



Best of L.A.: Burgers

By L.A. Weekly

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BEST BACON-AND-AVOCADO BURGER



If you're old enough to remember your parents taking you to a restaurant without consulting a Zagat for fear of choosing the "wrong" place, or not even thinking to ask who designed the interior, and you yearn for that kind of simplicity, **Howard's** is for you. If you were part of the more progressive, health-conscious generation born thereafter, and your mom never let your precious lips touch white bread, Howard's is for you. Now's your chance to experience this untouched-by-time diner, squat in the middle of an unattractive strip mall without a Starbucks (is that possible?) — where you can park right in front of the restaurant! — just like people did in the olden days. And for \$5.35 you can get what the place is famous for: a gooey, drippy bacon and avocado burger tasting of the grill. It puts the Carl's Jr. version to shame. For \$3.99 you'll get a classic BLT with four— count 'em—four slices of glistening bacon on toasted white bread. And trans fats be damned, here you can get the unadulterated full-fat version of French Fries (\$2.10). In case you've got to know: Décor is by Howard. Go before it all becomes extinct. 11127 Venice Blvd., Ste. 7, Culver City. (310) 838-9111.

—Heidi Dvorak

BEST BARGAIN-BASEMENT BURGER

Hawkins House of Burgers is most famous, perhaps, for its **Hawkins Special**, a truly absurd and behemoth creation consisting of three one-pound burger patties, cheese, bacon, chilies, onions, tomatoes, lettuce, fried eggs, pastrami, mustard, a butterflied hot dog, pickles and mayo. It weighs in at five pounds, costs sixteen bucks, and comes with fries and a soda. I'm not sure exactly how many people the monstrosity feeds, but let's hope it's more than one. Yet, while The Special is their claim to fame, it probably shouldn't be. Where else in Los Angeles can you pick up a delicious double cheese burger, an *enormous* pile of nicely prepared chili cheese fries and a tallboy of Olde English for around five bucks? Also, if you're *really* looking for a bargain, there's usually a guy on the patio outside selling bootleg DVDs for a dollar (not that we recommend that sort of behavior). And while you're there, take the opportunity to visit the Watts Towers just down the way. 11603 Slater St., Watts. (323) 563-1129.

—Noah Galuten

MOST REASONABLE BURGER

Let the economists rail against deflation, but if it means better-tasting burgers at great prices, bring it on! The Park, an Echo Park bistro-style restaurant, offers an unbeatable budget-friendly deal on Wednesdays, when the \$5 Burger Nite gives you one of their juicy and fresh-tasting burgers, plus a side of salad or crisp fries, for half off. The sumptuous, six-ounce burgers come in sirloin or veggie versions. Add another seven bucks and you can get dessert (go with the crisp apple tart with ice cream – all else is folly) and call it a real dinner. The adventuresome Park, the year-and-a-half-old child of chef Joshua Siegel, may not be the kind of place associated with a heartland standard such as hamburger, but its nonchalant air and somewhat spare ambience provides the suitable atmosphere to enjoy this comeback dish without the rush and clatter of fast-food joints or stuffy attitude of high-end establishments. The Park sponsors another great deal, Speakeasy Tuesdays, where three-course meals clock in at \$15. 1400 Sunset Blvd., L.A. (213) 482-9209.

—Steven Mikulan

BEST PUB BURGER

A juicy \$10 angus burger with sweet smoked onion marmalade, cheddar and garlic aioli sound like the grilled goods at pretty much every other fancy burger joint in town. The rub at **Simmzy's**, a new Manhattan Beach joint, is this burger's big enough to share. Well almost, if you also get the skinny fries that are piled so high into a paper-lined metal bucket you could easily share with the folks at one of the tightly packed tables next to you. The brioche bun on the burger is the perfect thickness for sopping up the juicy mess of meat and marmalade – and the interesting rotating selection of craft beers to wash it down with are worth another sip. Plus there's an unadvertised free bonus at the tiny open-air space overlooking Manhattan Beach Boulevard. You can soak up all the weekend hubbub and beach chit-chat you can handle, surfboards and string bikinis included, without having to actively participate yourself. 229 Manhattan Beach Blvd., Manhattan Beach. (310) 546-1201, simmzys.com.

—Jenn Garbee

BEST MACROBIOTIC VEGAN BURGER

In 1993, chef Eric Lechasseur's wife became ill. In an effort to help cure her, he began cooking and experimenting with macrobiotics. Well, the diet seemed to work, and Lechasseur has since become a private chef to health-conscious stars like Madonna, Sting, Leonardo DiCaprio and Tobey Maguire. Eventually, he opened Seed Kitchen in Venice, a low key, order-at-the-counter joint with a wide range of macrobiotic, vegan dishes. They serve many "burgers," but the best is probably the BBQ tempeh, a large and completely filling creation, served on a crispy seven-grain sourdough roll with a side of coleslaw. Tempeh is a soybean cake that offers more protein, fiber and vitamins than tofu, and while it can often be a fairly wretched tasting item, at Seed, it's slathered in a slightly sweet BBQ sauce and balanced out with tomato, lettuce, vegemaise and a crunchy slice of red onion. It may be difficult to eat without causing a mess, but that can be a welcome development to vegans out there who miss the slop, dripping fun that comes along with a juicy ball of dead cow. The fries, cooked in rice bran oil, hold up surprisingly well, but must be eaten quickly to retain their best qualities. 1604 Pacific Ave., Venice. (310) 396-1604, seedkitchen.com.

—Noah Galuten

BEST PUG AND AWE BURGER

What the pug burger at **Hungry Cat** lacks in structural integrity it more than makes up in sheer awesomeness, both of size and flavor. In fact, the glory of the pug is that it manages to be one of L.A.'s best burgers despite the point deduction for ridiculousness. It's a big fucker, maybe only consumable in the traditional way by John Madden, Steven Tyler or Sandra Bernhard. The rest of us have to concede, remove the top bun for later and eat the organic Niman Ranch ground beef, house-smoked bacon, avocado and Danish bleu cheese with a knife and fork like a little baby. More advisable, of course, is to manhandle the thing into your mouth while your friends look on in horror. If you squeeze it, the bacon will grind its way into the meat, the avocado will smush, and the muscular, no-bullshit bleu will spackle the very essence of the Pug. You will get cheese and grease all over your face. Keep going, sexy, you haven't even noticed the grilled brioche, a sturdy roll strong enough to contain the carnage. The pug burger comes with a pile of fries that you could share with your friends, but won't. *1535 Vine St., Hlywd. (323) 462-2155, thehungrycat.com.*

—Randall Roberts

BEST NONSERBIAN TURKEY BURGER

With a great menu of Serbian food, why talk about **Metro Café's** turkey burger? Because when you don't feel like the awesome Serbian salad (sometimes with my own twist, ahi tuna), or the white-bean-and-ham soup (from proprietor Sasa Stankovic's mother's recipe), or the zucchini pancakes or goulash or chevapchichi, and you just feel like some comfort food, you should go for the turkey burger. It may not be making the rounds of the food blogs, and it's neither as exciting nor as rich as the big Ron (bacon-and-bleu-cheese) burger, but there's just something about it: a good-sized patty of turkey mixed with onion and garlic powders, finely ground walnuts, olive oil and bread crumbs, topped with Stankovic's roasted bell pepper aoli. Add a slice of onion and tomato, some lettuce and a side of fries (the sweet potato version are great, but the plain are good, too), and you get what you need: a simple, dependable pleasure. Tomorrow you can order something more interesting, more international, but today you'll leave satisfied and oh so American. As in fat and happy. *11188 Washington Place, Culver City. (310) 559-6821, metrocafela.com.*

—Tom Christie