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No One Can Appreciate Art on an Empty Stomach


Written by
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Eating is an much of a passion for me as making art is. I'm not a fancy-schmancy foodie though. I prefer artery-clogging, hole-in-the-wall, comfort food.

Because it breaks my heart to think of Arts Month tourists or local starving artists fortifying themselves for marathon culture-viewing adventures with over-priced or mediocre meals, here is my guide to delicious, affordable food within a cab or trolley ride from the Hilton Bayfront Hotel.

Mexican

The best authentic, simple, delicious Mexican food in San Diego is at **Las Cuatro Milpas** in Barrio Logan. Anything you order will be amazing, but the tamale bowl is especially popular. Go at 11 or 1 because the line stretches down the block right at noon, and the sweet ladies behind the counter are never in a hurry. While you are here, be sure to check out the murals in Chicano Park and along Logan Ave. To get here: 1875 Logan Ave; Take the Blue Line Trolley east and get off at Barrio Logan

In case you haven't heard of it (I hadn't before I moved here), getting a burrito "California Style" means "with French fries stuffed inside." **Mexican Fiesta**, a counter service Mexican joint in Little Italy with a humble exterior serves great "California style" burritos as well as a crazy concoction known as "carne asada fries," so gluttonous it's likely to put you on the stretcher, but so delicious, you won't care. 1875 Logan Ave; Blue Line to Little Italy

Fish Tacos

Mitch's Seafood, which is in the same complex as the more well known Point Loma Seafood Co., has an out of this world special on Tuesdays. \$2 fish tacos and \$1 Tecates—both of which can be enjoyed while overlooking the Marina. For a buck more, you can get tacos filled with the freshest daily catch (listed on a chalk board by the register). FYI-The line gets long after 6 pm. 1403 Scott St; Cab it.

The other place to get great fish tacos is from a truck, and I am not talking about a trendy hipster food truck. **Marisco's German** is an old school lunch truck run by a family who brings their clams up from Baja. The family has a few trucks around town, but the closest to the downtown art scene is usually parked at 52802 Ocean View Blvd. IMHO, the shrimp tacos outshine the fish, and the grilled shrimp and carne asada is also a favorite. A crazy black clam soup/drink thing also seems to be popular with the folks in the know, but I haven't worked up the courage to try it yet. Every order comes with a free soup. Cab it.

Sandwiches

The Cheese Shop has the best Reuben downtown. They also serve a monster-sized club sandwich. They serve quality breakfast all day and stir up a spicy bloody Mary. 627 4th Avenue; Walk there.

Kabob Shop makes local tummies happy day after day. I get the lamb döner with extra garlic sauce every time, but the falafel is yummy too. You can “go California” here as well if you want fries inside. 630 9th Avenue; San Diego One mile walk from The Hilton

Pete's Quality Meats in little Italy appropriately prioritizes quality over quantity--there is only five things on the menu. Their meatball subs, Italian Sausages, and steak sandwiches are rich in flavor and authenticity. 1742 India St; trolley to Little Italy

Sweets

I am firmly on team Ice Cream when it comes to the Gelato vs. Ice Cream debate with one notable exception. The gelato at **Gelato Vero** is better than any I've had in Europe. Pistachio is my favorite. 3753 India St; Take the trolley to Washington, walk under the 5.

My favorite local bakery and breakfast spot is **Bread and Cie** in Hillcrest. Cinnamon Rolls, almond croissants, jalepeno cheese bread, and spinach and feta quiche make up my not-to-be-missed list. 350 University Ave; You'll need to cab it there or take the 11 bus from downtown, which will drop you off at their front door.

Neveria Tocumbo offers sweet-seekers an authentic Mexican ice cream shop experience and unique flavors such as elote and hibiscus. Also not to be missed--real, hand made Aguas Frescas. 4686 Market St B7; Cab it.

Burgers and Salad

Burger Lounge is a hip local burger chain with new locations popping up all over. Lucky for art goers, the newest is in The Gas Lamp. The turkey and bean burgers get rave reviews, but I could never order anything except the exceptional grass fed beef on a buttered bun. Their salads are also delicious. I like the veggie with basil vinaigrette. Mmmmm. 528 5th Avenue; Walk there.

You'll never be disappointed at Burger Lounge, but if you want THE best burger in town, you're going to have to take a cab. The Jayne's burger at **Jayne's Gastropub** is so moist it dissolves in your mouth, and house-pickled onions give it a wonderfully unique flavor. Jayne's happy hour is also worth checking out, where you can get a cheaper sampling size of the burger along with your expertly crafted cocktail or brew. 4677 30th St; Cab it.

Cocktails

Andaz [formerly The Ivy Hotel] in the Gas Lamp has a beautiful rooftop bar with breathtaking 365 degree views and a surprisingly affordable happy hour menu. A warning though —things get a lot pricier and trendier after happy hour ends. 600 F St; Walk There

The Pearl Pimm's Cup is my favorite drink in San Diego, and I always choose to sip it poolside, since both locals and tourists are welcome to take a dip. The food at The Pearl deserves mention as well. It's local, sustainable, delicious and normally out of my price range. But the super friendly folks at The Pearl offer "Wallet Savers" on their website, which includes a coupon for a BOGO entrée good through September. 1410 Rosecrans St; Cab it.

All visitors to San Diego interested in the craft brew/specialty cocktail scene must hit up a Scot Blair establishment. He's the man behind Hamilton's, Small Bar, Eleven, and now **Monkey Paw**, a downtown joint that just opened on August 23. Every establishment Blair touches turns into Yelp gold, and **Monkey Paw** customers are already raving about it's waffle fries, 30 beers on tap, and extensive jukebox selection. 805 16th St; 20 minute walk from the Hilton Bayfront, but I would take a cab at night.

Last but Not Least...The Food Trucks

Eating at a food truck is a novel experience especially for people from parts of the country not yet over run with restaurants on wheels. Here's a link to a site where you can see daily San Diego food truck locations. My favorite is **Miho**. The food is local and delicious, and you are guaranteed to leave feeling a little more hip and in-the-know. **Miho** serves everything from fried chicken and burgers to sopas and blueberry salad and **will be conveniently parked outside Space4Art from 6:30-9pm on Saturday September 3**. I bet the line is already forming.

One last bit of advice for those attending Art San Diego, the bottled water was outrageously priced last year, so bring your own bottle or prepare to be parched.

I've also created a [google map](#) that has additional suggestions from some of the other Sketchbook bloggers.

Visit me online at Shawneebarton.com

Photo of Pete's Quality Meats and the nice guy who works the counter by [sugrdva](#)