

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Where to Eat in Salt Lake City and What to Do Nearby

Our Friends · Wednesday, October 21st, 2026

Most lists that answer where to eat in Salt Lake City give you a dozen restaurants and no sense of where they sit. You end up driving across the valley for lunch, doubling back for a museum, then realizing the dinner spot was three blocks from where you started.

Here, every restaurant is paired with something to do within a short walk or a quick drive of the table. Salt Lake City is compact enough that most of these pairings work on foot, and the ones that need a car keep the drive under ten minutes.

The list works for a first visit or for locals who want a full day rather than a single reservation. Use this guide to eat your way across downtown, Central 9th, 9th and 9th, the Avenues, and South Salt Lake.

## How Salt Lake City Eats Right Now

The mountains shape the dining habits here more than anything else. Dinner runs early because half the city was up a canyon at dawn, breakfast and brunch are serious business, and patios matter for nine months of the year.

The scene itself has moved fast. Long-running family institutions share the valley with chef-driven kitchens that have picked up national attention, including James Beard recognition and, in 2026, Michelin's arrival in Utah. Salt Lake City has real Thai, Vietnamese, Indian, and regional Mexican food, brewpubs that predate the craft beer boom, and a soft serve shop that treats sweet corn as a flavor. It is a better food town and has more to do than most visitors expect.

## 1. Red Iguana and the International Peace Gardens

**Red Iguana** has answered "where should we eat in Salt Lake City" since 1985, and its family recipes go back to 1965, when Maria and Ramon Cardenas took over a small downtown restaurant called Casa Grande. The original at 736 W North Temple is the one with a line out the door on weekends. Red Iguana 2 at 866 W South Temple serves the same menu a few blocks away and is the practical fix when the wait at the original looks long.

The reason people cross town or drive in from Utah County is mole. Red Iguana makes seven of them, each rooted in a different regional Mexican tradition, and the mole sampler lets a first-timer taste the range before committing. Mole Coloradito with carnitas is the most approachable entry point, Mole Negro is the most complex thing on the menu, and Cochinita Pibil, pork rubbed with

achiote and slow-roasted, is where regulars go when they want something other than mole. Guy Fieri featured the restaurant on *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* in 2008 and came back in 2020, which tells you how long the reputation has held.

Pair it with the **International Peace Gardens** at Jordan Park, a mile and a half south at 1060 S 900 West. The gardens are a series of small plots, each themed to a different country, strung along the Jordan River, and admission is free. Walk the gardens in the afternoon, then drive north for an early dinner. Both locations are open Sunday through Thursday 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Friday and Saturday until 10 p.m.

## 2. Clark Planetarium and Lupessa (The Gateway)

**Clark Planetarium at The Gateway Mall** is one of the easiest afternoons in downtown SLC. The exhibit floor is free, the dome shows are ticketed, and it works equally well for a family with kids or for two starry-eyed adults.

Dinner does not require leaving the complex. Family-friendly options are available at the mall food court. Or for a date night celebration, **Lupessa** at 156 S 400 West is a modern Italian restaurant a short walk across The Gateway from the planetarium doors, with a dining room built out like a forest and a menu of hand-made pasta, arancini, and shareable starters that lean on local produce. It runs dinner nightly and a weekend brunch on Saturdays and Sundays, which makes it the rare downtown spot that fits both a planetarium morning and a planetarium evening. Book a table and expect fine-dining prices.

## 3. Pretty Bird and Why Kiki (Downtown SLC)

**Pretty Bird** built a local following on Nashville-style hot chicken before expanding to multiple locations across the valley. The downtown shop at 146 S Regent Street, a half block off Main Street, is the one to use here. Order the sandwich, pick a heat level with some humility on the first visit, and expect a quick counter-service meal rather than a long sit-down. It is a good place to eat before a night out precisely because it does not eat up the evening.

Why Kiki is two blocks north at 69 W 100th Street. The tropical-themed bar hosts burlesque, themed dance parties, drag brunch on Sundays, and regular silent disco nights in the basement, and has become a gathering place for the city's queer community and allies. It is 21 and over, so this pairing is the adults-only night on the list.

## 4. Skillets, the Maven District, and Normal Ice Cream (Central 9th)

**Skillets** started as a food truck in 2021 and opened its brick-and-mortar spot at 282 E 900 South in late 2024. The owners are Venezuelan, and it shows in the details: shredded beef in the tater tot skillet, a cilantro and garlic green sauce that belongs on everything. The "Tower for Two" is perfect for your first time, featuring a full spread of waffles, breakfast meats, and butter and toast, all delivered on a three-tiered platter. Once you've tried that, don't skip the poutine. Weekend hours run 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., and the patio is the best seat in the house.

After breakfast, walk west into the **Maven District** to find a colorful stretch of 900 South built around women-owned businesses. **Lovebound Library** stocks nothing but romance novels across every subgenre. **Pantry Products** sells refillable home and body goods, and the blocks between

are lined with small studios and cafes that reward a slow wander.

Dessert is on the same street. **Normal Ice Cream** at 169 E 900 South started as a truck and now runs a small storefront where the soft serve flavors rotate through things like sweet corn, chai, and whatever is in season. The cones are built with toppings and sauces to order, and the shop sits close enough to Skilletts that a late brunch can roll straight into a cone.

## 5. Publik Coffee, Iconoclad, and Star of India (Central 9th, Afternoon into Evening)

**Publik Coffee Roasters** at 975 S West Temple is the flagship of the local Publik operation, a roastery and cafe in a converted industrial space where the coffee is roasted on-site, and the food menu rotates. Sandwiches and toasts change with what the kitchen has sourced, so check the board rather than expecting a fixed item. With a large upstairs workspace, it's a great place to work or vibe for an hour or to eat a real lunch before an afternoon of shopping.

From there, **Iconoclad's** State Street location at 855 S State is a few blocks east and is the bigger of the shop's two stores, a consignment boutique that leans toward edgy, festival-ready, pre-loved clothing and gives consignors half the sale price in cash. The shop cats are part of the visit. Plan on more time than you think, since the racks run deep.

**Star of India** closes the loop, located at 1000 S Main Street, right by Publik. The restaurant has been a Salt Lake City fixture since 1990, when Avtar Singh moved from Punjab and opened it, and his daughter runs it now. The menu is Northern Indian cooking built around a tandoor. The lunch buffet is gone, so order from the menu. Chicken tikka masala, rogan josh, and the tandoori platters are the dishes regulars return for, and the restaurant is closed Sundays.

## 6. Vessel Kitchen, Dolcetti's and 9th and 9th Shopping

The 9th and 9th neighborhood, at 900 East and 900 South, is Salt Lake's most walkable stretch of independent shops, and **Vessel Kitchen** sits right in the middle of it. The Utah-born fast-casual chain opened its first location in Park City in 2016 and has grown to roughly ten spots across the state, with 9th and 9th anchoring a neighborhood walk. The menu is scratch-made and health-forward, bowls built on shredded chicken and sweet potato hash, seasonal salads, tacos, and sides that cover vegan, gluten-free, and kid-friendly needs without making a fuss about it. It is a great meal that leaves you ready to walk rather than ready to nap.

After lunch, walk across the street to **Dolcetti Gelato** and prepare yourself for the best game of I-spy you've ever had. The rotating list of 150 gelato flavors, espressos, and macarons for sale won't be the first thing that blows you away. Just take a look inside the intricately decorated space, and you'll be feasting with your eyes. And then you'll have even more fun eating delicious gelato.

Gelato in hand, you're ready to explore the shops. **The Stockist** specializes in small-batch clothing, ceramics, and design objects. **Salt and Honey Market** brings together independent handmade crafts, clothing, art and more. Don't forget to pay respects to the 9th and 9th whale, the neighborhood's public art landmark designed to act as a canvas for local artists, getting repainted every few years. Grab a photo before you head out, using your best whale pose.

## 7. Gilgal Sculpture Garden and Oquirrh (East Downtown)

The **Gilgal Sculpture Garden** at 749 E 500 South is a small city park hidden in the middle of a residential block. A local stonemason named Thomas Child carved the dozen or so sculptures here in the mid-twentieth century, including a sphinx with a human face, and the park nearly disappeared before a foundation saved it. It is free, quiet, and strange in the best way. Start here and take your time. Bring a book or let yourself meditate.

Afterward, do dinner at **Oquirrh**, back toward downtown at 368 E 100 South. Chef Andrew Fuller and his wife Angie opened it in 2019 after his years at Copper Onion and Pago, and Fuller has since been named a James Beard Award semifinalist for Best Chef in the Mountain region three times, most recently in 2026. The menu is New American with a seasonal, local-sourcing backbone, familiar dishes done with a twist, and the dining room is small enough that parties larger than six need to email ahead. Book it.

## 8. 11th Avenue Park and Sawadee Thai (The Avenues)

Ready to get your scenic views in? Drive up into the Avenues before dinner and park at **11th Avenue Park**, the overlook locals use when they want the whole valley in one frame. Golden hour is the time to be there, with the Wasatch Mountains lighting up behind the city and the Oquirrh Range on the far side.

Descend to **Sawadee Thai** at 754 E South Temple, at the base of the Avenues where the neighborhood meets downtown. The restaurant has been serving the same corner since 2006, and the menu covers Thai cuisine classics from curries in every color to pad see ew, chicken basil stir-fry, and a soup of the day. It is roomy enough for a group and calm enough for two, and it rarely has a line. It's a hidden gem, and it's worth the trip.

## 9. South Salt Lake Mural Tour and Grid City Beer Works

Some of Salt Lake's coolest features are the murals. They're everywhere, and South Salt Lake's Mural Fest has turned the blocks around 2100 South and West Temple into an open-air gallery, with dozens of large-scale murals on warehouse walls and storefronts. You can walk the core cluster in an hour or drive a wider loop, and the city publishes a map each year. The artists featured have created amazing work, with some of the most beautiful murals tucked back where you'd least expect them.

End at **Grid City Beer Works**, 333 W 2100 South, right inside the mural zone. The brewery pours its beers three ways: cask, nitro, and standard CO2, so you can taste the same ale three times and notice the difference. The kitchen is better than a brewery kitchen needs to be, with vegan and gluten-free options that are not afterthoughts. Grid City is 21 and over.

## Also on Locals' Lists

A few favorite restaurants belong in the conversation, and are a great choice no matter what you get up to in SLC.

- **Ruth's Diner**, up Emigration Canyon is the brunch drive, known for its Mile High Biscuits and a patio in the trees.
- **Feldman's Deli** is where locals go for sandwiches built on the East Coast model, pastrami and corned beef stacked tall.
- **Lone Star Taqueria** in Cottonwood Heights is the fish taco stop on the way to the canyons.

- **Takashi** is the downtown sushi bar people book weeks out.
- **Copper Onion**, a downtown staple since 2010 and the kitchen where Oquirrh's chef trained, is the fallback when Oquirrh is full.

## Great Eating is Everywhere in Salt Lake City

With great options on every corner, the best way to eat in Salt Lake City is to let the neighborhood pick the restaurant. Downtown has the show-night dinners, 900 South has the mornings and the strolls, the Avenues have the view, and South Salt Lake has the murals and the beer. Start with Red Iguana, because everyone should, then work through the rest of the map. The city rewards people who walk it in the right areas.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Which of these restaurants is best for a first visit to Salt Lake City?

Red Iguana. It is the most distinctive food in the city; the seven moles do not exist anywhere else in Utah, and the family history behind the menu is part of the meal. Go to Red Iguana 2 if the original has a line.

### Which pairings are walkable without a car?

Pretty Bird and Why Kiki, Skilletts through the Maven District, Publik Kitchen and 9th and 9th, Iconoclad through Gilgal to Oquirrh, and the mural tour to Grid City are all on foot. Red Iguana to the Peace Gardens and 11th Avenue Park to Sawadee need a short drive.

### Where should you eat near downtown Salt Lake City before a show?

Pretty Bird for a fast meal, or Oquirrh for a proper dinner with a reservation. Either option is within a few blocks of the Main Street theaters and the Delta Center.

### Are these restaurants family friendly?

Most are. Red Iguana, Skilletts, Publik Kitchen, Star of India, and Sawadee all seat kids without a second thought. Why Kiki and Grid City are 21 and over.

*Photo: Pixabay via Pexels*

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