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Top Doctors for Children's Health

The Star-Ledger

NEW JERSEY'S
TOP RATED
LAWYERS

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Inside Jersey



Asbury Park



Atlantic City



Cape May



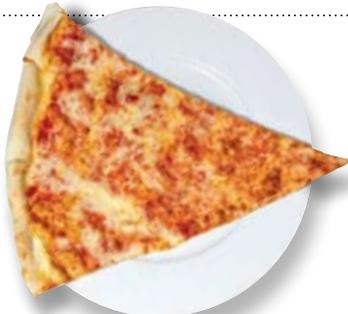
Collingswood

12 Best Towns for Food Lovers | *plus* JERSEY TOMATO TIME

DINING DOZEN

The Best of NJ

113 of the best places to eat, drink and be happy



Hoboken



Jersey City



Montclair



Morristown



Newark



New Brunswick



Princeton



Red Bank

COLLINGSWOOD



This Camden County town is South Jersey's hottest new dining destination. And tree-shaded Haddon Avenue, chock a block with shops and restaurants, is one of the state's most charming main streets. Dining is all over the map from barbecue, tacos and pizza to Indian, Mediterranean and Italian. Just a short distance from scenic Cooper River Park, you can even plan a picnic if you have some time.

BEST ECLECTIC

Trenton-born Alex Capasso has backgrounds in Italian, French, Moroccan, Lebanese, Egyptian and Israeli cooking, and the diversity spills out onto the menu at **Blackbird**, his casual, upscale 70-seat restaurant. There's pan-seared foie gras and a fricassee of Prince Edward Island mussels; house-made potato gnocchi and ragu of rabbit; crispy pastrami-spiced salmon; bacon-larded black cod; and more. Decadent desserts include a lemon cheesecake, warm truffle cake and chocolate cherry bread pudding.

★ BLACKBIRD

714 Haddon Ave. • (856) 854-3444
blackbirdnj.com

CRAB CAKE CENTRAL

Bobby Chez (Bobby Sliwowski) has come a long way from his schoolkid days, when he would sell fruit-flavored snowballs from a wagon. Today, he reigns over a crab cake kingdom, with six takeout stores in South Jersey and his famous jumbo lump crab cakes being shipped all over the nation. Lots are available — shrimp, fried oysters, clams, flounder — plus rotisserie chicken, potato salad, seashore fries, lobster potpie and more. Prepared meals like crab bisque, veal Milanese and rack of lamb for two also are available.

★ BOBBY CHEZ

33 W. Collings Ave. • (856) 869-8000

bobbychezcrabcakes.com

A TASTE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

I'm pretty sure **Zena's American Mediterranean Cuisine** offers the only Turkish cheese cigar in town. No, you don't smoke it; it's a feta cheese and parsley-stuffed, thinly rolled phyllo treat. There's a beef cigar, too. The American side of the menu features pizza, burgers and steaks, but stick to the Middle Eastern side, with Syrian, Lebanese, Greek, Turkish and Indian dishes vying for attention. Desserts, including the maamoul (a baked semolina butter cookie with

crushed walnuts and showered with powdered sugar) are homemade.

★ ZENA'S AMERICAN MEDITERRANEAN CUISINE

400 Richey Ave. • (856) 858-3700
zenasamericanmed.com

BEST JAPANESE

Sagami, with its boxy exterior and location on a dreary stretch of Route 130, does not look like the kind of place that would serve the best Japanese food in South Jersey. But it certainly does. The freshest sushi and sashimi are here, plus eel, shrimp, edamame, tempura and other standards, served in a rustic, tearoom-like interior that can get noisy. Appetizers include uncommon dishes, such as jushikatsu (fried pork and onion on skewers) and gomae (boiled watercress with sesame sauce).

It's BYOB. After you polish off that bottle, order the green tea ice cream.

★ SAGAMI

37 W. Crescent Blvd. • (856) 854-9773

Has a Facebook page.

MOST FUN HANGOUT

The Pop Shop is a blast into the retro past, with its leather booths, long curvy counter (reclaimed from a '40s diner in Iowa), spinning stools,

soda fountain, 1954 Seeburg jukebox and black-and-white tile floors. It's the perfect place to take that fidgety child of yours, with an atmosphere and menu kids of all ages can enjoy. Breakfast is served all day, and there are 30 kinds of grilled cheese sandwiches, plus burgers, salads, veggie selections and such classic soda fountain treats as cherry Cokes and egg creams.

★ **THE POP SHOP**

729 Haddon Ave. • (856) 869-0111
thepopshopusa.com

BEST ITALIAN

Sapori shared top Italian restaurant honors in the state (with Bay Avenue Trattoria in Highlands) in the 2011-12 Zagat guide. The brick-walled, stone floored restaurant, shaded by chocolate velvet drapes, is overseen by Italian-born chef Franco Lombardi, whose menu bounces comfortably back and forth between Northern and Southern Italian food. Start with the carpaccio di carne (wafer-thin filet mignon in an olive oil and lemon emulsion), then proceed to the gnocchi in pork-tomato ragu, or fillets of veal sautéed with mushrooms, figs and shallots.

★ **SAPORI**

601 Haddon Ave. • (856) 858-2288
sapori.info

INDIAN OASIS

Mumbai-born Rakesh Ramola, owner of **IndeBlue**, hoppedscotched around the world (Dubai, London, Cyprus) before landing in Collingswood. His handsome

restaurant — hardwood floors, peach-colored walls — offers cuisine from around India. Inventive fare includes chicken tikka spring rolls, Indian-style crab cakes (with a creamy tamarind aioli) and shrimp koli (chickpea-battered shrimp with ginger, garlic and lemon). Monthly specials may include rabbit simmered in a tomato, onion and pine nut sauce, and pan-seared shark steak.

★ **INDEBLUE INDIAN CUISINE**

619 Collings Ave. • (856) 854-4663
indebluerestaurant.com

BEST PIZZA

Collingswood has no shortage of pizzerias, but the best can be found not at a pizzeria but at an Italian restaurant — **Villa Barone**. Sure, you can order the homemade ravioli and gnocchi, or breaded veal cutlets, but you may not find a better specialty pizza than the capricciosa, a heavenly blend of prosciutto, kalamata olives and to-die-for fresh mushrooms.

★ **VILLA BARONE**

753 Haddon Ave.
• (856) 858-2999
villabaronesite.com

Assortment of sushi from Sagami Japanese restaurant.



THE
CRITIC'S
CHOICE

★ **NUNZIO RISTORANTE RUSTICO** • 706 Haddon Ave. • (856)-858-9840 • nunzios.net Chef-owner Nunzio Patruno earned legions of fans on the other side of the Delaware when he directed the kitchen at the still-missed Monte Carlo Living Room on South Street. In Collingswood, Patruno hones his mojo even further in a setting reminiscent of a piazza in Italy. Bring a bottle of your favorite Barolo and tuck into dishes like salmon with olives and capers and pappardelle with braised rabbit ragu. But even if you're in the mood for a delicious eggplant parm, Nunzio won't disappoint. — Beth D'Addono