and **Fermenti Artisan** (fancy sandwiches with homemade pickled things).

- **Bru Burger (1 mile, \$\$):** The Bru Burger consists of Taleggio Cheese, bacon, tomato jam, caramelized onion, lettuce, and mayo. If that doesn't suit your carnivorous cravings, then perhaps one of the more than ten other avant-garde "Chef Burger" combinations—the Proviçal, the Mexicali BBQ—will. The PBR battered onion rings and the housemade veggie burger (a garbanzo-mushroom patty topped with balsamic mayo) are tantalizing vegetarian options.

- **Saffron Café (1 mile, \$\$\$):** The first time I walked into the Saffron Café, I felt like I had stepped into a jewel box. Ceramic tiles in vibrant patterns adorn the walls, and pretty lanterns emitting colored light hang over the tables. If you like a Middle Eastern flavor profile, then peruse this Moroccan menu. My favorite is the Lamb Honey: a honey-glazed leg of lamb with pear halves, prunes, and apricots, served in a cumin sauce.

- **Bluebeard (1.5 miles, \$\$-\$\$\$):** A librarian and bibliophile, I couldn't resist a literary reference to Kurt Vonnegut. Thankfully,



A Belgian waffle with fruit and mocha from Taste.

Photograph by Meagan Lacy.

the restaurant is as good as the book. Bluebeard, which opened just last summer, specializes in Italian-style, farm-to-table fare: snack on cheese and charcuterie; feast on roasted duck breast and sweet potato hash. **Amelia's**, their wholesale bakery, is located inside and serves

up crusty, hearth baked breads that would tempt even the most devoted Atkin's dieter. I dream of the grilled bread with whipped lardo, anchovy butter, and roasted garlic oil.

- **Recess (6 miles, \$\$\$):** If you have committed to tapping into your 401K for a good meal in Indy, then I suggest that you head straight to Recess. It's fan-cy. Amuse-bouche fancy. Conceived as "the ultimate culinary playground," Recess creates a new, four-course, pre-fixe dinner menu everyday, Tuesday through Saturday. Each course features local, seasonal ingredients and lots of imagination. Seating is tight, so if you're a big party, make a reservation.

- **Taste (7 miles, \$\$-\$\$):** Taste is my number one, all around favorite place to eat in Indianapolis. When I first moved to Indy, I literally came here every weekend—not only for the food, but also for the smart, friendly servers. They know how to make you feel at home. Taste is open for brunch daily, offering loose-leaf teas and espresso, expert egg dishes (truffle egg toast, anyone?), and gorgeous salads. The dessert case sits directly between you and the menu board, so you cannot resist the hummingbird cake staring back at you.

Ethnic dining

If you are craving something a little more continental, hop in a taxi and head toward La-

fayette Square—off West 38th Street and Lafayette. This neighborhood, recently featured in a *New York Times* article, offers a variety of ethnic cuisine. I love, Love, LOVE the Vietnamese sandwiches at **K&T deli** (and not only because they are \$3.50), the tacos at **Guatelinda** and **Carniceria Guanajuato**, and the beef “dry pot” at **Szechwan Garden**.

Food trucks

Weekday lunches are never dull thanks to the Indy food truck scene. **Scratch Truck** serves the best burger I’ve ever had—a beef patty, topped with bacon marmalade, arugula, and Gorgonzola, on a toasted bun. The hand-cut french fries are perfectly crisped and have singlehandedly rekindled my love of the potato. Chef Becky’s **Duos Mobile** is a paragon of delicious, conscientious, and healthful food. The menu changes weekly but always features local vendors, vegan and vegetarian options, and desserts. Once Becky made a caramel-nut shortbread cookie that literally almost made me cry. It was that good. Also look out for the **Mac Genie**, the **Seoul Grill**, **The Flying Cupcake**, and **Scout’s Treats**.

Diners

A born-and-raised West Coaster, I was instantly taken by the diner culture in Indianapolis. Unlike anything I’ve seen before, some of these establishments have existed since the ’40s and ’50s and are truly institutions. **Peppy Grill**, located in Indy’s Fountain Square neighborhood, is open 24 hours and is especially popular after the bars close down for the night. **The Working Man’s Friend** (234 N. Belmont Ave.) makes killer onion rings and exemplifies the “diner burger”: a thin



Hoosiers line up for Scratch Truck. Photograph by Meagan Lacy.

beef patty, crisped at the edges, topped with American Cheese, iceberg lettuce, and tomato. **Mug n Bun**, near the Speedway, is an old school drive-in that serves mac-and-cheese wedges—and pretty much anything else you can think of to fry. The **Rock-Cola Café** (5730 Brookville Road), located in Irvington, is



Yogurt rice, cabbage chutney, and cut salad from Duos Mobile. Photograph by Meagan Lacy.

the only place you can get a genuine can of Choc-ola, a chocolaty beverage produced in Indianapolis between the 1940s and late 1970s. When Rock-Cola’s owner Dan Iaria hankered for a sip, his nostalgia led him on search that ended at the U.S. Patent Office: he purchased the expired trademark

and, for 300 bucks, Choc-ola became his. And, for around \$2, a glass of it can be yours.

Donuts

• Long’s Bakery (4 miles, \$, cash only):

They really do deserve a category all their own. I have stood in line as early as 5:00 in the morning for one of Long’s warm, yeasted donuts. They’re good at room temperature, too, and, don’t worry, the line moves fast.

Bars, pubs, and lounges

• **The Libertine Liquor Bar (0.5 miles, \$\$):** This lofty space, with its sparse, Scandinavian décor and lambent light, is the perfect refuge. The first thing that you will notice is the Whitman poem, “Pioneers! O Pioneers!” painted across the wall. But, even if literary allusions don’t impress you, the drinks will. “The Last Word”—a mixture of Bluecoat gin, Luxardo maraschino, and green chartreuse—is aptly named, as it will stun you to silence. Their cocktail menu rotates regularly, but rest assured you will find something housemade, infused, and/or muddled.

• **Tavern on South (0.5 miles, \$-\$\$):**

Tavern is a bit of a misnomer, hardly describing this sleek, sophisticated space. Just around the corner from the Lucas Oil Stadium, Tavern on South almost makes me wish I were a sports fan. The two-story brick storefront is bright and airy on the inside and displays banner-sized, black-and-white photographs of historic Indianapolis. Offering a full bar as well as a seasonally inspired lunch and dinner menu, Tavern has it all.

• **Ball and Biscuit (1 mile, \$-\$\$):** The Ball and Biscuit is named eponymously after the STC 4021, a microphone first made in the 1930s by Standard Telephones and Cables Limited. An eclectic collection of microphones, transistor radios, and other musical equipment can be found throughout this elegant space—as well as cushy, oversized leather chairs. If this is where you decide to unwind, make sure you have the Pearl Jam in hand. This concoction of grapefruit juice and Pearl Plum flavored vodka is ambrosial.

• **Chatterbox Jazz Club (1 mile, \$):** Regulars reverentially refer to it as the Church of the Chatterbox. Imagine a shoebox-sized dive dimly lit by multicolored twinkly lights. A festoon of Indy 500 flags hang like Mexican papel picado banners in a low, zigzag pattern from the ceiling. The walls are a collage of posters, photographs, and found art pieces—a broken Elvis clock, a ball of tinfoil, a Mr. Potato Head. Despite its humble



The Zach Lapidus Trio plays every Thursday at the Chatterbox. Photograph by Meagan Lacy.

appearance, the Chatterbox consistently appears in *Downbeat* magazine’s list of top jazz venues in the United States and frequently features the local talent from the IU Jacobs School of Music. I’m partial to the Zach Lapidus Trio on Thursdays. Music is free most

nights, but be sure to bring a few bucks for the collection.

• **The Rathskeller (1 mile, \$):** Established in 1894, and located in the basement of the Athenaeum building (designed by Clemens Vonnegut, Kurt Vonnegut’s granddad), the Rathskeller is the city’s oldest operating restaurant. An impressive structure, its lofty heights will have you gazing even before you start sipping on your German-imported beer. If it’s nice out, you might want to slink upstairs into the Biergarten.

• **Chatham Tap (1.5 miles, \$):** If you’re looking for a neighborhood pub feel, Chatham Tap’s got your number. Rotating taps feature local craft beer and imports. The pub food is also exceptional. I suggest the Reuben pizza: corned beef, sauerkraut, mozzarella, and Thousand Island dressing. I know it doesn’t sound like a right thing, but trust me *it is*.

• **Black Market (2 miles, \$\$-\$\$\$\$):** Located at the northern-most tip of Mass Ave, Black Market is your most eclectic option—not only in terms of drink (craft beer, wine, and cocktails) but also food (lunch on a grilled pb&j and chips...or welsh rabbit). The interior is dark, minimalist, and masculine. Think hardwood floors, exposed brick walls, and black leather upholstery. Two custom-made communal tables are the restaurant's focal point, making it an ideal locale for calming down with a group of colleagues.

• **Brugge Brasserie (8 miles, \$-\$\$):** Brugge is my personal standby. Whenever I am too hungry to think of what to eat, much less cook, I go directly to Brugge, order a ginormous cone of pomme frites, and patiently sip on the Tripel de Ripple—a Belgian-style Tripel—until they arrive. I don't know if it's the warm light, the good beer, or the bustling activity, but I always leave Brugge in a cocoon of contentment.

Beer

If any of you have been paying attention to Amy Pohler's *Parks and Recreation* as closely as I have, you will have noticed that the characters are often found sipping authentic Indiana beer from the **Upland Brewing Company**. Although Upland's headquarters is

located in Bloomington, Indiana, the **Tasting Room** (49th and College) is just a 20-minute cab ride away from downtown. More like a coffeehouse than a bar, it's furnished with café-style tables and overstuffed chairs. Downtown, you'll find **Sun King** (home of the popular Wee Mac) and **Flat 12**. At Flat 12, you taste *for free*, and the atmosphere is the best of the three. Featuring an outdoor fire pit and a woodsy seating area, it is the perfect place to down your Lacto-Matic Milk Stout. Sometimes, the **New York Slice**, a local food truck, and the nearby **Smoking Goose Meatery**, are on the premises to assist you in your sobering-up needs.

Conclusion

Three years and ten pounds later, I continue to wonder at the creativity and diversity of Hoosier cuisine. It's not just what they do. It's how they do it. Food is prepared with care and served with warmth and unexpected kindness. Workers remember you. They ask you about your day and actually *mean* it. They call you "sweet pea" or "thirsty bird," and you somehow find it endearing. In other words, they treat you like family. As someone moving 2,000 miles away from her closest friends and family, I couldn't have been more grateful to find these homes away from home. I'm really proud to eat here. *ZZ*

ACRL 2013 buddy program, workshops, THATCamp, IdeaPower Unconference

ACRL invites attendees who are new to the conference, and those who are seasoned veterans to find each other in Indianapolis and learn from one another. This is a great way to first-time attendees to learn about ACRL and network. If you've ever been to an ACRL conference before and are willing to commit some time to helping a new person navigate and make some new connections, that's all it takes.

Registration opens for 15 great ACRL 2013 workshops on Monday, March 11. Workshops offer three contact hours that provide active and in-depth learning in a smaller environment. They are free with your ACRL 2013 registration, but you must sign up in advance.

Registration opens for THATCamp ACRL 2013 on Monday, March 11. THATCamp is a free unconference where librarians, scholars, and technologists of all skill levels learn and build together in sessions proposed on the spot.

IdeaPower speaking opportunities are also available March 11. The IdeaPower unConference is designed to be an exercise in the dynamic presentation of powerful ideas. Presenters volunteer to share an idea that has the power to transform the academic libraries in a six-minute presentation.

See the conference Web site at www.acrl.org/acrlconference for full details and to sign up for these events. ACRL 2013 will be held April 10–13, 2013, in Indianapolis.

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