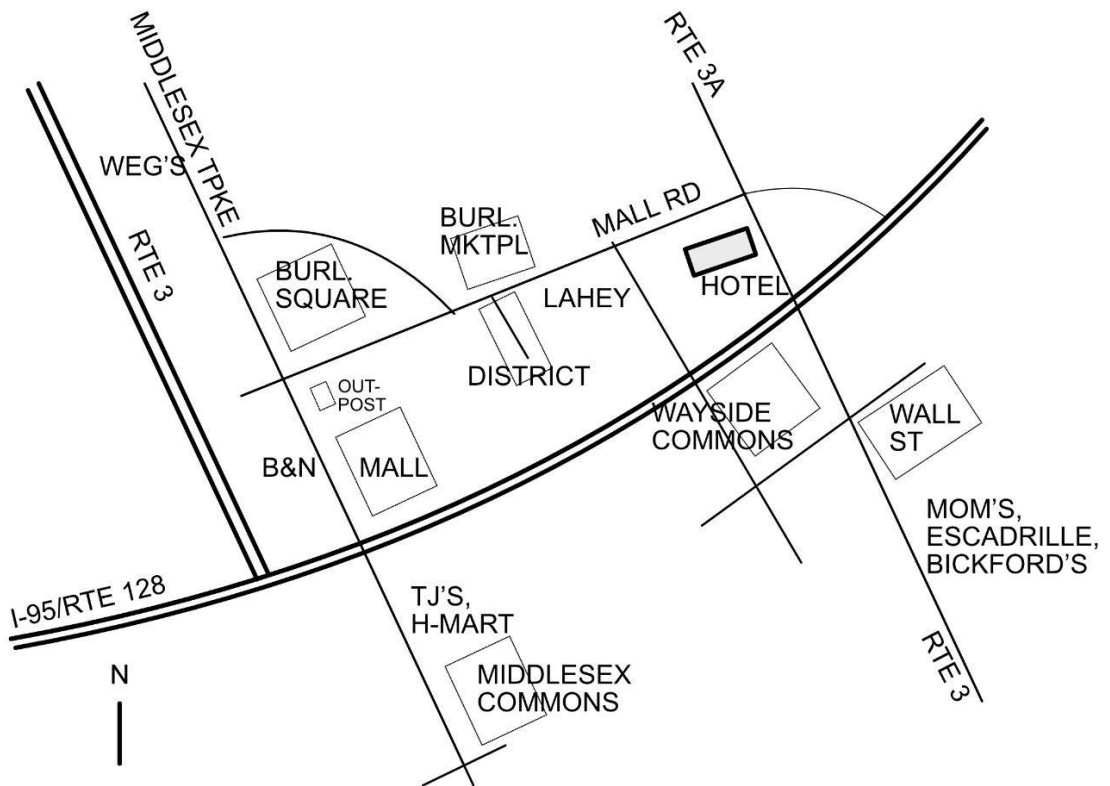


Readercon Restaurant Guide 2026

A note from the author:

When Readercon asked me to do this guide, I jumped at the chance, because we like to eat out (who doesn't?). I grew up in the area – I remember the mall being built – and visit it frequently. However, I do not have infinite time nor money, so this guide is, necessarily, incomplete. I did try to concentrate on what's new, and ignore large, national chains. If you have no inkling of what a Cheesecake Factory, Buffalo Wild Wings, or Five Guys is like, ask a friend. I also concentrated on what was within reasonable walking distance (there are a few exceptions) and sorted it by location; the hotel shuttle will gladly take you to the Burlington Mall. Because I wanted this to be more than a quick Yelp/Google/etc. review, these reviews go long, and I concentrate on things important to many fans, such as noise level, gender neutral bathrooms, gluten-free and vegetarian/vegan offerings, a full bar, and outdoor dining. I didn't look at delivery, because in this post-pandemic era of UberEats, DoorDash, and so on, everyone does takeout and delivery.

In the words of a famous Bostonian, "Bon appétit!" – Lisa Hertel



Best Bets

American – Yard House (Middlesex Tpke)

Bar – Café Escadrille (down Rte 3)

BBQ – Smoke Shop (up Rte 128)

Bowls – Teriyaki Madness (Burlington Marketplace)

Breakfast – Bickford's (down Rte 3)

Café – Tatte

Chinese – Sichuan Cafe (Burlington Square)

Gas, Cheap – Al Prime (up Rte 3A)

Ice Cream – Schoolhouse (up Rte 3A)

Italian – Chateau (Middlesex Commons)

Kids – Mall Food Court (Burlington Mall)

Large Groups – Mall Food Court (Burlington Mall)

Market – Market Basket (Middlesex Tpke)

Mediterranean – Naya (Burlington Square)

Mexican – Border Café (end of Mall Rd)

Outdoor Dining – Jack's (Wall St)

Pizza, Upscale – Jack's (Wall St)

Quick Lunch – hotel concessions

Salad/Wrap – Just Salad (Burlington Marketplace)

Seafood – Row 34 (District)

Small Bites – Seasons 52 (Wayside Commons)

Steak, Expensive – Capitol Grille (Wayside Commons)

Subs – Nick's (up Rte 3A)

Sushi/Japanese – Feng Shui (District)

Vegan – Pressed (District)

At the hotel

Hotel Concessions Sat/Sun noon - 1:30pm ***

Wraps, chips & salads. Limited selection, but fast and easy, and fine. The price is a bit high but not unreasonable. In the hallway outside the Bookshop. I'll note they often run out of certain things, and the line is long during the 10-minute program break.

Chopps ****

The hotel restaurant. The food is about what you'd expect for serving a captive audience – a bit pricey, but okay. Nobody's destination who isn't staying at the hotel (except maybe the bar), but you won't walk away sad. See below under steakhouses.



Down Rte. 3 (south of the highway)

Wall St

Temazcal Tequila Cantina, Wall St ****

It's perfectly good (but not great) Mexican. We went at lunch, and it was rather subdued. I suspect it's much livelier (and noisier) at dinner. An alternative to the Border Cafe, which is generally crowded, plus this is within walking distance. There's a bit of outdoor dining, but it seems to not get used. Obviously, as you can guess from the name, the bar is a central feature. Not as good as the Border Cafe, but a lot quieter – and closer.



Jack's, Wall St ****

Tucked into the same building as Temazcal, you might not notice this coal-fired pizza place. It has a large, shaded outdoor dining area (which does get used) and, unlike Frank Pepe's in the mall, a menu that includes pasta. The indoors is surrounded by TVs, and there's sprightly 80s pop music playing overhead, guaranteeing you'll need to keep your conversations on the louder side – outside is probably quieter. As one would expect, the pizza is charred. They also seem to like truffle oil. There's a gluten free pizza (again, unlike Pepe's), as well as a wide selection of vegetarian options. There's a full-service bar, though I'm not terribly likely to get an Argentinian malbec with my pizza. Afterwards, you can pop into the resale Lego store in the strip mall next door. Or try to plow through their huge brownie sundae instead.



Eggholic, Rte 3, Wall St ***

Having never been to India, I can't vouch for the authenticity of this “street food,” but it's definitely different. We chose light spice where possible and it was plenty spicy. The samosa chaat was half warm, half cold: like fresh, broken up samosas with cooked vegetables and such on top, but the topping was cold, because it was irregularly microwaved. The kathi roll was a naan (which is not on the menu) taco with tofu and onions, in a very spicy red sauce. I liked the Maggi – overcooked noodles with vegetables – but I couldn't handle the spicy topping (tadka), and my dining companion didn't care for the minty flavor. We were sad to find out the roti was just one piece. My chai was pretty good. Ordering is via Toast, and water is bottled. If you're looking for Indian food you know, I suggest trying elsewhere. If you're looking to challenge your spice levels and try something different, this is the place.



Wayside Commons

Seasons 52, 6 Wayside Rd *****

I can't comment, except generally, on the menu here, because (as the name implies) it changes seasonally. While fresh, the items aren't necessarily local, though. There are some things on the menu that seem to be staples (like mac'n'cheese), and a kids' menu. Seasons 52 specializes in low-calorie and small plate items; most entrees are around 600 calories. It's perfect for those with lighter appetites. There's an extensive wine selection and the background music is soft enough to allow reasonable conversation. The service was good, and while they asked us about reservations, they seemed unperturbed when we didn't have any. However, it might be a good idea, as it seems quite popular, and with good reason: we found the food to be generally excellent.



Capital Grille *****

Probably the best steakhouse (see page 11).



Further down Rte 3

Cafe Escadrille, 26 Cambridge St ***



Fifty years ago, if you wanted fine French food and didn't want to drive into Boston, you went to Cafe Escadrille. Lo, how the mighty have fallen. Though there are still a number of traditional French items on the menu – notably, escargot and French onion soup – this restaurant is more cafe than French, with standard fare, focused on seafood (they even have a sushi menu). It's decent, with an extensive wine list and nice bar, but not the superb place it once was. When we were there for weekday lunch, the crowd was definitely elderly, and the playlist was from that era, too. The atmosphere is okay, with the music at a level that does not prohibit conversation in normal tones, and the service was excellent. In short, a fine place to go, but there are better choices out there – unless you're really jonesing for snails. Be aware they're closed on Sundays.

Bickford's, 6 Cambridge St *****



Once a local diner chain, Bickford's has imploded and this is the only one left, to the dismay of many. Its most famous dish is the Big Apple, a dutch baby, which is a delicious souffle with apples and brown sugar. (They no longer make the slightly smaller Baby version.) It's fun to watch it deflate when you pour on the mapeline corn syrup. (Real maple syrup is available for a fee.) My dining companion is a fan of the German pancake, a sort of thick crepe with crisp, upturned sides, served with powdered sugar and lemons; he makes a lemon icing on it. Try it with a mimosa or bloody mary. If you're going for lunch or dinner, Bickford's is one of the few places you can get fried clam strips, for those too wimpy for whole belly clams (which they also have). Their pot roast, tuna melt, and traditional turkey dinner (get *all* the carbs!) are also excellent. There's a well-deserved line if you go on a weekend morning, and getting food might take time. Closed for Sunday dinner, and Monday and Tuesday.

Burlington Mall

Burlington Mall Food Court, 75 Middlesex Tpke **



The food court is perfect for a large group of varied appetites, especially those in a hurry; the hotel has a shuttle to take you there. Which is good, because parking in the lot near the food court is often difficult. The restaurants often change, and are skewed Asian: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, and Thai, including specialties such as boba and sushi. There are a few long-term staples, such as Gourmet India, Chick-fil-A, and Regina Pizzeria, and a cheesesteak place for those who eschew the exotic. The food is passable, fast, and there's a kids' play area. Expect a bit of noise due to the ambient atmosphere. Like most of the mall, the food court closes at 9pm on Friday and Saturday, and 6pm Sunday, though of course Chick-fil-A is closed on Sundays.

Karma, Burlington Mall (Middlesex Turnpike side) *****

Note for the COVID-Adverse: Karma has outside dining, as do a few other mall restaurants. The food is very good, but about 25% more expensive than other Asian restaurants of its class, which kept me from trying the sushi. Dishes are served in the traditional “family style,” so expect one entree to serve 2-3 people. Though we arrived at an unusual hour (for ‘lupper’), they asked about reservations, and the place did fill up while we were there, so I suggest calling ahead. If you’re a large group, there are really lovely live-edge wooden slab tables for larger groups.

(Doesn’t effect the food, but it’s nice.) The place is a little noisy for easy conversation. Note that you can’t get to Karma from the mall (or vice versa); see if the shuttle will drop you off around the front, or go through the mall to the front side entrance, and take a right. It’s about halfway between Neiman Marcus and Primak. Also, if you’ve been to the Karma in Andover, be aware that Burlington’s menu is different.



Frank Pepe’s, Burlington Mall (Middlesex Turnpike side) ****

Do you like pizza? Because Frank Pepe’s is all about pizza. There are some appetizers and desserts, but the entrees are pretty much all pizza or a few salads. The pies are very good, if you like the burnt crust style made popular by Bertucci’s, though Pepe’s uses a coal-fired oven instead of wood. There are tomato-free options, but no gluten-free pizzas. (Sorry, you get salad.) The pizza was hot upon arrival, toppings were fresh, with plenty of cheese, the crust perfect, and the knife and fork unnecessary. Like, why even give them to us? They also have some funky sodas; I chose a birch beer which was nice and smooth. Because of the burnt crust thing, we didn’t eat our edges, but one pizza was plenty large enough for two anyway; the small pie was about 12” across. You can either enter from the parking lot or the mall. Be aware that the place is small, and a bit noisy – definitely not suitable for large groups. They do a brisk takeout business. However, unless you’re stuck with the mall, Jack’s (Wall St.) is better.



Wonder, Burlington Mall northwest outpost *

Wonder has been popping up everywhere. I was curious, but the reviews online are terrible, the prices aren’t great (though there’s a 50% off up to \$10 coupon easily findable), and they don’t seem to be anything special. I declined this cross between a food court and a delivery service; YMMV. If you go there, let me know how it was.



Greco, Burlington Mall, ***

This is Greek fast food. It’s okay, but not great. Nothing was quite what we expected. The rose lemonade smelled of rose but tasted ordinary. The sandwiches have fries stuffed inside; we ate the fries first. The avogolemono soup was very lemony, but the sole source of chicken was the broth – no chicken pieces. My souvlaki was really more like a formed kebab. You order and pay at a kiosk, and can easily customize everything. The tables weren’t cleaned, but that may be different at lunch. There’s gluten free pita available, and an outdoor dining area. In all, I think I can get better, more authentic Greek at my local sub shop. Or go across Mall Rd. to Cava or Naya.



Caffé Nero, Burlington Mall outpost (corner Mall Rd & Middlesex Turnpike) ***

Making fun of bad font choices, my kid and I call this “Cafe Nerd.” This is an utterly generic cafe, but they let you hang out and pretend like you’re a real writer. Go to Tatte.





Friendly Toast, Burlington Mall (outside near Legal's) ****

I have a lot of friends who adore this local chain, a cross between a 50s diner and a modern upscale cafe. The food selection is breakfast oriented, though there are some salads and sandwiches. The salad was a good size, but the dressing being on the bottom was a bit weird; next time, we'll ask for it on the side. The sourdough bread for the sandwich was really thick and a bit dominant, with an erratic application of mayo which oozed out the holes in the bread. The real maple syrup (included) for the French toast came in a cute little bottle. The French toast was very thick, cooked through, and came with a lot of whipped cream that tasted like ice cream. Our biscuits were good and crunchy, served with a maple butter and a lightly spicy apricot jam – it was sufficient to make a light meal. Friendly Toast has a full bar, and offers funky drinks, including a mimosa flight, a selection of coffees, and Pepsi products. They have a good hand with seasoning and spices. As one would expect, the prices are a bit higher than a regular diner, but that's true of most mall restaurants. There's a covered outside area here as well.



Fiorella's, Burlington Mall (under Primark) ****

A little over the top on Italianate decor, this place is busy enough that we had to eat in the bar, as we didn't have reservations, and noisy enough that I had difficulty parsing what my dining companions were saying. The menu is typical modern Italian, with entrees in the mid- to upper - 20's to 30's. They start you with a good, cheesy herbed flatbread and an unexceptionable marinara. Meals are served with a hunk of garlic bread. (They do have a gluten free menu.) The meat in the braised short rib dish was tender and rich, obviously the product of slow cooking. The pasta was perfectly cooked, and all our meals were good, and not too large, but the portions were quite generous; boxes home are common. The tiramisu (oh, what I'll suffer for my art!) had a lot of coffee flavor and the marscapone wasn't too sweet – perfectly done. I saw a giant meatball go past, as well as a fancy drink with a blood orange and pretty decorations in it. Service was fine, but a little leisurely. Although a bit pricey and noisy, we were very satisfied.

Fogo de Chão, Burlington Mall ***

The Boston area has a huge Brazilian community. If you really want an authentic churrascaria, go to one of our local restaurants (like Tudo na Brasa in Woburn center, or Oasis Grill in Lowell), and skip this incredibly expensive national chain. That said, Fogo does have a very nice salad bar (sans sneeze shields, which makes me nervous), and the meat is pretty good. The service is incredibly slow, which allows you plenty of time to digest what comes off of one skewer before the next appears. The place is always crowded and noisy, with kids running around; even for two, I strongly recommend reservations. However, I've found my local churrascaria cheaper, with a better selection of meats and service, though the salad bar isn't as good. On the other hand, who goes to a churrascaria for the salad bar? Plus I'm helping a local business, not a national chain. But if you really want to drop \$100 each, go ahead; it won't be a bad meal. Also, unless your special diet is meatatarian, you're out of luck for many things.



On Mall Road

Burlington Marketplace, 82 Burlington Mall Rd ***

Just over the hill towards the mall is the Burlington Marketplace, a small strip mall that has a FedEx store and a bunch of healthier fast lunch chain places (all are also open for dinner). These currently include Chipotle, Starbucks, Cookie Monstah, Teriyaki Madness, and Just Salad (a large national chain replacing Clover, a small local chain), mostly gathered at the farther end. Stores (especially food) do tend to come and go, so things might be slightly different by mid-July. Be aware that the parking lot is often full, so if you can, walk, or get delivery – everybody here will do the usual (Door Dash, Uber Eats, etc).

Starbucks has its advocates, though true New Englanders drink Dunkins. I'm not a coffee drinker, so I don't have any opinion. If you want your burnt Seattle coffee, you can also get it in the hotel. Still, if you go somewhere else in the plaza for lunch or dinner, it's nice to know you can get real coffee to go with it, if you want.



Chipotle is all about the overstuffed burritos, but they do have bowls and such. I tend to ask them for less rice. They claim not to use eggs, nuts, or fish, and there are soy, gluten free and dairy free options on the menu, listed on the website. There are also vegan and vegetarian options. For details, see chipotle.com/allergens.



Cookie Monstah cookies are great – but expensive. They have Richardson's ice cream, and make cookie ice cream sandwiches that are very good. They also have brownie sundaes. For vegans, there's a vegan chocolate chip. Because selection varies, not all cookies may be available at all times, so if you're craving a particular variety, check online or call ahead. If you're having a party, they do platters.



Teriyaki Madness is surprisingly tasty, with vegan and gluten free options, though they admit to possible cross-contamination. Mostly they feature teriyaki bowls (no surprise there) with chicken, steak, salmon, or tofu. Apps are edamame, an egg roll, crab rangoon, or potstickers.



They offer both white and brown rice, as well as the noodles. If you're looking for a filling, hot lunch or dinner, they're a great option.

Just Salad is more than just salad; they also have wraps, warm rice bowls, and "market plates," which are three-part meals with a protein and sauce on rice, a vegetable, and a salad. The meals are pretty substantial, and you can combo up to add a drink and chips (the chip selection is pretty good), or a side salad. Alas, my chips were way out of date and stale; check yours.



They also have smoothies. Everything is made to order, so if you're a kale hater or want less rice, they can swap or leave it out. While there are gluten free and vegetarian options, there is a risk of cross-contamination, so beware if you are allergic.

The District (District Ave)



Sorella, The District, Mall Road *****

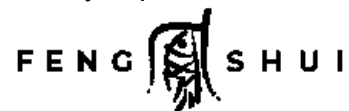
Technically, this replacement for Tuscan Kitchen might be the closest restaurant to the hotel, outside of the hotel restaurants. While the prices are quite high, the food is good. The service is attentive but a bit leisurely – not the place for a fast lunch. The noise level is high; conversation at a normal level will likely be difficult, and punctuated by a strong backbeat. There's a full-service bar, and they will make mocktails. They started us with an excellent focaccia served with a lovely olive oil, flavored with roasted garlic and rosemary, and accompanied by a few Spanish olives. My dining companion found his white pizza with prosciutto to be almost as good as Bertucci's Nolio, his favorite white pizza. My pasta wasn't too spicy: just enough bite in the sausage, and a light sauce. We also split a small antipasto, which was plenty for two. You get to pick the size, but not the ingredients, though it can be made gluten-free, as can many other menu items. We passed on trying a \$30 shrimp cocktail or a \$50 steak dish; even the salads (no meat) approached \$20. So while the food is tasty, and the chairs were comfy, I can only recommend it if you have deep pockets.

Row 34, The District, Mall Rd (just before Black and Blue; for parking turn in between them, it's in the rear) *****

ROW 34

Within sight of Legal Seafoods, this fish place may be easier to get seated, and has more outside dining. Reservations are still wise. It has a full bar, and, as one would expect, features mostly seafood, with an extensive raw bar selection. The menu does have a few non-seafood dishes, but only one vegan salad and sides. The fish here is mostly not fried, so gluten free is easy, though they do have whole belly clams – the only true way. The salmon pate was surprisingly a bit spicy, though still mild. But if you like spice, the cocktail sauce came with an extra lump of horseradish that could be stirred in. The accompanying shrimp were huge and flavorful. The stripped bass ceviche was quite good, with just enough vinegar, and served with addictive sweet potato chips. The tuna crudo was nice and fresh, but we both really loved the onion strings. As for the chowder – a standard by which New Englanders judge seafood restaurants – it was a perfect modern one: big hunks of bacon and red bliss potatoes, along with plenty of clams, and not too thick. The music is a bit loud, but at least it's different: mostly rap, rather than the 80s playlist that seems so ubiquitous. Dessert options include a sorbet, and there's a good selection of coffees and teas. Note the soda is refillable, but the iced tea is not. I found the creative offerings here both better and fresher than Legal's, but if you prefer more traditional seafood, you might want to go there instead.

Feng Shui, The District, Mall Rd ****



A good, solid Asian restaurant, with sushi. Nothing here is bad, but nothing is outstanding; everything will leave you happy and satisfied. They do have soup dumplings (they call them juicy dumplings), lunch specials, and the usual assortment of expected Chinese and Japanese dishes, with some interesting additions, like Indian pancakes. The prices are reasonable, though not cheap, the atmosphere is nice, and there's a small outside dining area that seems rarely used. Feng Shui does a brisk take-out business, so don't let the dining room fool you: the kitchen really is busy. Nevertheless, they do know how to get you in and out at lunch. On weekends, there's still a lunch buffet (11:30 - 2:30), which is getting to be a rarity. The food here isn't quite as good or authentic as Sichuan Gourmet, but it's a bit more in line with what most people expect (plus sushi). And it's closer. As always, call ahead if your group is large.

Burlington Square (Staples plaza)

Sichuan Gourmet, Burlington Square (Staples Plaza), Mall Rd *****



Do you like spice? Are you a culinary adventurer? Some of the items on the menu here will leave you curious, and many of the offerings will leave your mouth tingling. But the clientele skewed heavily Asian, which boded well. We picked two familiar dishes (not everything is odd), plus an unfamiliar one. While my dining companion thought the General Tso's could be hotter, I was fine with it, plus the broccoli was nice and green, and the thick sauce had a good orange flavor. The crab rangoons were also flavorful, not just cream cheese, and we both liked the unusual light batter on the chicken fingers. Our bamboo shoot dish was, as requested, not spicy, and had a slight vinegar flavor and excellent crunch. I'm glad we chose the rice and pupu platter for one; for two would have been far too much. Service was fast and efficient, and everything came out hot and fresh. As soon as you sit down, they serve you water, hot tea, and a lightly pickled vegetable assortment; the latter can have some spicy bits. The food was excellent, and there are lunch specials available. Try something different!

Life Alive, Burlington Square, Mall Rd *****

Though this location is sleek and modern, it still has its roots in the funky hole-in-the-wall original location in Lowell. Mostly Life Alive offers earthy-crunchy bowls, served with noodles or quinoa, and fantastic sauces.

Everything is made to order if, like me, you have the taste buds of a twelve year old. (No kale!) They also make excellent juices. There's a small, sunny patio.



Tatte, Burlington Square, Mall Rd *****

Both a bakery and a cafe, Tatte has all the specialty coffee and tea drinks you could desire (as well as some just juice ones, and hot cocoa). They also have brunch, sandwiches, and fruit cups. But let's be honest, here: you're coming for the desserts, many of which are on the edge of decadence. Their offerings vary seasonally, so you probably will miss my strawberry rhubarb pie, which, though a little on the sweet side, had plenty of rhubarb and a lovely, flaky crust. My companion had a fancy Oreo. The exterior cookies had a deep cocoa flavor, counterbalanced by the interior frosting. You can eat inside, but we opted for the patio. I look forward to returning and seeing if they have a good croissant. I suspect I'll be pleased.



Cava, Burlington Square, corner Mall Rd and Middlesex Turnpike ***

Naya, Burlington Square, corner Mall Rd and Middlesex Turnpike *****

Another couple entries in the fast casual Mediterranean category. Cava focuses more on bowls, whereas Naya is into wraps. I'm not sure how both will survive, being across a parking lot from each other, with Life Alive, which is similar, in between.

And across Mall Rd is Sweetgreen, which is similar to Life Alive. Then there's Just Salad halfway down Mall Rd. No wonder Clover couldn't compete; the area is saturated. At least we now know to stay away from Greco.



On Middlesex Turnpike (across from the mall)

Yard House, Middlesex Turnpike (next to Barnes and Noble) ****

Another Darden Group product, the Yard House is your typical large chain brew pub, with an extensive menu dominated by beers, plenty of TVs tuned to sports, and hard, wooden surfaces guaranteed to make the place noisy. While not quite outside dining, there's a covered patio area with large garage doors that are close. The little tablet on each table will point out things on the menu that are vegan (not a lot), gluten free (ditto), and ingredients for allergen checking. They can accommodate large groups, have an all-gender bathroom, and a full-service bar. The food is what you'd expect: good but not great. We were surprised by the tortilla soup being creamy and not tomato-based, though it had a bit of a bite. My dining companion's burger was properly cooked, thick with a good exterior char, but not crunchy. The fish in my taco had a light, fluffy beer batter; next time I might go for the fish and chips. The sides were prosaic. No waiting for the check: you pay with the tabletop tablet. Just be aware you'll have to go through a questionnaire to pay. My dining companion declared this his favorite.



Down Middlesex Turnpike (south of the highway)

Chateau, Middlesex Turnpike (Middlesex Commons, aka Market Basket Mall) ****

Do you like old-fashioned Italian? Then Chateau, a venerable local institution, is for you. This small, local chain features all the classics, including a selection of "trios," each of which are probably enough for two. Beyond the usual, they also have excellent fried seafood and, often, American classics like traditional turkey dinners. I love their lasagna, which has a meat sauce but no meat inside (vegetarians can ask for marinara). My dining companion is a big chicken parm fan. Every meal starts with their own scali bread and butter – no froofroo olive oil here. While Chateau isn't cheap, it certainly won't leave you poor, and there will be lots of leftovers. Gluten-free is possible but difficult. They also do takeout.



Worth the Trip

The Smoke Shop, Rte 38, Woburn *****

Yes, this is a bit far, and I normally wouldn't include it. But there isn't a lot of barbecue in New England, and for good reason. That said, the Smoke Shop is a small, local chain that is fairly decent Q. I especially like their wings, and the fatty brisket is also good, if you like such things. They serve the sauces on the side, and the ribs aren't overcooked – no meat falling off the bone here. Some of the sides are meh, but the sweet potatoes are good, as are the mashies. The slaw has a bit of spice to it, and people either love it or hate it. Because the sauce is on the side, it's possible to get gluten free, but this is not the best spot for people on special diets.





Schoolhouse Ice Cream, Rte 3A, north of Burlington center *****

Boston is known for its ice cream, and for good reason. Most of the small, local shops buy from Richardson's – and their place in Middleton is definitely worth a trip – but Schoolhouse makes their own, in-house, which means they have a different variety of flavors. And all of it is great! The staff is happy to explain what's in each one, and offer you a taste. While the prices are high, they're in line with everyone else, and the portions are extremely generous – a “mini” is almost a cup of ice cream. Schoolhouse only does ice cream, but it does it really well, and offers the usual variants, including sundaes, various toppings (including jimmies), waffle cones, frappes, and more. There are tables both inside and outside, but the place is crowded enough that we often eat in the car. While you're waiting in line, you can be entertained by a silent TV tuned to a kid-friendly station, a wall full of trivia, or deciding what you'll have. Or maybe just watching the excited kids. Afterwards, if it's open, go a block farther and visit the gigantic Used Book Superstore – but please, patronize the Bookshop first!

Sub Shops

Nick's Place, Rte 3A, Burlington ****

Alexander's Pizza, Bedford St, Lexington ****

The local sub shops. Nick's is closer, but both are quite good. Typical local Greek pizza: thick, crunchy crust, but a little soft underneath, a sweet sauce and plenty of cheese. A good variety of hot and cold subs, salads, wraps, and fried foods, all made to order. The same price as a value meal, larger, much healthier, and fresher! And they're local business by local people (often immigrants). Nick's is only open until 9pm, and closed on Sundays. Alexander's is also closed on Sunday, but open until 10 or 10:30pm. If it's late at night, try Pizza Days on Winn St; they're open until midnight and on Sundays. (I've never been there, so I can't vouch for them.) Always check if they will deliver to the hotel when calling in your order. Or you can go to the prepared foods counter at Market Basket; they're even cheaper and will make a sub to order. No delivery, though.



Upscale Steakhouses

Burton's, Capital Grille, Mooo..., Eddie V's, & Chopps

Readercon isn't paying, so I didn't go to these places, though I've been to all of them in the past except Mooo... (and yes, the ellipsis is part of the name). They're all about the same price. Capital Grille and Mooo... are a bit more upscale; you'll probably feel underdressed if you go in a T-shirt and jeans. Burton's and Eddie V's tend to be noisy. And, of course, being the hotel restaurant, Chopps is the most convenient, though it mostly does Italian. I still prefer Texas Roadhouse if I'm getting beef – just as good and a lot less money. Alas, there's none nearby. However, if I have to differentiate: Capital Grille is probably the classiest, Mooo... has a very good reputation, and Chopps is the most convenient, but has the worst menu selection. Check out the menus online and decide if you really need steak at \$6/pound.



Supermarkets

Note: supermarkets tend not to do delivery. However, you can usually order in advance and do pick-up.

Market Basket, Middlesex Commons, Middlesex Turnpike *****

Forget trekking to Costco in Waltham. Market Basket has similar prices and is our local chain. While it has its detractors, many people are fiercely loyal to MB (it's even a case study), both customers and employees. You won't find annoying self-checkouts or loyalty cards here, just a good, solid selection, decent local produce, and amazingly low prices. We love their finger salad sandwiches (a lobster roll under \$10!), the made-to-order deli sandwiches, rotisserie chicken, fresh-squeezed lemonade, and potato salad. They'll even cook a lobster for you while you shop. There's a little seating area in the store with a microwave. On your way out, pick up a whoopie pie.



Wegmans, Third Avenue ***

Wegmans was great when it first came to town, but it's gone downhill; prices have crept up, and selection decreased to emphasize their own brand. It still has nice charcuterie boards, and a good selection of liquids (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic). There are plenty of people who love the place and make a pilgrimage there, but it's not really a viable choice for lunch or dir, despite the nice eating area upstairs.



MOM (Mom's Organic Market), Rte 3A **

MOM's wins on being close (within long walking distance) and having some specialty foods. But this Whole Foods wannabe falls short. It never seems to have quite what I'm looking for, and the prices are high. People on special diets (keto, gluten free, dairy free, etc.) may find it a viable option.



Stop and Shop, Bedford St., Lexington ***

This gets a shout-out because, outside of Brookline or a kosher market, this Stop and Shop has the best kosher food selection, with a Vaad-certified kosher bakery, and a kosher deli slicer. Sure, the prices are high; Stop and Shop rates as one of the most expensive supermarkets in New England. But still cheaper than The Butcherie.



Shaw's, Winn St, Burlington center **

Really here for completeness, Shaw's is just as expensive (if not more so) than Stop and Shop, but like every market, it has its devotees.



Trader Joe's, Middlesex Turnpike ****

Hidden in the back behind McDonald's, if you want to find the local TJ's, you might need your GPS. Even I have to admit they have decent produce, and the triple ginger cookies are to die for. Everyone has a favorite food from Trader Joe's, but I find some of their business practices sketchy, so I avoid shopping here. Besides, the parking lot is too small.



Whole Foods, 170 Great Rd, Bedford ****

A friend calls it “Whole Paycheck.” Sure, it's got some great organic stuff. Sure, the produce is beautiful. Sure, there's plenty of vegan and gluten free foods. And their selection of dark chocolate is amazing. Have we succumbed to Amazon Fresh at ten at night and ordered strawberries to appear on our doorstep for breakfast? Well, maybe occasionally. I can't guarantee that will work with a hotel, though.



H-Mart, Middlesex Turnpike ****

Technically a Korean grocery store, H-Mart carries all kinds of Asian food, from a dizzying variety of Pocky to fresh and frozen produce you've never seen nor heard of. (And if you buy frozen durian, please leave the hotel.) There's also a food court with a variety of fast food stalls – an Asian bakery, ramen, sushi, teriyaki, etc. None of it is great, and most of it is closed in the evening. At lunch, it's very crowded; I usually end up in my car in the parking lot, which is so busy on weekends that they sometimes get a cop to direct traffic. Also, finding the entrance can be a challenge. Even if you don't eat Asian food, H-Mart is worth an ogle. If you can get in.



Costco, Waltham ***

Oh, just go to Market Basket. Really.

