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## Top Five Places to Eat in Austin, Texas

It may be south by southwest, but Austin serves up far more than just BBQ and Tex-Mex  
by Carolina Santos-Neves



Austin, Texas, is best known as a music town. It's got [Austin City Limits](#), [South by Southwest](#), and a never-ending selection of show venues on the main drag that is Sixth Street. But this city is more than just music to your ears—it hits all the right restaurant notes, serving up more than the expected BBQ and Tex-Mex fare. Check out our top five places to eat in Austin; you'll be surprised to see which are at peak performance.

### Authentic Mexican Food

You can experience Mexico by walking through the austere wooden doors of the hacienda-like [Fonda San Miguel](#). In this nearly 40-year-old restaurant, everything from the warm orange walls adorned with renowned artists' work to the light, crisp tortilla chips and fresh salsa sing its authenticity. In a city where Tex-Mex seems to dominate, it's refreshing to find a place that not only serves authentic dishes from seven different regions in Mexico but also gets much of its produce from its own garden. Whether you order the tender tacos *al pastor* or the fall-off-the-bone cochinita pibil (pork baked in a banana leaf), you'll have a hard time believing you're not in Mexico. For something lighter, the *ensalada de espinacas* combines spinach leaves, toasted almonds, chiles, and *panela* cheese, and there is always the *camarones Tikin Xik* (shrimp broiled in achiote seasoning), which has just the right amount of kick to it. (2330 W. North Loop Blvd.; 512-459-4121; [www.fondasanmiguel.com](http://www.fondasanmiguel.com))

### Eclectic Mexican

Warning: One might fall in love with tequila at [La Condesa](#) restaurant—perhaps because it has Austin's largest premium selection, with over 80 varieties of 100 percent blue agave tequila, or perhaps because the passion fruit and spiced mango Margarita really is that seductive. Second warning: One might also fall in love with the space, which is vibrant, modern, and trendy and has an enviable outdoor patio that feels quiet and secluded. Third warning: One can also fall head over heels with the perfectly paired dishes, such as the *Hongos y Huitlacoche* (tacos with mushrooms, truffle oil, huitlacoche, and Oaxacan cheese), the *elotes* (Mexican-style corn on the cob), and the *ejotes* (grilled Texas green beans with garlic and epazote). One preparation you will never encounter anywhere else is the *costillas de puerco*, pork ribs glazed with spicy guava and served with sweet plantains, pickled onions, fresh cheese, green salsa, and cilantro. It is that dish that will have you booking your next trip back to Austin. (400A W. Second St.; 512-499-0300; [www.lacondesaaustin.com](http://www.lacondesaaustin.com))

### Japanese Food

With its modern Japanese architecture and palate-perplexing dishes, [Uchi](#) feels much more Manhattan than Austin. This always-packed restaurant hidden off South Lamar has chef Tyson Cole at the helm. He's a local, yet he trained for a decade in sushi restaurants in Tokyo, New York, and here in Austin, and his menu (updated daily, though there's also a permanent one) provides for an unpredictable and exciting evening. The Machi Cure is an eclectic dish combining a rainbow of Asian flavors and textures that are displayed like art. The silky-smooth maple-wood-smoked baby yellowtail is paired with crispy yuca chips, subtly sweet Asian pear, and salty Marcona almonds. The Walu Walu is made up of oak-grilled escolar paired with candied citrus and finished off with *myoga* (Japanese ginger) and Yuzupon (essentially a Japanese vinegar). It is unlike anything you've ever had before, as is the cleverly composed Pitchfork roll, which combines tender Wagyu beef, ripe

avocado, and salty caviar topped off with sweet leek crisps. Who said beef doesn't belong in a roll? (801 S. Lamar Blvd.; 512-916-4808; [www.uchiaustin.com](http://www.uchiaustin.com))

## Upscale American

Amid the crowds and endless bars on Sixth Street, there is one restaurant that is reaching for greater heights. [Parkside](#), a Michael Hsu-designed space with exposed brick walls and a spacious bar, provides a casual atmosphere for decidedly upscale fare. Indeed, in *The Austin Chronicle*, MM Pack wrote, "Downtown Austin is a better place because Parkside is there." Chef Shawn Cirkiel knows how to get people coming back with starters as simple yet clever as garlic shrimp with smoked paprika and marrow bones with herb salad. The raw bar, with simple oysters on the half shell, also offers five ceviche options (try the fluke, lemon, crushed almonds, and chives). The key is to share the appetizers so that you can make room for the mouthwatering entrées. (301 E. Sixth St. & San Jacinto; 512-474-9898; [www.parkside-austin.com](http://www.parkside-austin.com))

## BBQ

You can't come to Austin and not have at least one meal of finger-licking-good barbecue. For those who want the ultimate Austin experience of listening to live music and indulging in serious, succulent BBQ, there is no better place than [Stubb's Bar-B-Q](#). It was at this institution that musicians such as Willie Nelson and Johnny Cash would "play for their supper," so the legend says. Start off the meal with the fried green tomatoes, which are crisp and firm, and the Texas onion rings, crunchy and sweet. But make sure to keep your eye on the prize and order the \$17.95 all-you-can-eat family-style BBQ dinner, which allows for your choice of three meats plus potato salad, coleslaw, and pinto beans. All of the restaurant's meats get marinated with a dry rub and are then house-smoked between 200°F and 225°F in a rotisserie pit fired with post oak. After deciding which three meats you want, not overeating may be your biggest challenge. (801 Red River; 512-480-8341; [stubbstaustin.com](http://stubbstaustin.com))

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