

# Where to Eat IN ARKANSAS

BY GREG HENDERSON :: PHOTOGRAPHY BY BECCA BONA AND GREG HENDERSON

**W**riting about food full time and managing two online food publications, *Rock City Eats* and *NWZeats*, means I visit a lot of restaurants around the state, and I'm often asked: "What is your favorite place?" It's difficult to answer this question with a single answer. There are a lot of places that I love for various reasons. For some, it is the amazement of how they have perfected a single dish or style. For others it is the contributions they make in moving the culinary scene of a region forward. Here are some of our favorite places to eat in the state right now.

## Deluca's Pizzeria Napoletana • Hot Springs

Anthony Valinoti quietly launched Deluca's in late 2013, in a location just a little further north than anyone actually drives in Hot Springs. In those two years, it has grown to have a cult following. He uses top ingredients, including mozzarella imported from Italy, carefully curated meats and a wide variety of locally sourced vegetables to make his pizzas and salads. Valinoti's passion for food is evident in every bite.

I could go on, but, really, the beautiful products coming out of his oven are best experienced in person. You may even walk away a little misty eyed.

[delucaspizzeria.com](http://delucaspizzeria.com)

## South On Main • Little Rock

If you had to pick one "must-try dining spot" in Little Rock, South on Main would be it. Their high Southern cuisine has really hit a groove lately, and the 2-year-old restaurant is cooking up increasingly better food every time we eat there. The restaurant often takes unconventional approaches to Southern dishes from around the region. And it's frequently that unexpected preparation that makes South on Main special.

If you are a music fan, be sure to catch their "Local Live Concert Series" every Wednesday night. It is easily the best meal and music pairing in the state.

[southonmain.com](http://southonmain.com)

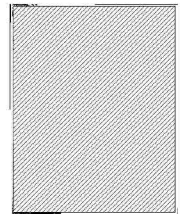
## The Hive • Bentonville

It is hard to mention former chefs of the Capital Hotel's Ashley's and not speak of Matthew McClure, chef at The Hive in Bentonville. The two-time best chef James Beard Awards nominee helped

◀ (left to right, from top left)

South on Main; Trio's Restaurant; Lost Forty Brewing Co., photo by Ashlee Nobel; The Hive; Oven & Tap; J Town's Grill; Deluca's Pizzeria Napoletana; Ristorante Capeo, photo by Sara Edwards Neal; and Therapy, photo by Sara Edwards Neal.

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▲ (Above)

Bar at Pressroom in Bentonville. Photo by Sara Edwards Neal.

solidify Bentonville as a food destination with the opening of 21c Museum Hotel, in which the restaurant is located.

“We build the menu around what is unique to the region,” McClure said. “If we put another Hive somewhere else in the country, it would be a totally different cuisine that would reflect what is special to that region.”

The menu changes seasonally with a number of weekly specials, so stop in frequently when you are in the Northwest part of the state.

[thehivebentonville.com](http://thehivebentonville.com)

**JTown’s Grill**  
 Jonesboro

One of our favorite places in the northeast has become JTown’s Grill. Chef Lisa Godsey has carved out a nice name for herself in the area, and her talents have made JTown’s one of the best in town.

The restaurant is located across from the Arkansas State University Red Wolves football stadium and is one of the few places in

town with a private license to serve alcohol, making it a hot spot on Saturdays in the fall.

The menu consists of a large selection of casual dining classics, including more than 10 varieties of burgers, numerous wraps and sandwiches, and an impressive selection of salads.

[jtownsgrill.com](http://jtownsgrill.com)

**Boulevard Bistro & Bar**  
 Little Rock

We have been fans of Boulevard Bread Co. in Little Rock for a long time. When the company decided to reinvent their flagship location in the Heights to become a sit-down restaurant, we were a bit skeptical.

What resulted is arguably some of the best food in Little Rock. The entree selection consists of about five or six items, which allows the team to focus on making a small, but strong variety of dishes very well. Add to it a number of great appetizers, such as the baked pimento cheese, and it is one of our favorite dinner spots in the capitol city.

[boulevardbread.com](http://boulevardbread.com)

**Pressroom**  
 Bentonville

I am sort of embarrassed to say how often I stop at the Pressroom in Bentonville. I’m there a lot. Yet, somehow, I always walk away finding a new favorite.

This is, in part, because Chef Michael Robertshaw is in the midst of a transformation much like Boulevard — going from a coffee and sandwich shop to more of a culinary experience. It is primed to play a critical role in what might be the best square mile of food in America, when paired with [The Hive](#), Tusk & Trotter American Brasserie, Oven & Tap, the upcoming Belfry and others.

[pressroomcoffee.com](http://pressroomcoffee.com)

**Lost Forty Brewing Co.**  
 Little Rock

One of our favorite places in the state is Lost Forty Brewing Co. The brewery opened up almost a year ago and was immediately the largest brewery in the state; however, producing the highest quantity of craft beers was no sacrifice to their quality. Lost Forty consistently turns out some of the best beer in the state and seems to get better with every batch.

One thing most breweries fall short on is their food offerings. Not Lost Forty. This eatery is the creation of the folks who brought us Big Orange, Local Lime and Zaza Fine Salad & Wood Oven Pizza Co., and the small menu size of Lost Forty makes this the strongest food menu of the entire group.

[facebook.com/lost40beer](https://facebook.com/lost40beer)

**Therapy**  
 Jonesboro

More of a wine drinker? Try Therapy wine bar in downtown Jonesboro and find a lot to love. The tiny kitchen in the space limits the cooking techniques some, but what comes out of the kitchen is a breath of fresh air in a town full of steaks, burgers and bad Italian food.

You’ll find a good selection of fresh dishes incorporating delicious pasta and seafood, along with fresh fruits and vegetables. Pair it with a glass of wine ... or three, and you have what we think is the best meal in the north-east region of Arkansas.

[facebook.com/Therapy870](https://facebook.com/Therapy870)

**Ristorante Capeo**  
 North Little Rock

In the more than 12 years that Ristorante Capeo has sat on the corner of Main and Fifth Streets in the Argenta District, a number of

other restaurants have come and gone. What hasn't changed is that Capeo cooks up some of the best Italian food in the entire state. Diners are classic Italian fare. Chef Eric Isaac shines on the traditional Italian dishes.

Don't miss the newly added lunch menu either. They are producing great wood-fired pizzas and basic pasta dishes for a much more casual lunch spot.

[capeo.us](http://capeo.us)

### **Central Park Fusion** **Hot Springs**

Deluca's is not the only restaurant serving amazing food in Hot Springs. About a block down the road, you'll find Central Park Fusion.

Don't let the relatively nondescript building fool you. Inside you will find a very exciting menu, featuring classic French cooking blended with a wide variety of dishes, such as pasta, curry and seafood. The result is exactly what the Spa City needs. Where Deluca's takes a traditional dish and makes it amazing, Central Park Fusion brings something refreshing and modern to the scene.

[centralparkfusion.com](http://centralparkfusion.com)

### **Oven & Tap** **Bentonville**

Oven & Tap may be the newest arrival to the scene, but they are not-so-quietly carving out a niche for themselves. They produce much more than just pizza from their 1,000-degree wood oven.

Oven & Tap sources their ingredients locally, and much of what is on the menu can be found within a few hours drive of the restaurant. They use it to create unexpected wood-oven dishes on their daily menu.

[ovenandtap.com](http://ovenandtap.com)

### **Trio's Restaurant** **Little Rock**

Trio's Restaurant recently celebrated its 29<sup>th</sup> year, a feat very few eateries manage in a rapidly growing food scene. They seem in no danger of slowing down either — the restaurant is always packed.

We recently asked co-owner Capi Peck what has helped them succeed for this long: "It is being willing to constantly reinvent food and your way of doing business. People change a lot over 29 years. We listen to our customers and keep up."

[triosrestaurant.com](http://triosrestaurant.com) 