

Madison, CT: A Foodie's Paradise

by Jen Matteis



Looking for that perfect oolong tea, gourmet cheese, lobster roll, or even escargot? Thanks to its broad selection of restaurants run by chefs from around the world, Madison is a top choice for foodies of all tastes. From breakfast and coffee to dinner and cocktails, it's no hard task to find something special for every occasion.

At Cristy's, there's a menu, and then there's the pancake menu. On my first visit, I spent as much time trying to decide among the 40 flavors of pancakes as I did eating them. Coconut pineapple macadamia nut, pumpkin, or blueberry raspberry crunch? The second visit was easier since the first pancake was so delicious that I just ordered the same thing.

Choices are not as difficult at Madison's new Taste of China restaurant called Steamed, a small shop specializing in dumplings. These are as authentic as they come, as those familiar with Taste's other two locations (Clinton and New Haven) already know.

Another choice for casual yet delicious dining is Lenny & Joe's Fish Tale, which is so well-known it may need no introduction. It's one of the best places on the shoreline for a buttery, meat-packed lobster roll, and is also known for its all-you-can eat specials such as fish and chips. New to my eyes on a recent visit were the fish tacos with coconut curry sauce, a delightful addition to their traditional fare. Looking for an atmosphere to match the food? At Cafe Allegre, Chef Silvio Suppa serves up farm-to-table Italian dishes in a formal dining room attached to an elegant inn. Don't miss the fried artichoke hearts, a delicacy I'd only seen before on the West Coast.

The splendor of the CT shoreline is easily witnessed at Madison Beach Hotel which also will satisfy you if you're looking for oysters, mussels, and other seafood-based items. It's not just about seafood at the hotel though, and I highly recommend you try their trio of dips and their beach fries. Elegance also abounds at Elizabeth's Cafe. This restored 18th century cottage offers a surprisingly diverse menu, from its Crab Cake Po'Boy to its Pork Banh Mi. It also offers catering and a Sunday brunch featuring brioche French toast and much more.

Relatively new to Madison is Eclectic Café with a build your own sandwich menu, but often sought out for their salad bar and their two different daily mac-n-cheeses or soups. For an authentic croque monsieur, visit Bar Bouchee for a true French bistro experience. Run by Chef Jean Pierre Vuillermet, whose family ran a restaurant/resort at the foot of the French Alps for generations, the menu is inspired by the bistros of Lyon, France.

For dessert, try R.J. Julia Booksellers as the R.J. Cafe sells award-winning cupcakes alongside soups, sandwiches, and more. It's also a good spot for a latte, or a cup of tea—although serious tea drinkers should put Savvy Tea Gourmet at the top of their list. Owner Phil Parda doesn't just know his teas, he's experienced them firsthand through hundreds of trips to different tea sources throughout China. The shop also offers tea tastings and an afternoon tea.

For specialty Italian pastries, there's Meriano's Bake Shoppe, which also runs a cannoli truck. On the subject of food trucks, look out for Taco Pacifico and Taqueria Cinco, both which draw devout fans.

Open from 3 to 6 p.m. on Fridays on the Madison Green, the summer farmers' market is the best place to find fresh fruits and veggies, along with a wide variety of gourmet meats, breads, pies, and even seafood. Live music complements your shopping (and snacking; they have free samples!) experience.

Finally, for cocktails, Moxie is the place to go. From its "Stay Classy, Madison," to its "Sweaters & Boots," you'll find a unique signature drink to match your taste. For more traditional choices and expert advice, try the Madison Wine Shop.

This foodie list is far from complete. Specialties abound, such as the 40 varieties of olive oil and vinegar available at the Shoreline Vine, as do favorite local eateries such as Donahue's Madison Beach Grille (great pub-feel with great food – their cucumber dill ranch dressing is perfect on a summer salad) and Friends and Company who renovated to add a deck for dining al fresco. I'd love to tell you the best place to go—but that's something you'll have to discover for yourself!