

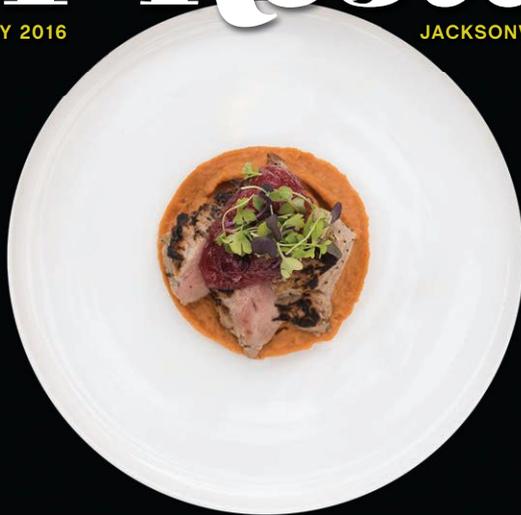
NEW YEAR NEW YOU \* SALAAM Y'ALL \* LEGEND SERIES X \* TONY MEOLA \* AND MORE!

# JACKSONVILLE

## 50 BEST Restaurants

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# NOTABLE NEWBIES



IL DESCO

**Kaika Teppanyaki Asian Fusion**, which opened last summer, is a strip mall spot one block from Five Points, but the inside is neither cheesy nor hipster. The décor brings to mind a modern spa and the food is a welcome surprise, too. During lunch, go for a filling Bento box; for dinner, take a seat at one of several hibachi tables and try the lobster and filet mignon combination. • As long as diners keep saying yes, the meat keeps coming at **Terra Gaucha Brazilian Steakhouse**. The southern Brazilian menu includes cuts like picanha (premium top sirloin), cordeiro (leg and rack of lamb), frango (chicken wrapped in bacon) and more, all flame-grilled and unlimited. Show up hungry. • A huge beer selection, sausages and brats topped with things like bacon mac and cheese or sliced roast beef and a fried egg, burgers, salads and even a vegan menu—**Hoptinger Bier Garden and Sausage House** has all this with sides of lively game-day atmosphere and some totally metal murals. • *Top Chef's* Kevin Sbraga opened his first Jacksonville restaurant **Sbraga & Company** in late 2015 amid much anticipation. He didn't disappoint. The family-style eatery has large plates of smoked meats and New York strip steaks to share, a raw bar and small snacks such as deviled egg toast. But don't overlook the kale salad with hot vinegar dressing, a surprise favorite. • In May 2015, **Super Food and Brew** food truck parked for good in a former Starbucks in Downtown Jax. Fresh is the focus here—items like ahi poke bowl, sushi burrito and pork belly stir fry are all made in-house without the use of freezers. • **Whiskey Jax**, a dimly-lit gastropub in the Baymeadows area, serves upscale bar food and—surprise!—more than 120 whiskeys. Sure, they dish out good

burgers and cocktails, but don't miss appetizers like bleu cheese chips, avocado fries dipped in citrus Thai chili sauce and beer cheese soup topped with Parmesan popcorn. • **Il Desco** moved into the spot previously occupied by Pele's Wood Fire on Park and King streets in November. Owned by the group which operates Bistro Aix and Ovinté, the restaurant has the same fancy-yet-low-key feel as its sisters with its neutral color palette, tufted booths and on-trend succulents gracing the tables. From the "modern Italian" menu, we suggest the tasty grilled octopus appetizer and rabbit lasagna washed down with a Negroni cocktail. • Invented in 1974, the panino is the rustic **Trasea & Co.'s** signature dish: not quite a burrito, not quite a wrap, the ingredients are folded into the special dough and baked at 495 degrees. We recommend the spicy Sawgrass shrimp panino, filled with seasoned Mayport shrimp, spicy ranch, sausage and Swiss cheese. • Entrées like the short rib risotto and pistachio-crusting grouper match **Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurant's** sleek, dressy atmosphere. Vino sourced from Cooper's own winery and selected to pair well with each dish is a standout feature which makes this recent Town Center addition spot-on for a date or a girls' night out. • Known for its groovy décor and casual atmosphere, **Mellow Mushroom's** approach to its stone-baked pies is anything but mellow—they've won the pizza category of our Best in Jax list for the last couple years. Each franchise offers a "local menu" with some unusual offerings. The newest Jax location—Mellow Mushroom River City, on the Northside—is decorated in a transportation theme and offers the far-out pies, hoagies and array of craft beers for which the chain is known. \*



MELLOW MUSHROOM