

*Best Bites*  
**AUBURN  
OPELIKA**



# Best Bites

**T**his isn't just any list. Auburn-Opelika's independent restaurateurs and talented chefs have built exceptional dining experiences with specialty dishes you will not find anywhere else. And they don't land here by accident. Every spot in these pages has earned its place, chosen for our visitors and by our visitors. These are the GOATs, the local legends, and the ones that set the standard for YUM.

From Iron Chef and the James Beard Foundation to Garden & Gun, Southern Living, and Wine Spectator, the world is catching on to what we have known all along: the Auburn-Opelika culinary scene is on fire. Along the way you will meet some of our region's most celebrated chefs whose vision and creativity have put this community on the map.

Whether you're looking for a fine dining experience, a neighborhood favorite, or a quick bite that hits the spot, you'll find it here. So dive in, discover something new, and share your favorite with the world. And don't forget the hashtag: #AuburnOpelika



FRONT COVER: LUCY'S | BOTTOM LEFT: ZAZU GASTROPUB | TOP RIGHT: ARICCIA CUCINA



Scan for the full list  
of Best Bites in AO!

# Feeling Fancy?



## 1856 - Culinary Residence

205 South College Street, Auburn  
334-249-4275 | auburn1856.com

Located on the first floor of the Tony & Libba Rane Culinary Science Center, 1856 – Culinary Residence is Auburn University's upscale teaching restaurant where education meets fine dining. Hospitality students from the Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management have the opportunity to prepare and serve under the direction of Chef Joël Antunes, a Michelin-starred chef and James Beard Award winner. Chef Antunes has led kitchens at The Oriental Bangkok, Les Saveurs in London, and others, and most recently served at Le Logis in Cognac.

Set against a stunning backdrop of seasonal, rooftop-garden-sourced herbs and produce overlooking Samford Hall, 1856 – Culinary Residence delivers an ever-changing culinary experience crafted in partnership with Ithaka Hospitality Partners and Auburn University's faculty.

The restaurant also offers immersive experiences such as Tea on Thach, an elevated afternoon tea unique to Auburn on select Sundays. Serving lunch and dinner. Reservations required.



## Ariccia Cucina Italiana

241 South College Street, Auburn  
334-844-5140 | aricciacucina.com

Inspired by a hilltop town of vineyards, palaces, and poets, Ariccia Cucina is a modern Italian escape located in the heart of Auburn. Offering breakfast, brunch, lunch, and dinner 365 days a year, Ariccia has become a favorite among locals and visitors alike.

Guests can enjoy authentic Italian fare in the intimate dining room or al fresco on the patio, experiencing fresh ingredients and house-made pasta. The extensive wine selection, coupled with a full-service bar and lounge, provides an ideal dining experience.

Ariccia favorites include rigatoni Bolognese, spaghetti carbonara, and truffle ravioli, as well as their signature porchetta, featured on the list of 100 Dishes to Eat in Alabama Before You Die. Hearty paninis, wood-fired pizzas, and unique brunch offerings round out the extensive menu options, giving guests a true taste of Italy. Casual yet sophisticated, Ariccia offers something for every palate. Full bar available. Open seven days for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch. Reservations accepted.



## Acre

210 East Glenn Avenue, Auburn  
334-246-3763 | [acreauburn.com](http://acreauburn.com)

Located in downtown Auburn just blocks from Toomer's Corner, Acre blends Southern hospitality with modern sophistication. The restaurant celebrates the harvest of Alabama soil, sourcing responsibly grown ingredients from its on-site gardens and local purveyors. With reclaimed architectural details and an inviting atmosphere, it's a neighborhood gathering place for everything from farm-to-table meals with friends to Sunday brunch with family.

At the helm is Chef David Bancroft, a five-time James Beard Award nominee whose bold, innovative cooking has put Auburn-Opelika on the national food map. Bancroft interprets the flavors of the deep South in a fresh, modern way, bringing seasonal menus to life with artistic presentation and a true sense of place. Fan favorites like the locally sourced charcuterie board highlight his dedication to Alabama's farmers, while creative entrées reflect his vision of "new Alabama cuisine." Acre offers a full bar and serves lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch. Reservations recommended.



*Chef David Bancroft*



## Lucy's

2300 Moores Mill Road, Auburn  
334-521-0391 | [lucysauburn.com](http://lucysauburn.com)

Awarded by guests as the #1 restaurant in Auburn on Trip Advisor, Lucy's is a modern American eatery offering a fresh, approachable spin on the classics. A light and bright bistro, its menu is ever-changing and filled with fresh seafood, locally-farmed meat, and produce. Lucy's is all about shared plates, award-winning cocktails, and a killer wine list with wine on tap. Did we mention their brunch?

Hospitality at Lucy's is warm, welcoming, and one of the many things that sets the restaurant apart. It's truly a community hub and a place for all people and all occasions: Sunday suppers, first dates, anniversaries, big brunches with friends, and casual drinks at the bar. It's simply where locals and those passing through love to be.

**Insider Tip:** Be sure to visit Lucy's sister spots, Little Darling Burger Co. and Wildchild Tacos, located in the Hey Day Market of the Tony & Libba Rane Culinary Science Center.

Full bar featuring skilled mixologists; open daily. Reservations recommended. Private dining and event space available.





## Café 123

123 South 8th Street, Opelika  
334-737-0069 | [cafeonetwentythree.com](http://cafeonetwentythree.com)

A true staple of downtown Opelika's dining scene, Café 123 offers fine dining in the historic Haynie's Drugstore building, where vintage charm meets modern sophistication. Frequently listed among Alabama Tourism's 100 Dishes to Eat Before You Die, it has become a go-to destination for anniversaries, date nights, Sunday brunch, and celebrations of all kinds. White-linen elegance paired with the building's 1950s soda fountain roots creates a one-of-a-kind backdrop that feels both nostalgic and timeless.

At the wheel is Chef Eron Bass, whose culinary creativity and attention to detail have earned Café 123 a loyal following.

His menu highlights Southern and continental classics with modern flair, featuring hand-cut ribeyes, sushi-grade tuna, and seasonal specials that showcase his signature brown

sugar rub. Standout favorites like beer-battered asparagus with lemon aioli and the tableside Caesar salad for two have become signature experiences for guests. With a full bar, polished service, and Chef Bass' ever-evolving menus, Café 123 continues to set the standard for fine dining in Opelika and remains a must-visit for anyone exploring Alabama's culinary landscape. Reservations recommended.



*Chef Eron Bass*

## The Depot

124 Mitcham Avenue,  
Auburn | 334-521-5177  
[allaboardauburn.com](http://allaboardauburn.com)

Set in a restored 1847 train depot in downtown Auburn, The Depot blends historic charm with gulf-coastal flavors and globally inspired cuisine. Once a bustling landmark tied to Auburn's early history, the building has been reimagined as the city's premier seafood brasserie by Executive Chef Scott Simpson, alongside Matt and Jana Poirier, who also own The Hound. Chef Simpson brings more than 30 years of international culinary experience to The Depot, shaped by his Mexican and Italian heritage and training in Florence and Napa Valley. His career includes leadership roles with Marriott and Capella Hotels, as well as opening acclaimed restaurants across Europe, South America, India, and the Caribbean. At The Depot, Simpson channels his global expertise into menus that highlight fresh gulf seafood and inventive, worldly flavors while staying rooted in Southern hospitality. Signature offerings such as fresh oysters, whole fish presentations, and creative daily specials showcase his skill for blending coastal tradition with international flair. With its historic setting, vibrant menu, and warm hospitality, The Depot delivers a dining experience unlike anywhere else in Auburn. Reservations recommended.



*Chef Scott Simpson*



# Tried & True



## Amsterdam Cafe

410 South Gay Street, Auburn\* | 334-826-8181  
1850 Shug Jordan Parkway, Auburn | 334-209-1587  
2301 Ogletree Village Lane, Auburn | 334-209-1599  
[amsterdamcafe.com](http://amsterdamcafe.com)

An Auburn tradition, Amsterdam Café offers a relaxed, stylish setting with menus that span seasonal specials, fresh seafood, and award-winning sandwiches. With a full bar, terrace dining, and service for lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch, it remains a local favorite for gatherings big and small.



## Bow & Arrow

1977 East Samford Avenue, Auburn  
334-246-2546 | [bowandarrowbbq.com](http://bowandarrowbbq.com)

From Chef David Bancroft of Acre, Bow & Arrow is where South Texas barbecue meets Alabama potluck. Smoked meats from the live-fire grill are paired with classic Southern sides like hashbrown casserole, collard greens, and brisket beans, alongside a lineup of Tex-Mex favorites. With a full bar and creative cocktails, it's a casual spot for lunch or dinner. Pickup window available. Reservations not accepted.

## Dough Pizzeria

104 South 8th Street, Opelika  
334-203-1370

Historic downtown Opelika's Dough Pizzeria is known for its handcrafted, wood-fired pizzas with crisp, smoky crusts and fresh, high-quality ingredients. The menu highlights Neapolitan-style favorites like the Margherita and Carnivore alongside fresh salads, appetizers, and rotating seasonal specials. With its cozy, relaxed atmosphere, Dough is a local favorite for both casual meals and nights out. Serving lunch and dinner, with takeout and delivery available.



## Hamilton's

174 East Magnolia Avenue, Auburn | 334-887-2677  
1849 Ogletree Road, Auburn | 334-329-5886  
[hamiltonsgroup.com](http://hamiltonsgroup.com)

Hamilton's on Magnolia offers an intimate, casual atmosphere that's made it a favorite destination in historic downtown Auburn for over a decade. The menu consists of diverse, contemporary American selections. Appetizers, salads, and sandwiches are available throughout the day. Whether dining for pleasure, business, or hosting a special event, Hamilton's will make a lasting impression. Patio dining and full bar available with daily drink specials. Serving lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch. Check out their second location at Moore's Mill! Reservations not accepted.



## The Hound

124 Tichenor Avenue, Auburn  
334-246-3300  
[thehound-auburn.com](http://thehound-auburn.com)

The Hound is known for over-the-top American classics, heritage pork bacon, top-shelf bourbon, and 28 craft beers on tap in downtown Auburn. Chef Robbie Nicholaison delivers seasonal menus with hearty favorites like meatloaf, wild-game sausage, thick-cut chops, and famous bread pudding. With its lodge-style atmosphere and standout weekend brunch, The Hound remains a local favorite. Full bar available. Serving lunch, dinner, and brunch. Reservations recommended.



*Chef Robbie Nicholaison*



## The Waverly Local

1465 Patrick Street, Waverly  
334-539-6077 | [thewaverlylocal.com](http://thewaverlylocal.com)

Just outside Auburn in the town of Waverly, The Waverly Local is a destination where Southern charm and culinary creativity meet. Housed in Alabama's first Ford dealership, the restaurant serves seasonally inspired dishes that highlight the region's heritage, from gulf seafood to bacon-wrapped Wickles okra. With a focus on fresh, local ingredients and a welcoming atmosphere, it is a must-visit for anyone seeking a distinctive dining experience. Reservations recommended.



## Niffer's Place

1151 Opelika Road, Auburn  
334-821-3118 | [niffersplace.com](http://niffersplace.com)

Niffer's Place opened in 1991 with good food for an excellent value in a fun atmosphere. Niffer's loves even the pickiest of eaters, offering everything from wings, nachos, huge salads, and ½ pound burgers to grilled chicken, steamed veggies, pasta, a kid's menu, desserts, and more. Full bar and patio dining available. Open daily for lunch and dinner. Reservations not accepted.



## Zazu Gastropub

112 South 8th Street, Opelika  
334-203-1747 | [zazuopelika.com](http://zazuopelika.com)

Set in a beautifully restored, downtown Opelika building, Zazu Gastropub combines rustic character with a welcoming, laid-back atmosphere. Chef Graham Hage crafts "fine dining" comfort food with global inspiration, made from scratch and sourced from local partners like Opelika Grows and Oakview Farms. The menu ranges from creative pub bites to elevated entrées, all paired with a full bar and wide craft beer selection. Serving lunch and dinner. Reservations accepted.



# Quick & Cravable

## Auburn Plaza Bar & Lounge

1188 Opelika Road, Auburn (Midtown)

334-521-0074 | [auburnplaza.com](http://auburnplaza.com)

From the team behind Waverly Local, Auburn Plaza is a lively Midtown spot for quick & creative cuisine, cocktails, and weekend brunch. With a casual space that flows outdoors, it's perfect for lunch, dinner, or drinks with friends. Live music and events often add to the upbeat vibe, making it a go-to for gathering with a crowd.

## Byron's Smokehouse

436 Opelika Road, Auburn

334-887-9981 | [byronsmokehouse.com](http://byronsmokehouse.com)

A local favorite since 1989, Byron's Smokehouse serves pit-cooked pork, chicken, sausage, and ribs alongside classic sandwiches, salads, and home-cooked sides. Breakfast is a standout, making this spot a go-to for Southern comfort any time of day. It's fast, friendly, and filled with regulars who know it's some of the best BBQ around.

## Hey Day Market

211 South College Street, Auburn

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

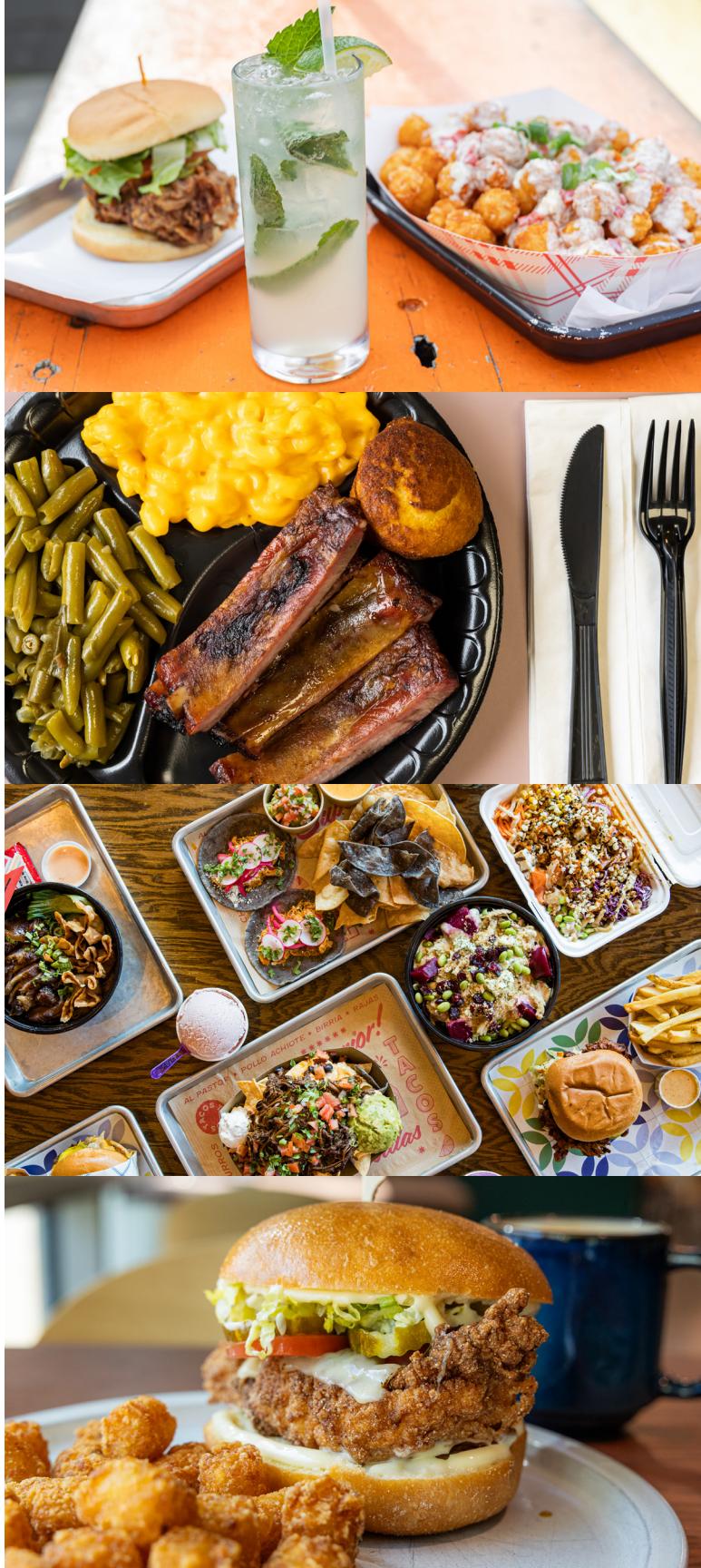
Auburn's vibrant food hall features nine creative vendors, a coffee roastery, taproom, and full bar inside a bright, communal space next to the Rane Culinary Science Center. From poke bowls and tacos to pizza and gelato, it's the go-to for a quick bite or a relaxed hangout. With a greenspace and regular events, Hey Day is a favorite for all ages.

## Corner Office

540 Devall Drive Suite 103, Auburn

334-649-7400 | [cornerofficeauburn.com](http://cornerofficeauburn.com)

From the creators of The Hound and The Depot, this eclectic café in Auburn's Research Park serves up coffee, pastries, and all-day breakfast and lunch. Favorites include the fried green tomato sandwich, shrimp & grits, creative build-your-own breakfast sandwiches, plus rotating chef specials each weekday. A perfect spot for casual meetups, work lunches, or just a thoughtful mid-day bite.





## Chuck's Bar-B-Que

905 Short Avenue, Opelika  
334-749-4043 | [chucksbbqofopelika.com](http://chucksbbqofopelika.com)

An Opelika mainstay since 1976, Chuck's serves up classic Southern barbecue with a tangy mustard-based sauce and pit-cooked meats like pork, chicken, turkey, and ribs. Quick and welcoming, it's a go-to for plates, sandwiches, wraps, loaded taters, and comforting sides all in a family-friendly, casual setting. Dine in, take out, or catering, Chuck's delivers Southern flavor without the fuss.



## The Irritable Bao

127 East Magnolia Avenue, Auburn  
334-329-7009 | [theirritablebao.com](http://theirritablebao.com)

Don't let the name fool you, this downtown Auburn favorite serves some of the best bao in the South. Known for long lines and a menu that changes daily, it's a casual spot where authentic Chinese flavors draw crowds to Toomer's Corner. Follow on social media for the day's offerings, then get in line for fast service and seriously delicious food await. Online ordering available.



## Mrs. Story's Dairy Bar

1900 Pepperell Parkway, Opelika  
334-749-1719

An Auburn-Opelika tradition since 1952, Mrs. Story's Dairy Bar is famous for its milkshakes, ice cream, and homemade chili dogs served from a classic 1950s walk-up on Pepperell Parkway. Now run by the third generation of the Story family, it's still the spot for fresh, no-frills "fast" food that never goes out of style. Serving lunch and dinner.



## Pannie-George's Kitchen

2328 South College Street #6, Auburn  
334-821-4142 | [panniegeorgeskitchen.com](http://panniegeorgeskitchen.com)

A beloved cafeteria-style spot named for the owners' grandparents, Pannie-George's Kitchen serves Southern comfort food with a family touch. The menu changes daily, but legendary fried chicken is always on the line alongside favorites like catfish, meatloaf, mac & cheese, and banana pudding. Serving lunch and dinner.

# Can't Get Enough?

*Neither can we.*



BIG BLUE BAGEL

## Big Blue Bagel

A downtown Auburn favorite for decades, Big Blue Bagel offers fresh bagels, hearty breakfasts, and stacked sandwiches making it a go-to for a quick, satisfying bite.

## Botanic

Part restaurant, part café, part greenhouse, Botanic is unlike anywhere else. With ever-changing menus and spaces, it's a destination you will want to explore again and again.



BOTANIC

## Butcher Paper BBQ

Simple, classic, and satisfying, Butcher Paper BBQ delivers Southern barbecue with all the homemade sides you crave. The laid-back atmosphere and smoky aroma make it a must-try for BBQ purists.

## Pho Lee

Pho Lee offers fresh flavors of Vietnam with steaming bowls of pho, crispy egg rolls, and other specialties. Each dish is made to order with herbs, spices, and rich broth that keep regulars coming back.

## Savanh Thai Kitchen

Savanh Thai Kitchen delivers bold, authentic Thai flavors with curries, stir-fries, and noodle dishes prepared fresh to order. It's a casual and reliable favorite.



SAVANH THAI KITCHEN

## Sheila C's Burger Barn

For over 20 years, Sheila C's has been serving distinctive, juicy hamburgers with thick-cut fries and sweet tea. Simple, fast, and no-frills, it's a longtime favorite for a satisfying burger.

## Sword & Skillet

Sword & Skillet may be a food truck, but its permanent Midtown spot delivers fine dining fare with Pacific Island fusion flair.



SWORD & SKILLET

## Vendori's Italian Restaurant

Vendori's serves generous portions of classic Italian cuisine in a cozy setting. The family-friendly menu features pastas, seafood, and buttery garlic rolls.



Scan for the full list of dining options in AO!



*D*iscover Auburn-Opelika's food trails and taste your way through some of our favorite bites. Scan the QR codes to start exploring.



### **Burger Trail**

From classic patties to chef-inspired stacks, follow the trail to the area's best burgers.



### **Pimento Cheese Trail**

Spread it, dip it, or melt it – this Southern staple shines in countless delicious ways.



### **Lemonade Trail**

Cool off with creative, lemonade-themed treats that are as refreshing as they are fun.

This information is proudly presented by Auburn-Opelika Tourism, a non-profit service organization positively impacting our local economy and improving the quality of life in our community through tourism and travel.

**AUBURN  
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tourism

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