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DOUG YOUNG

**FRIED CALAMARI** La Tavola Trattoria, Sayville

# Can't-miss signature dishes

## 10 LI favorites and 30 places to find them

BY PETER M. GIANOTTI

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**'D**o you ever have déjà VU, Mrs. Lancaster?"

"I don't think so, but I could check with the kitchen."

This Q&A from "Groundhog Day" could describe the experience at numerous restaurants via countless menus in Nassau and Suffolk.

Some dishes are nearly everywhere and too many taste the same. So, here's a digestible report on 10 signature dishes that have taken hold on Long Island — and the dining rooms where they stand out.

### 1 **FRIED CALAMARI**

Squid could become an endangered species here, grilled, stuffed, stewed or fried. But it's the crisp pile of rings and tentacles that's the big catch.

**Thom Thom in Wantagh** isn't satisfied with merely frying. The kitchen offers kung pao calamari, sauced as if it's chicken in Chinese restaurants, with added crunch from ground peanuts. Who needs a fish house?

*Thom Thom, 3340 Park Ave., Wantagh, 516-221-8022, [thomthomrestaurant.com](http://thomthomrestaurant.com)*

Listed as "hot tapas," fried calamari is a crisp treat at **Cafe Buenos Aires in Huntington**. It arrives with a side of chipotle aioli and vies with Argentine flair amid the ceviche and the stuffed piquillo peppers.

*Cafe Buenos Aires, 23 Wall St., Huntington, 631-603-3600, [cafebuenosaires.net](http://cafebuenosaires.net)*

Italian and Italian-American restaurants elevate squid almost as regularly as pasta. The fried calamari at **La Tavola Trattoria** in Sayville is a very satisfying version, with plenty of crunch outside and tenderness within. Dip the rings in a spicy marinara



sauce or, even better, a riff on sauce rémoulade laced with horseradish.

*La Tavola Trattoria, 183 W. Main St., Sayville, 631-750-6900. latavolasayville.com*

## 2 PASTA WITH WHITE CLAM SAUCE

If there's a leading candidate for the national dish of Long Island, this is it. You'll find it more often than spaghetti and meatballs or lasagna — combined.

An exceptional production will be found at an unlikely source: **Bryant & Cooper**, one of Long Island's top steakhouses. It's a destination for stone crabs in season and lobster anytime, but the buttery, rich linguine with white clam sauce is a major main course. You can precede it with clams oreganata, casino or on the half shell.

*Bryant & Cooper, 2 Middle Neck Rd., Roslyn, 516-627-7270, pollrestaurants.com*

**Jonathan's Ristorante in Huntington** mixes the traditional and the contemporary, Italian with New American. After a fine fritto misto or a salad with beets and robiola cheese, order the expertly made spaghetti with Manila clams and roasted garlic, spurred by the little kick from a very serious habanero chili pepper.

*Jonathan's Ristorante, 15 Wall St., Huntington, 631-549-0055, jonathansristorante.com*

Almost equal parts New American and Italian, **Cafe Testarossa** stylishly zooms along with creative, consistently excellent food. Linguine with Manila clams goes pedal-to-the-metal with Calabrian pepper and basil.

*Cafe Testarossa, 499 Jericho Tpke., Syosset, 516-364-8877, cafetestarossa.com*

## 3 DUCK

Long Island duckling truly is "the big duck," from roadside architecture to a history of duck farming that produced more than 7 million quackers in the 1960s. The number is considerably

lower now. But duck remains a menu staple, from all sources.

The combo of seared duck breast and confit of duck leg is a four-star classic at **Mirabelle**, in the Three Village Inn in Stony Brook. Currently, it's accented with a vol-au-vent of chanterelle mushrooms and corn, pickled cherries and roasted eggplant. The duck liver-and-foie gras mousse with toasted brioche is a lush way to precede it.

*Mirabelle, 150 Main St., Stony Brook, 631-751-0555, lessings.com*

Beijing duck highlights Chinese cuisine. **Monsoon Steak & Sushi** in Babylon prepares one of the best, a whole Peking duck served for two, with cucumber, scallion, hoisin, parchment skin, shredded duck and steamed buns.

*Monsoon Steak & Sushi, 48 Deer Park Ave., Babylon, 631-587-4400, monsoonny.com*

**Lola**, the Mediterranean-

themed restaurant in Great Neck, is committed to duck in many forms. The main dish these days is the seared Hudson Valley duck breast, accompanied by a white-bean ragout and duck bacon, with an herbaceous jus. If you're in a full duck mood, sample the foie gras.

*Lola, 113A Middle Neck Rd., Great Neck, 516-466-5666, restaurantlola.com*

## 4 FRIED CHICKEN

Roast chicken is wonderful and barbecued chicken a treat; grilled chicken, elemental; and chicken potpie, homey. But fried chicken's appeal is unassailable.

Southern cooking is revered at **LL Dent** in Carle Place, a shopping-center restaurant that transports you. The fried chicken is exceptional, served with two side dishes. Fried chicken and Belgian waffles

See FAVORITES on B6



**PASTA WITH WHITE CLAM SAUCE**  
Cafe Testarossa, Syosset



**DUCK**  
Lola, Great Neck

# Feed Me TV Presents THE MAD SCIENTIST OF BURGERS

BBD's in Rocky Point may look like a tame burger joint from the outside, but step inside and it's a shrine to heavy metal, beef and craft beer.

Newsday's new six-part series takes you on a culinary journey to meet the Island's top chefs, discover must-try restaurants and taste everything from just-shucked oysters to tie-dyed pancakes.



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# Where to get LI's favorite dishes

## FAVORITES from B4

will entice you, too. And try the cheese grits, the cornbread, sweet-potato biscuit, Hoppin' John and sweet potato pie.

**LL Dent**, 221 Old Country Rd., Carle Place, 516-742-0940, [lldent.com](http://lldent.com)

**Orient Odyssey** in Jericho ranks high among Long Island's Chinese restaurants, for everything from dim sum to mayonnaise shrimp with sugared walnuts. Deep in the extensive menu is "golden fried crispy chicken," with roasted garlic — a rustic feast.

**Orient Odyssey**, 511 N. Broadway, Jericho, 516-719-0021, [orientodyssey.com](http://orientodyssey.com)

**Salamander's on Front** in Greenport is the destination for memorable fried chicken with coleslaw and cornbread, simple and to the point. Enjoy it with an order of Buffalo-style chicken wings, or quietly pick the Vietnamese caramel duck legs to give another big bird equal time. Outstanding to take out, too.

**Salamander's on Front**, 38 Front St., Greenport, 631-477-3711, [salamandersonfront.com](http://salamandersonfront.com)

**5 PASTA WITH RED SAUCE** The sea of marinara and tomato sauce continues to rise. You can get a good version in the most informal place, in a pizzeria, off the shelf. These three are among the leaders in simmering the sauce.

**Scarpetta Beach** is the handsomely designed oceanfront restaurant in Gurney's Montauk Resort & Spa. Expect extraordinary pastas and a transporting exercise in perfection: the simply named spaghetti, subtitled tomato and basil. Sweet and superb, crowned with Parmigiano-Reggiano.

**Scarpetta Beach**, 290 Old Montauk Hwy., Montauk, 631-668-1771, [ldvhospitality.com](http://ldvhospitality.com)

Tomato sauce overflows at **Mamma Lombardi's** in Holbrook, whether you're eating in the main restaurant or the adjoining pizzeria. Sample it with the spaghetti in marinara sauce, ziti with tomato



DOUG YOUNG

### FRIED CHICKEN

**Salamander's on Front**, Greenport



BENJAMIN PETIT

### ZITI WITH RED SAUCE, above and on the cover

**Mamma Lombardi's**, Holbrook



YVONNE ALBINOWSKI

### BRANZINO

**Arturo's Ristorante Italiano**, Floral Park



JEREMY BALES

### MEATBALLS

**Emilio's**, Commack

sauce and, adding some other ingredients, in the fired-up penne arrabbiata and Roman rigatoni all'Amatriciana.

**Mamma Lombardi's**, 400 Furrows Rd., Holbrook, 631-737-0774, [mammalombardis.com](http://mammalombardis.com)

**Sergio's** is a longtime neighborhood favorite in Massapequa. Pasta with sardines, beef braciola, tripe, pork chops with vinegar peppers, an orange salad are all attractions. Likewise, perciatelli with tomato sauce, spaghetti and meatballs, stuffed shells, lasagna, baked ziti, ravioli and manicotti.

**Sergio's**, 5422 Merrick Rd., Massapequa, 516-541-6554, [sergiositalianrestaurant.com](http://sergiositalianrestaurant.com)

**6 BRANZINO** The fish of the moment, succeeding Chilean sea bass and filet of some-kind-of-sole, branzino is a mild, unassertive Mediterranean sea bass amenable to many preparations.

Full-flavored and carefully cooked is the whole fish baked in a salt crust at **Casa Rustica** in Smithtown. The moist, aromatic fish is complemented by a tomato concassé, with lemon, parsley and mustard, and filleted tableside.

**Casa Rustica**, 175 W. Main St., Smithtown, 631-265-9265, [casarustica.net](http://casarustica.net)

**Kyma** in Roslyn leads the restaurants that focus on whole grilled fish sold by the pound. Lavraki, or Mediterranean sea bass, is lean and one of the main choices, along with pompano, black sea bass and fagri, or pink snapper.

**Kyma**, 1446 Old Northern Blvd., Roslyn, 516-621-3700, [kymarestaurants.com](http://kymarestaurants.com)

Whole branzino al forno is a specialty at **Arturo's Ristorante Italiano**, the veteran establishment near the county line in Bellerose-Floral Park. It swims in on greens, boosted by white wine and garlic sauce.

**Arturo's Ristorante Italiano**, 246-04 Jericho Tpke., Floral Park, 516-352-7418, [arturorestaurant.com](http://arturorestaurant.com)





## 7 MEATBALLS

They come in many sizes and from many countries, from China to Sweden to Italy and beyond. You can savor them at a pizzeria, a restaurant, even at the eatery in IKEA. And pick your favorite, from beef to chicken to the combination of beef, veal and pork.

**Emilio's** in Commack is the flagship of a little Long Island armada of eateries. It's packed for terrific pizza, appealing pasta and Italian-American specialties. The beefy appetizer of Mamma Mia Meatballs is reason enough to visit, plated with a long-simmered sauce, ricotta, sweet roasted peppers and garlic bread. The dish also is served at Fanatico in Jericho and Passione in Carle Place.

**Emilio's**, 2201 Jericho Tpke., Commack, 631-462-6267, emilios-restaurant.com

**Tony Colombos** in Rockville Centre makes the beef-veal-pork variety, with a savory Sunday red sauce, whipped ricotta with basil, crisp prosciutto chips and focaccia crostini. Yes, it's an appetizer.

**Tony Colombos**, 208 Sunrise Hwy., Rockville Centre, 516-678-1996, tonycolombos.com

**Maroni Cuisine** is a small restaurant with big ambitions. Come for the tasting menu, a showcase of different cuisines and preparations and maybe 25 courses. But the distinctive spot is known for Grandma's meatballs, available by the pot, and for their victory in a televised "throwdown" over those of celebrity chef Bobby Flay. TKO.

**Maroni Cuisine**, 18 Woodbine Ave., Northport, 631-757-4500, maronicuisine.com

## 8 STEAMED LOBSTER

The king of shellfish on Long Island and many other coastal venues, it's immortalized here grilled, broiled, boiled, in a lobster roll either warm or cold, in restaurants American, Italian, Chinese, more. But it's hard to top the simply steamed beauty.

**Louie's Grill & Liquors**, the latest incarnation of what started in 1905 as a barge on Manhasset Bay, is a major seafood house. The lobster Cantonese is diverting, and the two types of lobster roll addictive. But the 1½-pound,



**STEAMED LOBSTER** Louie's Grill & Liquors, Port Washington



**BAKED CLAMS** Catch Oyster Bar, Patchogue



**SALMON** Toku Modern Asian, Manhasset

steamed lobster with coleslaw and corn on the cob is the reigning rendition.

**Louie's Grill & Liquors**, 395 Main St., Port Washington, 516-883-4242, louiessince1905.com

**Jordan Lobster Farms** leaves nothing to mystery. Diners and customers know why they're here. Lobster rolls and lobster cakes are available. But the whole steamed lobsters, from 1¼ to 10 pounds define the place. Call ahead to see whether the bigger ones are available. The lobster is served with coleslaw, fries, lemon and butter.

**Jordan Lobster Farms**, 1 Pettit Place, Island Park, 516-806-6251, jordanlobsterfarms.com

**Prime: An American Kitchen & Bar** has a water view, dependable New American cuisine and sushi, and, yes, steamed lobster. The 2-pounder is all you'd want. Lobster also appears here in lobster-and-corn chowder, shrimp-and-lobster wontons, a lobster cocktail and butter-poached lobster to enrich a steak or anything else.

**Prime: An American Kitchen & Bar**, 117 New York Ave., Huntington, 631-385-1515, restaurantprime.com

## 9 BAKED CLAMS

You can have them oreganata, casino, seasoned with hot sausage, horseradish and more. The breadcrumbs will vary, the tasty result shouldn't.

**Artie's South Shore Fish Market & Restaurant** in Island Park does offer baked clams with the subtle tingle of horseradish, a suggestion of lemon zest and garlic. They're one of many dishes you'll want at the ultracasual restaurant and fish market.

**Artie's South Shore Fish Market & Restaurant**, 4257 Austin Blvd., Island Park, 516-889-0692, southshorefish.com

**Catch Oyster Bar** in Patchogue is no larger than a bluepoint. But about 30 diners can dig into the raw and cooked shellfish. The cooked include baked clam "stiffies," first-class baked clams emboldened with bacon. Ample and excellent.

**Catch Oyster Bar**, 63 N. Ocean Ave., Patchogue, 631-627-6860, catchoysterbar.com

**Salt & Barrel** in Bay Shore livens up its stuffed clams with andouille sausage, plus onion and breadcrumbs. They call for only a squirt of lemon. And the company of the restaurant's tarragon biscuits is obligatory.

**Salt & Barrel**, 61 W. Main St., Bay Shore, 631-647-8818, saltandbarrel.com

## 10 SALMON

It's almost everywhere and prepared almost any way. Broil, sear, bake, poach — pick one. Or have it uncooked as sushi or sashimi at nearly all Japanese restaurants, where you're likely to find it in teriyaki, too. And devotees of smoked salmon must visit the nearest Fairway for Scottish, Irish, Nova Scotia, pastrami-seasoned and pickled.

**Toku Modern Asian**, a star feeding shoppers at the Americana Manhasset, sears salmon and complements it with bok choy, eggplant, soy and ginger. It competes with a cooked salmon-and-avocado roll, salmon tartare and salmon sushi and sashimi.

**Toku Modern Asian**, 2014C Northern Blvd., Manhasset, 516-627-8658, pollrestaurants.com

**The Jolly Fisherman & Steak House**, in its 60th year near the pond in Roslyn, is a reef-and-beef establishment that's both traditional and contemporary. The house's salmon is enriched with a macadamia-nut crust and golden banana fritter.

**The Jolly Fisherman & Steak House**, 25 Main St., Roslyn, 516-621-0055, jollyfishermanrestaurant.com

The many local branches of **Bagel Boss** are appetizing spots for sandwiches, wraps, salads, omelets, pancakes, French toast and rugelach. Sample the Atlantic smoked salmon, belly lox and baked kippered salmon, with or without a bagel, with or without a schmear, to eat in or take out.

**Bagel Boss** locations include Hewlett, Oceanside, Lake Success, Carle Place, Jericho, Merrick, East Norwich, Roslyn, Bay Shore, East Northport

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