

America's Top Ten Small-Town Cafés

A small-town café is more than a place to eat. It is where citizens gather to exchange opinions on matters of great (or not-so-great) importance across the counter or in the dining room at large. How do you spot such a place? Look for cop cars and pickup trucks parked outside. See if regulars keep personal coffee mugs on a shelf, and if they help themselves to refills. If there's a collection jar for a community member in need or if you spot the pie-maker's blue ribbons tacked up around the pastry case, you've hit pay dirt. Probably the best way to find a memorable small-town café in an unfamiliar place is to drive slowly, with your windows down. Inhale. Do you smell biscuits hot from the oven? Ham sizzling on the griddle? Apple pie set out to cool? Congratulations, you've found a great small-town café!

Commons Lunch: On the Commons

Little Compton, Rhode Island

Downing Café

Route 170 in the Civic Hall, Downing, Wisconsin

Idle Isle

24 South Main, Brigham City, Utah

Juilleret's

1418 Bridge Street, Charlevoix, Michigan

Monument Café

1953 South Austin Avenue, Georgetown, Texas

Ramona Café

628 Main Street, Ramona, California

Sonny's Grill

1119 Main Street, Blowing Rock, North Carolina

Susie's Kitchen

404 Broad Avenue, Stanton, Iowa

Tripp Sports Bowl Café

210 South Main Street, Tripp, South Dakota

Village Restaurant

55 Main Street (Route 133), Essex, Massachusetts



These days the Village Restaurant opens only for lunch and supper, but there was a time about a half-century ago when regulars used to arrive before dawn (and before the kitchen staff), let themselves in, and cook their own breakfasts! The Village Restaurant is now somewhat less accommodating (they actually lock the door after hours), but it's still a favorite among locals...as well as with travelers to the Massachusetts North Shore. There is no better place to eat fried clams, lobster pie, and Atlantic fish in configurations that range from broiled scrod to Haddock Rockefeller. As for dessert, it's a good idea to have a dining companion so you don't have to decide between the Indian pudding, served piping-hot with vanilla ice cream on top, and blueberry bread pudding, set afloat in a pool of sweet rum sauce.