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## Best Eating

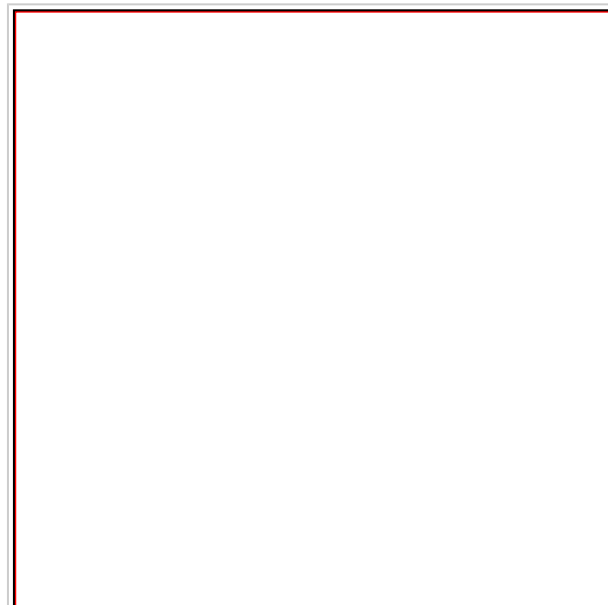
### From Fine Dining to Fast Food

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DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - Los Angeles Downtown News readers and staffers chose 35 top eating establishments in the community. The highlight is not one, but four "new" restaurant categories, reflecting the wealth of options that opened in the past year. Then there are old favorites like Best Burger, Best Chinese, etc.

#### READERS' CHOICE

- Best New Upscale Restaurant: Bottega Louie
- Best New Affordable/Mid-Range Restaurant: Casa Cocina y Cantina
- Best New L.A. Live Restaurant: Yard House
- Best New Latin/Mexican: Casa Cocina y Cantina
- Best Upscale Restaurant: Roy's Hawaiian Fusion
- Best Affordable/Mid-Range Restaurant: Pitfire Pizza Company
- Head to Head: Best French Dip: Philippe, The Original
- Best Italian: Drago Centro



Best Eating - Head to Head: Best French Dip: Philippe, The Original. Photo by Gary Leonard.

#### This Week's Issue



#### Today's Weather

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Best Steak: Morton's the Steakhouse

Best American: Yard House

Best Pizza: California Pizza Kitchen

Best Latin/Mexican: Ciudad

Best Burger: Original Tommy's

Best Japanese: Shabu Shabu House

Best Sushi: Wokcano

Head to Head: Best Ramen: Daikokuya

Best Breakfast: The Original Pantry Café

Best Chinese: Yang Chow

Best Dim Sum: Empress Pavilion

Best Vegetarian (or Kind of Vegetarian): Tiara Café

Best Cafe: Urth Caffé

Best Seafood: Water Grill

Best Decor: Cicada

#### **EDITORS' CHOICE**

Best Chef: John Rivera Sedlar at Rivera

Best Dining Experience: The Palm

Best French: Church & State

Best Fries: Magnolia's Sweet Potato Fries

Best Burger: Blu LA Café

Best Sausage: Wurstküche

Best El Salvadoran Food: Sarita's

Best Cupcakes: Village Kitchen

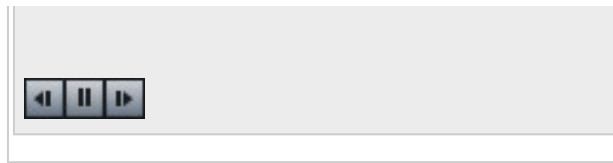
Best Popsicles: Paletteria La Michoacana

Best Meal With a View: Takami

Most Decadent Desserts: Nickel Diner

Best Tea Room: Chado

#### **BEST NEW UPSCALE RESTAURANT**



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## Bottega Louie

**READERS' CHOICE:** This elegant, marble-heavy restaurant and market at Seventh Street and Grand Avenue is upscale in design but actually quite reasonable in price, which is one reason it has been packed since practically the moment it opened in April. Another reason is the high-quality Italian food, with menu standouts such as the Italian chopped salad, the thin-crust pizzas and the roasted chicken. There is also a delightful King salmon which comes wrapped in parchment paper, as well as a mammoth osso buco. Bottega Louie serves three meals a day between its takeout options, enormous deli case and the dining room. Also, don't leave without trying the pastel colored, \$1.75 macarons from the in-house patisserie. At 700 S. Grand Ave., (213) 802-1470 or [bottegalouie.com](http://bottegalouie.com).—Anna Scott

## BEST NEW AFFORDABLE/MID-RANGE RESTAURANT

### Casa Cocina y Cantina

**READERS' CHOICE:** The past year might be considered Downtown's restaurant revolution, as dozens of establishments opened. Casa on Bunker Hill rose to the top, luring those who crave an improved version of taco truck food, but who don't want to stand on the street while in a suit. The well-priced menu means you can sample numerous inventive options. An order of pollo asado tacos is \$6.95, tacos al pastor and carnitas are \$7.25 and a vegan version is \$7.50. Add in guacamole for just \$1.25. Things are always changing, and the low prices mean you can sample the margarita made from jalapeño puree. At 350 S. Grand Ave., (213) 621-2249 or [casadowntown.com](http://casadowntown.com).—Richard Guzmán

## BEST UPSCALE RESTAURANT

### Roy's Hawaiian Fusion

**READERS' CHOICE:** Dining at Roy's is always a treat. In keeping with the restaurant's Hawaiian roots, you're greeted with an "aloha" the second you walk in. All your cares melt away the instant you sip from your coconut and pineapple martini and nibble one of the succulent grilled pork ribs. Despite becoming a mini empire, this restaurant chain still maintains its excellent service and fine dining edge. Typical island fare is replaced by nuanced fusion favorites such as macadamia-crusted mahi mahi and elegant sashimi. The aloha spirit is indeed alive and well in South Park. At 800 S. Figueroa St., (213) 488-4994 or [roysrestaurant.com](http://roysrestaurant.com).—Kathryn Maese

## BEST NEW L.A. LIVE RESTAURANT

### Yard House

**READERS' CHOICE:** Along with two concert venues, a hotel and a movieplex, L.A. Live is delivering more than a dozen restaurants. Pre- and post-event diners have thronged the Downtown outpost of the Yard House for a variety of reasons: its combination of a nightlife atmosphere with restaurant service; entrees that reach your table in no time but never taste like they've been rushed out of the kitchen; the more than 100 beers on tap; and the classic rock soundtrack. Sure, it's no different than the other Yard Houses in the chain, but it gives the people what they want. At 800 W. Olympic Blvd., (213) 745-9273 or [yardhouse.com](http://yardhouse.com).—Richard Guzmán

## BEST NEW LATIN/MEXICAN

### Casa Cocina y Cantina

**READERS' CHOICE:** It was a good year for Mexican and Latin food in Downtown, with the arrival of restaurants like the upscale Rivera in South Park and Yxta in the Industrial District. While Casa in the Cal Plaza Watercourt had a bumpy opening, it quickly righted the ship, and the restaurant co-owned by Mendocino Farms mastermind Mario Del Pero gets crowds at lunch and after work. Lines are often out the door and diners fill private "haciendas," mini-pods that surround some of the tables. Chef Nicholas Albrecht puts a delicious spin on authentic Mexican small plates with favorites like tacos, burritos and huaraches. Keep an eye out for the tacos with kurobuta pork. At 350 S. Grand Ave., (213) 621-2249 or [casadowntown.com](http://casadowntown.com).—Richard Guzmán



## BEST AFFORDABLE/MID-RANGE RESTAURANT

### Pitfire Pizza Company

**READERS' CHOICE:** As Downtown grows and more restaurants, businesses and residents arrive on the scene, Pitfire remains a reliable source of comfort food. It's been a go-to for Civic Center workers and Historic Core residents since it opened on the ground floor of the Higgins Building. The crust is thin and many of the pies are just right for one person. Staples include the margherita and sweet fennel sausage pies, though you can kick it up a notch with the "Green Eggs and Ham," with braised chard, farm fresh eggs and smoked prosciutto. They also do some nice panini and a few simple yet effective pastas. With a pizza and a drink, it's easy to be out of here for less than \$15 a person. At 108 W. Second St., (213) 808-1200 or [pitfirepizza.com](http://pitfirepizza.com).—Ryan Vaillancourt

## HEAD TO HEAD

### BEST FRENCH DIP

#### Philippe, The Original

**READERS' CHOICE:** The war for French dip supremacy in Downtown Los Angeles began a century ago. It continues today, with Philippe, The Original capturing the most recent battle.

Not that victory was easy. Cole's reopened last year after a \$1.6 million renovation by nightlife mogul Cedd Moses. Now officially known as Cole's, Originators of the French Dip, the establishment got both a physical upgrade and a menu spruce-up.

While the French dip is a simple sandwich, the differences are obvious between the two historic locations. The biggest is that with Cole's French dip the au jus comes with the plate, so dipping is done at the table and not in the pan drippings, the style at Philippe's.

Maybe it was the pan drippings that did it, but Downtowners remained loyal to the sawdust-covered floors of Philippe's, with 74% of voters choosing the restaurant in head-to-head combat with Cole's.

That loyalty was obvious at Philippe's 100-year anniversary celebration last October, when thousands of people lined up around the block to help mark the restaurant's birthday as sandwiches were rolled back to just 10 cents. However, the loyalty is also visible most days at lunch, when people stand in long queues to partake of the beef, turkey, pork, ham or lamb French dips and the nickel coffee.

Many of those customers have been coming to Philippe's for generations. But it's not just the diners who have a long family history with the restaurant — some of the staff have been there for decades. One family has had three generations work at Philippe's.

This battle may be over, but the war for Downtown's stomach is not. Who knows what the next 100 years will bring?

At 1001 N. Alameda St., (213) 628-3781 or [phillippes.com](http://phillippes.com).—Richard Guzmán

## BEST ITALIAN

### Drago Centro

**READERS' CHOICE:** It won "Best Italian," but this City National Plaza newcomer from Celestino Drago is easily one of the best restaurants in Downtown. The 9,500-square-foot establishment is highlighted by a 16-foot high glass wine tower. The kitchen, helmed day-to-day by Ian Gresik, turns out powerful Italian fare, with pastas such as a paccheri with prawns and a puttanesca sauce, and pappardelle with roasted pheasant and morel mushrooms. Entrees include a lamb osso buco, a foccacia-stuffed quail and fish like the branzino. The wine list is arranged by region (including a scarily vast selection of reds from the Piemonte region). The service is also some of the best in Downtown. At 525 S. Flower St., Suite 120, (213) 228-8998 or [dragoentro.com](http://dragoentro.com).—Jon Regardie

## BEST STEAK



## Morton's The Steakhouse

**READERS' CHOICE:** When it comes to steak, Morton's serves nothing but Midwestern grain-fed USDA prime beef, which is wet-aged in vacuum-sealed bags to retain moisture, leading to a more tender, concentrated flavor. There's more marble in those babies than a Roman villa. The same criteria goes for all cuts of meat; there's the double-cut filet mignon (the most tender option); the spice-rubbed Cajun rib-eye, which gives a nice kick to the usual beef flavor; and the 24 oz. porterhouse, otherwise known as the post-meal nap inducer (sweet dreams). All the steaks are fired in a 1,800-degree broiler. Can't do that at home. At 735 S. Figueroa St., Suite 207, (213) 553-4566 or [mortons.com](http://mortons.com).—Ryan Vaillancourt

## BEST AMERICAN

### Yard House

**READERS' CHOICE:** It doesn't get more American than thick burgers, crispy fries, cold beers and classic rock — the Yard House serves all that and then some. Appetizers like Buffalo wings and nachos are served in big portions. Entrees like New York steak and fries, steak and shrimp, St. Louis-style ribs and grilled rib-eye steaks are All-American classics. Desserts like fresh brownies and peach apple cobbler taste better than the ones your grandma made. And of course there are the burgers. Classic sliders are always a great choice, as is the Pepper Jack with roasted green chiles. If you want real Americana, the cheeseburger is stepped up a notch with roasted garlic aioli. At 800 W. Olympic Blvd., (213) 745-9273 or [yardhouse.com](http://yardhouse.com).—Richard Guzmán

## BEST PIZZA

### California Pizza Kitchen

**READERS' CHOICE:** When it comes to toppings, the choices at California Pizza Kitchen go beyond pepperoni, bell peppers and mushrooms. At CPK's Downtown locations at the 7+Fig mall and the Wells Fargo Center, pizzas take on a whole new definition. Some of the chain's new items provide the best examples of the creativity. Take the cheeseburger pizza, which has ground Angus beef with caramelized onions and mozzarella and American cheese. Want a little less meat? How about a pear and gorgonzola pie? Or go exotic with the Thai chicken pizza. At 735 S. Figueroa St., (213) 228-8500, and 330 S. Hope St., (213) 626-2616 or [cpk.com](http://cpk.com). —Richard Guzmán

## BEST LATIN/MEXICAN

### Ciudad

**READERS' CHOICE:** More than a decade after it opened, Ciudad is still a draw. The fun and festive atmosphere continues in the Financial District establishment founded by Susan Feniger and Mary Sue Milliken, though these days executive chef Jeremy Tummel is in charge of the empanadas and Argentine Gaucho Steak that the kitchen sends out. There are plenty of specials (e.g. Paella Tuesdays) and killer drinks like the mojito and the piscorita (a Central American margarita), but really, it's about the food: Dishes like the glazed beef short ribs and the Niman Ranch Pork Carnitas keep the crowds coming. At 445 S. Figueroa St., (213) 486-5171 or [ciudad-la.com](http://ciudad-la.com).—Jon Regardie

## BEST BURGER

### Original Tommy's

**READERS' CHOICE:** If there's a burger worth standing for, Tommy's is it. Opened in 1946, the original spot at the corner of Rampart and Beverly boulevards still draws huge crowds, and the shack has changed little in its decades-long history. There are still no tables and chairs; the chiliburgers are just as good and the lines can still get long. The only recent upgrade to this L.A. classic has been the addition of fountain drinks instead of soda cans. Somehow, they make the burgers taste even better. At 2575 Beverly Blvd., (213) 389-9060 or [originaltommys.com](http://originaltommys.com).—Richard Guzmán

## BEST JAPANESE

### Shabu Shabu House

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**READERS' CHOICE:** Those unaccustomed to Japanese cuisine may think that boiling red meat is just a Soviet thing. But Shabu Shabu House is proof, if any were needed, that boiled beef can be sheer bliss. But don't take our word for it. Just observe the lines that often stretch or clump outside this Little Tokyo establishment. While the wait can be an hour or more, those in the know happily kill time. Once inside, you cook the thin slices of lean beef yourself at the table, then dip them in a number of salivating sauces. At 127 Japanese Village Plaza, (213) 680-3890.—Ryan Vaillancourt

## **BEST SUSHI**

### **Wokcano**

**READERS' CHOICE:** This Asian fusion restaurant and lounge serves a large and sometimes eye-popping selection of sushi rolls in its chic, low-lit dining room. Signature items include the Tornado Spicy Tuna Dips, a spicy tuna roll with cucumber and avocado, served with Doritos (yes, you read that right); the Black Pearl, a deep-fried salmon-tuna-yellowtail concoction with cream cheese, covered in a garlic butter sauce; and the Late Night Party Roll, a crabmeat-avocado roll topped with baked lobster, scallops and smelt eggs in a creamy sauce. More traditional sushi options, like California and simple tuna rolls are also on the menu. At 800 W. Seventh St., (213) 623-2288 or [wokcanocafe.com](http://wokcanocafe.com).—Anna Scott

## **HEAD TO HEAD**

### **BEST RAMEN**

#### **Daikokuya**

**READERS' CHOICE:** Juzo Itami's 1985 cult film Tampopo featured some ramen eating advice from a mysterious noodle master. It is worth considering when dining at Daikokuya, a ramen legend of its own in Little Tokyo.

"First, observe the whole bowl," the master directs. "Appreciate its gestalt. Savor the aromas. Jewels of fat glittering on the surface. Bamboo roots shining. Seaweed slowly sinking. Spring onions floating. Concentrate on the three pork slices. They play the key role but stay mostly hidden."

There are other options on Daikokuya's menu, but it's the savory bowls of ramen that draw crowds. No wonder that in the head to head match-up with Oro Chon, Daikokuya earned 57% of the vote.

The wood-heavy interior features an exposed kitchen surrounded by a bar. Sitting there, one can observe the slowly rolling stock pots full of broth, and watch as a samurai-style headband-clad chef decorates the bowls with blossoms of bamboo and bean sprouts.

You can get the traditional ramen bowl, complete with kurobuta pork belly, or a version called tsukemen, which has all the same ingredients but served separately, with the noodles chilled (an option people go for on hot days).

If there is a line and you're not willing or don't have time to wait, head over to Oro Chon. Some even prefer this Little Tokyo competitor, which is known for having a little more variety on its ramen menu, including three different broths and levels of spiciness.

For either place, consider the noodle master's advice: "Gently pick [the pork] up and dip it into the soup on the right of the bowl. What is important here is to apologize to the pork by saying, 'See you soon.'"

At 327 E. First St., (213) 626-1680 or [daikoku-ten.com](http://daikoku-ten.com).—Ryan Vaillancourt

## **BEST BREAKFAST**

### **The Original Pantry Café**

**READERS' CHOICE:** It's the most important meal of the day, and at the Pantry, they treat it with the respect it deserves. The restaurant owned by former Mayor Richard Riordan has been around for 85 years, and they serve breakfast 24 hours a day. Be

ready though — the portions are big. Staples include the buckwheat pancakes, steak and eggs, French toast and a bacon and cheese omelet. You also can't go wrong with a simple ham and eggs or hotcakes, eggs and potatoes. In other words, the world is your oyster, or at least your omelet. The pastries are the Pantry are also worth noting. A honey bun or cinnamon roll can reasonably stand in for breakfast. At 877 S. Figueroa St., (213) 972-9279 or [pantrycafe.com](http://pantrycafe.com).—Richard Guzmán

## **BEST CHINESE**

### **Yang Chow**

**READERS' CHOICE:** Hyperbole or not, Yang Chow's self-proclaimed "world famous" slippery shrimp is just plain delicious, and if it's not famous around the world, then it certainly is in Los Angeles. Crispy, sweet and spicy, this dish has helped build the Cantonese restaurant's die-hard fan base — hence the jam-packed tables. But don't neglect the other tasty offerings, like the steamed dumplings, sizzling rice soup and mu shu pork. Yang Chow serves affordable, abundant, tasty food, and they offer valet parking. What more could you ask for? Some more slippery shrimp perhaps. At 819 N. Broadway, (213) 625-0811 or [yangchow.com](http://yangchow.com).—Kathryn Maese

## **BEST DIM SUM**

### **Empress Pavilion**

**READERS' CHOICE:** Some people go to church on Sunday mornings. Others make their Sunday ritual around the dim sum table at Empress Pavilion. The massive establishment on Hill Street packs 'em in, and people of every age and ethnicity grab the goods as the little carts speed through the dining room. The selection is large and eclectic, everything from standards like fried dumplings, pot stickers and spring rolls to more exotic fare such as sticky rice in a lotus leaf, sesame sponge cake and shark's fin dumplings. Everything is \$2.30-\$5.75 a plate, so even if you don't like something new, it's not a big loss. At 988 N. Hill St., (213) 617-9898 or [empresspavilion.com](http://empresspavilion.com).—Richard Guzmán

## **BEST VEGETARIAN (OR KIND OF VEGETARIAN)**

### **Tiara Café**

**READERS' CHOICE:** While the menu at this Fashion District restaurant — which looks like an upscale cafeteria — is not exclusively vegetarian, chef Fred Eric's Tiara Café offers some of the best vegetarian options in Downtown. Herbivores and carnivores alike can enjoy starters like the chickpea fritters, which look like thick-cut French fries and come with a spicy aioli dipping sauce, or the bubbly Indian flat bread with mango chutney. Vegetarian main courses include a variety of salads, enchiladas with marinated grilled veggies and hand-made pasta with vegetables. If you really want to get crazy, try the grilled seitan (wheat protein) in a Japanese curry with potatoes and peas. Trust us, even meatheads will like it. At 127 E. Ninth St., (213) 623-3663 or [tiara-cafe-la.com](http://tiara-cafe-la.com).—Anna Scott

## **BEST CAFE**

### **Urth Caffè**

**READERS' CHOICE:** Despite the mouth-watering, oversized cookies on display near the cash register, this cozy Arts District cafe is known for its healthy fare and extensive selection of organic coffees and fine teas. Dishes like the Urth Farmers Salad with grilled artichokes and glazed pecans, the curried chicken sandwich and the plate-sized quesadilla attract a sizeable lunch crowd to the indoor dining room and large patio. Meanwhile, the long list of fresh roasted, whole bean organic coffees include enticing varieties such as vanilla nut, classic French roast and "dolce espresso." The equally long tea menu includes black, green, white and herbal choices, with several organic options. At 451 S. Hewitt St., (213) 797-4534 or [urthcaffe.com](http://urthcaffe.com).—Anna Scott

## **BEST SEAFOOD**

### **Water Grill**

**READERS' CHOICE:** When Michael Cimarrusti left Water Grill in 2005, fans wondered what would become of the establishment

many considered the city's best seafood restaurant. Four years later, his replacement, David LeFevre, has been a model of stability, and Water Grill remains popular and dependable. It's hard to go wrong with the half-dozen oyster options, and the always-fresh fish entrees include crowd pleasers like a Chilean sea bass, a Maryland striped bass, swordfish, monkfish and more. Whether you're heading there for a power lunch or to celebrate a special occasion, Water Grill still does fish right. At 544 S. Grand Ave., (213) 891-0900 or [watergrill.com](http://watergrill.com).—Jon Regardie

## BEST DECOR

### Cicada

**READERS' CHOICE:** The Italian dishes alone could bring you back to Cicada again and again. But the beauty of the Art Deco establishment makes it memorable. The 15,000-square-foot space in the 1920s Oviatt Building is a transmogrified haberdashery, and you'll sup near where they once sold ties and pants. There is rich wood, thick Lalique glass and enough gold leaf to make a miner sigh in envy. While lunch and dinner are a fine way to experience the restaurant, don't miss the "Cicada Club," the Sunday night experiences when big bands or other throwback themes take over the space. This joint can still swing. At 617 S. Olive St., (213) 488-9488 or [cicadarestaurant.com](http://cicadarestaurant.com).—Jon Regardie

## BEST CHEF

### John Rivera Sedlar at Rivera

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** The culinary world began buzzing when word spread that celebrated fusion chef John Rivera Sedlar would open his own place in South Park. Since Rivera restaurant debuted in January, the buzz has only grown, with crowds and food critics fawning over the offerings that stream out from the open kitchen. Sedlar whips up a modern mix of traditional Latin American dishes, adding his spin by blending culinary traditions and techniques. This leads to options like the cochinita pibil, a Mexican dish that Sedlar upgrades with a French twist. There are also kurobuta pork short ribs, here prepared like Mexican carnitas. Don't be surprised when the chile relleno salad comes with a depiction, in spices, of undocumented immigrants crossing a highway. At 1050 S. Flower St., (213) 749-1460 or [riverarestaurant.com](http://riverarestaurant.com).—Richard Guzmán

## BEST DINING EXPERIENCE

### The Palm

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** Many Downtown restaurants turn out top-quality food. Some of them understand that good service means always meeting customers' needs, often before they ask. But no one brings everything together quite like the Palm. Under General Manager Jonathan Scott, the South Park restaurant works like a well-oiled machine, and customers are treated right from the moment they walk in the door. The place is spotless and the caricatures on the wall provide instant character. The experienced waitstaff has personality, but doesn't cross the line. The steaks are thick yet tender and the Nova Scotia lobsters never disappoint. Whether it's a power lunch, a date or a group get-together, visiting the Palm is more than a meal — it's an experience. At 1100 S. Flower St., (213) 764-4600 or [thepalm.com](http://thepalm.com).—Jon Regardie

## BEST FRENCH

### Church & State

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** When it opened in September, the urban chic Church & State brought a burst of energy to a gritty part of the Arts District. Built in an old loading dock, the \$900,000 establishment with an open kitchen and appealing patio has tons of charm and personality. And of course, there's the food: Although owner Steven Arroyo went through a nasty split with original chef Greg Bernhardt, new chef Walter Manzke jumped on board and made Church & State something special. The French bistro is flavored with offerings like escargot de Bourgogne (snails baked in garlic and parsley), steak tartare and Confit de Canard à la Montmorency (French lentils and pickled cherries). There's nothing like it in Downtown. At 850 Industrial St., (213) 405-1434 or [churchandstatebistro.com](http://churchandstatebistro.com).—Richard Guzmán

## BEST FRIES

## Magnolia's Sweet Potato Fries

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** Remember a few years ago when sweet potato fries started showing up on the menu of just about every restaurant in town? Some did them better than others, and for a while, we couldn't get enough. Then the craze fizzled, maybe because the novelty wore off or we had one too many soggy version that turned that sweet potato sour. Thankfully, the new Magnolia in South Park is out to resuscitate the trend. Their fries are simply transcendent: The thin-cut tuber is ever so lightly dredged to produce a crispy jacket, dusted with parsley and served with a side of ketchup and crème fraiche. It's one sweet potato. At 825 W. Ninth St., (213) 362-0880 or [magnoliala.com](http://magnoliala.com).—Kathryn Maese

## BEST BURGER

### Blu LA Café

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** Whether you opt for the deliciously oozing 1/2-pound cheeseburger or the decadent version with roquefort cheese, bacon and garlic mayo, you just can't go wrong with this petite cafe's awesome burgers. The beef is appropriately beefy (no skimpy patties here), the brioche bun tasty and the flavor explosive. It's perfectly cooked every time, and the hand-cut fries are crispy and delicious. Though burger options abound Downtown, Blu should be at the top of your dining list. To sweeten the deal, their dessert counter is sinfully good. At 126 E. Sixth St., (213) 488-2088 or [blu.la](http://blu.la).—Kathryn Maese

## BEST SAUSAGE

### Wurstküche

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** As they say in Berlin, die Wurst schmeckt lecker, or, the sausage tastes yummy. Notice that the Germans take sausage seriously, as Wurst (sausage) is a proper noun. At the Arts District's Wurstküche, they pay homage to tradition with sausage classics (bratwurst with kraut and the hot Italian), but they've generated the most buzz with their exotic offerings, like one that combines rattlesnake, rabbit and jalapeño peppers, or another that includes alligator meat — both are surprisingly succulent. The 24 beers on tap have helped the new business become a neighborhood favorite. At 800 E. Third St., (213) 687-4444 or [wurstkucherestaurant.com](http://wurstkucherestaurant.com).—Ryan Vaillancourt

## BEST EL SALVADORAN FOOD

### Sarita's

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** Downtown has surprisingly few El Salvadoran restaurants. But with Sarita's at the Grand Central Market, which offers up the classic dishes that originated in the Central American country, you may not need more than one. Sarita's serves delicious pupusas, El Salvador's main dish, as well as tamales (which are bigger and less dry than Mexican tamales). Their specialty is the soups: Sarita's offers a handful of favorites, like the Sopa de Pata (cow's feet with corn, tripe and yucca) and Sopa de Res (beef stew). At Grand Central Market, 317 S. Broadway, (213) 626-6320.—Richard Guzmán

## BEST CUPCAKES

### Village Kitchen

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** The small but oh-so-delicious selection of cupcakes at this City West bakery will literally melt in your mouth. The mini cakes come in four flavors: red velvet, carrot cake, yellow cake with chocolate frosting and white cake with vanilla-coconut frosting. More manageable than the oversized pastries you see at some of L.A.'s upscale cupcake joints, these are the perfect snack size (they're also a steal at \$2 a cupcake). The cake is light and fluffy, the frosting cool and creamy, and there's not even any need to feel guilty. The cafe benefits the adjacent Good Shepherd Center for Homeless Women and Children, so eat up. At 1667 Beverly Blvd., (213) 235-1487.—Anna Scott

## BEST POPSICLES

### Paleteria La Michoacana

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** You'll find frozen heaven on a stick at this tiny Financial District ice cream shop, which sells a rainbow of

paletas, or Mexican ice pops, stacked in every flavor imaginable. For \$1.75 — or \$3 for the fancier ones — you'll get an icy hunk crammed with massive chunks of fresh fruit or nuts. There are milk-oriented versions, like the strawberry and cream, as well as water-based creations such as the spicy-sweet mango and chili. These treats are addicting, so be prepared to come back to try the more exotic popsicles. You should work your way up to the soursop and cactus fruit. At 306 W. Seventh St., (213) 623-2650.— Kathryn Maese

## BEST MEAL WITH A VIEW

### Takami

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** At Takami, you'll probably eat with your mouth open — not because you're rude, but rather because you'll be reacting to the stunning view. Located 21 floors above the street, in the penthouse of the 811 Wilshire building, the Asian restaurant offers a postcard-like view of Downtown. Of course, the view would mean nothing if the food faltered. Fortunately, it's top notch, with a mix of fresh sushi, inventive entrees and grilled robata items with choices in the meat, chicken, fish and vegetarian families. Still, it may be hard to take your eyes off the view. At 811 Wilshire Blvd., (213) 236-9600 or [takamisushi.com](http://takamisushi.com).—Richard Guzmán

## MOST DECADENT DESSERTS

### Nickel Diner

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** Need proof that the Nickel has decadent desserts? Look no further than its website, where the home page boasts that it is the “home of the Maple Glaze Bacon Donut.” Visit the Nickel for lunch or dinner and it is impossible not to drool over the sky-high dessert tray as it rolls through the dining room. Pastry chef Sharlena Fong creates huge slabs of red velvet cake, the little chocolate cake rolls that you might recognize as ding dongs (just like the Hostess ones, but homemade) or the ultimate decadent dessert, the Saltina — an ooey gooey chocolate-peanut butter-potato chip layer cake. Only downside is, you might have to roll home. At 524 S. Main St., (213) 623-8301 or [5cdiner.com](http://5cdiner.com).—Anna Scott

## BEST TEA ROOM

### Chado

**EDITORS' CHOICE:** This well-stocked spot at Little Tokyo's Japanese American National Museum offers more than 200 varieties of tea. From hot pots to pitchers of iced tea, including a bright red herbal variety adorned with berries, there is a beverage here for even the most discerning connoisseur. The snacks are as much of a draw as the tea and are ideal for sharing. The best deal is the Afternoon Tea, which for \$18 a person includes a pot of tea and a three-tier rack of four half-sandwiches, a scone with homemade cream, fruit, a cookie and a slice of cake. At 369 E. First St., (213) 258-2581 or [chadotea.com](http://chadotea.com).—Anna Scott

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