

Best New Restaurant

Preservation Tap & Chophouse





the Best of Jacksonville

From bar food to chic shops, *Jacksonville Magazine's* annual guide to the region's cream of the crop in dozens of categories.

photos by Bradley Stookey

HERE, NEARLY 100 OF THE THINGS WE LOVE most about Jax this year, complete with the city's "Best" as picked by our readers in an online poll, as well as personal favorites of the magazine staff. It's no easy task to compile a list covering topics as diverse as favorite karaoke spot and best place to buy jeans. But we think you're worth it.

Join us as we spotlight fantastic places to eat, drink, shop and have fun outdoors. And because we know some of you have difficulty making decisions, we've included a cut-and-fold template for *Jacksonville Magazine's* exclusive Best of Jacksonville Evening on the Town dice. In this game, every roll is a winner.

**French Fries ♦ Outdoor Dining ♦ New Restaurant ♦ Bar Eats ♦ Dancing ♦
Dive Bar ♦ Girls Night Out ♦ Jazz Spot ♦ Karaoke Joint ♦ Open Mic Night ♦
Winter Activity ♦ Kids Clothing Shop ♦ Toy Shops ♦ Ladies Boutique ♦
New Day Spa ♦ Jeans Store ♦ Beaches Salon ♦ Hard to Find Wines ♦
Weekend Drive ♦ Family Getaway ♦ Family-Friendly Restaurant ♦ Lingerie Shop**



& MORE!

Seafood Shacks

Raw Bar

Sliders Seafood Grille

(218 1st St, Neptune Beach, 246-0881)

Warning: Consuming raw or undercooked animal products may increase the risk of catching food-borne illness, especially for people with vulnerable immune systems. That includes steak, sushi, eggs sunny-side up, egg nog ... and oysters. Thought you should know that before heading out to a raw bar of any sort.

But, if you like things raw, stop by Sliders Seafood Grille, where fresh oysters are served by the bucket and ready for shucking.

Local's Secret

Beachside Seafood Restaurant

(120 3rd St. S., Jacksonville Beach, 241-4880, beachsideseafood.info)

Right on Jacksonville Beach's main drag, Beachside Seafood Market & Restaurant might

not be much of a secret anymore. Lines of sandy-footed diners waiting for fresh-fried grouper or a shrimp burger outside the two-story shack are common during the summer. Fresh seafood also can be bought to cook at home.

Ocean Spray

The Reef

(4100 Coastal Hwy. A1A, Vilano Beach, 824-8008; www.thereefstaugustine.com)

Despite having miles of Atlantic Ocean coastline, there are too few waterfront restaurants in operation in Northeast Florida. Thankfully, places like The Reef still exist. The lengthy menu covers a lot of ground, including coconut shrimp, crab cakes, grilled lamb chops, jambalaya and scallops carbonara. Tuesday night is prime rib and crab leg special night. The Sunday brunch feast is served 11 AM to 2:30 PM. And the view from the large deck can't be beat.

Cheesy Décor

Joe's Crab Shack

(6 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville Beach, 249-6160, www.joescrabshack.com)

Whether it's the psychedelic posters and rustic picnic tables or hand-strewn nets and disco lights at Joe's Crab Shack, there's a lot more than shell-cracking going on at this beachfront joint. Servers wear a variety of tie-dyed T-shirts and are known to spontaneously perform song skits.

Seafood Trivia

Seafood Galore

(1589 Atlantic Blvd., Neptune Beach, 241-7400, www.seafoodgaloregrill.com)

Every Friday night is Team Trivia Night at Seafood Galore, the latest addition to Trivia Team Challenge's roster of locations on the First Coast. There's no limit to the number of people per team, but the one that wins will have to split the \$30 gift certificate amongst its members. Chomp on some gator tail or shark bites to get the intellectual juices flowing, while you're at it. The first game starts at 6:30 PM, the second at 7:30 PM. Don't forget to come up with a snazzy team name.

Beachside Seafood



Steak Houses



Morton's, The Steakhouse

Civic Duty

Plaza III, The Steakhouse
(Hyatt Regency, 225 E. Coastline Dr.,
598-0234, plaza3jax.com)

Being called for jury duty in Duval County doesn't have to be as dismal as the old courthouse building looks. At least, not at lunch. In cooperation with the Clerk of Courts Office, Plaza III has whipped up a few lunch specials for jurors and county courthouse employees. A juror's badge or employee ID gets you a 10 percent discount on the steakhouse's regular lunch menu (from 11:30 AM to 2:30 PM) or a

choice of several \$7 meals. If you're in a real hurry, the specials can be taken to go.

Service

Tento Churrascaria
(528 N. First St., Jacksonville Beach, 246-
1580, tento-churrascaria.com)

When you want something carved to order, Tento Churrascaria has got it covered. Literally. And as many times as you wish. Servers at the Brazilian steakhouse parade steaming skewers of various meats—beef, lamb, chicken—and

slice portions tableside until patrons can eat no more. A self-serve buffet of soups, salads and sides comes with the meal price.

Bar

Morton's, The Steakhouse
(1510 Riverplace Blvd., 399-3933,
www.mortons.com)

The house specialty cocktail at Morton's The Steakhouse is the appropriately named a "Mortini." Actually a select line of potent and pretty-as-a-picture drinks, Mortinis vary in taste from the Heavenly Cosmopolitan to the Heavenly Palm Beacher, made with Skyy vodka, pineapple and mint. Even 007 himself would enjoy this shaken, not stirred, cocktail, particularly when served in the Southbank restaurant's chic and clubby bar. The relatively small space features a smattering of high-top tables, a couple of cushy couches and plenty of elbow room at the bar. It offers a view into the main dining room but some patrons prefer to enjoy their appetizers, steak and side dishes in here.

Entertainment

The Tree Steak House
(11362 San Jose Blvd., 262-0006,
www.treesteakhousejax.com)

Before savoring the sirloin, guests on the waiting list at The Tree Steak House can cozy up to the restaurant's bar, which features live piano players and large plasma TVs, separate from the dining areas, of course.

View

Ruth's Chris Steak House
(1201 Riverplace Blvd., 396-6200,
www.ruthschris.com)

To enter the city's Downtown location one first needs to step inside the 292-room Crowne Plaza. The Ruth's Chris is located inside the hotel, overlooking the St. Johns River. The waterside views are postcard-worthy; however, many diners don't really notice, given the menu offerings like USDA prime ribeye, creamy au gratin potatoes topped with melted sharp cheddar and caramelized broiled tomatoes drawing so much attention. Of course, the best tables are those that hug the outer wall, allowing for the best views of the city skyline and the bright blue lights of the Main Street Bridge.

Good Eats

(that really are kinda' bad for you)

D'oh!

Homer Doughnut at
Edgewood Bakery
(1012 S. Edgewood Ave., 389-8054,
edgewoodbakery.com)

Edgewood Bakery has been satisfying local sweet teeth for 60 years. The Murray Hill landmark moved and expanded its operation a couple of years ago, electing to add things like salads and sandwiches to the lineup. While the new additions are tasty, the bulk of regulars still count on Edgewood for cakes, cookies, Danish, cinnamon rolls, muffins, coffee cakes and doughnuts, including the enormous Homer. Slathered in pink frosting, the Homer is edible homage to The Simpsons cartoon dad. D'oh!

Chocolate Thunder

SUPER Gooley To Die For
Chocolate Covered Brownie at
3 Sisters' Chocolate
(9965 San Jose Blvd., 262-9122,
www.3sisterschocolate.com)

What happens when a chocolatier supersedes her already gooey, to-die-for, chocolate-covered brownies? The SUPER Gooley To Die For Chocolate Covered Brownie at 3 Sisters' Chocolate happens, almost five pounds of the rich fudge-like cake. If that's not enough chocolate for the ultimate chocoholic, order a classic chocolate shake from the 3 Sisters' chocolate bar.

Golden Nuggets

Beach Road
Chicken Dinners
(4132 Atlantic Blvd., 398-7980)

A Jacksonville staple, the fried chicken dinner is a must-eat. At Beach Road Chicken (which is not on Beach Boulevard but Atlantic, once the only street leading to the beach), the chicken is hot and crispy, and served with heaping helpings of mashed potatoes, rice and creamed peas. The biscuits alone are worth the trip. Dinners are breaded and fried from 4 to 8:30 PM Tuesday through Saturday, and from 11 AM on Sunday.

Say "Cheese!"

Fried macaroni & cheese
@ The Cheesecake Factory
(St. Johns Town Center, 10260 Midtown Pkwy.,
998-9511, www.thecheesecakefactory.com)

They say there's something for everyone at The Cheesecake Factory, which boasts a 19-page menu (and they use small type). But it's somewhat surprising that the California-based restaurant chain has fried macaroni & cheese on the table—talk about taking something unhealthy and making it even more. According to the menu, the macaroni and cheese balls are "crumb coated" and served with a creamy marinara sauce.

Sauce Boss

Hot wings at Dick's Wings
(various locations, www.dickswingsandgrill.com)

The growing number of Dick's Wings franchises in and around Jacksonville probably isn't due to those who survive Dick's Secret Sauce. The Jacksonville-based, NASCAR-themed wing house prepares chicken wings 365 ways, ranging in temperature from "no heat" to the "secret sauce" (it's so hot that diners have to sign a waiver to order the stuff). Have the milk of magnesia handy.



Edgewood's Homer Doughnut

IF WE COULD CREATE our own menu using dishes from the best restaurants on the First Coast, we'd be the most sought-after menu creators in the city. Following is our version of the ultimate menu featuring appetizers, entrées, and desserts culled from our Top 25 Restaurants article published in our September edition. Happy eating!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Menu items were selected in the Fall of 2007, and prices were rounded up to the nearest dollar. Prices and availability are subject to change. And, if you were wondering why there are only 24 dishes on the menu, one of our Top 25 (Crush) closed.

1. **b.b.'s**
2. **Biscottis**
3. **Bistro Aix**
4. **Blue Bamboo**
5. **Brick**
6. **Cobblestones on the Creek**
7. **The Corner Brasserie**
8. **Crush**
9. **Dwight's Bistro**
10. **Eleven South**
11. **Giovanni's**
12. **Lemongrass Restaurant**
13. **Matthew's at San Marco**
14. **Mezza Luna**
15. **Mossfire Grill**
16. **Ocean 60**
17. **Pastiche**
18. **Pom's Thai Bistro**
19. **Ragtime Tavern**
20. **River City Brewing Co.**
21. **The Row Restaurant**
22. **Sorrento Italian Restaurant**
23. **Sterlings of Avondale**
24. **Tento Churrascaria**
25. **Wine Cellar**

Dream Menu

Jacksonville Magazine's Top 25 Restaurants

Appetizers, Soups & Salads

Beer Cheese Soup

Creamy blend of handcrafted ales and aged cheeses served with asiago-toasted points, \$6

River City Brewing Co.

Shrimp Bisque

b.b.'s signature soup, served with focaccia bread, \$6

b.b.'s

Tomato Cheese & Pesto Napoleon

With organic olive oil & aged balsamic vinaigrette, \$8

The Row Restaurant

Spinach Cobb Salad

With bleu cheese, grape tomatoes, boiled egg, applewood smoked bacon, avocado and a sun-dried tomato bacon vinaigrette, \$9

Biscottis

Fried Oysters

Lightly breaded and deep fried, these juicy oysters are tossed in barbecue sauce. Served with mango pico de gallo, \$9

Ragtime Tavern

Hoisin Chicken Mee Krob

Served on fresh lettuce, \$10

Blue Bamboo

Entrées

Seafood

Mussels Frites

Steamed in white wine, thyme & garlic with saffron aioli, \$19

Bistro Aix

Jumbo Lump Crab Cakes

Served with choice of chilled couscous, coleslaw, fries, baked potato or the vegetable of the day, \$26

Brick

Three Kings

1-pound whole Maine lobster, prawns & scallops wok fried in a white wine butter garlic sauce & Thai basil, served with fried rice, \$39

Pom's Thai Bistro

Snapper

Deep-fried whole snapper topped with a special curry sauce and mixed vegetables, Market Price

Lemongrass Restaurant

Meats & Poultry

Pork Loin

Spice-rubbed center cut, grilled and topped with ancho cherry glaze and crispy tortillas with choice of mashed potatoes & veggies or black beans & rice, \$14

Mossfire Grill

Pan Roasted Stuffed Breast of Range Hen

With sun-dried tomatoes and shiitake mushrooms in natural jus, \$23

The Corner Brasserie

Petto D'Anitra

Herb-grilled breast of duck topped with torched goat cheese crème, served with roasted rustic tomato sauce, creamy parmesan polenta and sautéed spinach, \$28

Giovanni's

Filet Sterlings

8-ounce filet grilled then sautéed with jumbo shrimp and asparagus, topped with béarnaise, \$36

Sterlings of Avondale

Sirloin with Bacon

One of various cuts of meat that are served table-side in an all-you-can-eat setting, \$39 (adult)

Tento Churrascaria

Vegetarian & Pasta

Roasted Portabella Enchilada

Served with frijoles refritos & saffron dirty rice over salsa verde & tequila romesco, \$14

Ocean 60

Leaning Tower of Eggplant Parmesan

Layers of eggplant, marinara & melted cheese, \$16

Mezza Luna

Cannelloni

Pasta tube stuffed with three cheeses, spinach chicken & veal and choice of sauce, \$14

Sorrento Italian Restaurant

Lobster & Asparagus Ravioli

Served in fresh cilantro broth, \$19

Wine Cellar

Angel Hair Puttanesca

Handmade pasta served with Calamata olives, capers, tomatoes, garlic, anchovies and hot pepper, \$23

Dwight's Bistro

Desserts

Cobblestone's Signature Brownie Indulgence

A warm slice of a blond brownie topped with a chocolate chip cookie and vanilla ice cream, \$6

Cobblestones at the Creek

Warm Upside Down Pineapple

Brown Butter Cake

Served with rum raisin ice cream, \$7

Pastiche

Buttermilk Carrot Cake

Wrapped in white chocolate, cream cheese mousse and rum anglaise, \$8

Eleven South

Matthew's Flourless Chocolate Cake

with kiwi-lime coulis and mint, \$9

Matthew's at San Marco

JACKSONVILLE MAGAZINE
COVER 8
MODEL 2008
SEARCH 2

In conjunction with our 5th annual **Best of Jacksonville Party**, we're hosting our second Cover Model Search. Admission to the party, a fundraiser for the Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville, is required. Contestants must be at least 18 years of age and not under contract with a modeling agency. The winning model will be featured on the cover of a spring 2008 issue of *Jacksonville Magazine*.

2007 Winner Lindsay Watters (pictured) appeared on the May 2007 cover.

photo by Bradley Stookey

Casting Call | January 17, 2008 | 7:30-9:30 PM | at MOCA Jacksonville
Call (904) 389-3622 for more information.



**5th
ANNUAL**

the **Best**
of **Jacksonville**
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DECEMBER
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Retail Therapy

Creature Comforts

St. Johns Town Center
(4663 River City Drive, 642-8339,
www.simon.com)

Shoppers aren't the only ones who can enjoy the grounds of the St. Johns Town Center, which has incorporated a small dog park where pooches can play. Along with oversized chess tables outside Dick's Sporting Goods, the park may give the entire family something to do while Mommy shops. The dog park is about the

size of an airliner restroom, but most pooches don't seem to mind. Most of the open-air mall's second phase, with brands like Swarovski and Coach, opened in late October.

Liberal Retreat

Materialistic
(125 St. George St., St. Augustine, 824-1611)

Smack dab in the middle of the Oldest City's tourist's dream alley, the familiar aroma of a headshop radiates from Materialistic. The quirky

store sells comfy artwear, funky jewelry and risqué (some might say offensive) trinkets—primarily at dear old President W's expense.

Spy Gear

SpyGear4U.com
(corporate office, 1556 Whitlock Ave.,
880-3354)

Have a sneaking suspicion your spouse is cheating? Or need to track your teenage son's whereabouts? You might want to visit SpyGear4U.com, an Internet-based company with corporate offices in Jacksonville. In business about six years, SpyGear4U offers more than 500 different products, much of which is not readily available in stores. The company provides video camera installation services in the Jacksonville area.

Pirate Hats

Corner-Copia
(210 Centre St., Fernandina Beach, 261-7575)

Thanks in large part to Johnny Depp, pirates are hotter than ever. When visiting the "Isle of Eight Flags," a.k.a. Amelia Island, make sure you find the perfect pirate hat. With the 34-year-old Fernandina Pirates Club staging a pirate invasion at the annual shrimp festival, the Fernandina Beach High School Pirates, the Fernandina Beach Middle School Pirates and Southside Elementary Lil' Pirates, a pirate lid is all but required to fit in. Corner-Copia, a gift shop of various novelties on Centre Street, carries several styles to match your outfit.

Holiday Tchotchkes

Cracker Barrel
Old Country Store
(various locations, www.crackerbarrel.com)

Those with an itch to decorate for the holidays about two months before the actual season hits won't be disappointed when visiting the nearest Cracker Barrel Old Country Store. Christmas, Easter, Independence Day, Halloween and Thanksgiving are covered with a mélange of items that only your grandmother would appreciate. Stores in these parts also have a selection of Florida, Georgia and Florida State tchotchkes on sale. The best part: You can browse before chowing on biscuits and gravy.

St. Johns Town Center Dog Park



Great Outdoors

View

Skydive Jacksonville

(Herlong Airport, 9300 Normandy Blvd., 888-JUMP-JAX, www.skydivejacksonville.com)

The view is likely the last thing on your mind when jumping out of a plane 12,000 feet in the air, but a ride with Skydive Jacksonville includes a complimentary bird's eye view of the St. Johns River, Downtown and the Atlantic Ocean—just before you hurtle back to earth at 120 miles per hour! While there are other drop zones in the area with larger planes (in St. Marys, Ga., and Palatka), Skydive Jacksonville at Herlong Airport is the only one that flies over Downtown's skyline. A tandem jump runs up to \$175, and is over in about five minutes. Have a video made (\$60) and relive the experience again and again.

Place to Get Hit

GTF Paintball

(960 Goodbread Rd., Yulee, 548-7256, www.gtfpaintball.com)

Fire in the hole! If your idea of fun includes dirt, camouflage and stinging pain, then paintballing may be the thing for you. OK, they say getting hit by a paintball feels like being snapped by a rubber band, but we bruise like a banana. There are several fields to choose from in the Jacksonville area, but GTF Paintball in Yulee is one that offers both scenario and speed-ball games over five (soon to be six) fields. Players of all skill levels are welcome. All-day passes are available as are equipment rentals. Even better, active military, law enforcement, emergency medical technicians and firefighters play for free (excluding the cost of paint) the first weekend of every month.

Bike Trail

Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve

(450 Guana River Rd., Ponte Vedra Beach, 825-5071, www.gtmnerr.org)

In Northeast Florida, off-road biking is confined to hills (there are no mountains in Florida), but there are scenic routes throughout. At the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve, a few miles north of St. Augustine, bikers are treated to waterfront



views on a wide, nine-mile trail that loops around the peninsula between the Guana and Tolomato rivers. Trails at Hanna Park are more difficult but not as pretty. The clearly marked trails are open from 8 AM to sunset year-round. Entry fees are \$3 per vehicle.

Nature Park

Kathryn Abbey Hanna Park
(500 Wonderwood Dr., 249-4700)

Talk about a park that has everything: Kathryn Abbey Hanna Park has quiet and sunny beaches, a 60-acre freshwater lake and hundreds of campsites. You can bike, hike, fish, kayak and fire up the grill just steps away from the Atlantic Ocean, while the kiddies frolic in the

park's quarter-acre water playground. Or test your surfing mettle at The Poles, at the very southern tip of Mayport Naval Station. Entry fees are a measly \$3 per vehicle, up to six people, or \$1 per pedestrian.

Bronzing Spot

Peters Point on Amelia Island
(Florida A1A and Amelia Island Parkway)

Not far from The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, Peters Point is a large public beach that allows for peaceful sunbathing while surreptitiously scoping out what the resort's ritzy guests are doing in their cabanas. The beach access has ample parking, as well as special accommodations for horse trailers.

Reader Picks

Results in 40 categories from Jacksonville Magazine's online poll.

Food & Drink

Burgers

Five Guys Famous Burgers and Fries

Various locations, www.fiveguys.com

Made with fresh ground beef that's never frozen, Five Guys' burgers normally come with two patties and all the toppings you want. Maybe they should call themselves Big Guys.

Desserts

Biscottis

3556 St. Johns Ave., Avondale (387-2060; www.biscottis.net).

Before sitting down at your table, be sure to inspect the front-of-the-house display case—typically brimming with gargantuan cakes and other decadent sweets—so you can make room for dessert.

Cheap Eats

Chick-fil-A

Various locations, www.chick-fil-a.com

Whether it's their chicken sandwich or waffle potato fries you crave, you better get your fill during the week: All Chick-fil-A locations are

closed on Sundays.

French Fries

Cruisers Grill

Two locations: 832 A1A, No. 2, Ponte Vedra Beach (273-5446); 319 23rd Ave. S., Jacksonville Beach (270-0356).

The cheese fries served at Cruisers are the stuff of legend. An order of thick-cut slivers of spuds drenched in melted cheese, bacon bits and jalapeño peppers is a meal all by itself. In fact, a single order is plenty for two.

Outdoor Dining • Jacksonville (tie)

River City Brewing Co.

835 Museum Cir., Southbank (398-2299; rivercitybrew.com).

Watching boats sail by on the St. Johns and listening to live weekend entertainment on the outdoor deck at River City Brewing Co., you realize why they call Jacksonville, "The River City."

Brick Restaurant

3585 St. Johns Ave., Avondale (387-0606).

People watching is almost as fun as eating at Brick, in the heart of Avondale's shopping district.

Outdoor Dining • Beaches

Cap's on the Water

4325 Myrtle St., Vilano Beach, St. Augustine (824-8794; www.caponthewater.com).

Longtime Vilano Beach-goers remember a time when Cap's was a small outpost far removed from just about anywhere. Today, Cap's is a rambling restaurant loved for its huge deck overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway and an islands-inspired raw bar. Ice-cold Red Stripe, anyone?

New Restaurant • Jacksonville

Preservation Tap & Chophouse

3951 St. Johns Ave., Avondale (387-5700; www.preservationchophouse.com).

Avondale area foodies heartily welcomed the springtime opening of Preservation Tap & Chophouse. The menu is heavy on traditional American fare like red meat and potatoes. The interior is highlighted by Art Deco-like chandeliers and swathes of red and black. Try a J. Dealicious draught on your next visit.

New Restaurant • Beaches

Tento Churrascaria

528 First St. No., Jacksonville Beach (246-1580; www.tentochurrascaria.com).

This Brazilian buffet isn't the typical Jacksonville all-you-can-eat joint. Servers carve assorted cuts of meat—from sirloin to shrimp—tableside in the upscale eatery, which also features a full bar.

Hard-to-Find Wines

Riverside Liquors & Village Wine Shop

1035 Park St., Riverside (354-1001; www.riversideliquors.biz).

Likely one of the first shops in Jacksonville to stock good wine (they all used to drink whisky back in the '60s), Riverside Liquors offers a wide selection of alcoholic beverages and has a knowledgeable staff to help the novice sot.

Happy Hour

The Twisted Martini

Two locations: 2 Independent Dr., Downtown (353-8023, www.thetwistedmartini.com); 822 N. Hwy. A1A, Ponte Vedra Beach (280-8810).

Get happily twisted from Wednesday to Sunday, 4 to 8 PM, while indulging in \$5 tapas and two-for-one premium cocktails, beers, wine and



the featured martini of the day. Then celebrate you made it to Saturday, when everyone drinks for free from 7 to 8 PM.

Bar Eats

Ragtime Tavern & Seafood Grill

207 Atlantic Blvd., Atlantic Beach (241-7877; www.ragtimetavern.com).

The main bar area at Ragtime Tavern & Seafood Grill, www.ragtimetavern.com is usually jumping with jovial patrons. Being one block from the beach, it's no surprise that fish and shellfish are menu staples. The appetizer list is a real treat and is loaded with items such as crispy fried calamari, shrimp nachos, lobster tacos and the house classic, Cajun crawfish dip served with seasoned toast points.

Fun & Nightlife

Dancing

Cuba Libre Bar

2578 Atlantic Blvd., San Marco (399-0609; www.cubalibrebar.com).

"Let's dance" is the phrase on the lips of regular patrons of Cuba Libre. The sister club of the popular Cuban eatery Havana-Jax, the nightspot is spacious and cozy at the same time. Comfy sofas, plenty of tables near the dance floor and a pulsing sound system keep bodies shaking to Latin-infused favorites. The mojitos help, too.

Girls' Night Out

The Melting Pot

7860 Gate Pkwy., Southside (642-4900, www.meltingpot.com).

There's little secret to the main attractions at the city's new Melting Pot. Think melted cheese and chocolate. Enough said. Sure, guys like dipping bread into warm cheese and dunking marshmallow into thick chocolate sauce. But, perhaps the experience is best enjoyed by a group of girlfriends who don't mind gabbing over a lengthy meal of Wisconsin trio cheese fondue, wild mushroom ravioli or citrus pork tenderloin.

Guys' Night Out

Sneakers Sports Grille

Two locations: 8133 Point Meadows Dr., Baymeadows (519-0509; www.sneakerssports-grille.com); 111 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville Beach (482-1000).

Sports buffs rejoice: Sneakers has multiple large-screen TVs surrounded by smaller screens that simultaneously air every sport imaginable, all the beer you can afford and servers dressed in cheerleading skirts. The potato slabs are fit for a lumberjack, but we won't tell anyone you had the strawberry shortcake.



Dive Bar

Pete's Bar

117 1st St., Neptune Beach (249-9158)

When locals think of the Beaches, a few things come to mind: Sand, surf, suntan lotion and Pete's Bar. Legend has it that Pete's is the oldest continuously operating bar in Florida. It's lasted so long with little in the way of window dressing. Cold and inexpensive beer, pool tables and Southern rock on the juke box draw an odd assortment of clientele, including everyone from leather jacket bikers to PGA Tour pros in town for The Players.

Jazz Spot

Simons, A Wine Bar

1004 Hendricks Ave., San Marco (396-8088).

The options for listening to quality live jazz bands are few and far between in the River City. The best spot, according to readers, is Simons Wine Bar. The pint-sized San Marco club makes up for its small confines by offering an unusual tapas-like menu, a fine wines list and a regular lineup of jazz musicians. Start time is usually around 9 PM.

Open Mic Night

Fly's Tie Irish Pub

177 Sailfish Dr. E., Atlantic Beach (246-4293)

It might be the Guinness talking, but our readers

readily endorse the ultra-casual vibe of an Atlantic Beach favorite, Fly's Tie Irish Pub. Fly's Tie serves all the pub classics and its dart boards have been known to play host to a wager or two. Open Mic Night, for those not in the know, is when an establishment lets regular folks sing and play for customers. It doesn't always mean talent takes the stage, but after a couple of hard ciders most customers don't seem to mind.

Karaoke

Monkey's Uncle Tavern

Two locations: 1850 3rd St. S., Jacksonville Beach (246-1070); 10601 San Jose Blvd., No. 30 (260-1349).

There are two pubs carrying the Monkey's Uncle name. The Beaches locale is the larger of the two and perhaps attracts a more vocal crowd. Karaoke isn't nearly as popular as it was a few years ago, but some still enjoy butchering classic rock ballads. Why? We don't know.

Weekend Drive

Savannah, Ga.

For visitor information call 877-SAVANNAH or visit www.savcvb.com.

Savannah is but a two-hour drive from Jacksonville, making it an ideal getaway year-round, though we recommend booking early for St. Patty's Day festivities.

Kid Stuff

Activity/Event • Fall Jacksonville Sea & Sky Spectacular

Location alternates between Jacksonville Beach oceanfront and NAS Jacksonville, late October or early November (630-3690; www.coj.net).

The annual event brings the U.S. Navy Blue Angels to Jacksonville's skies along with other military and civilian flight teams. Bring sun-screen and sunglasses, and prepare to wake up with a stiff neck the next morning.

Activity/Event • Winter Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus

January 16-20, 2008, Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Arena, (630-3998).

Every January for about as long as anyone can remember the train carrying the Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey Circus has rolled into the River City. The Greatest Show on Earth leaves its home base in Venice, Florida, and heads north to begin its annual cross-country trek, stopping for about a dozen performances January 16-20 inside Veterans Memorial Arena. Clowns, lions, elephants, high wire acts, cotton candy, peanuts—this stuff never gets old, does it?

Activity/Event Spring Opening of the Beaches

Sandcastle contest, April 26, 2008; Beaches parade, April 27, 2008, 2 PM.

For the last 60-plus years, the opening of the Beaches has been the unofficial start of summer on the First Coast (face it, do we really have a spring?). Residents and business owners of the Beaches ride in a nearly two-hour parade, while artists build castles in the sand.

Activity/Event • Summer 4th of July Fireworks

Your backyard and various other locations.

Ring in the dog days of summer with colorful pyrotechnic displays Downtown, at the beach or wherever there's open air. On a clear night, views from some of Downtown's office and condo towers reach out to the shows at the beach and Orange Park. Note: Driving while watching fireworks is not recommended.

Clothing Boutique Kyds

St. Johns Town Center, 4413 Town Center Blvd. (645-0712; www.kyds.net).

A trip to JC Penney and Buster Brown just won't do for today's stylish infants and children. To be truly fashion forward, your kids may need to be outfitted at Kyds. A purveyor of clothing for tiny tykes and grade schoolers, Kyds carries fun and funky fashions from



Cowford Traders

names like Charlie Rocket, Junkfood, Roxy, Ella Moss and Juicy Couture.

Toy Shop (Large) Target

Various locations, www.target.com

Target has toys suitable for the adult or kid, and it (typically) won't hurt the pocketbook. Look for their signature dollar bin for funny novelties and other things you can't use.

Toy Shop (Small) Cowford Traders

3563 St. Johns Ave., Avondale (387-4557).

Walk past the scented candles and soaps and the Vera Bradley stuff to discover the real fun at Cowford Traders. Like a toy store from yester-

year, Cowford specializes in classic windup gizmos, books and loads of toys we remember from our childhoods. How much for the kazoo?

Casual Restaurant Ollie Koala's BackYard

Two locations: 1318 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville Beach (242-2444; www.olliekoalas.com); 11700 San Jose Blvd., Mandarin (288-7230).

Ollie Koala's is the Aussie version of Chuck E. Cheese with rides and arcade games for the kids, but with more dining options for the adults. Menu items include pizza, sandwiches, Aussie dogs and St. Louis style ribs. Beer and wine are available for the headache that's sure to follow a rambunctious game of air hockey or Popcorn Slam Dunk.

Family Getaway Walt Disney World Resort

Orlando (407-939-6244;
www.disneyworld.com)

Mr. Mouse Ears, himself, is only a two-hour drive from Jacksonville, which makes it an easy family trip. With four theme parks and numerous themed hotels, there's plenty to do at the resort. To save some cash, families might consider buying season or annual passes.

Oceanside Activity Collecting shells

What better way to pass the time than collecting treasures from the sea? It's free, and you

can decorate picture frames or vases to remind you of how close you live to the ocean.

Style & Shopping

Boutique • Jacksonville Anomaly Five Points

1021 Park St., Five Points (354-7002,
www.anomalyfivepoints.com).

Anomaly and Five Points are a match made in artsy heaven. The Riverside shop sells all sorts of merchandise, from T-shirts to sweaters to jeans and jewelry. Regulars know it for the trendy fashions and other hard-to-find styles. Look for the lime-green storefront. You can't miss it!

Boutique • Beaches

Sutra

320 9th Ave. N., Jacksonville Beach
(242-2560).

Combine a hip hair salon with a clothing boutique for men and women and the result will be something like Sutra. The boutique/salon carries labels Rock & Republic, True Religion, Female, Monarchy, English Laundry and, exclusively, designs by Jacksonville's own fashion designers, Love Brigade.

Dress Shop

J. Ashley

3588 St. Johns Ave., Avondale (388-2118).

The Shoppes of Avondale epitomized lifestyle retail centers in the River City long before anyone even dreamed of mega centers such as St. Johns Town Center. And chic boutiques like J. Ashley have been outfitting local fashionistas with the latest styles by Kay Unger, Sue Wong, Elle Tahari, Trina Turk and others for years. New this season are items from Lacoste and Diane vonFurstenberg.

Handbags

Khazana

Two locations: The Avenues, 10300 Southside Blvd. (519-0448); Jacksonville International Airport, 2400 Yankee Clipper Dr. (741-5009).

Apparently, many readers of *Jacksonville Magazine* are fans of Vera Bradley. The city's two Khazana locations specialize in the traditional designer's line of bags and purses. The shop carries plenty of other merchandise but Bradley gear is a top seller. The outlet at the airport is great for last-minute gift ideas.

Jeans

Rosie True

Three locations: 1960 San Marco Blvd., San Marco (396-7463; www.rosietrue.com); 2400-104 Third St. S., Jacksonville Beach (247-8464); 108 Bartram Oaks Walk, Ste. 107, Julington Creek (230-7750).

Local fashion retailer Rosie True recently welcomed a third shop into the fold. Selling lines from designers like Hanky Panky, Juicy Couture, Tarina Tarantino, Zoey, People's Liberation Denim and Hudson Jeans keeps plenty of shoppers happy and returning. And now that fall has arrived, it's cool enough to wear jeans again!

Vintage Clothing

Clothing Warehouse

1010 Park St., Five Points (354-9002).

Everything old is new again in the Clothing Warehouse, stockers of arguably the largest collection of slightly used cowboy boots this side of the Rio Grande. The shop is packed to



Anomaly Five Points



the ceiling with vintage threads for him and her. Shirts and blouses number in the thousands. And they have plenty of jewelry to match just about any outfit. Halloween and costume parties draw loads of shoppers looking for classic Americana styles.

Business Attire

Rosenblum's

Two locations: 5500 San Jose Blvd., Lakewood (733-8633; www.erosenblums.com); 2400 Third St. S., No. 203, Jacksonville Beach (247-9755)

Except for the big-box chain stores, there are too few local outlets for professional business clothing. According to the readers of *Jacksonville Magazine*, Rosenblum's gives both men and women options for high-quality suits,

ties, shirts, slacks and accessories. The tailoring service is a nice touch.

Running Shoes

1st Place Sports

Three locations: 3931 Baymeadows Rd., Baymeadows (731-3676; www.1stplacesports.com); 424 Third St. S., Jacksonville Beach (270-2221); 550-7 Wells Rd. (264-3767).

With more than 20 recommended running routes across the River City, 1st Place Sports bills itself as Jacksonville's running headquarters. The store, which first opened in 1979, is the official manager of Jacksonville's famed Gate River Run, a 15K race every March. No wonder they were voted best place to find good running shoes!

Lingerie

Victoria's Secret

Various locations and by catalog, www.victoriasecret.com

With more than 1,000 stores across the country and a booming online and mail-order catalog business, Victoria's Secret is no longer a secret. Pink-laden stores are open for those who must have instant gratification.

Day Spa (New)

Beau Monde Spalon

2758-401 Racetrack Road, Julington Creek (287-4247).

The name means "beautiful world" and the designers of the new Julington Creek Beau Monde Spalon took the theme and ran with it. Treatment rooms are inspired by locations around the globe so no two are the same. The spa and salon offers customers head-to-toe services and its boutique offers hard-to-find and exclusive brands of skin care. The waterfall wall is really cool, too.

Guy's Haircut

Supercuts

Various locations, www.supercuts.com

It may not be the first choice for metrosexuals (does anyone still use that word?), but for our male readers, a simple cut and blow dry at one of the city's many SuperCuts franchises is just fine, thank you. We're in and out for about \$15. Not too much off the sides, please.

Salon • Jacksonville

Cecil Vignutti Studio for Hair

1545 May St., Riverside (356-4140).

Housed in a renovated carriage house on an actual cobblestone street, Cecil Vignutti's salon is a highly regarded fixture among the city's fashionable. The beautifully appointed interior is divided so that color work is handled upstairs (to better control the chemical odor) and cuts and such are done on the first floor. The salon's boutique carries all sorts of hair care products as well as an assortment of jewelry and accessories. Walk-ins accepted? Are you kidding?

Salon • Beaches

Ten, A Sheila Powers Salon

115 Professional Dr., #106, Ponte Vedra Beach (285-7776).

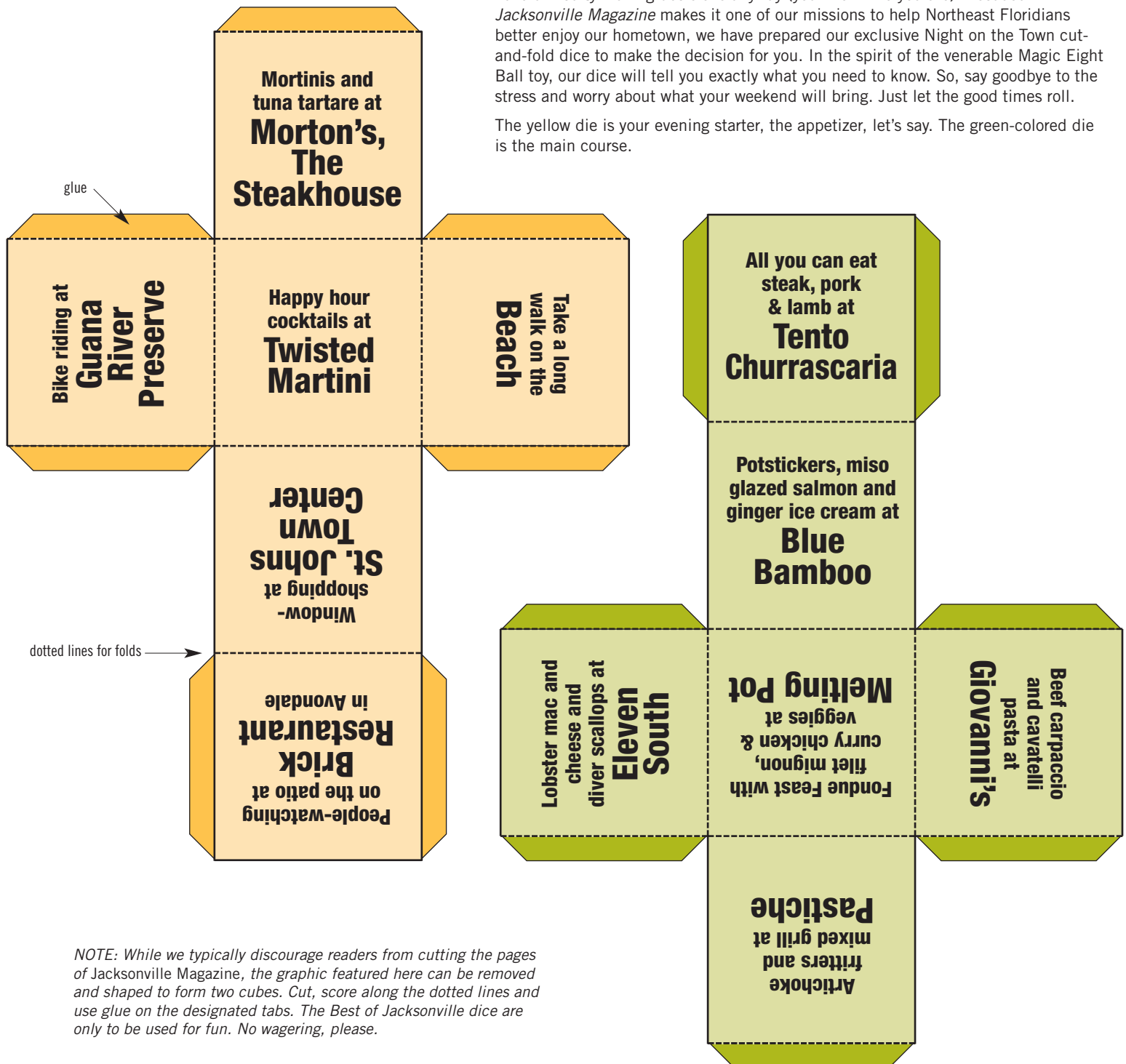
Open for about a half-dozen years now, Ten lays claim to being the official salon of First Coast News. So, if you really like, say, newscaster Shannon Ogden's hair, the salon probably knows just how to give you the same style. Cuts and color treatment are the house specialties; however, nail techs and skin care pros are ready and waiting, too. *J

Best of Jacksonville

Night on the town decision-making dice.

What are we going to do tonight? It's a question that's been asked and/or posed by all of us at least once. And it's a question that vexes many, particularly those who have difficulty making decisions anyway (you know who you are). Because *Jacksonville Magazine* makes it one of our missions to help Northeast Floridians better enjoy our hometown, we have prepared our exclusive Night on the Town cut-and-fold dice to make the decision for you. In the spirit of the venerable Magic Eight Ball toy, our dice will tell you exactly what you need to know. So, say goodbye to the stress and worry about what your weekend will bring. Just let the good times roll.

The yellow die is your evening starter, the appetizer, let's say. The green-colored die is the main course.



NOTE: While we typically discourage readers from cutting the pages of Jacksonville Magazine, the graphic featured here can be removed and shaped to form two cubes. Cut, score along the dotted lines and use glue on the designated tabs. The Best of Jacksonville dice are only to be used for fun. No wagering, please.

Personal Bests

The faces that bring you Jacksonville Magazine each month declare their favorites.

The Crew & their picks for	Mexican Eats	Libation of Choice	Random Guilty Pleasure	Restaurant I Love (when someone else is paying)	Weekend Getaway	DVD Rental	Magazine (other than, you know...)
Anna Marie Burke 	Mi Toro for their enchiladas verde	Red wine, almost any label will do	Buying expensive jeans	Eleven South, great food, atmosphere and wines	The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island	<i>Life is Beautiful</i> , I love foreign films	<i>Budget Travel</i> for the deals and ideas
Christy Sappenfield 	Doña Maria's	Saintsbury Merlot, great, but hard to find	Massage at the Ponte Vedra Inn & Club	Roy's, love the red snapper	Banner Elk, North Carolina	<i>The Shining</i> , still scary after all these years	<i>Newsweek</i>
Kathrin Lancelle 	Doña Maria's, happy hour all day!	Mojitos at Cuba Libre	Mini Indulgences desserts at Cobblestones	Ruth's Chris Steak House	Universal Orlando	<i>Run, Lola Run!</i> DVD lets you watch in German	<i>Smithsonian</i> , always wonderful photos
Wendy Castro 	Chile rellenos at La Nopalera	Merlot	White macadamia nut cheesecake at Biscottis	Bistro Aix	Cedar Key, always quiet and peaceful	<i>Flightplan</i> , keeps you guessing	<i>Star</i> , have to know the latest with Elvis
Mike Romero 	La Nopalera, good and cheap	Gin and soda with lime	"Homer" doughnuts from Edgewood Bakery	Matthew's at San Marco	World Golf Village, I'd play at night if they'd let me	Episodes of <i>Freaks & Geeks</i>	<i>Skateboard Magazine</i> , reminds me of my childhood
Alison Trinidad 	The original La Nopalera in Orange Park	Tequila and Squirt on the rocks	Hot, glazed Krispy Kreme doughnuts	Matthew's, love the waiters in suits	Southern California, visit my folks	I could never pick just one	<i>Cooking Light</i> , great food with less calories. Yum!
Kathy Weedon 	La Nopalera, love the big portions	Coors Light in a bottle with lime	Pedicures with a foot and leg massage	Matthew's, food is always outstanding	Casa Monica Hotel in St. Augustine	<i>Gone With the Wind</i> , it's a classic	<i>People</i> , keeps me up with pop culture
Terry Jamerson 	Nachos at Seven Bridges	Rebel Yell Bourbon, I am a Southern Belle, after all	A good massage	Dolphin Depot in Jacksonville Beach	Jekyll Island because it's not touristy	<i>To Kill A Mockingbird</i> , simply the best movie ever	<i>Southern Living</i> , love the recipes

	Mexican Eats	Libation of Choice	Random Guilty Pleasure	Restaurant I Love <small>(when someone else is paying)</small>	Weekend Getaway	DVD Rental	Magazine <small>(other than, you know...)</small>
	Cha Chas—the bean burrito is Deelish!	Sweet tea with loads of lemon	BBQ pork sandwich and mac'n'cheese from Hickory Chips	Bistro Aix for Fish Aixoise and a house salad (plus a peach Bellini)	Asheville, North Carolina is just so “purty”	<i>The Royal Tenenbaums</i>	<i>ReadyMade</i> because it's crafty
	Doña Maria's for the atmosphere and margaritas	Cosmopolitan because it's pink!	Chocolate fondue because it's chocolate fondue	Dwight's Bistro	Southern California, my heart and soul are there	<i>Holiday</i> , it makes me laugh and cry	<i>W</i> , have to know the latest fashions
	Maria's burritos at El Rodeo in Orange Park	Ice cold Tucher with a lemon slice	Doritos, I can eat an entire bag watching baseball on TV	Morton's, big steaks that I don't have to cook	Charleston, great combination of restaurants and history	<i>Raising Arizona</i> is the funniest movie ever made	<i>Vanity Fair</i> , combines many subjects under one title
	Don Juan's, family-owned so the service is always tops	Starbucks iced caramel latte	Cheesecake, any flavor will do	Morton's, love the atmosphere and the food	Amelia Island because you're out of town, but not really	<i>National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation</i>	<i>US Weekly</i> , who doesn't love reading celebrity trash?
	El Potro, Westsiders like Mexican, too	Sweet tea	Gourmet tea cookies from Publix	Melting Pot is soooo good	Any place that's new to me is fun	<i>Christmas Vacation</i> because it only gets funnier	<i>GQ</i> , I like the models
	Cha Chas, best refried beans in town	Vodka and club soda	'80s pop music	Bistro Aix for the filet mignon and \$9 Bellinis	Savannah, lots to walk around and see	<i>Urban Cowboy</i> is a highly underrated love story	<i>Bust</i> because it's fierce, funny and proud to be female
	Chicken quesadilla at Mossfire Grill	23 oz. Miller Lite draught at European Street on Park	Watching beauty pageants and infomercials	Salt, The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island	My couch with a DVR full of cheesy reality shows	<i>Swingers</i>	<i>Entertainment Weekly</i> because its snarky and obsessed with reality TV, like me
	La Nopalera on Kingsley Ave in Orange Park	Michelob Amber Bock	Dove Dark Chocolate. Enough said.	Beef O'Brady's, it's not the most extravagant but good for the whole family	Our family cabin in the mountains just outside Boone, North Carolina	<i>Evan Almighty</i>	<i>US News & World Report</i>
	Tacos al Pastor at La Nopalera	Rum and coke at the Florida Yacht Club	Swedish Fish	Ruth's Chris	Sailing regatta, anywhere	<i>Talladega Nights</i>	<i>Wired</i> , full of diversity
	Leftovers from Cha Chas	Cereal milk	Once ate an entire loaf of Pepperidge Farm 7-grain bread	Redbones Pet Bakery in Fernandina	The Barking Lot	<i>Best In Show</i>	<i>Cat Fancy</i> , I love kitties!