

TODAY

Food

YOUR WEEKLY TASTE
OF NEW JERSEY'S
CULINARY SCENE

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Clockwise from top left: Shauna Masson brings the burgers out with a smile at Burger 21 in Voorhees; the baked brie burger at the Committed Pig has creamy brie, bacon and fig preserve; and Dutch Market/Olympia Dairy Bar in Penns Grove offers hungry diners an old-fashioned burger experience. (SAED HINDASH AND AMANDA MARZULLO / NJ ADVANCE MEDIA FOR THE STAR-LEDGER)

JERSEY'S BEST

A united state

North and South Jersey share commitment for good burgers.



Peter Genovese
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Our quixotic quest for N.J.'s best burger has taken us to restaurants across the state. On our latest trip, we headed to Camden, Gloucester and Salem counties, where we may have found the best fries so far and stopped at a roadside business known more for ice cream than anything.

After our journey through South Jersey, we shot back up the Turnpike and headed over to Morris County for four more burger joints on our list. The debate over differences between South and North Jersey rages on, but you can find good burgers anywhere — and sometimes where and when you'd least expect it.

Burger 21, Voorhees

For those who love malls, Voorhees Town Center is paved paradise; It's the only Jersey mall you can actually live at, with attached condos and apartments. There's plenty of good eating inside the mall.

There are outside shops and restaurants on Town Center Boulevard, including Burger 21, the only Jersey location of a small nationwide chain. Fresh, never frozen, Angus beef is used, and there's a gluten-free menu.

Burger 101, a basic burger with lettuce and tomato on a toasted brioche, is an upgrade from the usual bland mall burger. For something different, try the Tex-Mex Haystack, a formidable-looking combo of applewood-smoked bacon, Gouda, guacamole, onion strings and chipotle-jalapeno sauce.

Kitchen 519, Glendora

New Jersey is in the midst of a craft beer mini-revolution, with small brewery operations popping up all over the state.

John Stewart, chef/owner of Kitchen 519, proves craft beer goes well with burger with his Lunacy burger, a whiskey-glazed burger with bacon and a garlic gorgonzola sauce made from Lunacy Brewing IPA. The brewery, hard to find but well worth the trip, is located minutes away in Magnolia.

Even better: the Inside Out Burger, with certified Hereford beef, stuffed gorgonzola, applewood bacon, sliced vine tomatoes, arugula and caramelized onions.

The best fries so far on our journey may have been the garlic parmesan fries here. The cute, cozy restaurant takes its name from the wedding date of Stewart and his wife, Diana. It's a place I'd definitely return to try such dishes as hoison calamari, rojo pork sandwich and Cuban quesadilla.

Society of Burgers, Sewell

Photographer Saed Hindash was understandably puzzled when we pulled up in front of the Salad Society in Sewell.

"Where is it?" he said, referring to the Society of Burgers.

For once, I knew where I was going. SOB, as the burger joint called itself, is a separate counter inside the restaurant. On one side,

healthy salads, on the other, a carnivore's delight. The burger counter was added a year ago; the Salad Society opened in September 2011.

With just salads on the menu, "you realize you're not satisfying everyone in the family," said general manager Dennis DeConnick. Works for me.

I tried the Tex-Mex, with avocado, jalapenos, cheddar jack and spicy chipotle sauce, and a tasty mushroom Swiss burger, with sauteed wild mushrooms. Good sweet potato fries, hot and crunchy.

Lapp's/Olympia Dairy Farm, Penns Grove

This classic roadside ice cream stand, open since 1956, also does barbecue — and burgers. It's been in the Lapp family or six years; They also run Lapp's Dutch Market in Penns Grove.

Minutes away is Cowtown Rodeo, the nation's longest-running weekly rodeo, and the Corner Bar, winner of our N.J.'s best bar competition.

"We get a lot of rodeo traffic," Jeff Lapp says behind the counter. "Saturday night at 10 o'clock is our biggest night. It's ice cream night."

His wife, Melissa, works here and so do Melissa's two sisters. There are tables outside, but you'll want to sit at the counter, and be transported back to the '50s. Shake sizes come in regular, medium and monster.

Get the burger with the pulled pork and cole slaw piled on top; it's a mighty tasty handful.

Maybe the meat and salt and whatever else is finally getting to me, two weeks into my search for N.J.'s best burger.

The Committed Pig, Morristown

How else to explain walking into The Committed Pig in Morristown and not noticing the floor covered with pennies?

A total of 2014 pennies to be exact, to commemorate the restaurant's scheduled opening (it actually opened this January).

"This has been a home run, better than I expected," said owner Jerry Rotunno, joining us at a curbside table.

There's another Committed Pig in Manasquan. The Morristown location is

located along the Green.

The meat is a Pat LaFrieda mix of brisket, short rib and hanger steak. The chipotle bacon burger features Muenster and a commendable bacon chipotle mayo, but the standout was the baked brie burger, a tantalizing trio of creamy brie, bacon and fig preserves. Good waffle fries, too, uber-crispy.

Arthur's Tavern, Morris Plains

Arthur McGreevey, the late owner of Arthur's, had a favorite saying.

"Show me a famous restaurant owner and I'll show you a pain in the a--."

McGreevey passed away in 2011, but his legend lives on — there's a parking spot out back held for him. He owned Arthur's in Morris Plains, Hoboken and North Brunswick, plus Llewellyn Farms in Morris Plains and Larison's Turkey Farm Inn in Chester.

The Morris Plains Arthur's may boast the biggest collection of neon beer signs in the state. The meat is a 80/20 blend from the Green Village Packing Co., the rolls from Anthony & Sons in Denver.

I love spice and heat, so the Hell Burger was a natural. A five-pepper hot sauce, with habaneros, jalapenos, chipotles, cherry and chiles, are spread over a Cajun-spice-crust burger with pickled jalapenos and a ghost pepper sauce.

Call it the Purgatory Burger: I was hoping for hotter. Good cheeseburger, though, on a toasted roll.

Tiff's Burger, Rockaway

Tiff's Burger, in the Rockaway Townsquare Mall space once occupied by Fatburger, is owned by Mike Romanelli, who oversees the five Tiffany's restaurant/bar locations in New Jersey. His son, Mike Romanelli Jr., is head chef at the Pequannock Tiffany's.

The menu offers burger options — peanut butter and bacon, anyone? I tried the Loaded Avocado Burger, with Vermont cheddar, red onion and guacamole, and the Ultimate Burger, with American cheese, applewood-smoke bacon, fried egg, and a beer-battered onion ring.

Morris Tap & Grill, Randolph

Eric LeVine is the tattooed chef at Morris Tap & Grill in Randolph and Paragon Tap & Table in Clark, both showcases for his creative gastropub cuisine. Excellent craft beer selection at Morris Tap, and bartenders who know their brew.

We tried the BaconEater burger during our search for N.J.'s best bar. This time around, it was the craft beer burger, with chuck loin, short rib and brisket soaked in stout with caramelized onions, bacon and mushrooms, and the Southwest burger, with its tasty topping of lemon citrus aioli, jalapeno jack cheese, salsa and fried onions.

I couldn't resist taking home two growlers, both from craft beer newcomer Magnify Brewing, of Fairfield. Both the Search Saison and Vine Whine IPA are excellent.

IF YOU GO

Burger 21

Where: 12109 Town Center Blvd., Voorhees Town Center, Voorhees

Hours: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Contact: Call 856-528-2990 or visit burger21.com

Kitchen 519

Where: 200 E Evesham Rd., Glendora

Hours: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Contact: Call 856-312-8629 or visit kitchen-519.com



Burgers beware! Pete Genovese on the hunt for N.J.'s best burger at Society of Burgers in Sewell.

(SAED HINDASH / FOR THE STAR-LEDGER)

Society of Burgers

Where: 137 Egg Harbor Road, Sewell

Hours: 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday-Friday; 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturdays; noon to 6 p.m. Sundays

Contact: Call 856-302-1357 or visit saladsociety.com

Lapp's/Olympia Dairy Farm, Penns Grove

Where: 1073 W. Route 40, Penns Grove

Hours: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Saturday; Closed Sundays

Contact: Call 856-514-3448 or visit lapps-dutchmarket.com/dairybar

The Committed Pig

Where: 28 W. Park Place, Morristown

Hours: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 5 to 9 p.m. Monday-Wednesday; 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 5 to 10 p.m. Thursday-Friday; 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday; 8 a.m. - 9 p.m. Sunday

Contact: Call 862-260-9292 or visit thecommittedpig.com



The spicy Hell Burger at Arthur's Tavern.

(AMANDA MARZULLO/FOR THE STAR-LEDGER)

Arthur's Tavern

Where: 700 Speedwell Ave., Morris Plains

Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday-Tuesday; 11:30 a.m. to 10:20 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday; 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday

Contact: Call 973-455-9705 or visit arthurstavern.com

Tiff's Burger

Where: 321 Mount Hope Ave., Rockaway

Hours: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday-Saturday; 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday

Contact: Call 973-891-1907 or visit tiffsburger.com

Morris Tap & Grill

Where: 500 Route 10, Randolph

Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday-Saturday

Contact: Call 973-891-1776 or visit morristapandgrill.com



The Southwest burger at Morris Tap & Grill is topped with lemon cilantro aioli, jalapeno jack cheese, salsa and fried onions.

(AMANDA MARZULLO/FOR THE STAR-LEDGER)