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DISCOVER



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FREE

HOT LIPS

DINING, PRESENTS AND PARTIES FOR SINGLES AND COUPLES ON VALENTINE'S DAY.

17-21

'The Metromaniacs' has audiences and critics cheering. **Details on page 2**



San Diego's best fried chicken

BY PAM KRAGEN

Three months ago today, the Crack Shack opened in Little Italy. The hip fried chicken eatery developed by "Top Chef" judge/winner Richard Blais and owner Mike Rosen has elevated crispy poultry to new heights in San Diego, but it's far from the only local cluck-stop on the map. For our guide to San Diego's top spots for fried chicken, we excluded the national fast-food chains and wing spots (which are more about the sauce) to focus on dishes that celebrate the basic bird. Here are our picks for the top 25 fried chicken dishes in town:

The Crack Shack

1 Chicken comes a multitude of ways at this stylish outdoor eatery, but the best is the signature fried chicken plate. Five pieces of juicy, flavorful Jidori chicken (organic, free-range, California-raised) are dredged in a tongue-tickling secret seasoning and fried to a not-too-thick, not-too-crunchy finish (\$15). Make room for the buttery biscuits or sample the creamy chicken oysters, served on skewers. *2266 Kettner Blvd., Little Italy. \$7 valet parking. (619) 795-3299 or crack-shack.com.*

StreetCar Merchants

2 This trendy North Park corner cafe serves some of the finest fried chicken anywhere. Prepare to wait a half-hour for the made-to-order dish, but we promise it's worth it. The savory, almost bakery-fine crust has a nice salty crunch, and there's zero grease underneath. The Mary's free-range chicken is juicy, sweet and tender. There are twice-fried Korean and Nashville hot and spicy varieties, but my money's on the traditional Southern Fried, which can be dressed up with a honey pecan glaze, if you like. *4002 30th St., North Park. (619) 546-9010 or streetcarmERCHANTS.com*

Felix's BBQ with Soul

3 The recipe for Felix Berry's Alabama Fried Chicken is closely guarded, but servers say the chicken is brined overnight and dredged in Louisiana-style seasoning before being fried to a perfect brown, never-greasy crunch. It's the slightly spicy, finger-licking seasoning that you'll crave. Orders are



NANCEE E. LEWIS

The Crack Shack's tasty chicken made our list for the hottest wings spots in town.

made from scratch and require 15 minutes of well-rewarded patience. *342 Euclid Ave., southeastern San Diego, (619) 546-9120. 3613 Ocean Ranch Blvd., Oceanside, (760) 439-7072. felixbbq.com*

Coop's West Texas BBQ/Da Chicken Coop

4 Bradrick Cooper's fried chicken is acclaimed as the best in town, but it's not on the menu and appears only occasionally as a special. Fortunately, demand for Coop's chicken—which won first place in a countywide cook-off last summer—will soon have its own place to shine. Da Chicken Coop is set to open next week in the same shopping center. His secret is marinating the chicken in buttermilk (which gives the chicken a tangy flavor and thickens the crust), then seasoning it liberally with garlic salt before it's dredged in secret seasonings and flour and fried. *2625 Lemon Grove Ave., Lemon Grove. (619) 589-0478 or coopsbq.com*

Tender Greens

5 The Southern Fried Chicken is surely the most fattening thing on this healthy eatery's menu, but it's also the best. Ultra-tender boneless white and dark meat is marinat-

ed in buttermilk and rolled in a savory seasoning with rosemary and thyme. It's available as part of an entree spinach salad or plated with mashed potatoes and small side salad. \$11.50. *Multiple locations. tendergreens.com*

Zymology 21

6 From the creators of Cafe 21, this science-themed cocktail bar has recently revamped its menu to offer more creative farm-to-table fare. One of its best-sellers is the chicken and waffles, which is one of the very best of its kind in San Diego. Tender, free-range organic chicken breast is brined for 48 hours in buttermilk then dredged in flour, salt, pepper and rosemary and lightly fried and served with a savory herbed cheddar waffle. The finishing touch is a serrano chili/lime agave syrup (served in test tubes) that's sweet on the tongue but leaves your lips tingling. Available all day, it's \$15 and could serve two hungry people. *750 Fifth Ave., Gaslamp Quarter. (619) 546-9321 or facebook.com/zymology21*

Solace & the Moonlight Lounge

7 Available only as a Sunday night special, chef Matt Gor-

don's buttermilk fried Jidori chicken is a mountain of Southern goodness. Five pieces of crispy chicken are stacked on a bed of organic creamy grits with tender-crisp green beans and topped with a drizzle of country-style sausage gravy and a palate-cleansing arugula salad. The chicken is brined in buttermilk and dipped in a rich, spicy seasoning batter that includes Worcestershire and Tabasco sauces. The deep-brown crust is like no other in town, and the meal easily feeds two. \$21.50. *25 E. E St., Encinitas. (760) 753-2433 or eatatolace.com*

Rakiraki Ramen

8 Chef Junya Watanabe's chicken karaage (a traditional Japanese pub appetizer) is unfortunately addictive. The chicken is marinated in soy sauce, sesame oil and curry extract, then dipped in egg batter, rolled in wheat starch and fried in canola oil. It's ultra-tender and savory and has a soft but satisfying crunch. The house dipping sauces (ponzu and spicy mayo) add some kick. A \$6.25 starter order will feed a hungry crew.

4646 Convoy St., Kearny Mesa. (858) 573-2400 or rakirakiramen.com

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