

A Taste of Alabama

WITH BOUNDLESS INSPIRATION AND A STRONG HOLD ON TRADITION,
ALABAMA'S CULINARY SCENE IS HITTING ITS STRIDE



WHILE ALABAMA CUISINE may bring to mind visions of classic Southern fare, there's more to the state's dining than meets the eye. From the foothills of Appalachia to the sands of the coast, Alabama's restaurants are as varied as its geography. Across the state, innovative chefs spin heritage into culinary experiences, each infused with distinct personality and flavor. To celebrate this epicurean culture, the state gathers its best and brightest in the official **"100 Dishes to Eat in Alabama."** In pursuit of these unforgettable bites, we first took to the eastern part of the state for a culinary tour equal parts delicious and diverse.

In Alexander City, **SpringHouse** restaurant is perched atop a hill, overlooking the stables and pastures below. The Tuscan-inspired space is rustic and elegant, lit with chandeliers and twinkling lights on the outdoor patios. Chef Chris Morina's sophisticated menu is full of winks to Southern tradition, from wild game to a homemade pimento cheese. Here, the must-try is **Mr. Jim's Vegetable Plate**, a summer staple named for beloved former chef James Black featuring a vibrant bounty of local produce and a rich wedge of cornbread.

Located in the historic Haynie's Drugstore building in nearby Opelika, **Café 123** is a cozy downtown spot serving Southern fare with French influence. Amid the exposed-brick interior with black-and-white checkered floors, the casual atmosphere meets a polished brasserie menu. One starring dish is the **Beef Tenderloin Napoleon**, a petite fillet topped with crispy fried green tomatoes, béarnaise sauce

and blue crab on a bed of mashed potatoes and asparagus.

To satisfy a Mexican craving, longtime favorite **El Rey Burrito Lounge** is often the answer, its neon-lit space and outdoor patios oozing quirky charm. Since opening in Montgomery in 1999, the restaurant has sourced local ingredients for its menu of street tacos, burritos, enchiladas, and more. The bright, fresh **ancho BBQ** and **jicama salad** is one thing all can agree on. Served with warm tortillas, the dish features jicama and cabbage slaw, pickled cucumbers, grilled chicken or tempeh, and cotijain a Yucatán barbecue sauce.

No trip down South would be complete without a helping of comfort food. While travelers would be remiss to skip the classic meat-and-three, two diners lean into another mainstay: homemade dessert. In Troy, **Sisters' Restaurant** was founded by real-life sisters Pat Rogers and Geraldine Umbehagen in 1997 and has served its unfussy dishes ever since. Locals flock to the eatery for fried chicken and mac and cheese, but the spot is most famous for its **banana pudding**. Meanwhile, **Johnny's** of Homewood boasts a legacy dating back nearly one hundred years. Chef-owner Timothy Hontzas is a three-time James Beard Award semifinalist whose Greek and Southern fare is heralded throughout the country. While his heritage shines in traditional dishes from keftedes to baklava, one of the most popular orders is the **chocolate peanut butter torte**, a rich nod to his Southern upbringing. It's a true encapsulation of the state's culinary spirit: Alabama cuisine is a great many things.

From left: Timothy Hontzas, chef-owner of Johnny's; El Rey Burrito Lounge's ancho BBQ and jicama salad; the elegant dining room at SpringHouse

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