

An Enduring Affair with Hot Dogs

September 26, 2023 - edited by: [Jeffrey Spear](#)

Americans have a thing for hot dogs. Called by many names and served with a dizzying variety of toppings, any way you make 'em, we'll eat 'em.



For those of you who remember the Patty Duke Show, a television sitcom that aired on ABC from 1963 to 1966, the opening theme song indicated that “Our Patty loves to rock and roll, A hot dog makes her lose control.” While I wouldn’t say my relationship with the great American frankfurter impacts my state of mind to this degree, I do get excited whenever they’re served at backyard barbeques, from rolling carts on city streets, at sporting events and carnivals. The interesting thing is, I’m not alone.

According to the National Hot Dog and Sausage Council, it is estimated that Americans consume approximately 20 billion hot dogs a year. That’s 20 with a “B” for billion. That’s a lot of hot dogs – about 70 per person per year. With stats like this, I’d say this particular food has earned bragging rights as an indelible part of the American culinary narrative.

While I’m basically an equal opportunity hot dog enthusiast, there are those who believe their hometown dog is the unequivocal best. While I make no assertion that one’s better than the other, these are just a few of the places I’ve visited that serve a damn fine dog. Having grown up in Baltimore, I’ll start there.

BALTIMORE – Mandel Ballow, one of Baltimore’s highly regarded Kosher-style delis, opened in the 1940s. When they made a hot dog, it was two slices of slightly crispy, pan-fried bologna placed in a bun, followed by the hot dog, then

topped with yellow mustard. While that deli is long gone, you can still get a good Baltimore dog at Attman's (attmansdeli.com), the only surviving deli on Baltimore's "Corned Beef Row." As an avid fan of corned beef, coleslaw and Russian dressing sandwiches, it's always a toss up whether I'll get the dog or the sandwich. Frequently, I'll have both.

NEW YORK – You can find hot dogs on just about every corner in Manhattan. Most common are Nathan's (nathansfamous.com) and Sabrett (sabrett.com). While some are sold without any specific brand affiliation, they're all good, especially when served with mustard and sauerkraut. Every now and then I'll find a vendor grilling up coils of Italian sausage. Served with tantalizing mounds of caramelized onions and peppers, getting one of these puppies on freshly baked Italian bread is a real treat. Who needs the Statue of Liberty, Guggenheim Museum or the Empire State Building when you can bliss out on street dogs.

LOS ANGELES – There's always been just one place for hot dogs in Los Angeles – Pinks (www.pinkshollywood.com). Founded by Paul & Betty Pink in 1939 near the major studios, Pink's was popular among producers, directors, movie and TV stars. This modest fast-food stand has grown, becoming an undisputed Hollywood landmark frequented by locals and tourists alike. Pinks now serves

over 2,000 hot dogs and 200 hamburgers a day. My all-time favorite dog is their Chili Dog – a hot dog topped with mustard, chili and onions. Whether for lunch, an afternoon snack, or in the wee hours after a night of carousing, if you're in L.A. and crave a hot dog, Pink's is the place.

WASHINGTON DC – Ben's Chili Bowl (benschilibowl.com), opened in 1958 by Ben Ali, a Trinidadian-born immigrant of Indian descent, is renown for its fresh homemade chili, half smokes and banana pudding. Today it has become a historic landmark in DC and a vital part of DCs black community. For those unfamiliar with half smokes – half-pork and half-beef smoked sausages (they look just like hot dogs), they are a DC phenomenon. You can get them from sidewalk vendors but, when you sit down to a couple of dogs at the counter at Ben's, you are experiencing history.

CHICAGO – Chicago is a city famous for deep dish pizza, Italian beef sandwiches and, most importantly, hot dogs. No matter where you find them, a true Chicago dog is an all-beef dog (many are Vienna Beef brand) served on a poppy seed bun topped with yellow mustard, chopped onions, bright green sweet pickle relish, a dill pickle, sliced tomato, pickled peppers and a dash of celery salt. While you can find them all over town, and even in the airport, a few of the best places include Superdawg, Jimmy's Red Hots, Byron's Hot Dogs and The Wieners Circle.

COSTCO – No matter where you live, Costco hot dogs, sold as a combo deal (with a soda) for \$1.50, have been a favorite among shoppers since the store launched on-premise sales in 1985. While certainly an affordable treat, they are surprisingly good dogs. Along with the store's many loyal hot dog buyers, celebrated American chef Julia Child was known to be a big fan. For me, a trip to Costco always includes a little extra time for a dog or two, even if I have to get them to go and eat them in the car. If you have any doubt about their popularity, sales are rumored to exceed 135 million hot dogs per year.

BASEBALL STADIUMS – According to the song "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," written in 1908 by Jack Norworth and Albert Von Tilzer, baseball is about the game, peanuts and Cracker Jacks. For me, it's the game and the hot dogs. Depending on the city you're in, the dogs served vary from one stadium to the next. For Orioles fans, there are Esskay dogs at Baltimore's Camden Yards, Chicago Cubs fans have Vienna hot dogs at Wrigley Field, Red Sox fans enjoy the Fenway Frank in Boston's Fenway Park, and Brewers fans have the Klement's "Wisconsin Dog" at Miller Park in Milwaukee. I would imagine there's a different dog at every stadium. Could make for an interesting road trip. Any takers?