

Restaurant listings for the BT Dining Guide are written by Geoffrey Anderson and Dianne Rubin of Miami Food Pug (MFP), Andrew McLees (AM), Mandy Baca (MB), and the late Pamela Robin Brandt (PRB) (restaurants@biscaynetimes.com). Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, but restaurants frequently change menus, chefs, and operating hours, so please call ahead to confirm information. Icons (\$\$\$) represent estimates for a typical meal without wine, tax, or tip. Hyphenated icons (\$-\$\$\$) indicate a significant range in prices between lunch and dinner.

\$ = \$10 and under
\$\$ = \$20
\$\$\$ = \$30
\$\$\$\$ = \$40
\$\$\$\$\$ = \$50 and over

ADDiKT

485 Brickell Ave.
305-503-0373

So long, 15th and Vine. The now-shuttered W Miami restaurant has been replaced by a more playful, approachable spot: ADDiKT. While the dishes have cheeky names like “Banh-Who? Banh-Me” (a Vietnamese pork belly sandwich) and “Juan in a Million” (shrimp tacos), this is some serious international cuisine. The view alone is worth the visit -- any seat offers a breathtaking look at Brickell. Breakfast, brunch, lunch, and dinner. No matter the meal, the creative menu will keep you on your toes. \$\$-\$\$\$ (MFP)

All Day

1035 N. Miami Ave.
305-699-3447

Here is a stroke of inspired insanity: an artisanal coffee shop and all-day breakfast bistro at the edge of downtown Miami’s clubland corridor. Fans of breakfast have plenty to fawn over,

including a delicious baked egg and leek skillet served with a side of toasted baguette, and a curiously exotic poached egg and congee bowl. Sandwiches and salads are also available. The space is bright and accented with beautiful natural woods, and sports some seriously hip flourishes including a neon drink menu illuminating the coffee station. Single-origin coffee is a specialty here and the baristas prepare it with effortless finesse. For the weekend warriors, after the all-night EDM bender, thankfully there is All Day. \$\$ (AM)

Alloy Bistro

154 SE 1st Ave.
786-773-2742

Deep within the bowels of an otherwise unspectacular swath of urban sprawl lies a small but wondrous urban oasis where the food is fresh, creative, and presented with playful finesse. Chef Federico Genovese's imaginative Mediterranean fusion menu rotates daily, and features fresh, seasonally driven recipes whose ingredients are sourced both locally and overseas. On a recent visit, nothing fell short of divine: the 24-hour short rib served over aged white cheddar and topped with mashed potatoes was expertly prepared. A show-stopping take on a classic blueberry tart dessert served with coconut foam garnished with powdered green tea was an inspired way to end the night. Even the bread was baked to perfection and served with the most fragrant olive oil I've ever had the pleasure of tasting. If there is an oyster's pearl to be found in the heart of downtown Miami, this is it. \$\$\$ (AM)

American Social

690 SW 1st Ct.
305-223-7004

The gastropub grows up, offering a huge modern playground for the social butterfly to enjoy all aspects of life. From indulgent chicken and waffles at brunch to open-faced short rib flatbreads at dinner, dozens of craft beers and a long list of cocktails for happy hour, flat-screen TVs to watch all the important games, and even an area to dock your boat. Your most difficult task will be choosing between plush indoor seating and outdoor riverside seating. \$\$-\$\$\$\$ (MB)

Area 31

270 Biscayne Blvd. Way
305-424-5234

www.area31restaurant.com

Not that the sleek interior of this seafood restaurant (named for fishing area 31, stretching from the Carolinas to South America) isn't a glamorous dining setting. But we'd eat outside. From

the expansive terrace of the Epic condo and hotel on the Miami River, the views of Brickell's high-rises actually make Miami look like a real city. It's hard to decide whether the eats or drinks are the most impressive. The food is impeccably fresh regional fish, prepared in a clean Mediterranean-influenced style. The cocktails are genuinely creative. Luckily you don't have to choose one or the other. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

Arson

104 NE 2nd Ave.

786-717-6711

James Beard-nominated chef Deme Lomas is known for his Spanish tapas restaurant NIU Kitchen in downtown Miami, but his latest venture is poised to steal the spotlight. Located just a stone's throw from NIU Kitchen, Arson remedies some of that restaurant's shortcomings -- a tight space and limited menu -- to craft a distinct yet familiar experience that will appeal to NIU fans and first-timers alike. The Josper charcoal oven makes meats like the Patagonian lamb chops and Angus grass-fed skirt steak come out perfect; one bite of either will entice you to order a second round. \$\$\$ (MFP)

Balans

901 S. Miami Ave

305-534-9191

www.balans.co.uk

Open until 4:00 a.m. on weekends, this London import (Miami's second Balans) offers a sleeker setting than its perennially popular Lincoln Road progenitor, but the same simple yet sophisticated global menu. The indoor space can get mighty loud, but lounging on the dog-friendly outdoor terrace, over a rich croque monsieur (which comes with an alluringly sweet/sour citrus-dressed side salad), a lobster club on onion toast, some surprisingly solid Asian fusion items, and a cocktail is one of Miami's more relaxing experiences. \$\$-\$\$\$ (PRB)

Bali Café

109 NE 2nd Ave.

305-358-5751

While Indonesian food isn't easy to find in Miami, downtown has secret stashes -- small joints catering to cruise-ship and construction workers. This cute, exotically decorated café has survived and thrived for good reason. The homey cooking is delicious, and the friendly family feel encourages even the timid of palate to try something new. Novices will want Indonesia's signature rijsttafel, a mix-and-match collection of small dishes and condiments to be heaped on rice. Note: bring cash. No plastic accepted here. \$\$\$ (PRB)

Batch Gastropub

30 SW 12th St.

305-808-5555

The name refers to Batch's signature novelty items, which we think of as gourmet fast-food cocktails: high-quality fresh ingredients (some barrel-aged), pre-mixed in batches and served on tap for instant gratification. But a menu designed by E. Michael Reidt (ex-Area 31), means solid foods are serious chef-driven pub grub: the Mac Attack, sophisticated mac 'n' cheese featuring gnocchi and aged Gruyere; sinfully succulent burgers, substituting brisket for leaner beef; nachos upgraded with duck confit; wood-oven pizzas topped with unusual combinations like pumpkin plus shortrib; duck fat popcorn; housemade sodas. \$\$ (PRB)

Bengal Indian Cuisine

109 NE 1st St.

305-403-1976

To say that there's a lack of Indian restaurants in South Florida would be an understatement. Thankfully, Bengal Indian Cuisine in downtown Miami helps bolster the county's slim offerings with tasty classics like chicken tikka masala, pakora (lentil-based vegetable fritters), and naan bread. Although they warrant their prices, the à la carte offerings for dinner can quickly put a dent in your dining budget. Instead, take advantage of the generous lunch buffet that won't break the bank. \$-\$\$ (MFP)

Big Easy

701 S. Miami Ave.

786-866-9854

If you visit Big Easy with expectations of po'boys, muffulettas, and beignets, you're going to be very disappointed. The restaurant has nothing to do with New Orleans -- it's actually the nickname for South African golf pro Ernie Els, one of the restaurant's partners. Here's what you can expect: delectable South African cuisine incorporating a wealth of flavors and spices. Start with the Boerie Bites -- they look like mini-hot dogs but elevated -- then work your way to the bison ribeye and the toasted couscous risotto, which can double as a meal. \$\$-\$\$\$\$ (MFP)

Blue Martini

900 S. Miami Ave. #250

305-981-2583

With a 41-martini menu (plus exotic lighting, late hours, dance floor, and live music most nights), this wildly popular place is more lounge than restaurant. Nonetheless food offerings are surprisingly ambitious, including substantial items like sliced steak with horseradish sauce, as well as shareable light bites -- parmesan-topped spinach/artichoke dip, served hot with toasted pita; shrimp and blue crab dip (yes: crab, not faux "krab"); a seductive puff pastry-wrapped and honey-drizzled baked brie. Come at happy hour (4:00-8:00 p.m. daily) for bargain drink/snack specials, and lots of locals. \$\$ (PRB)

Bonding

638 S. Miami Ave.

786-409-4794

From trend-spotting restaurateur Bond Trisansi (originator of Mr. Yum and 2B Asian Bistro), this small spot draws a hip crowd with its affordable menu of redesigned traditional Thai dishes, wildly imaginative sushi makis, and unique signature Asian fusion small plates. Highlights include tastebud-tickling snapper carpaccio; an elegant nest of mee krob (sweet, crisp rice noodles); blessedly non-citrus-drenched tuna tataki, drizzled with spicy-sweet mayo and wasabi cream sauce; greed-inducing "bags of gold," deep-fried wonton beggar's purses with a shrimp/pork/mushroom/waterchestnut filling and tamarind sauce. \$\$ (PRB)

Bon Fromage

500 Brickell Ave. #106

786-329-5632

Though independently owned instead of a chain cog, this cheese and wine café/shop is like a pint-size version of Midtown Miami's Cheese Course, right down to being officially self-service. But it is staffed by accommodating employees who, unofficially, do their best to double as servers for eat-in diners. The cheese (plus charcuterie) menu of garnished platters, salads, and crusty baguette sandwiches features numerous high-quality, imported favorites, but don't miss more unusual domestic treasures like Wisconsin bread, a cooked cheese that, like halloumi, doesn't melt but tantalizingly softens when heated. \$\$ (PRB)

Burger & Beer Joint

900 S. Miami Ave. #130

305-523-2244

While not quite Miami's first hip hangout featuring high-quality burgers, the original South Beach B&B certainly goosed the gourmet-burger craze in a major way. This Brickell branch has all the familiar favorites, including the ten-pound Mother Burger -- really more good gimmick than

good. Otherwise B&B, which still consistently makes “Top 10” lists, features a huge selection of basics in addition to beef (bison, turkey, chicken, veggie, seafoods); nicely balanced topping combos; and enough succulent sides (tempura-battered pickles, fried green beans, mini-corn dogs) to make a meal that’s totally burger-free. \$\$-\$\$\$ (PRB)

Café at Books & Books

1300 Biscayne Blvd.

305-695-8898

Adding unique literary/culinary arts components to the Arsht Center, this casual indoor/outdoor café, directed by Chef Allen Susser (arguably Miami’s earliest and most dedicated local-ingredients booster), serves fresh and fun farm-to-table fare all day, everyday -- unlike the Arsht’s upscale Brava!, open only for pre-performance dinners. Especially delightful vegetarian/vegan dishes range from snacks like cornmeal-battered “urban pickles” with dill tzatziki to a hefty curried cauliflower steak. Major breakfast pluses include heritage pork hash, eggs with Miami Smokers bacon, and free parking till 10:00 a.m. (in Lot C). \$-\$\$\$ (PRB)

Café Bastille

248 SE 1st St.

786-425-3575

Anyone looking for brunch, a quick lunch or dinner would be remiss to snub Café Bastille, a quaint bistro that practically vanishes against downtown Miami’s dreary cityscape. Once inside, however, this modern French eatery oozes charm and boasts seriously hearty portions, especially during brunch. The ham and salmon benedicts as well as the crêpes are phenomenal, and no French meal is complete without sampling dessert. For dinner, try the filet mignon de boeuf served over a creamy peppercorn sauce. Remember to ask about daily specials; it’s easy to overlook the tiny board located in the back of the restaurant. \$\$ (AM)

Cantina La Veinte

495 Brickell Ave.

786-623-6135

In a spectacularly stylized indoor/outdoor waterfront setting, this first U.S. venture from Mexico’s Cinbersol Group serves upscale modern Mexican fare with international influences transcending Tex-Mex. No ground-beef tacos here. Rather, fillings range from cochinita pibil (pork in achote/orange sauce) to grilled bone marrow -- even escamoles: butter-sautéed ant eggs. For the less adventurous, fried calamari with a Jamaican-inspired hibiscus reduction or dobladitas de jaibas suave, delectably crunchy softshell crabs wrapped in flour tortillas with creamy/kicky

jalapeño sauce, are irresistible. Bonus: A specialty market/deli with imported packaged goods, cheeses, pastries, more. \$\$\$ (PRB)

Casa Tua Cucina

70 SW 7th St.

305-755-0320

Casa Tua, the Miami Beach institution, has made its way to the mainland. Unlike the South Beach location, this outpost of Casa Tua isn't an Italian restaurant -- it's an Italian food hall. Located inside Saks Fifth Avenue at Brickell City Centre, the first-floor concept is made up of various dedicated stations. Those craving pasta can choose from several delicious white- and red-sauce dishes, while guests in the mood for pizza have no shortage of selections. Portions are big, so come hungry. \$\$-\$\$\$ (MFP)

Cipriani

465 Brickell Ave.

786-329-4090

Derived, like all Cipriani family restaurants worldwide, from legendary Harry's Bar in Venice (a favorite of Truman Capote, Hemingway, and other famous folks since 1931), this glamorous indoor/outdoor riverfront location in Icon has two absolutely must-not-miss menu items, both invented at Harry's and reproduced here to perfection: beef carpaccio (drizzled artfully with streaks of creamy-rich mustard vinaigrette, not mere olive oil) and the Bellini (a cocktail of prosecco, not champagne, and fresh white peach juice). Venetian-style liver and onions could convert even liver-loathers. Finish with elegant vanilla meringue cake. \$\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

Clove Mediterranean Kitchen

195 SE 3rd Ave.

786-717-6788

Clove Mediterranean Kitchen whips up affordable and healthy fare for the businessperson on the go. Streamlined counter service offers a selection of basic building blocks: a base (pita, bowl, or salad), a dip or spread, proteins and veggies, and toppings and dressings, including smoked paprika mustard, honey and orange tahini, and creamy feta. Although the cuisine tends toward the light side of Mediterranean cooking, portion sizes are undeniably hearty, making Clove a serious value. With its hip, clean, fast-casual appeal and above average cuisine, this is a welcome addition to the bustling downtown neighborhood, where people are hungry for exciting alternatives to the brown bag lunch and leftovers. \$-\$\$ (AM)

Crazy About You

1155 Brickell Bay Dr. #101
305-377-4442

The owners, and budget-friendly formula, are the same here as at older Dolores, But You Can Call Me Lolita: Buy an entrée (all under \$20) from a sizable list of Mediterranean, Latin, American, or Asian-influenced choices (like Thai-marinated churrasco with crispy shoestring fries) and get an appetizer for free, including substantial stuff like a Chihuahua cheese casserole with chorizo and pesto. The difference: This place, housed in the former location of short-lived La Broche, has an even more upscale ambiance than Dolores -- including a million-dollar water view. \$\$\$ (PRB)

Crust

668 NW 5th St.
305-371-7065

Chef-restaurateur Klime Kovaceski is back, and we are oh so glad. Not only does his pizza-focused restaurant fill a hole in the neighborhood, it offers a cozy space that feels more like someone's rustic home. A lot of thought went into their crusts, and it shows -- sturdy enough to hold less traditional ingredients like perfectly cooked octopus and steak, and still doughy on the inside. The medium at 14 inches and 6 slices is large enough for two, and there will still be leftovers. Delivery available. \$\$ (MB)

CVI.CHE 105

105 NE 3rd Ave.
305-577-3454

Fusion food - a modern invention? Not in Peru, where native and Euro-Asian influences have mixed for more than a century. But chef Juan Chipoco gives the ceviches and tiraditos served at this hot spot his own unique spin. Specialties include flash-marinated raw seafood creations, such as tiradito a la crema de rocoto (sliced fish in citrus-spiked chili/cream sauce). But traditional fusion dishes like Chinese-Peruvian Chaufa fried rice (packed with jumbo shrimp, mussels, and calamari) are also fun, as well as surprisingly affordable. \$\$ (PRB)

D-Dog House

50 SW 10th St.
305-381-7770

While it has become increasingly common to find servers at upscale restaurants utilizing computerized POS (point of service) systems to take orders, this high-tech hole-in-the-wall trumps them by replacing servers -- and in-house entertainment, too -- with iPads that accept not just food orders and credit cards but music requests. You can web surf or game, too, while waiting for your choice of the house specialty: supersized hot dogs, most overloaded with internationally inspired toppings. To accompany, hand-cut fries are a must. And have a cocktail. There's a full liquor bar. \$-\$\$ (PRB)

DIRT

900 S. Miami Ave. #125
786-235-8033

DIRT, South Beach's popular clean-eating concept, has brought its talents to Mary Brickell Village. The restaurant's third location features an extensive menu that has Brickell diners covered from morning to evening. Breakfast is served all day here, so if you want a frittata tostada or matcha pancakes at 3:00 p.m., DIRT can make it happen. Tasty toasts -- including the ever-present avocado variety -- and sandwiches abound, but it's the seasonal platters that will keep you coming back. \$\$ (MFP)

Dolores, But You Can Call Me Lolita

1000 S. Miami Ave.
305-403-3103
www.doloreslolita.com

From the stylish setting in Miami's historic Firehouse No. 4, one would expect a mighty pricy meal. But entrées, which range from Nuevo Latino-style ginger/orange-glazed pork tenderloin to a platter of Kobe mini-burgers, all cost either \$18 or \$23. And the price includes an appetizer -- no low-rent crapola, either, but treats like Serrano ham croquetas, a spinach/leek tart with Portobello mushroom sauce, or shrimp-topped eggplant timbales. The best seats are on the glam rooftop patio. \$\$ (PRB)

Eat Greek

3530 Biscayne Blvd.
305-456-2799

Sometimes, you're in a hurry and can't enjoy a sit-down meal. Other times, all you want is to sit down, relax, and enjoy some good grub. Eat Greek is perfect for either situation. Here, those in a rush can pick up a lamb gyro pita wrap or falafel platter for the road. Or if you have the time, grab a seat and indulge in pork chops, grilled salmon, and other large plates. There's no wrong decision here. \$-\$\$ (MFP)

EDGE, Steak & Bar

1435 Brickell Ave.

305-358-3535

Replacing the Four Seasons' formal fine dining spot Acqua, Edge offers a more kick-back casual welcoming vibe. And in its fare there's a particularly warm welcome for non-carnivores. Chef-driven seafood items (several inventive and unusually subtle ceviches and tartares; a layered construction of corvina encrusted in a jewel-bright green pesto crust, atop red piquillo sauce stripes and salad; lobster corn soup packed with sweet lobster meat; more) and a farm-to-table produce emphasis make this one steakhouse where those who don't eat beef have no beef. \$\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

The Egg Spot

228 SE 1st St.

786-803-8329

The team behind Butcher Shop in Wynwood is now trying their hand at breakfast. Located in downtown Miami, the Egg Spot's claim to fame is its egggy morning fare. Guests will find hearty bites like the Son of a Butcher, a filling smoked brisket and egg sandwich, and the Bridge & Tunnel, a tasty Taylor ham and croissant creation. Dieters have nothing to fear, as there are many lighter -- and more lunch-appropriate -- selections like salads and "power bowls" available. \$ (MFP)

Eternity Coffee Roasters

117 SE 2nd Ave.,

305-609-4981 Normally we list only full restaurants, but even a (not so) simple cuppa joe from Chris Johnson and Cristina Garces's sleek micro-roastery will convince anyone possessing taste buds that fine coffee can be as complex as fine wine, and as satisfying as solid food. A changing selection of superior single-origin beans (many varieties from the Garces family's Colombian farm; most others from Ethiopia and Kenya), roasted in-house, produces "slow-pour" regular brews with amazing nuances of fruits, chocolate, and more. The espresso is so smooth sugar isn't necessary. Other treats: flaky chocolate-stuffed "cigars" and other locally baked pastries. Free parking. \$ (PRB)

Fado Irish Pub

900 S. Miami Ave. #200,

786-924-0972

Unlike most Miami “Irish” pubs, which serve mostly American bar food, rarely foraying past fish and chips or shepherd’s pie, Fado (pronounced “f’doe”) has a menu reflecting the pub grub found today in Ireland, including solid standards. But most intriguing are dishes mixing classic and contemporary influences, particularly those featuring boxty, a grated/mashed potato pancake. Try corned beef rolls (boxty wraps, with creamy mustard sauce and cabbage slaw), or smoked salmon on miniboxty “blini,” with capers and horseradish sauce. There’s a seasonal menu, too. \$\$ (PRB)

Fratelli Milano

213 SE 1st St.

305-373-2300

Downtown isn’t yet a 24/7 urban center, but it’s experiencing a mini explosion of eateries open at night. That includes this family-owned ristorante, where even newcomers feel at home. At lunch it’s almost impossible to resist panini, served on foccacia or crunchy ciabatta; even the vegetarian version bursts with complex and complementary flavors. During weekday dinners, try generous plates of risotto with shrimp and grilled asparagus; homemade pastas like seafood-packed fettuccine al scoglio; or delicate Vitello alla Milanese on arugula. \$\$-\$\$\$ (PRB)

Garcia’s Seafood Grille and Fish Market

398 NW N. River Dr.

305-375-0765

Run by a fishing family for a couple of generations, this venerable Florida fish shack is the real thing. No worries about the seafood’s freshness; on their way to the dining deck overlooking the Miami River, diners can view the retail fish market. Best preparations are the simplest. When stone crabs are in season, Garcia’s claws are as good as Joe’s but considerably cheaper. The local fish sandwich is most popular – grouper, yellowtail snapper, or mahi mahi. \$-\$\$ (PRB)

Gyu-Kaku

34 SW 13th St. #R1

305-400-8915

Even culinary individualists who generally find chain eateries too middle-of-the-road make exceptions for Gyu-Kaku, a modern yakiniku (Japanese BBQ) chain with about 700 locations, most in Asia, where flaming charcoal grills at each table signal adventure: Diners cook their own premium meats/seafood and veggies -- guided by experienced staff; no worries. The DIY experience extends to choosing one’s own marinades/toppings, but there are prepared dishes,

too, including fusion bibimbap bowls and dynamite tofu chigae. At happy hour, many items are just \$4-\$8. \$-\$\$\$ (PRB)

Hibachi Grill

45 NE 3rd Ave.

305-374-2223

Imagine a mini-express Benihana. This place specializes in teppanyaki cuisine -- minus the thrilling (or terrifying) tableside knife theatrics, true, but the one-plate meals of seasoned steak slices, chicken, shrimp, or salmon plus dipping sauces, fried rice, and an onion/zucchini mix come at bargain prices. There are also hefty soups or Japanese, Thai, and Singapore-style noodle and rice bowls loaded with veggies and choice of protein (including tofu). The limited sides are Japanese (shumai, plump chicken gyoza) and Chinese (various egg rolls). Fancy? No, but satisfying. \$-\$\$ (PRB)

Hokasan

21 SW 11th St.

Chinese restaurants are few and far between in Brickell. Enter Hokasan, a low-key dim sum spot where dumpling lovers have plenty of reasons to rejoice. This Brickell locale specializes in the doughy bundles of joy, which comprise most of the menu. You know the drill: Fill out the form with your picks -- make sure to throw in some classic pork and cabbage dumplings -- and prepare for some flavorful fare. Chilled tapas like yuzu miso mushrooms and okra will help round out your appetite. \$-\$\$ (MFP)

Il Gabbiano

335 S. Biscayne Blvd.

305-373-0063

www.ilgabbianomiami.com

Its location at the mouth of the Miami River makes this ultra-upscale Italian spot (especially the outdoor terrace) the perfect power lunch/business dinner alternative to steakhouses. And the culinary experience goes way beyond the typical meat market, thanks in part to the flood of freebies that's a trademark of Manhattan's Il Mulino, originally run by Il Gabbiano's owners. The rest of the food? Pricy, but portions are mammoth. And the champagne-cream-sauced housemade ravioli with black truffles? Worth every penny. \$\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

Jackson Soul Food

950 NW 3rd Ave.

305-377-6710

With a recently refurbished exterior to match its classy/comfy retro interior, this 65-year-old Overtown soul food breakfast institution now has only one drawback: It closes at 1:00 p.m. Never mind, night owls. If you're a first-timer here, order the astonishingly fluffy pancakes with juicy beef sausage, and you'll set multiple alarm clocks to return. Classic drop biscuits (preferably with gravy) are also must-haves. And hearty Southern breakfast staples like smothered chicken wings or fried fish do make breakfast seem like lunch, too. \$ (PRB)

Jaguar Sun

230 NE 4th St.

786-860-2422

Jaguar Sun might seem like a standard lobby bar. It's not. This is a menu that both welcomes and challenges guests. Pastas like bucatini and rigatoni make up most of the large plates here, with smaller plates like 'nduja toast and Parker house rolls rounding out the satisfying food offerings. On the cocktail side, Jaguar Sun juxtaposes familiar spirits with out-of-the-box selections that will keep you coming back to not only imbibe but also learn. \$-\$\$ (MFP)

Jamon Iberico Pata Negra Restaurant

10 SW South River Dr.

305-324-1111

From the outside, you know you're walking into the ground floor of a new condo building. But once inside the charmingly rustic room, you'd swear you're in Spain. Obviously Spain's famous cured hams are a specialty, as are other pork products on the weekly changing menu, from a roast suckling pig entrée to a fried chorizo and chickpea tapa. But seafood is also terrific. Don't miss bacalao-filled piquillo peppers, or two of Miami's best rice dishes: seafood paella and arroz negro (with squid and its ink) \$\$-\$\$\$ (PRB)

Katsuya

8 SE 8th St.

305-859-0200

Fans of Miami Beach's Katsuya no longer have to cross the bridge to get their sushi fix. Located at the SLS Lux in Brickell, this latest branch of the popular Asian restaurant features many of its sister location's favorites, along with new soon-to-be favorites like A5 fried rice with wagyu beef and tea-smoked duck confit leeks. Although the design of this Brickell beauty may be minimalist, the food is not -- it speaks volumes, and you'll want definitely want to listen.

\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$ (MFP)

Komodo

801 Brickell Ave.

305-534-2211

Accommodating a whopping 300 seats, this contemporary three-floor behemoth blurs the line between restaurant and lounge. An indoor/outdoor layout festooned with floating bird-nest pods creates a treehouse ambiance enhanced only by Southeast Asian fusion of tuna porterhouse, lobster onion rings, skewers of miso black cod, and wasabi shrimp. \$\$\$\$\$ (MB)

La Centrale

601 S. Miami Ave.

There's no such thing as too much Italian food at La Centrale, the three-floor Brickell City Centre dining hall. Each floor houses a variety of themed concepts: Meat and seafood lovers should head to the second floor, where Pesce and Carne, respectively, will hit the spot, while pizza fans can find satiety at Pizza e Pasta on the first floor. In a hurry? Head to the Mercato for grab-and-go bites or to do a little ingredient shopping for a hearty meal at home. \$-\$\$\$\$ (MFP)

La Estación American Brasserie

600 NW 1st Ave.

786-490-2949

The flagship restaurant of the Virgin Trains/Brightline station is a beast, both in size and in quality. The spacious downtown restaurant is located in a transportation hub, so the cuisine has to cater to a variety of tastes, and it does so successfully. Seafood is a large part of the menu, which features highlights like Maine lobster sliders and seafood pasta. Another standout is the steak frites. These items may sound tame on paper, but you'll quickly see that they aren't. \$-\$\$ (MFP)

La Loggia Ristorante and Lounge

68 W. Flagler St.

305-373-4800

www.laloggia.org

This luxuriantly neo-classical yet warm Italian restaurant was unquestionably a pioneer in revitalizing downtown. With alternatives like amaretto-tinged pumpkin agnolloti in sage butter

sauce and cilantro-spiced white bean/vegetable salad dressed with truffle oil, proprietors Jennifer Porciello and Horatio Oliveira continue to draw a lunch crowd that returns for dinner, or perhaps just stays on through the afternoon, fueled by the Lawyer's Liquid Lunch, a vodka martini spiked with sweetened espresso. \$\$\$ (PRB)

La Mar by Gastón Acurio

500 Brickell Key Dr.

305-913-8358

It's said that Peruvian cuisine is Latin America's most varied and sophisticated. Reserve a patio table at this indoor/outdoor Mandarin Oriental eatery to experience Miami's best for yourself -- along with some of the city's best bayfront vistas. The specialty is seafood, and the beautifully balanced recipes of Acurio (called Peru's food ambassador to the world), executed flawlessly by onsite executive chef Diego Oka, especially elevate ceviches, similar but more delicate tiraditos, uniquely lively "Nikkei" (Peruvian-Japanese fusion) sushi creations, and elegant whipped potato/fresh seafood causas, to world-class fine-dining level. \$\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

La Moon

97 SW 8th St.

305-860-6209

At four in the morning, nothing quells the munchies like a Crazy Burger, a Colombian take on a trucker's burger: beef patty, bacon, ham, mozzarella, lettuce, tomato, and a fried egg, with an arepa corn pancake "bun." While this tiny place's late hours (till 6:00 a.m. Friday and Saturday) are surprising, the daytime menu is more so. In addition to Colombian classics, there's a salad Nicoise with grilled fresh tuna, seared salmon with mango salsa, and other yuppie favorites. \$-\$\$ (PRB)

La Provence

1064 Brickell Ave.

786-425-9003

www.laprovincemiami.com

Great baguettes in the bread basket, many believe, indicate a great meal to come. But when Miamians encounter such bread -- crackling crust outside; moist, aromatic, aerated interior -- it's likely not from a restaurant's own kitchen, but from La Provence. Buttery croissants and party-perfect pastries are legend too. Not so familiar is the bakery's café component, whose sandwich/salad menu reflects local eclectic tastes. But French items like pan bagnats (essentially salade Niçoise on artisan bread) will truly transport diners to co-owner David Thau's Provençal homeland. \$\$ (PRB)

Largo Bar & Grill

401 Biscayne Blvd.

305-374-9706

Sure, Bayside Marketplace is touristy. But it can be fun to spend a day playing visitor in your own city. If you do, this waterfront place overlooking Miamarina is a superior food choice. Expect nothing cutting edge, just tasty, familiar favorites solidly prepared. You won't go wrong with stone crab claws and Cajun mustard dip; inauthentic but delicious fish tacos in hard blue corn tortillas with two sauces (cilantro and chipotle), generously portioned fish sandwiches (grouper, mahi, snapper, or daily catch), and festive cocktails. \$\$-\$\$\$ (PRB)

La Petite Maison

1300 Brickell Bay Dr.

305-403-9133

On any given night, you're sure to find a lively crowd at La Petite Maison. The internationally acclaimed French and Mediterranean restaurant has unsurprisingly garnered a loyal following since its opening. Don't expect out-of-the-box creations here: La Petite Maison focuses on getting the classics right. Items like the tuna carpaccio, grilled veal chop, roasted baby chicken, and rack of lamb may sound simple on paper, but once they hit your palate, you'll realize what all the fuss is about. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$ (MFP)

La Sandwicherie

34 SW 8th St.

305-374-9852

This second location of the open-air diner that is SouthBeach's favorite après-club eatery (since 1988) closes earlier (midnight Sunday-Thursday, 5:00 a.m. Friday and Saturday), but the smoothies, salads, and superb Parisian sandwiches are the same: ultra-crusty baguette stuffed with evocative charcuterie and cheeses (saucisson sec, country pâté, camembert, etc.) and choice of salad veggies plus salty/tart cornichons and Sandwicherie's incomparable Dijon mustard vinaigrette. Additionally the larger branch has an interior, with a kitchen enabling hot foods (quiches and croques), plus A/C. \$-\$\$ (PRB)

Latin Café 2000

1053 Brickell Plaza

305-646-1400

In a sea of upscale restaurants, Latin Café 2000 is a breath of fresh air in Brickell. The Cuban café stands out for all the right reasons: low prices, big plates, and familiar fare. Steak sandwiches, fried pork chunks, and other Cuban classics are all available here along with a full bar. Unlike its other locations with old-timey decor, this Brickell outpost is full of modern flourishes that make the place pop. One thing hasn't changed, though: the sight-for-sore-eyes ventanita serving Cuban coffee. \$\$\$ (MFP)

Lost Boy Dry Goods

157 E. Flagler St.

305-372-7303

After 6:00 p.m., downtown Miami tends to be a ghost town. That's not the case at Lost Boy Dry Goods, a former-clothing-store-turned-bar that offers a generous happy hour. Throughout the evening (and well into the night), Lost Boy's welcoming staff pours gin and tonics, junglebirds, and other classic libations at affordable neighborhood prices. Complementing these drinks is an extensive bar bites menu featuring cheese boards, German pretzels, and hefty sandwiches paired with delicious Zapp's potato chips. For a quieter time, come for lunch. \$\$\$ (MFP)

Luke's Lobster

Brickell City Centre

701 S. Miami Ave.

#353, 786-837-7683

Lobster rolls are tiny, sometimes overpriced slices of luxury, especially when portions run about as small as your average New York City apartment. This is not the case at Luke's Lobster, the venerable New England fast-casual chain championing traceable, sustainable seafood. Luke's understands the key to its destination status involves copious amounts of fresh lobster ($\frac{1}{4}$ pound, to be exact) as well as a healthy dose of disarming simplicity. True to its simple charm, Luke's Lobster is about as cheap and cheerful as seafood gets. All of the rolls -- lobster, crab, and shrimp -- are delicious, but it's the signature buttery lobster roll with its split top bun and mysterious seasoning that is an absolute must-try for the uninitiated. Considering its limited seating, it's safe to say this playfully rustic yet diminutive eatery gets hit hard during peak lunch rush at Brickell City Centre. \$\$ (AM)

Lutong Pinoy Filipino Cuisine

195 SE 3rd Ave.

786-717-6788

For the adventurous epicurean of Asian persuasion, Lutong Pinoy offers a deep dive into authentic Filipino cuisine, an otherwise unmapped territory to a great majority of South Florida's

bon vivants. Influenced by Malay-Indonesian, Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, and American cuisines, Lutong Pinoy crafts plates showcasing ingredients indigenous to the Philippines, and offers an extensive menu touching upon a full spectrum of exotic flavors. Some of the highlights at this diminutive hole-in-the-wall include the boneless lechón belly (roasted pig), kare-kare kawali (Asian vegetables cooked in peanut sauce), and the Sinigang na Hipon (shrimp in sour broth). For many, however, the main event is the halo-halo, a popular Filipino dessert made with shaved ice and evaporated milk, topped with a mélange of ingredients, including sweet red and white beans, bananas, coconut, sweet potato, coco jellies, leche flan, and milk. The boodle fight platter is piled high with an assortment of meat, rice, and vegetables on a bed of banana leaves. First conceived in the mess halls of the Filipino military, the boodle fight platter encourages eating with your hands. When checking in, remember to keep your mind and stomach wide open. \$-\$\$ (AM)

Marion

1111 SW 1st Ave.

786-717-7512

Third time's the charm for this behemoth space that works best when broken up into different offerings. In this case, this rose-colored Mediterranean palace by the guys behind Bâoli Miami is a café, restaurant, bakery, and oyster bar all at once. Save space for French classics like whole rotisserie organic chicken (large enough for two) and whole fish baked in Normandy sea salt and filleted tableside. Other (smaller) standouts include piquillo peppers, tuna belly ribbons, and of course, dessert. \$\$\$\$\$ (MB)

Meraki Greek Bistro

142 SE 1st Ave.

786-773-1535

Tucked away in an unassuming and quaint nook of downtown Miami, Meraki Greek Bistro is a pleasant surprise for anyone hunting for an urban hideaway. With a pride that is palpable, this bright little bistro boasts friendly service and delicious Mediterranean medium to large plates. Sample Mediterranean fare à la carte from Meraki's souvlaki (skewer) bar, or share a poikilies (family meal). Specials are also served daily, further expounding upon all of the wonderfully slow-cooked options on the menu. Meraki Greek Bistro offers everything you'd hope for in casual dining at a reasonable price. When it comes to Greek, the proof is in baklava -- and these guys nail it. \$-\$\$ (AM)

Momi Ramen

5 SW 11th St.

786-391-2392

Banish all thoughts of packaged instant “ramen.” Perfectionist chef/owner Jeffrey Chen (who cooked for more than a decade in Japan), changes his mostly ramen-only menu often, but constants are irresistibly chewy handmade noodles; soups based on creamy, intensely porky tonkotsu broth (made from marrow bones simmered all day); meats like pork belly and oxtail; and authentic toppings including marinated soft-cooked eggs, pickled greens, more. Other pluses: It’s open 24/7, and the ramen ranks with the USA’s best. Minuses: It’s cash only, and the ramen might be the USA’s most expensive. \$\$\$ (PRB)

My Ceviche

1250 S. Miami Ave.

305-960-7825

When three-time James Beard “Rising Star Chef” nominee Sam Gorenstein opened the original My Ceviche in SoBe, in 2012, it garnered national media attention despite being a tiny take-away joint. Arguably, our newer indoor/outdoor Brickell location is better. Same menu, featuring local fish prepared onsite, and superb sauces including a kicky roasted jalapeño/lime mayo), but this time with seats! What to eat? Ceviches, natch. But grilled or raw fish/seafood tacos and burritos, in fresh tortillas, might be even more tempting. Pristine stone-crab claws from co-owner Roger Duarte’s George Stone Crab add to the choices. \$\$ (PRB)

Naoe

661 Brickell Key Dr.

305-947-6263

Chances are you’ve never had anything like the \$200 prix-fixe Japanese dinner at Kevin Cory’s tiny but internationally acclaimed oasis, but trust us: It’s one of those rare, exhilarating, instantly revelatory Eureka! dining adventures that’ll keep you thinking about it for years. The reservations-only, omakase-only (chef’s choice) meals begin with a subtly inventive seasonal soup true to both Japanese tastes and local terroir (like miso/fresh Homestead corn) and a four-course bento box of the chef’s creations, proceed to about a dozen sushi dishes eons above others in Miami, and end with three desserts. Always changing, always astonishing. \$\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

N by Naoe

661 Brickell Key Dr.

305-947-6263

Like local secret-star chef Kevin Cory’s dinner-only Naoe, newer lunch-only N by Naoe shares a reservations-only, omakase-only (chef’s choice) policy-- and actually shares the same door.

Turn left for Naoe, right for N. Main differences: N has one elegant communal table, perfect for impressive power lunches (vs. Naoe's intimate individual seating), and prix fixe lunches are \$80 vs. \$200 for dinner. Admittedly, lunch is abbreviated: soup and multi-course bento box plus one dessert, without the dozen or so sushi dishes. But bentos are much bigger (seven compartments vs. four), and equally unique. Think of N as a relatively bargain-priced introduction to Naoe, or as a revelatory dining experience on its own. \$\$\$\$ (PRB)

NIU Kitchen

134 NE 2nd Ave.

786-542-5070

This contemporary Catalan eatery is located, according to its three playful proprietors, "somewhere between Dali's moustache and Gaudi's Sagrada Familia." Actually, it's in the heart of downtown, but the description does reflect the Barcelona-born chef's weirdly wonderful yet seriously skilled twists on tapas. Instead of Catalonia's rustic, bread-thickened tomato soup, there's a refined cold tomato broth poured over a mustard ice cream-topped crouton. Mato, a simple cheese and honey dessert, translates as custardy fresh cheese atop eggplant "jam," with candied hazelnuts. \$\$\$ (PRB)

Novecento

1414 Brickell Ave.

305-403-0900

www.bistronovecento.com

For those who think "Argentine cuisine" is a synonym for "beef and more beef," this popular eatery's wide range of more cosmopolitan contemporary Argentine fare will be a revelation. Classic parrilla-grilled steaks are here for traditionalists, but the menu is dominated by creative Nuevo Latino items like a new-style ceviche de chernia (lightly lime-marinated grouper with jalapeños, basil, and the refreshing sweet counterpoint of watermelon), or crab ravioli with creamy saffron sauce. Especially notable are the entrée salads. \$\$-\$\$\$ (PRB)

Novikov

300 S. Biscayne Blvd.

305-489-1000

When we first heard of Novikov, we thought the upscale downtown Miami restaurant was all about Russian food. We were wrong. Although the restaurant gets its name from Russian restaurateur Arkadiy Novikov, the menu is composed of Chinese and Japanese favorites. Everything is shareable, and most patrons should find satiety with two to three dishes each. If you only order two dishes, the rainbow naruto roll and duck salad are must-tries -- especially the

latter, with its deliciously crispy skin. \$\$-\$\$\$ (MFP)

Obra Kitchen Table

1331 Brickell Bay Dr.

305-846-9363

Latin restaurants are a dime a dozen, but few challenge your palate like Obra Kitchen Table. At this Brickell hotspot inside the Jade, chef Carlos Garcia and his team craft an assortment of Venezuelan delights that also incorporate global influences. The result: unique bites like grouper confit with fried arepa, yuca and bacon millefeuille, and octopus bucatini carbonara unlike anything you've tasted. Sit at the 25-seat bar for a more intimate dining experience, where you'll see these creations come to life. \$\$-\$\$\$ (MFP)

Pairings by Tomás Cuadrado

900 Biscayne Blvd., Suite 105

786-475-1811

We're usually hesitant to recommend a restaurant with a chef's name in it -- we think the food should do the talking. But Pairings by Tomás Cuadrado is the real deal. Given the chef's Spanish background, the menu unsurprisingly features an array of tapas like shrimp croquettes, baby octopus, and fried quail eggs. These flavorful selections are accompanied by an extensive list of satisfying mains like roasted Spanish rabbit and baked red snapper that are sure to turn you into a regular. \$\$\$ (MFP)

Pega Grill

15 E. Flagler St.

305-808-6666

From Thanasios Barlos, a Greek native who formerly owned North Beach's Ariston, this small spot is more casually contemporary and less ethnic-kitschy in ambiance, but serves equally authentic, full-flavored Greek food. Mixed lamb/beef gyros (chicken is also an option), topped with tangy yogurt sauce and wrapped, with greens and tomatoes, in fat warm pita bread, are specialties. But even more irresistible is the taramasalata (particularly velvety and light carp roe dip), available alone or on an olive/pita-garnished mixed meze platter. \$\$ (PRB)

1111 Peruvian Bistro

1111 SW 1st Ave.

786-615-9633

Peruvian cuisine gets honest with an ethos for ultimate transparency in the kitchen. Executive chef Geancarlo Mayorga and food superstar Diego Muñoz have gone back to the drawing board to not only find better ways to highlight every ingredient in simple dishes like causas and anticuchos, but to use higher quality products like duck and filet mignon. The team has fun with the catch of the day, so make sure to order it. \$\$-\$\$\$ (MB)

Perricone's

15 SE 10th St.

305-374-9449

www.perricones.com

Housed in a Revolutionary-era barn (moved from Vermont), this market/café was one of the Brickell area's first gentrified amenities. At lunch chicken salad is a favorite; dinner's strong suit is the pasta list, ranging from Grandma Jennie's old-fashioned lasagna to chichi fiocchi purses filled with fresh pear and gorgonzola. And Sunday's \$15.95 brunch buffet (\$9.95 for kids) – featuring an omelet station, waffles, smoked salmon and bagels, salads, and more – remains one of our town's most civilized all-you-can-eat deals. \$\$ (PRB)

Pez

20 W. Flagler St.

305-570-3440

"Baja-Med" cuisine has found a home in downtown Miami. At Pez, customers will find a delightful fusion of Mexican and Mediterranean flavors. The menu skews toward seafood: wahoo, sea urchin, octopus, and corvina are among the many proteins found throughout the restaurant's extensive offerings. Don't let intimidating names like tlayuda and tuetano scare you, as curious diners will be rewarded with satisfying bites. Just make sure to order the Tijuano taco; the mix of grilled octopus, carne asada, and shrimp is divine. \$-\$\$\$ (MFP)

Pieducks

1451 S. Miami Ave.

305-808-7888

If you can overlook a name as unenlightening as most in-jokes (it evidently refers to a favorite character of owner Claudio Nunes's kids -- we assume the Pokemon Psyduck), you'll experience pretty perfect pizza. Sadly, not all brick ovens turn out perfectly char-blistered crusts, crisp outside and airy/chewy inside, but that's what you'll consistently find here and a newer take-out/delivery-only Midtown branch. And unlike many artisan pizzerias, Pieducks doesn't get cheesy with cheese quantity (though we like that extra cheese is an option).

Elaborate salads complete the menu. \$\$ (PRB)

Pilo's Street Tacos

28 SW 11th St.

305-800-8226

Three words describe Pilo's Street Tacos in Brickell: good, fast, and filling. The area already has its fair share of taco shops, and Pilo's is among the pricier offerings, but that's because of the quality -- and quantity. These tacos are filled to the brim with proteins like "drunken shrimp," brisket strips, and crispy chorizo. Don't miss out on the salsas: There are ten different ones from which to choose, and they range from sweet to spicy to "Somebody call a fire truck." \$-\$\$\$ (MFP)

Pizzarium

69 E. Flagler St.

305-381-6025

Roman-style rectangular pizzas, served in square slices, have been available in the Miami area since the mid-1990s. But the familiar squares and Pizzarium's are similar only in shape. Main difference: dough, here allowed to rise for four days. The resulting crusts are astonishingly airy, as authentic Roman slices, intended as light street snacks, should be. Toppings, a rotating selection of nearly 30 combinations, are highlighted by quality imported ingredients -- not to mention a healthy imagination, as the zucca gialla attests: pumpkin cream, pancetta, smoked scamorza cheese. \$ (PRB)

Quinto La Huella

788 Brickell Plaza

786-805-4646

Uruguayan beef is in a class of its own, but it requires serious skill and the right tools to prepare it the way Uruguayan *parrilleros* do. Located within the hulking steeled Brickell City Centre, Quinto La Huella brings a dark, moody ambiance and the prestige of one of South America's best restaurants, Parador La Huella, to the complex. The centerpiece of this rustic eatery is an authentic wood fire parrilla, an essential component to grilling meat like a true *gaucho*

. It should come as no surprise then that the beef -- ordered medium rare, of course -- is the main attraction here. Other options represent typical steakhouse fare, with some standout wood-fired seafood entrées and pastas that deserve a try. Snag a seat outdoors during the more temperate Miami months; otherwise, opt to sit near the heart of the controls: the parrilla. Bring a liberal side of patience with you while dining room service sorts itself out. \$\$\$\$ (AM)

Raja's Indian Cuisine

33 NE 2nd Ave.
305-539-9551

Despite its small size and décor best described as "none," this place is an institution thanks to south Indian specialties rarely found in Miami's basically north Indian restaurants. The steam-tabled curries are fine (and nicely priced), but be sure to try the custom-made dosai (lacy rice crepes with a variety of savory fillings) and uttapam, thicker pancakes, layered with onions and chilis, both served with sambar and chutney. \$\$ (PRB)

Raw Juice

901 S. Miami Ave.
305-677-3160

Brickell's Raw Juice is making healthy living easy with a colorful array of cold-pressed "juce." Fruit-forward and vegetable-forward creations not only refresh but also give customers a quick vitamin boost. Despite the name, Raw Juice isn't just about juices: acai bowls, oatmeal parfaits, and salads are available to get patrons ready for their workout or help them recover from a grueling one. For those of you in need of a serious detox, Raw Juice's cleanse packages have you covered. \$-\$\$\$ (MFP)

The River Oyster Bar

650 S. Miami Ave.
305-530-1915
www.therivermiami.com

This casually cool jewel is a full-service seafood spot, as evidenced by tempting menu selections like soft-shell crabs with grilled vegetables, corn relish, and remoulade. There are even a few dishes to please meat-and-potatoes diners, like short ribs with macaroni and cheese. But oyster fans will find it difficult to resist stuffing themselves silly on the unusually large selection, especially since oysters are served both raw and cooked – fire-roasted with sofrito butter, chorizo, and manchego. There's also a thoughtful wine list and numerous artisan beers on tap. \$\$\$ (PRB)

Seaspice Brasserie & Lounge

422 NW N. River Dr.
305-440-4200

Unlike older Miami River market/restaurants like Garcia's, run by fishing families, this stylishly retro/modern-industrial converted warehouse (once Howard Hughes's plane hangar) has an owner who ran South Beach's hottest 1990s nightspots, so expect celebrity sightings with your seafood. What's unexpected: a blessedly untrendy menu, with simply but skillfully prepared wood-oven-cooked fish and clay-pot, shellfish casseroles. Standouts include luxuriant lobster thermador, as rich as it is pricey. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

Sergio's Cuban Café + Grill

40 SW 12th St.

786-500-0201

Cuban cuisine expands its footprint in Brickell with the addition of Sergio's Cuban Café + Grill. This branch of the popular chain leans on the ubiquitous "healthy bowl" concept. Guests have full freedom to create their perfect meal from an assortment of proteins, including turkey and beef. Sizeable sides like black beans and mojo yuca ensure you get your money's worth. Craving more traditional Cuban food? Their pan con lechon and croqueta preparada sandwiches have you covered. \$ (MFP)

Sokai Sushi Bar

350 S. Miami Ave.

Unit #CU-B

786-667-3061

When it comes to Peruvian-Japanese fusion, Sokai Sushi Bar pulls out all the stops. This Brickell outpost is the brand's fourth location, and it features many of the same delicious bites that fans have come to know and love. That includes delightful pork belly buns, tuna pizza (it tastes better than it sounds), and a bevy of signature sushi. Don't sleep on the Asia roll: The salmon, cream cheese, and truffle oil creation is packed to the brim with flavor. \$-\$\$ (MFP)

Soya & Pomodoro

120 NE 1st St.

305-381-9511

Life is complicated. Food should be simple. That's owner Armando Alfano's philosophy, which is stated above the entry to his atmospheric downtown eatery. And since it's also the formula for the truest traditional Italian food (Alfano hails from Pompeii), it's fitting that the menu is dominated by authentically straightforward yet sophisticated Italian entrées. There are salads and sandwiches, too. The most enjoyable place to dine is the secret, open-air courtyard. Alfano serves dinner on Thursdays only to accompany local musicians and artists. \$-\$\$ (PRB)

Sparky's Roadside Barbecue

204 NE 1st St.

305-377-2877

This cowboy-cute eatery's chefs/owners (one CIA-trained, both BBQ fanatics nicknamed Sparky) eschew regional purism, instead utilizing a hickory/apple-wood-stoked rotisserie smoker to turn out their personalized style of slow-cooked, complexly dry-rub fusion: ribs, chopped pork, brisket, and chicken. Diners can customize their orders with mix-and-match housemade sauces: sweet/tangy tomato-based, Carolinas-inspired vinegar/mustard, pan-Asian hoisin with lemongrass and ginger, tropical guava/habanero. Authenticity aside, the quality of the food is as good as much higher-priced barbecue outfits. \$-\$\$\$ (PRB)

Stanzione 87

87 SW 8th St.

305-606-7370

Though Neopolitan-style pizza isn't the rarity it was here a decade ago, this is Miami's only pizzeria certified authentic by Italy's Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana. This means following stringent rules regarding oven (wood-fired), baking time (90 seconds maximum, here closer to 50), tomatoes (imported San Marzano), olive oil (extra-virgin), even flour (tipo 00, for bubbly-light crusts). Toppings do exceed the three original choices served in 19th-century Naples, but pies like the Limone (fresh mozzarella, pecorino, lemons, arugula, EVOO) prove some rules should be broken. \$\$ (PRB)

Station 28

91 SE 2nd St.

305-905-0328

A little paradise in the heart of downtown Miami, complete with hidden patio, lush greenery, long communal tables, tropical juices like papaya and lucuma, and extra large Peruvian sandwiches and burgers. This oasis offers a more casual taste of the cuisine, the comfort foods that will remind you of home, no matter where you come from. Their \$10 daily special includes your choice of a sandwich or burger with fries, salad or soup, and dessert. Delivery available. \$ (MB)

SuViche

49 SW 11th St.

305-960-7097

This small Japanese-Peruvian place serves food influenced by each nation distinctly, plus intriguing fusion items with added Caribbean touches. Cooked entrées, all Peruvian, include an elegant aji de gallina (walnut-garnished chicken and potatoes in peppery cream sauce). But the emphasis is on contemporary ceviches/tiraditos (those with velvety aji amarillo chili sauce particularly), plus huge exotic sushi rolls, which get pretty wild. When was the last time you encountered a tempura-battered tuna, avocado, and scallion maki topped with Peru's traditional potato garnish, huancaína cheese sauce? \$ (PRB)

Tacology

701 S. Miami Ave.
786-347-5368

Tacology, the latest concept from Cantina La Veinte's executive chef Santiago Gomez, is a more approachable and affordable ode to Mexican food. Unlike its dimly lit upscale sibling, Tacology embraces a bright color palette and vibrant décor that is undeniably enticing -- a description that also applies to the cuisine. As the name suggests, delicious tacos abound on the menu, but they shouldn't be the only items you order: The Mexican nachos and crispy pork skin are other standout dishes that should be on every diner's mind at this Brickell City Centre restaurant. \$\$-\$\$\$ (MFP)

Toro Toro

100 Chopin Plaza
305-372-4710

Back before Miami's business district had any there there, the InterContinental's original restaurant was an executive lunch/dinner destination mainly by default. This replacement, from restaurant empire-builder Richard Sandoval, brings downtown power dining into this decade. As the name suggests, you can go bullish with steakhouse fare, including an abbreviated (in variety, not quantity) "rodizio experience." But the place's strongest suit is its pan-Latin small plates -- upscaled refinements of classic favorites: crisp corn arepas with short rib, guacamole, and crema fresca; fluffier cachapas pancakes with tomato jam; more. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

Toscana Divino

900 S. Miami Ave.
305-571-2767

When an upscale restaurant remains perennially packed during a recession, you figure they're offering something way beyond the usual generic Italian fare. While familiar favorites (Caprese salad, etc.) are available, the changing menu is highlighted by harder-to-find Tuscan specialties, albeit luxe versions: pappa al pomodoro, tomato/bread peasant soup elevated by an organic

poached egg and finocchiona (a regional fennel salami); an authentic-tasting “fiorentina” porterhouse, with smoked potato purée plus more traditional veggies. A budget-conscious boon: changing three-course lunches and early-bird dinners. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

Truluck’s Seafood, Steak, and Crab House

777 Brickell Ave.

305-579-0035

Compared to other restaurants with such an upscale power-lunch/dinner setting, most prices are quite affordable here, especially if you stick to the Miami Spice-priced date-dinner menu, or happy hour, when seafood items like crab-cake “sliders” are half price. Most impressive, though, are seasonal stone crabs (from Truluck’s own fisheries, and way less expensive than Joe’s) and other seafood that, during several visits, never tasted less than impeccably fresh, plus that greatest of Miami restaurant rarities: informed and gracious service. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

Tuyo

415 NE 2nd St.

305-237-3200

Atop the revolutionary Miami Culinary Institute, this upscale eatery, unlike the café downstairs, isn’t student-run. Rather it’s designed to showcase school ideals -- including sustainability as well as definitive Miami cuisine. The changing menu, from a culinary Dream Team headed by “New World Cuisine” inventor/MCI instructor Norman Van Aken (plus former protégés Jeffrey Brana and Travis Starwalt), mixes citrus-inflected creamy conch chowder and other pioneering signatures with new inventions like mind-reelingly multidimensional oyster pan stew, or tartare of tuna and bursting ripe tomato topped with a delicate sous vide egg. \$\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

Vinaigrette Sub Shop

159 E Flagler St.

786-558-5989

Bring an appetite to Vinaigrette Sub Shop, a fast-casual spot from the operators of Mignonette. Unlike its upscale seafood sibling, downtown Miami’s Vinaigrette is no frills (unless you ask). Affordable subs are stuffed to the brim with turkey, roast beef, and more; a hefty 8-inch sub is under \$10. If you don’t feel like creating your own, opt for the eatery’s massive Italian specialties. The namesake Vinaigrette is packed with prosciutto, mortadella, sopressata -- and the kitchen sink. \$-\$\$ (MFP)

Whole Foods Market

299 SE 3rd Ave.

305-995-0600

From the minute you walk through its doors or pull into a spot in the underground garage, you'll notice this Whole Foods is a bit different. Not only have local artists outfitted its walls in graffiti art, but also half of the store is dedicated to grab-and-go food and an ample and comfortable seating area, including casual counters and tables. Grab a coffee for energy at MET café, because you may be there awhile. Options include items from Jugofresh, Zak the Baker, and pre-made desserts by Versailles restaurant. There's also La Churrasqueira, Sushi Maki, Pizza Bar, and a soup bar featuring 20 soups like stone crab and chicken corn chowder. Parking is free for one hour with the purchase of an item. \$-\$\$ (MB)

Wolfgang's Steakhouse

315 S. Biscayne Blvd.

305-487-7130

Proprietor Wolfgang Zweiner worked for decades at Brooklyn's legendary Peter Luger's before opening the first of his own much-praised, old-school steakhouses in 2003, which explains the quality of the USDA prime-grade steaks here -- dry-aged on premises for bold, beefy flavor and tender but toothsome texture. Prices are prodigious but so are portions. The 32-ounce porterhouse for two easily feeds three or four folks curious to taste the difference. Plentiful sides include a bacon starter favored by those who love Canadian bacon over pork belly. Personally, just the simple, superb steaks leave us happy as clams. \$\$\$\$\$ (PRB)

Zest

200 Biscayne Blvd.

305-374-9378

Cindy Hutson finally has a home in the neighborhood with her "cuisine of the sun." If you can manage to order the entire menu, from cast-iron charred calamari to 50/50 meatballs and conch scampi, do it. You won't be disappointed in food that is so perfectly matches the city's weather and overall culture. The décor also screams Miami, in lively lime green, orange, and neutrals with pops of blue in between. Don't forget the tropical drink. \$\$-\$\$\$\$ (MB)

Zuma

270 Biscayne Blvd. Way

305-577-0277

This Miami River restolounge has a London parent on San Pellegrino's list of the world's best restaurants, and a similar menu of world-class, izakaya-style smallish plates (robata-grilled

items, sushi, much more) meant for sharing over drinks. Suffice to say that it would take maybe a dozen visits to work your way through the voluminous menu, which offersample temptations for vegetarians as well as carnivores. Our favorite is the melt-in-your-mouth pork belly with yuzu/mustard miso dip, but even the exquisitely-garnished tofu rocks. \$\$\$\$ (PRB)