

# Eating along New York State's 'Buffalo Wing Trail'

By MELISSA RAYWORTH 27 minutes ago



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BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The warnings come at you as soon as you step into the low-slung building that is Duff's Tavern. Advisories are posted on the walls. On the menus, they're even printed on the servers' t-shirts.

"WARNING! Medium IS HOT! Medium Hot IS VERY HOT! Hot is VERY VERY HOT!"

Yet not everyone who visits this popular stop on the "Buffalo Wing Trail" heeds the advice.

Joe Duff, who owns the suburban Buffalo restaurant, sees plenty of teenage boys driven to tears — or hiding in the men's room furiously splashing water into their mouths to cool the burn — after competing with their siblings or hockey teammates to devour the hottest wings on the menu.

The good news is this: You can find great meals along the Buffalo Wing Trail without testing your spice tolerance to the point of misery.

This list of 12 bars and restaurants was created by the Visit Buffalo Niagara tourism office when they realized their local dish was so beloved nationwide that it might just draw visitors in the same way that bourbon and craft-beer "trails" have done elsewhere.

Patrick Kaler, the president and CEO of Visit Buffalo Niagara, says choosing "the delicious dozen" was challenging given how many restaurants in the area make exceptional wings. His staff polled thousands of local diners on social media and scanned Yelp and TripAdvisor to form a solid but lengthy list of contenders. Then, to narrow it down, they turned to Drew Cerza, the "Wing King of Buffalo."

Cerza is credited with founding the annual Buffalo Wing Festival 18 years ago, inspired by a fictional wing-fest in the Bill Murray movie "Osmosis Jones." The Wing King will don his cape and wing-shaped crown again this year to host the festival on Aug. 31 and Sept. 1.

The final list of restaurants, unveiled last year, includes quirky places with loads of atmosphere, chicken wings that live up to the hype and — in the case of the Bar-Bill Tavern — a deliciously unique roast-beef sandwich called "beef-on-weck."

"Beef-on-weck was the Buffalo thing before the chicken wing ever was," says the Bar-Bill's current owner, Clark Crook. "To Buffalonians, it's as big as chicken wings."

The wing list has sparked some debate on social media. Buffalonians are passionate about their wings, Kaler says, and many post online to advise tourists about wing joints they believe should be included.

Among the 12 that did make the cut, here are four you won't want to miss if you're visiting the Buffalo area. But a warning, from experience: Unless your stomach is made of iron, hitting two places per day might well be enough.

## DUFF'S FAMOUS WINGS, 3651 Sheridan Drive, Amherst, N.Y.

The medium-hot and hot sauces here pack as much flavor as they do heat. And the BBQ wings are more than an afterthought for heat-averse diners; unlike so many cloyingly sweet BBQ sauces, Duff's is full of tangy, smoky warmth.

There's often a wait for a table at the main Duff's location. But the front-of-house staff keeps things moving, and the food is worth your patience.

You'll be welcomed warmly, but will reveal yourself as an out-of-towner if you use the phrase "Buffalo wings."

"Here," Joe Duff says, "they're just wings or chicken wings."

## ELMO'S, 2349 Millersport Highway, Getzville, N.Y.

Don't let the bland strip-mall exterior of Elmo's fool you.

Inside you'll find a cozy, unpretentious neighborhood sports bar that serves meaty wings with a twist: They're fried, dipped in sauce, then grilled to caramelize that sauce, and dipped again in another sauce of your choosing. More than a gimmick, this creates a deep flavor and satisfying crunch.

Along with mild, medium and hot wing sauce, you can mix in Cajun, BBQ or honey mustard, and wash it all down with popular local craft brew Flying Bison Rusty Chain.

## BAR-BILL TAVERN, 185 Main Street, East Aurora, N.Y.

The only food on the Bar-Bill menu was beef-on-weck when Joe Giafiglione bought the place in 1977. But the former mechanical engineer brought his scientific mindset to the job of perfecting a recipe for chicken wings, even using focus groups to hone his method.

To give each wing an identical taste and crispiness, Giafiglione pioneered painting an identical amount of sauce onto each wing with actual paint brushes. Every order comes with five drumsticks and five flat wings. And they're delicious.

"Uncle Joe was a control freak, and we're all better off for it," says Crook, who bought the business in 2011 with his wife, Katie, Giafiglione's niece.

You can watch cooks painting on sauces in the kitchen at the back of the bar. And don't miss the wall of glass beer mugs engraved with the names of the bar's many regulars. The vibe at the Bar-Bill is warm and friendly, and those roast beef sandwiches served on soft salt- and caraway-studded German rolls are reason enough to visit.

## THE ANCHOR BAR, 1047 Main St., Buffalo, N.Y.

This is the place where the world-renowned Buffalo wing origin story lives.

As it's told, it was late one night in 1964 when Dominic Bellissimo's friends showed up hungry at his bar. Busy serving drinks, Dominic asked his mother to make his pals something to eat. She grabbed chicken wings that she'd been planning to use for soup and fried them instead, adding a spicy, vinegary sauce she whipped up on the fly.

This, legend has it, is why Buffalo wings now exist on pretty much every bar menu in America.

The Anchor Bar now has franchise locations around the U.S. and Canada, but if you're a lover of spicy wings it's worth the trip to dine at the original.

Looking for one more hot spot to try great wings? A 13th restaurant — the Nine-Eleven Tavern — was added to the Buffalo Wing Trail as a bonus "audience favorite." But it comes with one qualifier.

"The owner is the only person that knows the recipe of making the wings," Kaler says. "And some days, he just doesn't feel like making wings."

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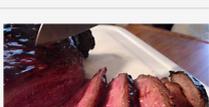
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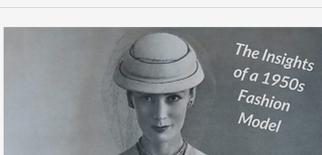
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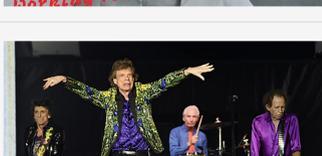
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