

DINING

# Jacksonville's essential restaurants: 5 to try in San Marco



**Tom Szaroleta** Jacksonville Florida Times-Union, July 23, 2025

- San Marco is one of Jacksonville's oldest neighborhoods, with tons of dining options.

For foodies, Jacksonville can be a difficult place to live. Sure, you can find just about any [sort of restaurant](#) you can think of — probably several of them — but there's a good chance that the place you have your eye on is 20 or 30 miles away, clear on the other side of town.

So we are breaking it down and looking at “essential” restaurants in 10 different areas of the city, including San Marco. By essential, we mean places you really should try out at least once.

San Marco is as good a place as any to start. The area just to the south of downtown Jacksonville is one of the city's prime dining destinations and includes the iconic San Marco Square, which is nearly a century old and is jammed with restaurants, and a shiny new center anchored by Publix across the street. Go a few blocks down Hendricks and you'll find the original Metro Diner.

We started with a list of about 20 San Marco eateries, then narrowed it down to an essential five by digging through Times-Union archives, Yelp reviews and online menus.

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## What are the Essential Restaurants of Jacksonville?

Jacksonville has plenty of great restaurants. But in a city as big as ours — *it is the largest city by area in the contiguous United States, after all* — it's easy to overlook some of the true gems. That's where our new guide, Essential Restaurants of Jacksonville, comes in. We're sharing

some of the must-try restaurants based on our experiences, past reporting, including Times-Union reviews, and online review sites, in a neighborhood-by-neighborhood guide. For now, we're starting each list with five destination restaurants. Next year, we'll add five more, including one selected by readers like you. Watch for more details on how you can share and vote for your favorite restaurant.

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## Matthew's Restaurant



For more than a quarter-century, [Matthew's](#) has been among the city's most elegant fine-dining restaurants, offering impeccable service, a menu of French and Mediterranean dishes, a AAA four-diamond rating and a Wine Spectator award-winning wine list.

It's from the same group that operates Restaurant Medure in Ponte Vedra, Rue St. Marc in San Marco and M Shack in Nocatee.

Dress is business-casual and the menu offers six- and eight-course chef's tastings, three caviar selections, Japanese A5 Wagyu Beef, Maine Diver Scallop, Pasta Radiatori and Basil-Crusted Lamb.

*2107 Hendricks Ave., Jacksonville, (904) 396-9922, [matthewsrestaurant.com](http://matthewsrestaurant.com)*

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# Town Hall



Open seven nights a week and for Sunday brunch, [Town Hall](#) has quickly become a San Marco favorite, thanks to locally sourced ingredients and a menu that makes everyday meals seem special.

The Seared Scallops, for instance, come on a bed of corn puree, topped by blistered shishito peppers and heirloom tomatoes, and the Loaded Fries are buried in a truffle-balsamic glaze, cheddar cheese, cured egg yolk and black garlic aioli.

It's from the same team behind Prati Italia at the Town Center and Electric Dough Pizza Co., which is next door in the former San Marco Theatre.

Vinophiles will love the weekly wine tastings, held from 4:30-7 pm. Wednesdays and Thursdays, where different wines are served right to your table.

*2012 San Marco Blvd., Jacksonville, (904) 398-0726, [townhalljax.com](http://townhalljax.com)*

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# Maple Street Biscuit Co.



Today, you can find 68 Maple Street Biscuit Co. locations, spread across 10 states from Ohio to Texas. But if [you want the original](#), you have to go to San Marco.

The "Southern comfort food with a modern twist" chain, [now owned by Cracker Barrel](#), closes for the day (at 2 p.m. on weekdays, 3 p.m. on weekends) before most restaurants have started setting up for dinner service.

Biscuits, of course, are the focus (and the Squawking Goat, topped with chicken, goat cheese and pepper jelly, is a favorite), but they also offer breakfast bowls, waffles and breakfast tacos.

*2004 San Marco Blvd., Jacksonville, (904) 398-1004, [maplestreetbiscuits.com](http://maplestreetbiscuits.com)*

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# Taverna



Don't take our word for it that diners love [Taverna](#). Since opening in 2009, USA TODAY named it as Jacksonville's most romantic dining spot, Florida Trend magazine named it one of Florida's best restaurants four times and Wine Spectator magazine gave the place several Awards of Excellence.

It's run by Executive Chef Sam Efron and his wife, Wine Director Kylie Wynne Efron, who also run Taverna Oceana next door. Taverna offers brunch, lunch, dinner and kids' menus, so you're likely to find something that suits your tastes.

The dinner menu leans toward Italian, with pizzas, pasta dishes and a Sicilian Seafood Stew, but steak, salmon or smoked chicken.

*1986 San Marco Blvd., Jacksonville, (904) 398-3005, [taverna.restaurant](http://taverna.restaurant)*



# Metro Diner



Metro Diner can trace its roots in San Marco to either 1938 or 1992, depending on how you look at it. The building that houses the original location has been around since the ‘30s, but Metro Diner didn’t move in until the ‘90s.

Now there are [more than 60 of them in 12 states](#), but the original, near Hendricks Avenue Elementary School, has a special charm. That’s the one where “Diners, Drive-ins and Dives” host Guy Fieri fell in love with the Iron City Meatloaf (but, unlike some other locations, this one closes at 3 p.m.)

Breakfast is a big deal at Metro, with pancakes, waffles and omelets on the menu. But you’ll also find wings, salads, fried chicken and waffles, and burgers. And meatloaf, of course.

*3302 Hendricks Ave., Jacksonville, (904) 398-3701, [metrodiner.com](http://metrodiner.com)*

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## More Essential Restaurants of Jacksonville

Look for future Essential Restaurants of Jacksonville lists here as they become available.