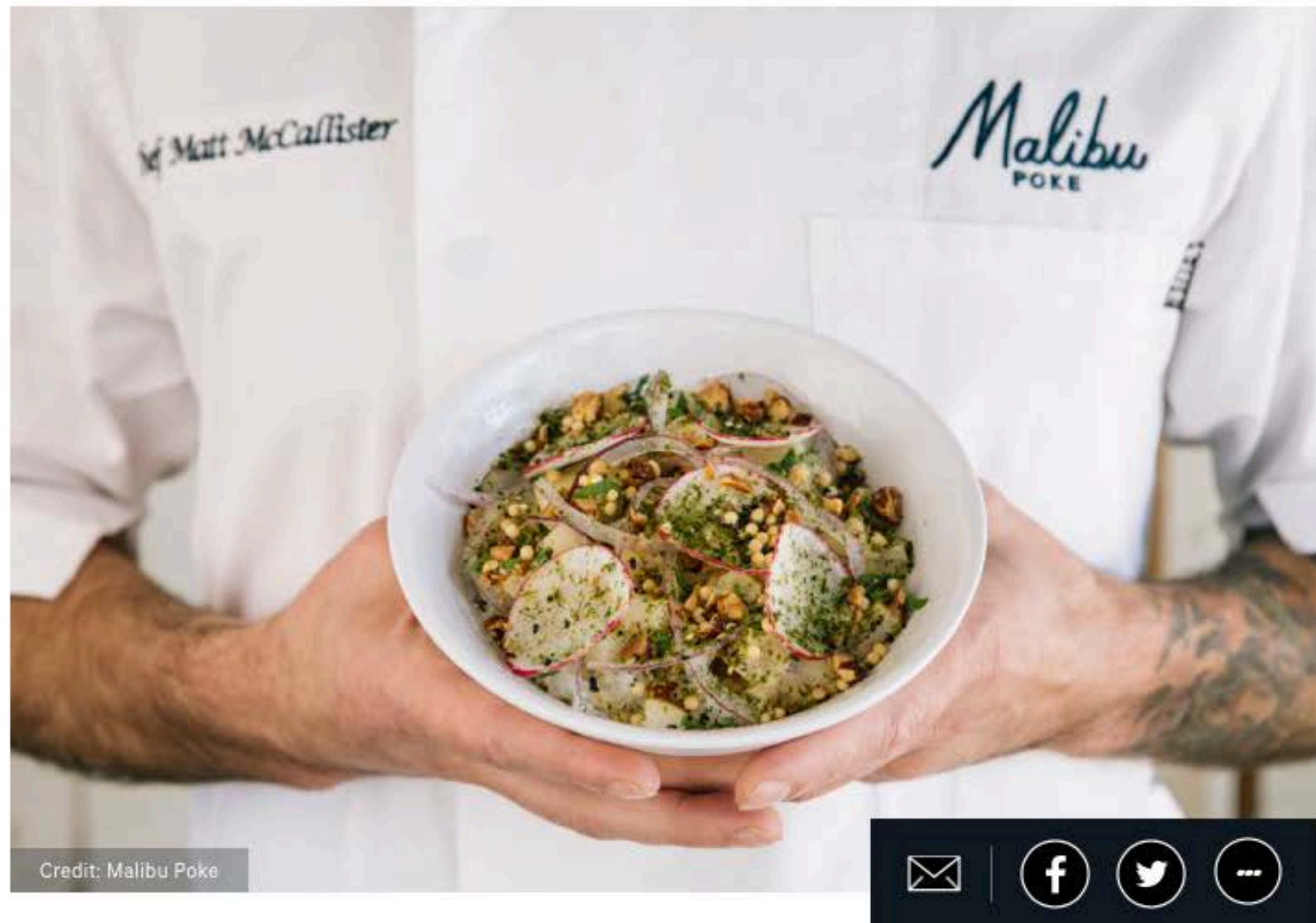


ZAGAT

Hottest Fast-Casual Restaurants in DFW

LOCAL SPOTS SERVING UP TACOS, KOREAN FARE AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN



Credit: Malibu Poke

December 22, 2017 · by Zagat Staff

Fast and easy doesn't have to leave you feeling culinarily unfulfilled. Several great chains born in Dallas (and one-offs that would *make* great chains) offer guests consistent, high-quality food in laid-back settings that elevate the dining experience above fast food, but stop short of white tablecloths and servers speaking French. Here are the best local fast-casual spots (old and new) worth checking out.



DUGG BURGER

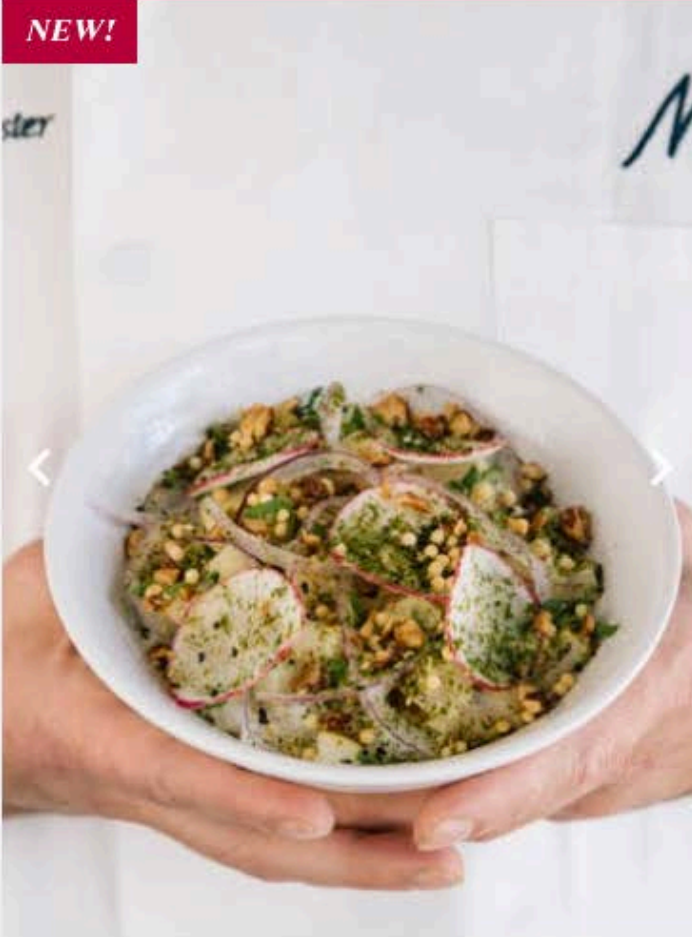
Burger · Casa Linda · \$

 ZAGAT RATED

Why it made the list: Fast-casual burger joints are a dime a dozen, but this particular one takes the number 13 to new and creative levels. Each burger (or chicken or portobello sandwich) comes with cheese *and* your choice of any or all 13 toppings (one of which changes daily), including bacon, mushrooms and fried onions. The most unique aspect, however, may be the hollowed-out (er, *dugg* out) top bun that allows the burger masters to stuff more toppings in without creating a towering sandwich that's impossible to eat.

Must-order: It's all up to your creativity, so go crazy with the toppings on either the traditional burger or grilled chicken (our two favorites), and then save room for the family-recipe bread pudding made from the leftover bread that was once part of all those top buns.

NEW!



MALIBU POKE

Turtle Creek · \$\$

ZAGAT RATED

Why it made the list: Though this fast-casual concept was late to the poke game, it was worth the wait. Celebrity chef Matt McCallister uses high-quality fish to craft inventive bowls packed with bold flavors and complementing textures. Easy-to-navigate touchscreen ordering makes technology a welcome addition rather than a distraction, plus the whole facial recognition thing is pretty darn cool. It all works together for a top-notch order-at-the-counter experience.

Must-order: Sure, you can DIY your own poke creation with a variety of fish and topping options, but start with one of the chef-created bowls before venturing out on your own. The coconut curry hamachi (pictured) tastes nothing like traditional Hawaiian poke, but that's actually A-OK.



EAST HAMPTON SANDWICH CO.

Sandwich · University Park · \$

ZAGAT RATED

Why it made the list: It wasn't long after the original sandwich shop opened in Snider Plaza that the crowds and rave reviews started pouring in. It was only a matter of time before the restaurant expanded to serve its popular lobster rolls and gourmet sandwiches, salads and soups across the region with multiple locations.

Must-order: The lobster roll, of course, but the house-roasted turkey is a real winner too, especially when combined with bacon and avocado. The shrimp and corn chowder and New England clam chowder are both comfort-food staples in colder weather. The ability to add lobster to any of the four salads is also a sign of the chain's upscale standards.



UNLEAVENED FRESH KITCHEN

American · Lakewood · \$

ZAGAT RATED

Why it made the list: Healthy eateries can be few and far between in our burger- and taco-obsessed region, so when one rises above the fray, it's worth doling out congratulations. Offering breakfast, lunch and dinner, these bright, cheery spots serve up wraps and bowls with a variety of fresh, health-conscious ingredients that still pack a flavorful punch. Gluten-free, vegan and vegetarian options reside alongside poultry, seafood, pork and beef in perfect harmony.

Must-order: The Weekender, as a salad (pictured) or wrap, has touches of guilt thanks to buttermilk fried chicken and pepper bacon, but the veggies provide a nice bit of food pyramid balance.



TWISTED ROOT BURGER CO

Burger · Mockingbird Station · \$\$

ZAGAT RATED
FOOD 4.4 · DECOR 4.0 · SERVICE 4.0

Why it made the list: This 10-year-old local chain was among the first to take burgers to a whole new level in a fast-casual setting. The chain differentiates itself in everything from housemade flavored root beers to a wide selection of game meats, including venison, rabbit, elk and even kangaroo, mates.

Must-order: The Southern Comfort (available with a turkey burger if you want to offset some of the fat and calories from the toppings) comes crowned with cheddar cheese, fried green tomatoes and bourbon BBQ glaze. Save room for loaded cheese fries and adult milkshakes, especially the Banana & Bailey's.



BBBOP SEOUL KITCHEN

Korean · Lower Greenville · \$

 ZAGAT RATED

Why it made the list: When local brother-and-sister team Steve Shin and Sandra Bussey opened the second location of their fast-casual Korean concept on Lowest Greenville Avenue, a few miles down the street from the original, things changed dramatically. Even more so when the Oak Cliff research-and-development location popped up. Upscale interiors and a menu vastly expanded beyond build-your-own rice bowls. The newest incarnation of the chain gives the brand longevity and the ability to grow.

Must-order: Not Your Mama's Fried Chicken, which is utterly addictive whether it's coated in spicy chile or mild soy-ginger sauce. Its namesake, the bibimbap rice bowl, is a Chipotle-style, name-your-protein-and-veggie option that gives customers exactly what they want in every bite.



START

Health Food · Mockingbird Station · \$

 FOOD 4.1 · DECOR 3.8 · SERVICE 4.0

Why it made the list: The concept is simple enough: fast food that provides healthy alternatives to typical drive-thru fare. The fact that it's well executed and kept within normal fast-food prices is what really sets it apart. The second location on Lemmon Avenue has proved equally popular, and it shouldn't be long before the better-for-you burgers, breakfast muffin sandwiches, salads and stuffed sweet potatoes are available in neighborhoods all over the city.

Must-order: The bacon, organic cage-free egg and cheddar sandwich on whole wheat English muffin is a perfect way to begin the day. And though it's not very fast-foody, the Best Ever Quinoa salad really lives up to its name with an addictive combination of feta, veggies and made-from-scratch extra-virgin herb vinaigrette. Baked chicken empanadas are pretty delish as well.



LIBERTY BURGER LAKEWOOD

Burger · Lakewood · \$

 FOOD 4.4 · DECOR 3.8 · SERVICE 4.1


Why it made the list: With seven North Texas locations (and one in Jackson, WY), this franchisable Texas-grown burger chain is ready to expand even further. The restaurants are committed to recycling and other sustainable practices, from using biodegradable products to sending compost to area farms. For the burgers, single-herd, grass-fed beef is sourced, and chicken comes from hormone-free birds raised in open-air environments, while the veggie patties are made in-house using seasonal ingredients.

Must-order: The Nooner — applewood-smoked bacon, ham, hash browns and a fried egg atop a beef patty — is brunch on a bun. The Libertine, meanwhile, is the turkey burger to beat with its white-meat patty, arugula, avocado, marinated cucumbers, tomato and onion on a cracked-wheat bun. Skip the fries when you're here because the Big O Rings are buttermilk-battered, steakhouse-style spheres of crunchy, oniony delight.



VELVET TACO

Taco · Knox-Henderson · \$

 FOOD 4.4 · DECOR 3.8 · SERVICE 4.0

Why it made the list: This taco shop stands out not just for its crazy tortilla-and-filling concoctions, but because it's open until midnight or later every night of the week (4 AM on weekends!). It's already expanded beyond Dallas and Fort Worth to Houston and Chicago.

Must-order: Think beyond your Tex-Mex notions of what tacos should be with the Indian-spiced No. 3 crispy tikka chicken (spicy pepper sauce, buttered cilantro basmati rice, mint-coriander yogurt and basil) to the No. 6 falafel (topped with tahini crema, arugula, tomatoes, Fresnos, avocado, pickled red onion and micro greens). Traditionalists will find plenty of meat, guacamole and cheese tacos too.