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AMERICAN CLASSICS MEMORABLE MEALS OF 2015

As author of the Great American Bites column on USATODAY.com, **Larry Olmsted** travels the USA in search of regional specialties. Here are some of the greatest things he tasted in 2015:



DUFF'S FAMOUS WINGS

AMHERST, N.Y.

Great American Bites did an extensive wing tour of the Buffalo area, trying the original at its birthplace, tons of hot styles, and esoteric varieties from BBQ to teriyaki to Sicilian. Buffalonians love arguing about wings almost as much as they love eating them, and everyone I spoke to during my visit had obviously given the matter a great deal of thought and was very opinionated. But the best of the traditional Buffalo hot wings, and the only ones to rate an "OMG," were at this beloved local institution, which has been going spicy since 1969.

In fact, heat is Duff's claim to fame, and the menu clearly reads "Warning! Medium IS HOT, Medium Hot IS VERY HOT and Hot is VERY, VERY HOT." There are several other grades, including mild, mild medium and medium light, plus options for upping the ante on hot with added suicidal or death sauces. The medium light was my favorite traditional wing of the trip, hitting the perfect sweet spot between spice and flavor and between saucy and dry. These and

Duff's medium were the class of Buffalo's hot-wing field, and even President Obama tried them in 2010.

Original, 3651 Sheridan Dr.; 716-834-6234; duffswings.com/



ZINGERMAN'S DELI ANN ARBOR, MICH.

Perhaps the most famous restaurant we visited this year, Zingerman's lived up to its widespread acclaim and loyal following that waits in long lines to eat here. The deli obsesses about using the best possible ingredients, especially the bread and meat. The in-house artisanal bakery is among the best in the country, producing loaves that are twice-baked for extra-crisp crusts. This is stunning bread, hand-sliced to order for every sandwich. The roast beef and turkey are roasted daily, the pastrami and corned beef cured in-house. More than a dozen types of specialty mustards are used, each chosen for a particular flavor combo.

There are 113 sandwich choices, all numbered and named, but the top four sellers are grilled versions: the signature Reuben #2 (house corned beef, real Swiss cheese, local artisan sauerkraut and Russian dressing on rye); the Brooklyn Reuben #48 (pastrami instead of corned beef on pumpernickel); the Cuban #00 (pulled pork, peppered ham, Swiss, dill pickle slices and hot mustard on paesano roll); and Pat & Dick's Honeymooner #27 (smoked turkey, muenster, Kream mustard on challah).

422 Detroit St.; 734-663-3354; zingermansdeli.com



PIZZERIA BIANCO PHOENIX

This is the place that years ago kicked off America's gourmet wood-fired-pizza revolution, and it remains the only pizzeria (or casual restaurant of any sort) to win its owner, Chris Bianco, the James Beard Foundation's coveted Best Chef award. A hyper-focus on the best possible ingredients, with carefully cultivated arugula and basil and house-made sausage and even cheese, have made

this the choice of many top critics as the best pizza in America.

They are right. I'm partial to the Biancoverde, a white pizza topped with explosively flavorful arugula, and *Men's Health* magazine proclaimed the Wise-guy, with oven-roasted onions, smoked mozzarella and fennel sausage, the single best pizza in the nation. But the reality is that every pizza on the menu is a must-try.

Original, 623 E. Adams St.; 602-258-8300; three other locations in Phoenix and Tucson; pizzeriabianco.com/

BOB'S CLAM HUT KITTERY, MAINE

We went to Bob's for the justifiably famous fried clams but were wowed by just about everything — including what may be the very best lobster roll in Maine. Bob's dates to 1956 and serves two styles of fried clams (if you can't choose, go half and half): Bob's and Lillian's, with light flour coating or heavier batter, respectively. Both are delicious, but so are the fried scallops, fried haddock, fried combo plates, lobster stew, clam chowder and superlative lobster roll. This column has visited lots of Maine coastal clam and lobster shacks, but if we could eat at

just one, it would be Bob's.

Bob's has won countless awards including Best Clam Shack in New England from *Boston Magazine*, and when it was featured on Guy Fieri's TV show *Diners, Drive-ins and Dives*, the host suggested, "For pure crunch-ification, go with the Lillian." It also is open year-round, a rarity in these parts, so as days get shorter and cooler, anyone visiting Maine should keep it in mind for excellent fried

seafood and lobster rolls long after its many rivals have shuttered for the winter.

Save room for dessert. Bob's sells gourmet Mt. Desert Island Ice Cream, an excellent Maine craft producer that has been featured here before in *Great American Bites*, as well as that other Maine specialty — the whoopie pie.

Route 1; 207-439-4233; bobsclamhut.com/



PHOTOS BY LARRY OLAMSTED FOR USA TODAY

NAPOLEON HOUSE NEW ORLEANS

This column has consumed a lot of sandwiches, but few (maybe none) have rivaled New Orleans' favorite contribution to the genre, the muffuletta. The historic Napoleon House is among the oldest places in the city serving the specialty, but it has long put a unique wrinkle on it, serving it warm, so the cheese is slightly melted; everyone else serves it cold. But the reality is, cold or hot, a great muffuletta cannot be beat, and this is a great muffuletta. Napoleon also is a fantastic setting and perhaps the best place in the country to have a traditional British Pimm's Cup cocktail, the signature drink.

The corner lot sits three blocks

off Jackson Square in the heart of the French Quarter and is instantly recognizable, thanks to the distinctive sign in the shape of Napoleon's iconic hat. The prime seats are in the interior open-air garden

courtyard, a fixture of New Orleans architecture. Diners can sit in the shade of potted palms and listen to the soothing gurgle of the fountain.

500 Chartres St.; 504-524-9752;
napoleonhouse.com/



New Orleans' famous muffuletta comes with a unique twist at Napoleon House: It's served warm, cheese slightly melted, rather than cold.