

food



Lobster Roll

FORD'S FISH SHACK

Inspired by New England fish shacks, Ford's Fish Shack serves sea fare amidst a nautical ambiance of rustic wood fixtures and ocean blue chairs. With lobster flown in fresh from Maine, each sandwich takes a 1.25-pound size sea pincher prior to peeling. Both chilled and warmed lobster creations are served on toasted New England split top rolls and chilled lobster comes tossed with mayonnaise, lemon juice, salt, pepper and Old Bay. The warm version rests in a bed of melted butter.

■ *Multiple NoVA locations; ford'sfishshack.com; @FordsFish —NM*

Indian CURRY MANTRA

Curry Mantra doesn't have to be jealous of its younger siblings. Opened three years ago in Fairfax, owner Asad Sheikh carried the concept, with slight twists, to Falls Church, Vienna and a fourth to debut this August in Alexandria, but the original still carries stunning curries. There's a light fish curry in coconut milk and a rich, meaty lamb roghajosh, proving there's a curry for any palate. Vegetarians feel welcome with malia kofta, potato and cheese dumplings in a creamy gravy. Like listening to Beyonce's tracks with Destiny's Child, Curry Mantra's original incarnation hasn't lost its luster. ■ *9984 Main St., Fairfax; 703-218-8128; dccurrymantra.com —SG*

Chinese PEKING GOURMET INN

Before there were celebrity selfies, there were restaurant walls. Peking Gourmet knows how to work star power in Falls Church, snapping and framing photos of George H.W. Bush, Nancy Sinatra and Psy, the South Korean

singer of <cue reminiscing of 2012> "Gangnam Style." The food, though, doesn't follow fleeting global dance trends. Scallops stay luscious in a squash soup that resembles a gingered-egg drop soup. And of course there's the whole duck, carved tableside. It's a show and then DIY-assembling of meat, crackling skin and hoisin inside housemade pancakes.

■ *6029 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church; 703 671-8088; pekinggourmet.com —SG*

Oyster Bar HANK'S OYSTER BAR

Eating ethically has never been as easy, and delicious, as it is at the newly expanded (24-seat bar!) Hank's Oyster Bar. The health of the Chesapeake Bay depends on a vibrant population of oysters and Hank's sells Battle Creek, Pungoteague and Chincoteague, among other varieties from Virginia. But there's more than the half-shell life, with a gorgeous miso-soy sablefish and shrimp over such creamy polenta it's more like a sauce. Bonus: Brunch starts Friday morning. ■ *1026 King St., Alexandria; 703-739-4265; hanksoysterbar.com;*

French Fries

FOSTER'S GRILLE

Foster's Grille, which started in Manassas in 1999, is mostly known for its charburger. However, it's the side that comes with the charburger that deserves just as much respect. Every charburger at Foster's Grille comes with their signature hand-cut Idaho potato French Fries from the "Famous Idaho Potato Truck." ■ *Multiple NoVA locations; fostersgrille.com; @Fosters_Grille* —EM

Deli

THE ITALIAN STORE

Take a number. Then while you wait, and wait you will at this always crowded Italian market, figure out your sandwich, which will combine multiple meats (prosciutto, mortadella, genoa salami) and cheese (provolone or mozzarella) on a hard or soft roll. While waiting, browse the mini market of imported goods (pastas, grains, beans) and wine. Later this year, owner Robert Tramonte will open a new store in Arlington's Westover community, which will be, says Tramonte, "The Italian Store on steroids," complete with an onsite bakery, espresso bar and coveted in-store seating. ■ *3123 Lee Highway, Arlington; 703-528-6266; italianstore.com; @TheItalianStore* —SG



VILLA MOZART

Spanish

JALEO

Remember when you didn't know what tapas were? Thank Jaleo and the leisurely pace of Spanish eating. Now that the small plates trend infiltrated modern American menus, it's time to go back to the source. Order the most expensive jamon you can afford and you'll understand why pigs not pent up in cages (instead roaming free, gorging on acorns) is a rallying cry that has much to do with humane treatment as it does for taste. ■ *2250 Crystal Drive, Arling-*

ton; 703-413-8181; jaleo.com/crystal-city; @jaleocc —SG

French

L'AUBERGE CHEZ FRANCOIS

Let the foams evaporate and the deconstructed desserts crumble, because classic French food will never fade. At L'Auberge Chez Francois, with a beautiful patio facing the kitchen's garden—that tripled in size this season—the menu remains steady with even a few dishes still served from its original menu when the restaurant

3 LOCAL CHEESES TO KNOW:

Cheese Shop

CHEESETIQUE

2411 Mt. Vernon Ave.,
Alexandria
703-706-5300

4056 Campbell Ave.,
Arlington
703-933-8787

cheesetique.com;
@Cheesetique —NM



Dragon's Breath:

From Keswick Creamery in Pennsylvania, Dragon's Breath is its take on a hot pepper jack. A blend of jalapeno, habanero and birdseye peppers, the smooth and creamy cheese is used in Cheesetique's pimento cheese.



Grayson:

On the pungent side, the Grayson cheese comes from Meadow Creek in Virginia. Using raw cow's milk, Grayson boasts a meaty, hearty and robustly smelly quality.



Appalachian:

Also from Meadow Creek, this local cheese sits on the milder side of the spectrum. The unpasteurized cheese has a semi-firm texture and a hint of grassy notes to it and pairs fabulously with chutney.

opened in Washington 60 years ago. For the special anniversary, Chez Francois will host farm-to-table dinners starting this month and celebratory events throughout the year. ■ 332 Springvale Road, Great Falls; 703-759-3800; laubergechezfrancois.com; @LaubergeChezF —SG

Steakhouse RAY'S THE STEAKS

In Francis Lam's James Beard-nominated Bon Appetit story, "Better with Age," he describes dry-aged steak as, "It tasted like country ham, it tasted like pho, it tasted like shiitake, it tasted like how bad you miss your mama when you're sick." It makes you want to find a piece of red meat immediately and Ray's the Steaks is where you should go. Ray's ages meat for more than 60 days for what owner Michael Landrum calls, "nutty, gamey, real intense" flavor. It's also offered with gratis creamed spinach and mashed potatoes. Take your mom. ■ 2300 Wilson Blvd., Arlington; 703-841-7297; raysthesteaks.com —SG

Italian VILLA MOZART

There are red sauce joints and then there are Italian restaurants. Originally from Italy, Chef Andrea Pace offers 50 seats for housemade pasta (silky squid-ink chitarra in a buttery clam broth) and stuffed proteins (rabbit sausage tucked within quail over a carrot puree). This summer expect nettle gnocchi, shrimp-stuffed squash blossoms and cold tomato soup with lobster. And as for those breadsticks sitting out, do take one. They are more buttery than a biscuit, but with olive oil; this is an Italian restaurant. ■ 4009 Chain Bridge Road, Fairfax; 703-691-4747; villamozartrestaurant.com —SG

Breakfast ANITA'S

A 30-year-old family business, Anita's pays respects to its motherland with its emphasis on New Mexico-grown red and chile pepper-based sauces. The

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CSA / Farmers Market

FALLS CHURCH FARMERS MARKET

City Hall Parking Lot, 300 Park Ave., Falls Church; 703-248-5077; fallschurchva.gov; @FallsChurchInfo



The official start to summer is less than a month away, but according to Gary Allensworth, what we're seeing at the farmers market is still two weeks behind schedule. The Westmoreland farmer behind Lois's Produce (Lois is Gary's wife), Allensworth predicts by July the season's crops will finally be where they should because of this winter's extreme cold. Summer's jewel, the **tomato**, won't arrive until the end of this month or even July. "We've had so many warm winters," says Allensworth, who works the same land his family's been tending since 1882, "that we got spoiled."

Tree & Leaf Farm's failed winter crop—**cabbage, kale**—lost owner Zach Lester \$20,000. For June, he won't have **squash** or **fava beans** and he predicts **peppers, eggplants** and **tomatoes** will arrive at the market later than usual. The Unionville-based farm grows crops in solar greenhouses, which protects the seeds, but because of the cold ground, it's taken longer to transfer plants to the field. This month, Lester hopes to bring **bok choy, lettuce, kale** and **onions** to markets.

Another survivor, says Allensworth, is **garlic**. When the rest of us were buried under multiple blankets, Allensworth provided the same warm treatment to **elephant garlic**, planting the variety deep within the soil, thinking "maybe that had something to do with" its vigor.

And after 30 years, the Falls Church Farmers Market is still such a coveted marketplace Howard Herman, the market's director since its inception, still rejects about 20 vendor applications every season. He keeps the market at 48 stalls; it started with eight. "There are more people that are more in tune to buying local and buying value," he says of the market's changing demographics. "I think younger people tend to get that better than people my age," says Herman, who recently celebrated his 60th birthday in Hawaii.

Unlike grocery stores, where a tomato is always available, weather dictates what fills the market's wooden crates. Shopping lists are obsolete. You buy what's at the market because the two don't always sync. It's a different way to think about your next meal—and forces you to think of your community. —SG