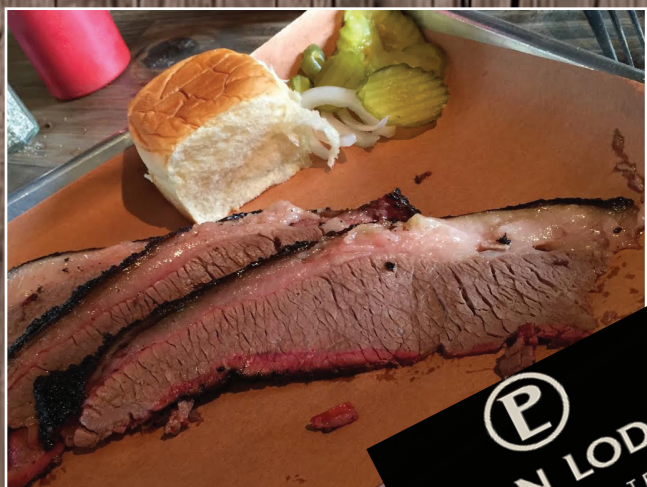


SMOKIN' HOT BBQ

No other cut of meat screams Texas better than brisket. Rubbed with seasonings, never sauced and slow-smoked hours over a real wood fire creates a slab of pepper-crusted perfection. While the Hill Country may boast the highest concentration of pit masters, Big D holds its own as these four joints serve up beef by the herd to patrons willing to wait in long lines to round up the big taste.



Best brisket

Price | \$12, without sides
2702 Main St., Deep Ellum



Best BBQ sauce

Price | \$20
901 Fort Worth Ave., West Dallas

Next to the historic, posh Belmont Hotel, Smoke upholds the same upscale aura and provides a gourmet experience to classic Texas BBQ.

Upon first step inside the art deco building, one might confuse the eatery's decor with the hotel's lobby with its hostesses and "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" rolling on bar TV's rather than a sports broadcast typical to other joints.

The sit-down restaurant delivers a knowledgeable wait staff, full bar, wine list and a variety of options on the menu, including seafood and vegetarian options.

The coffee-cured natural beef brisket sprawled over a piece of crunchy bread and a heap of chili-flaked potato salad accompanied it. The brisket, a bit overdone on this visit, worked out my jaw and dried my mouth.

Surprisingly, the coffee flavor disappeared in the meat. Fortunately, the four BBQ sauce varieties brought to the table revived the beef.

A molasses-based Texas sauce provided a tangy sweetness with an extra spice kick.

This Zagat-rated restaurant created by chef Tim Byres and partners Christopher Jeffers and Chris Zielke opened September 2009. In 2012, Food and Wine magazine readers name Byers Best Chef in the Nation in its People's Choice contests. Since then, popularity climbed and triggered a second location to pop up in Plano.

Patrons can regularly find Byers outback of the restaurant manning his smoker or just down the street at his other creation, Chicken Scratch and The Foundry Bar, hosting other chefs for a Cajun-style crawfish boil.

Originally located in Shed 2 in the Dallas Farmers Market, Pecan Lodge constantly attracted crowds so large that it sold out daily.

The market stall run by Justin and Diane Fourton caught the media when featured on Guy Fieri's "Diners, Drive-ins and Dives," and clenching the No. 2 position in Texas Monthly's 2014 "The 50 Best BBQ Joints ... in the World!" The spike in its popularity led the couple to open an actual storefront with an outdoor patio in Deep Ellum.

The restaurant has a sleek look accented with steel bars and tables and a black, white and light green color scheme.

Even though the noise levels were high, an emcee spits out orders like an auctioneer. The most notable order, brisket with a complex pepper-chili powder-mustard powder rub, is unbelievably tender and juicy—drips flow down fingertips to elbows.

Fourton smokes his brisket 15-18 hours over mesquite. The strong smoke flavor tangos well with the homemade, sweet vinegar-soy-ketchup sauce, well worth the 34-minute wait.



Best side dishes

Price | \$15
2234 Irving Blvd, Design District

Complete with wooden walls, self-serve fixin's and red-vinyl booths, Slow Bone delivers offerings cafeteria-style.

This Design District restaurant opened in 2013, and is lead chef Jack Perkin's—yes, the man behind the famous Maple & Motor burger—newest project.

Once you make it inside to the serve line, pick meat (beef, chicken, turkey, pork ribs, stuffed pork loin, old time sausage, smoked cilantro sausage or fried chicken), then pile up two sides (greens, pinto beans, Oora's jalapeño mac & cheese, hushpuppies and buttered squash are the most popular), ladle the tangy vinegar-heavy sauce onto your plastic school lunch style tray. A big chunk of fresh cornbread crowns your meal.

The hickory-smoked brisket was a little chewy and spicier than expected (but still mild). The special BBQ sauce livens up the beef. The brisket is wonderfully seasoned with pepper, salts and secret ingredients, but the sides stop the show. The crumbly sweet cornbread, luscious velvet mac and cheese with jalapeños and smooth buttered squash explode flavors.



Best atmosphere

Price | \$9
400 W Davis St., Bishop Arts

Located in Oak Cliff's hip Bishop Arts District, Lockhart Smokehouse radiates the rustic vibe of its Hill Country style—named after Lockhart, TX, often called the BBQ capital of Texas.

A spin-off of the legendary Kreuz Market, Lockhart features a full-service bar and ample seating for the constant crowds. With a counter-service method, the pork chops, ribs, brisket, chicken, turkey or sausages are immediately handed over at the cash register after ordering.

Meats are delivered with a few slices of white bread on brown butcher paper that says, "our brisket is so good, we don't need to dress it up."

The butcher paper is spotted with savory juices that flow from the 18-hour post oak smoked brisket. The beef is succulent and did not break apart, smoky but not ashy.

The fat on the brisket is perfectly silky, tender and richly flavored, proving up Lockhart Smokehouse's motto: "no sauce, no forks [needed]."

Under Pitmaster Tim McLaughlin, Lockhart Smokehouse clenched a spot on Texas Monthly's "The List: The Top 50 barbecue joints" in 2013. One year later, the magazine awarded Lockhart's the No. 14 position on "The 50 Best BBQ Joints ... in the World!"

Dallas Observer's reader's choice presented Lockhart Smokehouse with the best "barbecue" in 2011 in Dallas. Lockhart's success spawned a second location in Plano.

17.2 % enjoy
Pecan Lodge most out of
BBQ joints in Dallas.

survey of 98 students, Sept. 18

Photos and story by | Meredith Hessel