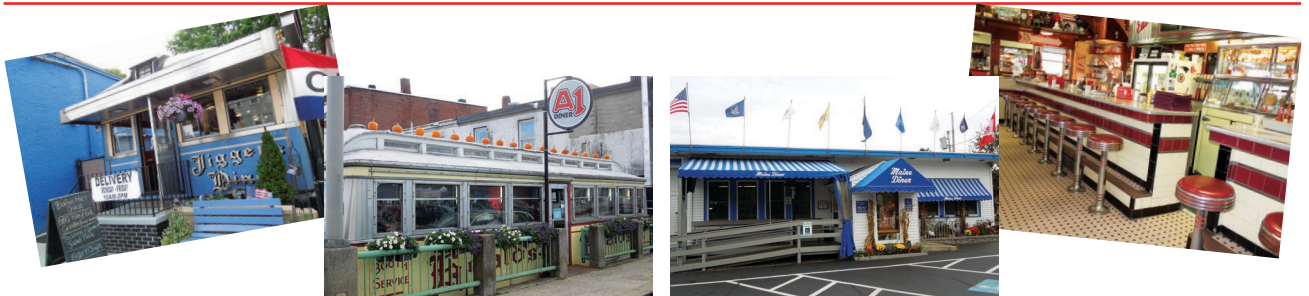


BEST 15 DINERS IN NEW ENGLAND

for

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New England is the birthplace of the American diner. It's also where diners and diner cuisine have developed most fully over the years. From the lunch wagons of 1870s Providence, Rhode Island, to the gleaming steel-and-glass palaces of today, New England diners have long served as community gathering places, offering comfort food at affordable prices in a warm, home-like atmosphere. Food and travel writer Mike Urban, author of *The New England Diner Cookbook* (Countryman Press, 2014) has visited dozens of these iconic eateries throughout the six-state region. Here are his picks for the top fifteen New England diners.



O'Rourke's Diner

After rising from the ashes of a devastating fire in 2006, this diner has galvanized its reputation as the best in New England. Owner Brian O'Rourke's Irish heritage shines through in such menu items as the Dubliner Omelet, corned beef hash, and Irish Soda Bread. (The diner does all its own baking.) Another not-to-miss dish is the Steamed Cheeseburger, a central Connecticut specialty. Brian is constantly innovating in his kitchen, and every day features some hitherto unheard of (and unforgettable) dish springing from his creative mind and showcasing the freshest of carefully selected local ingredients. *Middletown, CT. 860-346-6101; orourkesmiddletown.com*

Agawam Diner

This place epitomizes the way a good diner (or any restaurant, for that matter) should be run. Housed in a compact, stainless steel, 1950s Fodero diner car, the Agawam efficiently serves up a very basic and very excellent menu of diner classics, such as meat loaf, pot roast, upside-down chicken pie, omelets, pancakes—and its most famous item: pies. Co-owner Bubba Galanis bakes more than forty of them each day, and many end up in the display cases on either side of the kitchen door. Come here for the soul-satisfying comfort food, but be sure to stay for the pie! *Rowley, MA. 978-948-7780*



A1 Diner

Perched on metal stilts on a hillside some twenty feet above a parking lot, the A1's precarious position in the world belies its reputation as the most gourmet diner in New England. Co-owner Michael Giberson is constantly innovating in the kitchen of his 1940s Worcester diner car, coming up with such dishes as Syrian Cod Cakes in a Spiced Tomato Sauce; Lamb with Eggplant Curry; and Spinach with Dates, Red Onions, and Sumac-smoked Pita. You may also enjoy regular diner food, such as a plate of beans and franks or the A1's famous fresh-ground beef burger with hand-cut french fries. *Gardiner, ME. 207-582-4804; a1diner.com*

Modern Diner

Back in the late 1970s, the Modern was the first diner to make it onto the National Register of Historic Places. This 1940s Sterling Streamliner diner, owned by chef Nick Demou, is best known these days for its amazing weekend brunches. With such dishes as Linguica Hash Benedict; Lobster Cheese Grits; and a Sun-Dried Tomato, Caramelized Onion, and Feta Cheese Omelet, the Modern attracts devotees from Providence to Boston and all points between. The straight-up diner food is also excellent, especially the home-cooked meat loaf and the liver and onions. *Pawtucket, RI. 401-726-8390*



The Maine Diner

More than 6 million customers have enjoyed the fine cooking at this famous southern Maine eatery since it first opened its doors the early 1980s. Brothers Myles and Dick Henry started with their grandmother's recipes for dishes such as Lobster Pie, Red Flannel Hash, and New England Boiled Dinner, and they expanded the menu from there. Myles's Seafood Chowder is nationally renowned, and the fried clams, cod cakes, and baked stuffed haddock further elevate the diner's reputation for great, fresh seafood. Out back is a three-acre garden that provides the Maine with plenty of fresh produce throughout much of the year. *Wells, ME. 207-646-4441; mainediner.com*



Sonny's Blue Benn Diner

“Vegetarian” is the watchword at this southern Vermont eatery, which has been serving numerous meat-free dishes since the late 1970s, well ahead of the mainstream vegetarian movement. Sonny and Marylou Monroe have been owners of this Silk City diner since 1974, pioneering such dishes as Sonny’s Scrambled Tofu, Veggie Enchiladas, and Raspberry Crunch French Toast. Each day, there are more specials than items on the menu—indicative of a busy and innovative kitchen. *Bennington, VT. 802-442-5140*

Betsy's Diner

Betsy’s stainless steel, glass, and neon facade stands in stark contrast to the clapboard-dominant architecture in the Cape Cod town of Falmouth. The 1957 Mountain View diner car, moved here from Pennsylvania in the early 1990s, is nonetheless wildly popular with locals and tourists alike. Known for its family-friendly atmosphere (many of the waitresses first came to the diner as children with their parents), Betsy’s lives by the motto “Eat Heavy.” All the dishes are oversized, and no one goes home hungry. Try the Bay Scallop Chowder, Albert’s Fried Chicken, or the Fish Cakes with Baked Beans to get a real taste of down-home Cape Cod cooking. *Falmouth, MA. 508-540-0060*



Dottie's Diner

The rock ‘n’ roll retro décor of this eatery pairs 1950s kitsch with excellent home-made diner food—along with what may be the best home-made doughnuts in New England. Owner Dorie Sperry and her crew bake up fresh batches every morning. Other menu highlights include homemade coffee cake, piping hot chicken pot pie, an excellent meat loaf, and a gaudy lemon meringue pie. For the more refined crowd, there’s pan-seared sea bass and a healthy, flavorful vegetable risotto. *Woodbury, CT. 203-263-2516; dottiesdiner.com*

Jigger's Hill and Harbour Diner

This beautifully restored 1950s Worcester diner car sits on one of the prettiest Main Streets in New England. Karie and Steve Head have breathed new life into this establishment, and they’ve come up with a wonderful menu that’s a bit gourmet and completely Rhode Island. The Lemon Ricotta-stuffed French Toast with Blueberry Compote is a good breakfast choice, as is the Corned Beef Eggs Benedict. Be sure to try the coffee cabinet—a milkshake-like beverage containing coffee ice cream, coffee syrup, and milk—a Rhode Island original. *East Greenwich, RI. 401-884-6060; jiggersdiner.com*



Red Arrow Diner

This New Hampshire classic is open 24/7/365 and is a must-stop for all politicians barnstorming the state during the New Hampshire primaries. There’s a long, dimly lit counter covered with nameplates of the politicians who have bellied up there over the years. The servers are renowned for their speed and cheerfulness. What’s to eat? Try the hash-brown specials—potatoes grilled with onions and your choices of eggs, veggies, and meat. And their deceptively simple chili scores high on the flavor scale. First-time customers are “de-virginized” with the ring of a bell behind the counter and the affixing of a sticker on each newly de-virginized customer. *Manchester, NH. 603-626-1118; redarrowdiner.com*



Moody's Diner

A waystation on mid-coast Maine's U.S. Highway 1 since the 1930s, this third-generation Moody family institution is known far and wide for its magnificent pies. Still using co-founder Bertha Moody's lard-laden piecrust recipe, you can't go wrong with any pie ordered here. The chocolate cream pie has been voted the most popular by customers, but Moody's four-berry pie and walnut pie aren't far behind in the voting. Other dishes of note include fresh doughnuts made daily and the half-pound Percy Burger, named after co-founder Percy Moody. Moxie soda is the drink of choice here. *Waldoboro, ME. 207-832-7785; moodysdiner.com*

4 Aces Diner

Camouflaged beneath a red clapboard building, this 1952 Worcester diner car serves up heaping helpings of comfort food during the week then turns gourmet on weekends, when it caters to the students and faculty of nearby Dartmouth College. To illustrate, one of the most popular weekday dishes is a four-cheese grilled cheese sandwich; on weekends customers clamor for such delicacies as the Pan-Seared Tuna Cake Eggs Benedict. The 4 Aces makes fresh doughnuts daily, and on weekends only, there's a maple-glazed sour cream doughnut that's cut in half, tossed on the grill, and served with hot maple syrup and whipped cream. *West Lebanon, NH. 603-298-5515; 4acesdiner.com*



Becky's Diner

Becky's sits hard by Portland, Maine's commercial fishing docks on Hobson's Wharf in a nondescript, two-story, shingle-sided building. Yet the understated diner more than holds its own in this food-crazed city. Owner Becky Rand started her namesake diner as a breakfast place for fisherman; it's now open nearly round the clock, serving three meals and lots of baked goods throughout the day and night to a devoted local crowd. The diner roasts fresh turkeys every day, serving up Thanksgiving-type meals year-round. Becky's Atlantic Haddock Chowdah is just one example of the fine seafood to be had here. *Portland, ME. 207-773-7070; beckysdiner.com*

Chelsea Royal Diner

This charming Worcester-car diner is located on a two-lane highway in rural southern Vermont and is known for its slavish devotion to locally sourced food. With a two-acre garden in back and surrounded by farm country, the Chelsea Royal is never far from its food sources, and it shows in the cooking. Try the Turkey Croquettes or the grass-fed beef burger with grilled onions. All the breakfast egg dishes are farm fresh, including the famed Cajun Breakfast Skillet. Be sure to sample the home-made ice cream at the seasonal stand that's attached to the diner. *West Brattleboro, VT. 802-254-8399; chelsearoyaldiner.com*



Laurel Diner

Corned beef hash is the signature dish at this modest, whitewashed western Connecticut diner. Owner Pete Homick has perfected his hash recipe over the years, and it's the centerpiece of many of the diner's breakfast platters. Another must-have at breakfast is the Cinnamon Raisin French Toast, a fluffy cinnamon bun cut in half, dipped in an egg wash, and lightly browned on Pete's famous griddle. The lunchtime sandwich of choice is the hefty BBQ Bacon and Onion Ring Burger. For those seeking something a bit lighter, try the vegetarian Laurel Omelet, with fresh spinach, red bell pepper, mushrooms, and feta cheese. *Southbury, CT. 203-264-8218*