



Kansas City, *Here We Come*

*Roll up
your sleeves and
hang onto
your taste buds
here at the
crossroads
of barbecue,
where locals say
the South meets
the West.*

If we really are what we eat, I've become a human link of hickory-smoked sausage, a steaming mess of ribs, a tender hunk of brisket, a feisty chicken on slow burn. It may not be completely obvious to the untrained eye, but I've passed the point of no return. Nothing can stop my Kansas City barbecue feeding frenzy. Not even a giant mocking pig.

Standing guard outside the tiny downtown diner Lil' Jake's Eat It An Beat It, a pink concrete pig with part of its ear nibbled off (don't ask) shoots me a wicked smile—or so I hallucinate. I quickly look away, clinging more tightly to my security blanket, er, napkin, and continue forth. Ah, heaven . . . can wait. You see, there's much more work to be done. And this little piggy's not about to go home.

Kansas City, Missouri, and sister city



PHOTOGRAPHS: RALPH ANDERSON

Kansas City, Kansas, boast nearly 90 barbecue joints—more than any other place in the world.

But where do you even begin to share in the wealth? I made it my mission to find out, shamelessly researching more than two dozen of the region's most talked-about joints and tablecloth establishments to share with you the best of K.C. 'cue.

In this region you can surely bask in the cultural crossroads of barbecue: There's Texas-style beef brisket—sliced thin at legendary Arthur Bryant's and thick at K.C. Masterpiece. There are Chicago-style pork ribs at Gate's, Tennessee-style pork butt at Lil' Jake's, and a Carolina-style white sauce that is served with the barbecued chicken at Jack Fiorella's.

In a galaxy of uniqueness, I find twinklings of recognition. (To page 30)



The sliced brisket sandwich at historic chomping ground Arthur Bryant's is more than a handful. And it's worth every tender bite.



At Jack Fiorella's Smoke Stack in Martin City, the stacked onion rings and smoked chicken are nurtured, served, and eaten with a smile. Turn to page 204 for their Cheesy Corn Bake recipe.

For sure, it's their pride: "The best restaurants in the world are, of course, in Kansas City," notes humorist Calvin Trillin in *American Fried*. He goes as far as to call Arthur Bryant's "the single best." Maybe, but there's a lot of competition out there, both in restaurants and in 'cue cookoffs. "The truth is that our barbecue wins," says "Baron of Barbecue" cooking champ Paul Kirk, who travels the world teaching the art of Kansas City 'cue. "Where's the best? Find a contest. They nurture it there; it's their pride and joy," Paul says.

Next, it's their sauce: tomato-based, often with molasses, a hint of vinegar, and a rainbow of Caribbean spices. The mixture was notably concocted by the many African Americans who once settled here to work the abundant livestock. (To wit: In the 1920s "Father of K.C. 'Cue" Henry Perry put the first flame to succulent slabs bundled in newspaper at 19th and Highland.)

Then, it's their cooking techniques: seared and slow-smoked over indirect heat, leaving drop-off-the-bone tender meat coated with a crisp layer of rubbed spice.

Also, it's the belt-popping portions: piled handsomely high. Wash it all down with low prices and great service, thanks to all the competition.

Finally, it's, well, burnt: And people like it that way—enough so that burnt brisket end pieces are affectionately dubbed "brownies," and devotees are referred to as "brownie scouts." "Burnt?" Paul laughs. "We just like to say it has a nice bark on it."

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the cultural
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barbecue.**

Whatever that ol' K.C. blackened magic is, "you just can't question it; you just gotta go with it," says an Arthur Bryant's pitmaster. Words of wisdom.

For a taste of K.C. 'cue and sides, make your way to page 204. Or hit the road and

try these places when you get there (and pick up some sauce—many sell it by mail). *Denise Gee*

B.B.'s Lawnside Bar-B-Que: 1205 East 85th, (816) 822-7427. **Arthur Bryant's:** 1727 Brooklyn, (816) 231-1123. **Jack Fiorella's Smoke Stack:** 13441 Holmes Road, (816) 942-9141 (one other location). **Gates Bar-B-Q:** 1221 Brooklyn, (816) 483-3880 (other locations). **K.C. Masterpiece Barbecue & Grill:** 4747 Wyandotte, (816) 531-3332 (other locations). **Lil' Jake's Eat It An Beat It:** 1227 Grand, (816) 283-0880. **Rosedale Barbecue:** 600 SW. Blvd., (816) 262-0343. **Winslow's City Market Smokehouse:** 20 East Fifth, (816) 471-7427. **Zarda Barbecue:** 214 North Seven Highway, (816) 229-9999. ◇