

MIDWEST LIVING EDITORS happily ate our way through Northwest Indiana to uncover the best restaurants, burger joints, pizza places and cafes. We selected the most memorable to guide you on a culinary tour through the exciting, elegant and down-to-earth eateries in the towns of Portage, Porter, Chesterton, Beverly Shores and Valparaiso that make up Indiana Dunes Country.

INDIANA DUNES COUNTRY

Culinary Tour



*The
Indiana
Dunes*
Nature's Masterpiece

Midwest Living®



BARTLETT'S GOURMET GRILL & TAVERN

**131 E. Dunes Highway-12,
Beverly Shores**

It's retro-cool at this rustic restaurant where comfort is the motto. The throwback roadhouse elevates pub grub to gourmet status in dishes like the signature Hardwood Smoked Wings—brined and coated in old-school sauce (219/879-3081; eatatbartletts.com).



BLACKBIRD CAFE

114 E. Lincolnway, Valparaiso

The big flavors coming out of this closet-size kitchen garner a steadfast following. Breakfast regulars come for bagels and lox, then linger over a free refill of coffee and 60 kinds of tea. At lunch, locals line up for zesty sandwiches then thumb through a read from the pleasantly cluttered bookshelf or try to be productive with the Wi-Fi (219/548-2811; blackbirdcafevalparaiso.com).



BON FEMME CAFÉ

66 W. Lincolnway, Valparaiso

Adopt a Parisian approach to dining and sip Champagne under a canopy of billowing white fabric. You'll want to amble through a meal of French-inspired foods here, so cozy up in a leather banquette and indulge in the robust entrees. Chat with friends over Bouillabaisse swirling with seafood in a saffron broth, and take a cue from the Parisians and linger over coffee and a cordial (219/531-0612; bonfemme.com).





CRAFT HOUSE

711 Plaza Dr., Chesterton

Fitting for a popular happy hour destination, the bar is central to the action. Bartenders work 15 taps of microbrews while servers pop tops on 50 craft beers. The post work crowd gathers for sports on TV (27 screens), pub grub and brews. Pair the creative brews with sports-bar fare or find a spot in the family-friendly dining area and order a must-try dish like a seafood plate (219/929-5570; crafthouse.beer).

DISH RESTAURANT

3907 N. Calumet Ave., Valparaiso

Working in an open kitchen, chefs create updated American classics in a minimalist modern setting. What sets dish apart, though, is excellent service and a seasonal menu. (Bubbling Gorgonzola on a bed of homemade chips is always on the starter menu though). Dish feels grown-up, but the restaurant welcomes children, even creating dishes to suit young palates (219/465-9221; dishrestaurant.net).



DON QUIJOTE RESTAURANT

119 E. Lincolnway, Valparaiso

This Spanish restaurant delivers authentic tapas to share and traditional paella. Chef-owner Carlos Rivero and partner, pastry chef Elena Jambrina (both natives of Spain), greet patrons like family. Enjoy the warmth of murals and lanterns inside, or channel the sidewalk cafes of Europe with dinner and drinks at an outdoor table (219/462-7976; donquijotevalpo.com).



FUJI JAPANESE RESTAURANT

5942 US-6, Portage

The 13-page menu may be overwhelming, but photos ease the decision. Or focus on the sushi like most do, especially after watching the chef roll rice and fish into artful presentations. If you're not in the mood for sushi, main course options include tempura, teriyaki and vegetarian versions of *udon* (thick) and *soba* (thin) noodle dishes (219/763-4131).



INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION EATERY & GRILLE

1084 Linwood Ave., Valparaiso

Steel figures re-creating the iconic *Lunch atop a Skyscraper* is just one tribute to midcentury workers here. As patriotic as the decor are the colossal portions of comfort food, including the Risk-Taker Burger, a mountain of beef, cheeses and onion strings staked together with an American flag (219/465-1801; industrialrevolutioneatery.com).



KELSEY'S STEAK HOUSE

2300 US-30, Valparaiso

No need to reach for the steak knife; a butter knife cuts through the aged, char-grilled steaks. Each cut (from 10 to 38 ounces) is USDA Prime steak—the highest grade of beef. One bite makes the typical 30-minute weekend wait understandable. End with the Howie: chocolate cake with chocolate mousse and chocolate ganache (219/465-4022; kelseyssteakhouse.com).





LATITUDES WATERFRONT DINING

5987 Dune Harbor Dr., Portage

Get a fine-dining experience without changing out of deck shoes at this eatery off Lake Michigan. A kids' menu satisfies little sailors, and adults like that the upscale menu matches the country-club vibe without the hefty price tag. For a casual spot, try the Beach House on the lower level (219/841-9570; latitudesatmarinashores.com).

LUCREZIA CAFÉ

428 S. Calumet Rd., Chesterton

The cuisine of northern Italy inspires the seasonal specials listed on the chalkboard. The small cafe is known for its incredibly tender braised lamb shank, as well as pastas, grilled meats and seafood dishes. The relaxed atmosphere is comfortable for those in after-work attire or jeans. Plan on a wait (no reservations accepted), and try to score seats at the bar, which specializes in martinis (219/926-5829; lucreziacafe.com).



MAIN AND LINCOLN

210 E. Lincolnway, Valparaiso

Colorful dishes stand out against the simplicity of this refurbished turn-of-the-century building. Among the six artistically prepared items (plus specials) is Faroe Islands salmon on pearl couscous, butternut squash and roasted tomatoes with a crown of baby arugula. There's a special-occasion sensibility, but a kids' menu makes it accessible for those towing little ones (219/510-5548; mainandlincoln.com).



MEDITRINA MARKET CAFE

24 N. Washington St., Valparaiso

Color and flavor unite in this tiny (only 28 seats!) Mediterranean restaurant. Dishes combine a confetti of colors, like the paprika chicken in a creamy red tomato sauce with a side of saffron-yellow rice. Large plates change seasonally, but diners will find the paprika chicken year-round. Servers gladly suggest wine pairings (219/707-5271; meditrina-market-cafe.com).



OCTAVE GRILL

137 S. Calumet Rd., Chesterton

Burgers go beyond the quarter-pounder with cheese at this kitschy restaurant where grass-fed beef, local Fair Oaks Farm cheese and more than 25 toppings create new twists on the king of American cuisine. Couple a rave-worthy burger with sweet potato tots—and a ramekin of the irresistible stone-ground mustard to dip them in—for a satisfying meal (219/395-8494; octavegrill.com).



PARÉA

69 S. Franklin St., Valparaiso

This spot lives up to its name: *Parea* is Greek for gatherings of friends and family to enjoy meals. Stick with the Greek approach and split an appetizer of *saginaki* or *dolmades* (stuffed grape leaves). Although American entrees dominate the menu (such as the Amish chicken two ways), Greek lemon rice soup starts some meals. For a Greek finish, share baklava dripping in honey (219/510-5428; parearestaurant.com).





POPOLANO'S RESTAURANT

225 S. Calumet Rd., Chesterton

It's all about family at this Italian restaurant that caters to everyone's taste with a diverse, affordable menu. Whether it's dinner after soccer practice or date night, this family-run restaurant suits with ravioli, rigatoni, seafood, sandwiches and kid faves. Ask for as many forks as your family needs to eat homemade desserts like tiramisu (219/926-5552; popolanorestaurant.com).

TAO CHEN'S

532 Indian Boundary Rd., Chesterton

Save the airfare and get a taste of China at Tao Chen's. Owner Eddie Moy built a reputation for serving the region's best Chinese food at his first restaurant, Jade East; this spot solidifies it by using traditional recipes and fresh ingredients to prepare authentic Chinese food. Try out chopsticks on Buddha Delight, a spicy medley of pea pods, broccoli, eggplant and black mushrooms over rice (219/926-2542; taochenschinese.com).



THIRD COAST SPICE CAFÉ

761 Indian Boundary Rd., Chesterton

Feel-good food takes on a new meaning when it's organic, vegetarian and made from locally sourced ingredients. Begin the day with fluffy blueberry pancakes or an omelet made with cage-free eggs from a secret source—so the supply doesn't run out. Nearby farms supply the produce in lunchtime sandwiches (219/926-5858; thirdcoastspice.com).



TOMATO BAR PIZZA BAKERY

2310 Laporte Ave., Valparaiso

It's common knowledge that pizza and beer taste best together. What's not so common are the beers and pizzas here. Bartenders pour 20 on-tap craft beers, including limited editions from nearby breweries. Innovative pizzas push the envelope of unexpected, like the Popper that layers cream cheese, chicken, cheeses and jalapeños (219/462-7499; tomatobarpizza.com).



VALLEY KITCHEN & BAR

**55 S. Franklin St., Valparaiso
2405 E. US-30, Valparaiso (opening fall 2015)**

Locally sourced ingredients star at this farm-to-fork restaurant, featuring just five entrees—beef, chicken, pork, fish and veggie—plus appetizers and sides. The husband-and-wife duo changes out entrees like the Cowboy Cut Pork Chop, seasonally based on local availability (219/531-8888; eatvalley.com).



WAGNER'S RIBS

361 Wagner Rd., Porter

The only reason diners need a menu at this Indiana Dunes Country institution is to select sides, including coleslaw, corn bread cakes, BBQ baked beans, stacks of onion rings and waffle fries. Why just a side? Because this friendly spot is known for its fall-off-the-bone ribs, coated in just enough flavorful sauce so that it doesn't end up running down your chin or into a sticky puddle (219/926-7614; wagnersribs.com).

