



America's 50 Best Hot Dogs

These are the country's top tube steaks



Senate

One of America's best hot dogs is the Croque Madame dog served at at Cincinnati's Senate Restaurant: a béchamel-slathered dog, topped with Black Forest ham and a poached egg, in a toasted brioche bun.

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The hot dog is one of those foods that's nearly impossible to screw up. You heat it through, plop it on a bun, squirt on some mustard, and call it dinner. But there's a big difference between not screwing something up and turning it into a paradigm-shifting, transcendental dining experience. And there are lots of hot dogs out there that have the power to change your life.

[America's 50 Best Hot Dogs \(Slideshow\)](#)

The perennial grill mate to [hamburgers](#), the hot dog sometimes gets the short end of the stick, charring at the back of the grill while juicy burgers are snatched up as soon as they hit the right temperature. But there's a science, if not an art form, behind constructing the perfect hot-dog-eating experience.

That experience was introduced more than 100 years ago, when German immigrants first brought over their frankfurters and started selling them on the cheap, at places like Coney Island's Nathan's, arguably ground zero for American hot dog consumption. But then something interesting happened. People began developing their own spice mixes and making their own hot dogs, and every region and group of people put its unique stamp on the snack. [In Chicago](#) they top all-beef dogs with mustard, fresh tomatoes, onions, sport peppers, bright green relish, dill pickles, and celery salt. Spicy Texas Red Hots are popular in New Jersey, but not in Texas, while Greek immigrants in Michigan concocted a cinnamon-rich beef chili that came to be known as Coney sauce, but it has nothing to do with Coney Island. The uncured, unsmoked White Hot is popular in upstate New York. And the [regional variations](#) go on and on. [related]

On our quest to find America's best hot dogs, we kept an eye out for places with a definitive style of hot dog, one which embodies not only the region's quirks but the particular tastes and culinary traditions of its people. We also made sure to take into account online reviews from locals as well as the dog's overall reputation among those in-the-know, and the quality of the ingredients, namely sourcing the franks from well-known local producers, was also important. These hot dogs aren't being eaten in a void, either, so we took into account the entire experience, from driving up to the restaurant or stand to placing your order to taking that first bite.

We sorted through dozens of hot dog stands and restaurants in search of the best in America. In order to be included, the vendor needed to have a trademark dog, with toppings that add a certain extra something. For example, [Ben's Chili Bowl](#) in Washington, D.C. doesn't just have a trademark frank (the half-smoke), it has a trademark topping (chili), is well-regarded by locals and professional eaters alike, and eating there is a memorable experience unto itself. For those reasons, it's high on our list.

Sadly, there were some renowned institutions that didn't make the cut. While the original [Nathan's Famous](#) in Coney Island very well might be the most well-known hot dog stand in America, it didn't make our cut because the buns have been stale every time we've eaten there and it's sadly resting on its laurels at this point (even though the fries are admittedly delicious). And while the pretzel dog at chain Auntie Anne's has its loyal devotees, the experience isn't exactly sublime.

Our list runs the gamut from ancient stands that have been serving the same exact product day in and day out for decades to gastropubs putting their unique stamp on the hot dog to a place where people wait in line for more than an hour for one topped with foie gras. There's one constant thread between them, though: they're the country's best.



Slideshow: [America's 50 Best Hot Dogs \(Slideshow\)](#)

50) Gray's Papaya, New York City: New York-Style



The classic New York hot dog comes in many forms, but they're almost always made by one company: Sabrett. [Gray's Papaya](#) is now down to just one New York location, on the Upper West Side, and this colorful purveyor of old-school New York character grills their natural-casing Sabrett dogs on a flat top, nestles them inside a lightly toasted bun, and tops them with mustard, sauerkraut, or the classic "onions in sauce," also made by Sabrett. Lean up against the ledge, wash down a couple with some papaya drink, and be on your merry way, full, content, and out only a few bucks.

49) Moe's Hot Dog House, Philadelphia: Moe's Dog



At this South Philly gem, hot dogs are “done juuuust right!,” according to the motto on the creative and ample menu. At [Moe's](#) hot dogs are all-beef variations produced by Levis (established locally in 1895), and they're joined on the menu by some outstanding breakfast sandwiches, hand-carved roast beef, and classic Philly fare including cheese steaks, scrapple, and pork rolls. They'll deep-fry your dog if you ask (to three degrees of doneness), and their corn dog is awesome, but the quality of the dog is so high that you should just go with the standard griddled dog. A kosher hot dog's best friends are sauerkraut and spicy mustard, and the folks behind Moe's know that: they've made that style their flagship offering, called the Moe's Dog. Save the one topped with macaroni and cheese for your second visit.

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