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PHILADELPHIA CHEESESTEAK: THE ENDURING HISTORY OF AN ICONIC SANDWICH *The Who, What, Where & Whiz Of Philly Cheesesteaks*

PHILADELPHIA, September 14, 2018 – In Philadelphia, cheesesteaks are a civic icon, tourist draw and cultural obsession. Often imitated around the world, the cheesesteak is rarely duplicated outside of Philly. So, what is an authentic cheesesteak and where did it come from? Here's the lowdown on this region's favorite sandwich.

What Is A Cheesesteak?:

A cheesesteak begins with a long, crusty roll and continues with thinly sliced sautéed rib-eye, melted cheese and, as often as not, griddled onions. Generally, the cheese of choice is Cheez Whiz®, but American and mild or sharp provolone are common substitutions. The art of cheesesteak preparation lies in the balance of flavors, textures and what is often referred to as the “drip” factor. Other toppings may include sautéed mushrooms, ketchup and hot or sweet peppers. Some sandwich shops also offer a cheesesteak hoagie, a hybrid that combines the cheesesteak with cold hoagie dressings like lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise. Cheesesteaks are fast, portable and readily available at steak shops, delis, food trucks, pizzerias and even some high-end restaurants throughout the region.

Cheesesteak History:

The cheesesteak made its official debut in 1930, when South Philadelphia hot dog vendor Pat Olivieri slapped some beef from the butcher onto his grill. A nearby taxi driver noticed the alluring aroma and asked for his own steak sandwich. The next day, as the story goes, rumor of the delicious lunch had spread, and cabbies around the city came to Olivieri demanding steak sandwiches. Soon thereafter, Olivieri opened a shop on 9th Street and Passyunk Avenue, **Pat's King of Steaks**, to sell his new creation. Eventually, according to legend, he added cheese to the recipe. Today, Pat's grills sizzle 24 hours a day, as does circa 1966 **Geno's**, the rival shop across the street. For 53 years, the two family-run businesses have waged a friendly competition to win the title of best cheesesteak in town, with Geno's late founder, Joe Vento, claiming it was he, not Olivieri, who first added cheese to the cheesesteak.

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How To Order A Cheesesteak:

Ordering a cheesesteak is a simple yet specific process. First declaration to make: Cheese. One asks for “Whiz,” or “provolone,” or “American,” just like that. Next up: onions. For yes, the request is “wit.” For no, it’s “w/out.” (So, for Cheez Whiz with onions, it’s a “Whiz wit.”) Additional toppings, if available, go by their regular names. Be forewarned: Lines are long, and patience is tested. It’s wise to have your order and money ready to go.

Best Places To Find A Cheesesteak:

Nearly every pizza shop on any corner of every neighborhood in the city serves up the city’s best-known delicacy. Here are a few notable Center City and South Philadelphia spots:

Center City:

- **Barclay Prime** – This chic Rittenhouse Square steakhouse dishes out the city’s—and possibly the world’s—most expensive cheesesteak. For \$120, guests enjoy a gussied-up sandwich stuffed with Wagyu rib-eye, foie gras, truffled cheese whiz and served on a fresh-baked sesame roll. This decadent creation comes, fittingly, with a half bottle of champagne. 237 S. 18th Street, (215) 732-7560, barclayprime.com
- **Campo’s Deli** – Well known for its creative menu of hoagies, this busy Old City store cooks up a respectable traditional cheesesteak—that they also happen to ship to all over the country. Just a few blocks from the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall in Historic Philadelphia, it’s the perfect stop for a post-tour meal. 214 Market Street, (215) 923-1000, camposdeli.com
- **Cleavers** – This Rittenhouse Square spot gives cheesesteaks the spotlight, offering ingredients—rib-eye, chicken or veggies—in rolls, wraps or bowls, with toppings such as Sriracha aioli, blue cheese dressing, long hots and onion rings. 108 S. 18th Street, (215) 515-3828, cleaversphilly.com
- **Jim’s Steaks** – Jim’s has four locations, but the classic smell of fried onions wafting down South Street makes that address the most memorable—and the most popular after a late night of partying on the famed strip. 400 South Street, (215) 928-1911, jimssouthstreet.com; 469 Baltimore Pike, Springfield, (610) 544-8400, jimssteaks.com
- **Reading Terminal Market** – This busy, circa 1892 market houses more than 80 vendors of farm-fresh produce, meats, cheeses, herbs and ready-to-eat meals—from Amish baked goods to Greek fare. It’s also a great spot to feast on Philly’s most famous sandwich: the cheesesteak. **By George! Pizza, Pasta & Cheesesteaks, Carmen’s Famous Italian Hoagies & Cheesesteaks** and **Spataro’s Cheesesteaks** are among the solid options here, and for a twist on the classic cheesesteak, there’s the Trainwreck at **Beck’s Cajun Café**. It’s filled with thin-sliced steak, andouille sausage, salami, American cheese, fried onions and creole mayo. 12th & Arch Streets, (215) 922-2317, readingterminalmarket.org
- **Sonny’s Famous Steaks** – This Old City spot has distinguished itself with a healthful take on the recipe, frying the 100% Angus beef in its own juices rather than in oil. Sonny’s also uses locally baked Amoroso’s rolls and has a liberal ordering policy—meaning patrons shouldn’t feel pressured to order the cheesesteak in standard Philly fashion. 228 Market Street, (215) 629-5760, sonnyscheesesteaks.com

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- **Wiz Kid** – From the couple behind Philadelphia’s premier vegan dining destinations, Vedge and V Street, this fast-casual restaurant puts a plant-based spin on cheesesteaks. Wiz Kid’s signature sandwich credits its meatiness to thinly sliced seitan and mushrooms topped with an unbelievably creamy rutabaga sauce. 124 S. 19th Street, (267) 687-2137, wizkidfood.com

South Philadelphia:

- **Cosmi’s Deli** – This South Philly corner store has won plenty of praise for its rendition of the famous Philly delicacy. It’s even a two-time winner of *Philadelphia* magazine’s coveted “Best of Philly” award. 1501 S. 8th Street, (215) 468-6093, cosmideli.com
- **Geno’s Steaks** – Across the street from the oldest cheesesteak joint in town, Geno’s is a formidable competitor going roll-for-roll with Pat’s for more than 50 years. The key to success for the 24/7 spot? Quality thinly sliced rib-eye steak for maximum juiciness, the freshest of onions and house-made bread. 1219 S. 9th Street, (215) 389-0659, genosteaks.com
- **Gooley Looie’s** – With a name like this Pennsport spot’s, a kitchen isn’t going to skimp on meat. The deli plumps up its sandwiches with a beyond-generous helping of steak and cheese that demands many napkins—and sometimes utensils. 231 McClellan Street, (215) 334-7668
- **John’s Roast Pork** – There’s no “cheesesteak” in John’s name, but this small shack among Pennsport shopping plazas is frequently named one of the city’s top steak spots. Its secret weapon? A crusty seeded roll. 14 E. Snyder Avenue, (215) 463-1951, johnsroastpork.com
- **Little Sicily 2** – This unassuming strip mall pizzeria is home to one of Philly’s most unique sandwiches: an Indian-spiced cheesesteak. Beef, chicken or veggie fillings are doused in a fiery masala spice blend, adding South Asian flair to the Philly original. 1608 S. Columbus Boulevard, (215) 465-8787
- **Pat’s King of Steaks** – The original home of the cheesesteak has been owned and operated by the Olivieri family for 88 years and counting. A 24-hour shop, Pat’s shuts down for only 48 hours each year: Thanksgiving and Christmas. 1237 E. Passyunk Avenue, (215) 468-1546, patskingofsteaks.com
- **Philip’s Steaks** – This 24-hour South Philly institution is the perfect example of vintage cheesesteak shop architecture. Steaks are solid, service is swift and a serve-yourself peppers bar is available to spice up an order. 2234 W. Passyunk Avenue, (215) 755-4820
- **Royal Tavern** – A menu of creative bar food has been keeping this pub packed since 2002. The Royal’s offerings change frequently, but their vegan cheesesteak, made with seitan and dairy-free mozzarella, is a perennial crowd pleaser. 937 E. Passyunk Avenue, (215) 389-6694, royaltavern.com
- **Shank’s Original** – This blink-and-you’ll-miss-it Delaware River Waterfront vendor slings a highly reputed cheesesteak—and an old-school South Philly experience. Wise patrons know to save room for a bite or two of Shank’s famed chicken cutlet sandwich too. 901 S. Columbus Boulevard, Pier 40, (215) 218-4000, shanksoriginal.com
- **Tony Luke’s** – Every sandwich at this neon lit go-to—now with multiple locations in multiple states—is worth ordering. And although the cheesesteak, made with 100% USDA-inspected rib-eye steak, was not on the restaurant’s original menu, it’s been a top seller ever since it was added six months after opening in 1992. Original location, 39 E. Oregon Avenue, (215) 892-1010, tonylukes.com

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Other Neighborhoods:

- **Abner's Cheesesteaks** – Open until 2:30 a.m. on weekends, this West Philly favorite among the college crowd has been warding off hangovers for years with its hefty steaks and generous portions of waffle fries. The special here tops a traditional cheesesteak with marinara, pepperoni and provolone. 3818 Chestnut Street, (215) 662-0100, abnerscheesesteakspa.com
- **Chubby's** – Like South Philly, Roxborough offers a solid across-the-street cheesesteak shops rivalry: Chubby's versus Dalessandro's. At the former, thin rib-eye is mixed with thin-sliced onions and served on an Amoroso's roll. They also offer an atypical amount of cheese options: American, provolone, Swiss, pepperjack and Cheez Whiz. 5826 Henry Avenue, (215) 487-2575, chubbyssteaks.com
- **Dalessandro's Steaks** – Chubby's Roxborough rival has racked up an enormous amount of accolades since getting into the cheesesteak business a half-century ago. For this neighborhood staple, freshness rules. 600 Wendover Street, (215) 482-5407, dalessandros.com
- **Ishkabibble's** – This beloved South Street spot has been cooking up cheesesteaks and chicken cheesesteaks since 1979. Other favorites at this walk-up vendor include Ishka fries (with hot peppers and onions) and the original Gremlin, a half lemonade, half grape juice concoction. 337 South Street, (215) 923-4337; 517 South Street, (215) 922-0494, philacheesesteak.com
- **Jimmy G's Steaks** – In just a few short years, this Spring Garden store has established itself as a key player in the local sandwich game, griddling up classics in chopped and slab formats on Liscio's rolls. For the adventuresome, there's also a lamb variation. 695 N. Broad Street, (215) 763-2495, jimmygsteaks.com
- **Joe's Steaks & Soda Shop** – The staff at this Northeast Philly spot has been slinging the classic sandwich since 1949. The newer Fishtown location stays true to tradition, serving the 68-year-old recipe with beef or chicken and alongside milkshakes, ice cream sodas and egg creams. 6030 Torresdale Avenue, (215) 535-9405; 1 W. Girard Avenue, (215) 423-5637, joessteaks.com
- **Koja Grille** – Tucked into a menu of Korean and Japanese dishes, the bulgogi cheesesteak at this Temple campus spot is a fantastic fusion. Tender slices of soy, ginger and garlic-marinated beef are tossed with onions and peppers, topped with gooey American cheese and sandwiched into a long roll. 1600 N. Broad Street, (215) 763-5652, kojagrille.com
- **Max's Steaks** – For decades, neon-lit Max's has been a go-to place for cheesesteaks in the heart of North Philadelphia. Open daily from lunchtime to 2 a.m., the spot is known for its mammoth rolls, full bar (daiquiris recommended), celebrity following and a star turn in circa 2015 *Rocky* spinoff, *Creed*. 3653 Germantown Avenue, (215) 229-9048
- **McNally's Tavern** – The home of the iconic cheesesteak takeoff known as the Schmitter®, this cozy Chestnut Hill pub packs its signature creation with sliced beef, extra cheese, fried onions, tomato, grilled salami and secret Schmitter sauce. This family-owned bar has been serving its over-the-top sandwich on a flash-broiled Kaiser roll for more than a half-century now. 8634 Germantown Avenue, (215) 247-9736, mcnallystavern.com
- **One Pound Cheesesteaks** – The name says it all for this Kensington walk-up under the El. Close to two feet in length, one of One Pound's monster cheesesteaks is a two-person (or two-meal) job. 2661 Kensington Avenue, (215) 425-2996, onepoundcheesesteaks.com
- **Philly's Finest Sambonis** – This food truck doesn't keep a regular schedule; instead, it requires its fans pay close attention to social media. The juicy chopped steaks, packed into hollowed-out Liscio's rolls, make for ideal for a close follow on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook. facebook.com/samboniboyz

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- **Spot Gourmet Burgers** – Meat specialists in a Drexel University truck and a brick-and-mortar location in Brewerytown distinguish their steaks from the pack with whopping half pounds of house-butchered rib-eye per sandwich. Topped with provolone and grilled onions, Spot’s steaks make for a memorable rendition. 2821 W. Girard Avenue; 4300 Powelton Avenue, (267) 930-7370, spotburgers.com
- **Steve’s Prince of Steaks** – Five Philly locations, starting in Northeast Philadelphia and expanding into Center City, have been the domain for more than three decades of owner Steve Ilescu, who delivers his signature sandwich on a long, thin roll with just the right chew. 41 S. 16th Street, (215) 972-6090; 3836 Chestnut Street, (215) 921-6469; 7200 Bustleton Avenue, (215) 338-0985; 2711 Comly Road, (215) 677-8020; 1617 E. Lincoln Highway, Langhorne, (215) 943-4640, stevesprinceofsteaks.com

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