Words by Susan B. Barnes
Photos courtesy of VISIT FLORIDA

Michelin Guide Makes Its Way to Florida

Miami, Orlando and Tampa will be featured

Photo by Julie Fletcher

LATE LAST YEAR, MICHELIN AND VISIT FLORIDA ANNOUNCED THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, THE MICHELIN GUIDE WILL FEATURE THREE FLORIDA CITIES THIS SPRING IN THE MICHELIN GUIDE MIAMI, ORLANDO AND TAMPA.

"Michelin Guide inspectors look forward to discovering the world-class culinary landscape in Miami, Orlando and Tampa," Gwendal Poullennec, international director of The Michelin Guides, said in a press release. "From the excitement and glamour of Miami to Orlando's iconic attractions and the rich culture of Tampa's Gulf Coast, Florida's gastronomy is unique, diverse and intriguing for locals and travelers across the globe."

Though The Michelin Guide is new to Florida, the Sunshine State culinary scene has its fair share of award-winning chefs and restaurants. Here we highlight each of the three regions that will be featured in the new guide, along with shining stars who may be in contention for inclusion.

MIAMI

The cosmopolitan city in South Florida has an electric vibe that extends to its dining scene, where chefs take inspiration from myriad cultures and their traditional flavors to create exceptional dishes that are distinctly Miami.

New York's Major Food Group, opened its first restaurants in Miami last year, including Carbone in South Beach. Led by restauranteurs Mario Carbone, Rich Torrisi and Jeff Zalaznick, the group's original Carbone in New York City is Michelin-starred, and its sister restaurant serves Italian-American dishes with a Miami spin, like stone crabs and coconut-lime infused desserts. The restaurant's design has garnered its own attention: Robb Report named Carbone one of the 10 most beautiful U.S. restaurants to open in 2021.

Chefs Nando, Valerie and Fernando Chang blend Peruvian and Japanese ingredients and cooking techniques to create memorable dishes at Itamae in the city's Design District. The trio started out in a food hall in 2018, and as popularity grew, moved into a larger space where they can now accommodate 10 tables outside and seating for six inside. Itamae was included in The New York Times' 2021 Favorite Restaurant List, and the chef trio is a 2022 James Beard Award semifinalist for Best Chef: South.

In Miami's Coconut Grove neighborhood, Ariete Executive Chef/Owner Michael Beltran is also in the running for Best Chef: South. He incorporates his Cuban-American heritage and French training to create masterful dishes using seasonal inspiration, which makes for an ever-changing menu. Ariete is one of the handful of restaurants in the U.S. to offer the French tradition of duck a la presse.

When it opened in the summer of 2012, locals, critics and visitors alike instantly knew that Chef Michael Pirolo had a hit with Macchialina. He collected his first Best Chef: South nomination in 2016 and is considered the most-starred chef in Miami. His Italian fare served in a casual neighborhood setting in South Beach has earned him another Best Chef: South nom this year.

Joining in the collection of South Florida chefs named semifinalists for Best Chef: South is Chef Niven Patel of Ghee Indian Kitchen in Kendall. Here, Chef Patel puts a seasonal and contemporary spin on traditional dishes, much to the delight of the diners who dig into his dishes. He also oversees Ranch Patel, a two-acre farm from which 35% of the produce on his menu is harvested.

Chef Michael Schwartz of Michael's Genuine Food & Drink in Miami is no stranger to the James Beard Awards; he won Best Chef: South in 2010 and is a 2022 semifinalist for Outstanding Chef. Chef Schwartz's namesake restaurant is celebrating its 15th anniversary in the Design District, and he oversees Genuine Hospitality Group, a collection of seven restaurants in South Florida and Ohio.

The 2022 James Beard Awards also recognized semifinalists Chef Antonio Bachour for Outstanding Pastry Chef at Bachour in Coral Gables and Doral; Chef Zak Stern for Outstanding Baker at Zak the Baker in Miami; and Cafe La Trova in Miami for Outstanding Bar Program — one of The World's 50 Best Bars in 2021.

Michelin-starred chefs in major cities across the country have run Florida kitchens, including Executive Chef John Shields of Chicago's Smyth, who earned his first press at Grand Finale in St. Petersburg, Florida, part of the Tampa Bay metro area.

"What an amazing opportunity for my home state to be recognized on the global stage," Chef Shields says. "Slowly but surely, their restaurant community continues to grow and I can only imagine them getting better with the added excitement, and pressure, of Michelin inspectors watching their every move. There's a reason besides the beautiful weather that some of the best chefs on the planet have begun to open diverse and exciting new restaurants. The dining scene in Florida has always been noteworthy but with Michelin ratings in play it will only continue to elevate. With this added incentive, who knows when I'll be opening one there too."

Michelin-starred chefs Daniel Boulud and Nobu Matsuhisa have outposts in Miami; Masaharu Morimoto has a fusion restaurant called Morimoto Asia in Orlando's Disney Springs; and Jean-Georges Vongerichten has three concepts in The Miami Beach EDITION hotel.

Jason and Sue Chin of Good Salt Restaurant Group

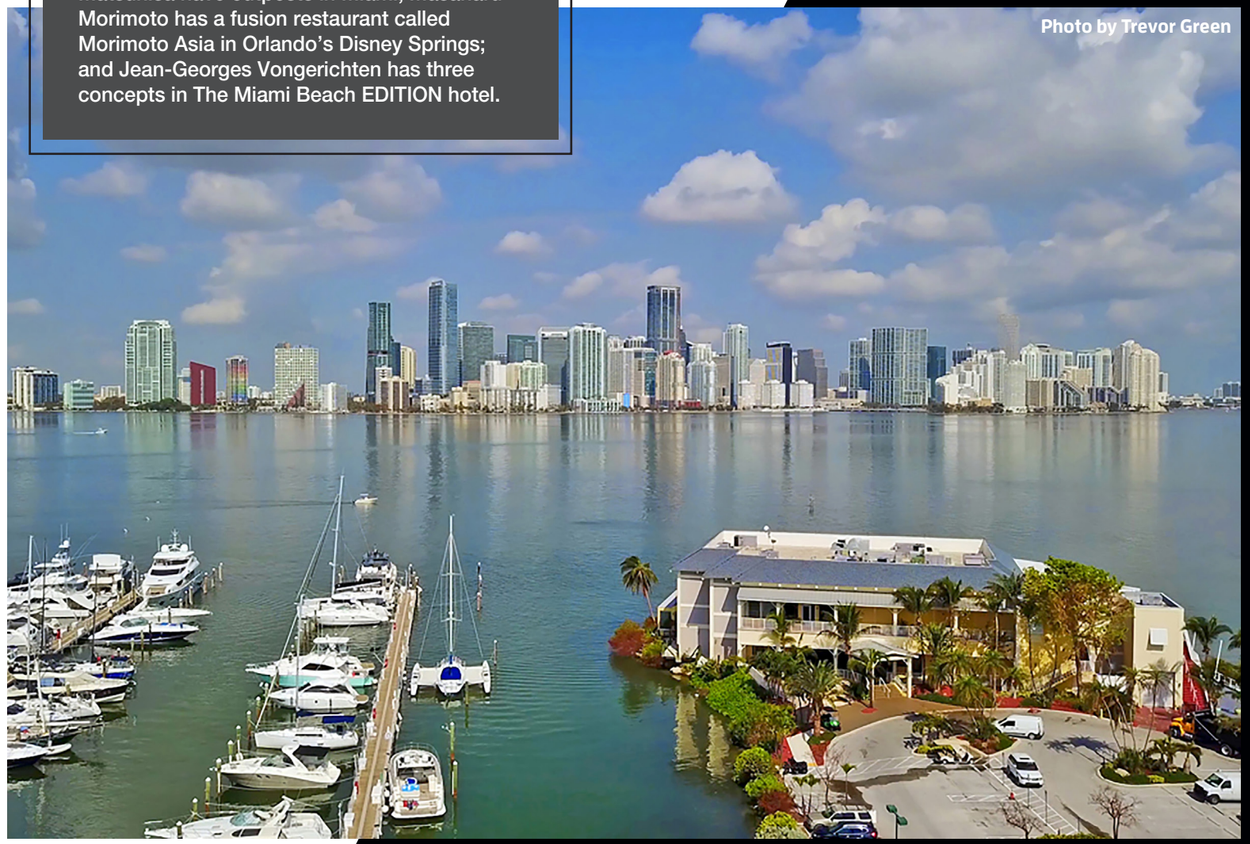

Photo by Trevor Green

ORLANDO

Known for its thrilling theme parks and out-of-this-world attractions, Orlando's culinary scene is part of the destination's draw.

Two years ago, Henry Moso received his first James Beard Award nomination for Rising Star Chef of the Year after he opened his first Kabooki Sushi. This year, he's a semifinalist for Best Chef: South. Chef Moso and his sushi and Japanese dishes have been heralded by Zagat, too.

Good Salt Restaurant Group's Jason and Sue Chin are semifinalists in the 2022 James Beard Awards' Outstanding Restauranteur category. For more than 20 years, the couple has drawn inspiration from their travels to elevate Orlando's dining scene. With a team of seasoned professionals, they collaborate to create meals to remember at Seito Sushi, Reyes Mezcaleria, The Osprey and The Monroe.

Chefa Rabii Saber and Evette Rahman join their culinary colleagues with Beard Award nominations for Best Pastry Chef at Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort and Best Baker at Sister Honey's respectively. Chef Rahman is a three-time World Dessert Champion (2016, 2019, 2021).

TAMPA

Tampa's lesser-known independent dining scene has taken off over the past 15 years, impacted by openings like The Refinery, from Chefs Greg and Michelle Baker. Chef Baker was a Beard Award semifinalist for five consecutive years from 2012 to 2016. Though The Refinery closed its doors in 2019, its impact on Tampa's dining scene continues.

Beyond JBF, there is a rich culinary history in this city on the bay. Chef Jeannie Pierola is a five-time Best Chef semifinalist, and her edison: food+drink lab is a five-time Florida Trend Golden Spoon Winner. In addition to edison, Chef Pierola has her talented fingers in Counter Culture and edison's Swigamajig, a dive bar and fish kitchen in Sparkman Wharf, a shipping container food hall concept in downtown Tampa.

Also in Sparkman Wharf is 2017 Best Chef: South semifinalist Chef Ferrell Alvarez from Rooster and the Till. He's teamed up again with Restaurateur Ty Rodriguez to highlight Asian street food with the just-opened Dang Dude, which joins the already-established Gallito Taqueria. Another Alvarez-Rodriguez local favorite is Nebraska Mini Mart.

A landmark since opening its doors in 1956, Bern's Steak House is Tampa's most acclaimed fine dining restaurant. It's among the Tampa Bay Times' 25 most iconic restaurants, Food & Wine named it the best classic restaurant in Florida, it made Tampa Magazine's 2020 Best Restaurants List and the wine cellar won a Wine Spectator Grand Award. The restaurant group includes Haven and Elevage at Epicurean Hotel.

Other Tampa restaurants that may interest Michelin Guide inspectors are Mise en Place, a member of Florida Trend's Golden Spoons Hall of Fame; Koya and Willa's, both among Tampa Bay's 2022 Best New Restaurants according to the Tampa Bay Times.