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Food

The 25 best sandwiches in the D.C. area

By Tim Carman | June 16, 2021



(Photos by Rey Lopez for The Washington Post; food styling by Lisa Cherkasky for The Washington Post)

I hate to personify an inanimate object, but I think we owe the sandwich a debt of gratitude.

The sandwich helped save restaurants. It fed us when we couldn't stomach the thought of preparing another pantry-surprise supper. It reminded us that its basic architecture — a foundation of bread, tiers of strategically placed fillings and a second, low-slope roof of bread — was blueprint enough to build magnificent handheld meals. These feats of sandwich engineering were, at times, so sublime they offered hope, even during the darkest days of 2020: They told us that the pandemic may have destroyed our favorite chefs' livelihoods, but it couldn't snuff out their creativity.

The sandwich pop-ups/ghost kitchens became a byproduct of the pandemic. They were, in many ways, survival tools, but they also expanded a D.C. sandwich scene already packed with terrific options. Accounting for them all is no easy task, but I tried. Scrolling back through [the photos on my phone](#), I see that I sampled 139 sandwiches for this guide, and that doesn't include the ones I tried more than once, just to make sure they were worthy contenders.

This list is comprehensive, but imperfect. I wanted diversity: in cuisines, in locations, in the types of bread used as the base. But I also placed restrictions on the hunt for my 25 favorites. I didn't include hot dogs or hamburgers, which seem in classes of their own. I also didn't include [fried chicken sandwiches](#) or [cheesesteaks](#), both of which I had covered recently. What's more, I decided that burritos are not sandwiches. True sandwiches gladly let you see their fillings without cutting into them or unfurling them, as if offering a window into their soul.

These rules, however arbitrary, resulted in a guide in which some famous names did not make the cut. It doesn't mean you can no longer find a decent sandwich at [A. Litteri](#), [the Italian Store](#), [MGM Roast Beef](#) or other places with great pedigrees. It just means they may no longer be the best in class. Or that they just have a lot more competition.

MUFF-A-LOTTA

– from Bayou Bakery –



If you order a Muff-A-Lotta at Bayou Bakery, the odds are good your sandwich will be 24 hours old, which is exactly how chef and owner David Guas wants it. The kitchen assembles and refrigerates his Muff-A-Lotta the day before diners can actually buy it. The reason is simple: The advance prep allows the olive salad to seep into the bread, spreading its oils and acids deeper into the sandwich. A native of New Orleans, Guas is acutely aware that his take on the muffuletta bucks a few traditions. He, for starters, prefers to serve his warm, to add a little crustiness to his custom-made bread, this dense, seeded Italian roll produced exclusively for the shop by the [French Bread Factory](#). He also likes to mince his olive salad, which he finds easier to spread compared with the chunky version found at, say, [Central Grocery](#), home of the muffuletta. He makes no apologies for his tweaks. He likes it this way, and so do I.

\$9. 1515 N. Courthouse Rd., Arlington, Va. 703-243-2410. bayoubakeryva.com.