

Food and culture make Ann Arbor more than your average college town

[LaTria Garnigan](#) Sep 25, 2017

When I traveled to [Ann Arbor, Michigan](#) I didn't know what to expect. But what I wasn't expecting was to encounter such a vibrant city full of diversity, culture and quite the variety of foodie destinations. Home to the University of Michigan, there's so much more to Ann Arbor than the school, which pleasantly surprised me.

On either the first or second day I marveled at hearing several different languages spoken by locals walking through downtown — a beautiful peek into the various cultures that call Ann Arbor home.

WHAT TO DO: There's SO much to experience in Ann Arbor. Beer lovers will appreciate the many breweries in town and in adjacent towns. There's a vibrant and robust arts community that features everything from handmade ceramics, to scarves and clothing made with yarn. And if you want to explore downtown (*why wouldn't you?!*), then you'll be just as satisfied.



Ann Arbor boasts the most concentrated amount of locally-owned book stores I've seen. There's a store for everyone and you might make it a challenge to visit all of them — as I did. On Saturdays, **Kerrytown** (kerrytown.com/) boasts a wonderful farmers market, after which you can walk over and visit **Found** (foundgallery.com/) to get inspiration for your home decor and then **Fustini's** (www.fustinis.com) to pick up a variety of olive oils and vinegars (all of which you can sample in-store).

WHERE TO STAY: I can't praise **The Kensington Hotel** (www.kcourtaa.com) enough. Recently renovated, the hotel is situated directly across from the mall, which is wonderful if you need to pick up a few items you might have left at home. Staff is friendly and the lobby has the most fragrant aroma. While on a stretch of road with several other hotels and restaurants, it felt like you stepped into a different city when inside the Kensington.

And here's a tip: if you stay on the executive level, there's a private concierge

lounge with daily continental breakfast. Or you can just head downstairs to eat in the onsite restaurant. It's truly your call.

WHERE TO EAT: Now this is where it gets exciting. You can't have a truly diverse city without showcasing that fact with the food being offered. And Ann Arbor does not disappoint. No stone was left unturned when it came to dining options. The food scene in general has a strong sense of community and many of the restaurant owners and local farmers know each other and work together — and surprisingly help drive traffic to each other's businesses. There's no division here. For breakfast, I would recommend stopping by **Tea Haus** (teahaus-annarbor.com). Opened for 10 years, its boasts about 180 varieties of tea. And make sure you don't leave without tasting some of the delicious macarons — try the peanut butter flavor.

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For lunch, there's really only one place you **MUST** visit and that's

Zingerman's Deli (zingermansdeli.com). They're somewhat of a local mainstay in Ann Arbor. The Zingerman team own 10 separate businesses in Ann Arbor alone, and have a unique management structure in that all are independently owned. They hope to have up to 12 - 18 businesses open by 2020. Not just a deli, it also houses a store where you can sample anything on the shelves. And I mean they will open up a jar of something for you, just to take a sample. Talk about customer service! The item to order is the No. 2, the corned beef sandwich.

Another great destination for lunch is **Ollie Food + Spirits** (ollieypsi.com), located in neighboring Ypsilanti. Not only is the presentation beautiful, but the food is dynamic and unique in preparation. Items you must order? The dream burger sliders, one of the signature dishes: Helen's chicken and buttermilk biscuits, and the mushroom and asparagus pasta. The pasta is handmade and right before being thrown in the water to boil. It was obvious the amount of care taken to create these meals.



Dinner depends on if you want to fancy or hearty. For fancy, it doesn't get any better than **The Earle** (www.theearle.com). A staple in the community for 40 years, the underground restaurant (*it's literally under ground*) boasts an impressive French and Italian menu with more than 1,200 different wines on the menu.

If you'd like to keep it casual, visit **Mani Osteria & Bar** (www.maniosteria.com). The Italian restaurant offers small plates and some of the best wood fired pizza around. And don't forget to order a pasta dish as well — this place is great for families.

With so much to see and do in Ann Arbor, it might be hard to fit it all in one trip. Here are a couple more places to add to your list. Ann Arbor is a place that requires several return trips.

- **The Last Word** (www.thelastwordbar.com) — be sure to order the

signature cocktail, The Osborn.

- **VinBar** (www.vinbara2.com)
- **Ayse's Turkish Cafe** (www.aysescafe.com) — for a pick-me-up the Turkish coffee is a must. Great food!
- **Miss Kim** (www.misskimannarbor.com) — part of the Zingerman's empire, this Korean restaurant offers authentically delicious food.
- **Original Gravity Brewery** (www.ogbrewing.com) & **Wolverine State Brewing** (www.wolverinebeer.com)
- **Fred's** (www.fredsannarbor.com)
- **High Five Pedal Tours** (www.highfivepedaltours.com) — a fun and interactive way to explore downtown

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