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BRUNCH AL FRESCO

An Insider's Guide to Top Outdoor Brunches



Travis Rummel/Felt Soul Media

EAT, DRINK, WALK, REPEAT

Denver Does Brunch Al Fresco

By **Eric Elkins**

Even though Denver locals know how to make the most of a warm Wednesday evening or a perfect Tuesday powder day, weekends bring something that even the above-average weekday can't truly provide: brunch. Between our temperate climate, active lifestyles, and a love of making the most of each day, Denver knows how to turn a weekend meal into an epic afternoon.

And we don't tend to settle into one spot to drink and dine the day away — although it can happen. No, we're a peripatetic lot, never content to stay in one spot for too long. Brunch in Denver is all about a daytime wander, starting with a friend or two, picking up others along the way, finding that next perfect bloody maria or slice of pain perdu. It's a rolling confab of pals — some post-hike, some recovering from the night before, some pre-gaming for an evening of fun.

Any Saturday or Sunday — especially Sunday — you'll find roving packs of contented carousers strolling through the neighborhoods of the city. Because Denver rarely gets too hot or too cold, patios are our jam. The hint of a sunny day has us dining al fresco, drinking on rooftops, and settling into outdoor coffeeshops.

So, to help you live like a local, here are outdoor brunch itineraries that you can follow (or not) as you see fit. I've generally kept options within an easy walk of each other, with a few necessary exceptions.



The High-End LoHi Culinary Tour

Looking for finer eats within just a few blocks? Make your way to the LoHi neighborhood for a slew of ideal brunches.

Carnivores should start with the meat-heavy **Old Major**, where Chef Justin Brunson shares his deep love and devotion for all things pig-related. The patio is small but lively and abuts the bar, which means your Night Train Brunch Punch will arrive quickly.

If you're a fan of Top Chef, you'll want to check in on Denver's own Chef Carrie Baird around the corner at **Bar Dough**. She crushed it week after week last season, winning quickfire challenges with her signature fancy toasts. Brunch at Bar Dough is an elevated offering, Italian-inspired, but not beholden. Whatever you do, be sure to order a spritz — pick your variation and enjoy.

I'm just going to say it. **The Bindery** is the most gorgeous, innovative, new restaurant in Denver. Saunter down the hill from Bar Dough to find a warm and inviting space with high windows and loads of natural light. The wild and approachable menu will draw you in, and the stellar staff, headed up by chef-hero-owner-designer-magician Linda Hampsten Fox, will charm you. Drop in for a latte and a life-changing Portuguese custard tartlet, or stay for seasonal brunch items (duck prosciutto, hello!) and a deep wine list. The Bindery feels like a spot in London or Paris, with an easy, welcoming vibe.

While you're down on Central Street, stroll a block over to **Candela Latin Kitchen** for a Capicu pick-me-up (Fernet, Rum, and Coke!), two kinds of ceviche, and affordable Latin-inspired brunch items from Chef Jesse Vega's family recipes. Oh, and try a spicy michelada before you go.

The LoHi Crawl

More in the mood for bites and brews? Start with snacks and mimosas at **Avanti Food and Beverage**. The hipster food court startup incubator has one of the best rooftop patios in the city, with a view of downtown and southward, and a crew of kick-ass bartenders. The range of options changes regularly, which means you have a ton of tasty items to choose from.

From Avanti, walk just a couple blocks up to **Recess Beer Garden**, with its vast, multi-level patio area. Grab a giant corn dog, pick out your beer, and put up your feet or get yourself into a round of cornhole. Love dogs? You'll find a ton hanging here with their chill owners.

Someone in your crew more in tune with bruschetta and prosecco? Right along the same alleyway is **Postino**. And **Bamboo Sushi**, nestled right between the two, just launched its own brunch. You could spend a whole day enjoying this little row of indoor/outdoor spots.

Finally, hoof it over to **Low Country Kitchen**, just on the other side of the park. Bypass the sidewalk patio and head straight upstairs to the rooftop deck. Grab a chicken biscuit, sip a pickled whiskey sour (trust me on that), and generate your vitamin D.



June Cochran Photography



Downtown Rounds

Truth: You could do serious damage without leaving the Union Station complex and feel pretty damn good about yourself. With James Beard award-winner Alex Seidel's **Mercantile Dining & Provision**, Kimball Musk's **Next Door**, Chef Jen Jasinski's seafood restaurant **Stoic & Genuine** (Best. Burger. In Denver. Not a hyperbole.), and the all-around classic brunch spot **Snooze**, you could get nice and sloshy and a belly full of goodness without walking more than a few steps in any direction.

But if you did that, you'd miss out on **Avelina**, just up the block, with its crispy duck hash and shrimp and grits. You'd miss **Kachina Cantina's** guac sampler. And **Urban Farmer's** tableside steak tartare (it's so damn good).

Speaking of Chef Jasinski, consider treating yourself to a short tour of the Denver institutions that bear her imprimatur, starting with the adorable **Bistro Vendôme**, with its intimate patio tucked away off Larimer Square. Start with classic French-style mussels in white wine sauce (get some frites to dip), or dig right into duck confit eggs benedict. Then pop across the street to Spain... er... **Rioja**, for cocktails and sweet potato hash with smoked salmon roulade. While you're at it, stumble around the corner to Jasinski's less-fancy, but still tasty, **Euclid Hall** for beer and brats. Or at least dig into duck poutine. (And yes, I love all things duck.)

RiNo Ramble

RiNo Art District is becoming more and more walkable, which is good news when you want to intersperse your drinking and dining with wanders through local art galleries and shops.

CALL, which just opened in the spring, is generating a ton of buzz for a small-but-delectable menu of edible wonders. The patio is gorgeous, and the perfect place to take in sunlight while sipping at a Morning Bell cocktail.

Then roll over to **Julep**, for — you know it — southern delights like succotash with poached eggs or chicken and waffles. Cool off with a Pimm's Cup and watch the delightful show that is Denver's downtown day drinkers at their hilarious finest walking along the street below.

The massive patio at **RiNo Beer Garden** is always a party, with solid brunch bites and rows of taps that seem to go on forever. You could stop for a beer or two, chomp on a "RiNo Hang-over," or crush the bottomless mimosas.

Starting to fade from the heavy food and alcohol haze? Amble down to **Denver Central Market**, grab a coffee from **Crema**, a sampling of meats and cheeses from **Cured**, a bit o' ceviche from **Tammen's Fish Market** (or maybe fresh pastries from **Izzio's**), and lazily consume it all on the patio. Or surrender to the haze and order a cocktail at **Curio** to go with it.



Capitol Hill Crawl

Just to the east of downtown is a concentration of brunch spots with a variety of dining experiences, all pretty much on the same street.

Stop in at **Steuben's**, a restaurant that put a pin in the Cap Hill map as a dining destination, or start next door at sister restaurant **Ace Eat Serve**, where you can get killer Asian-inspired dishes and play a few games of ping pong to keep the blood pumping. One of the most talented pastry chefs in all of Denver, Nadine Donovan, keeps the delectables at both spots on point, so be sure to indulge in whatever she has on the menu that day.

Down the street is **Beast & Bottle**, and though the patio is small, the menu isn't. Choose from the shared dishes (deli-style fish board? Yes, please!), and do not miss the lamb pastrami hash. Drink something bubbly and watch the world go by.

Next, walk up to **D Bar**, originally a dessert spot headed by celeb chef Keegan Gerhard, now a mecca for hearty food and magical sweets, from the legendary Cake & Shake to seasonal specials.

Or continue your stroll down 17th Avenue, stopping in at **Dos Santos**, **Watercourse** (for strictly delicious vegetarian fare), or **OneFold** for congee (with duck confit!) and eggs.

Eric's Tips for All-Day Brunching

If you think you can handle a day of drinking and dining in Denver, don't forget you're in a dry climate at a high altitude. That means the alcohol works faster. Here are three things to keep in mind:

Drink a TON of water — Locals know to drink at least a glass of water for every cocktail or beer. Sure, you'll need to make more runs to the restroom, but it beats the crushing dehydration headache that's sure to follow if you're spending the day tipping in the sun.

Be snacktacular — Eat. Whether it's a slow graze of small plates at each new stop, or a few heavy dishes to lay in a foundation, the food is damn good, and eating will keep you from getting too trashed too early in the day.

Stop for coffee — I love nothing more than taking a break from the sun and suds by stopping into an air-conditioned coffee shop for a cappuccino. Caffeine and coolness can keep you going.



Southside Stroll

Even though it's not an easy walk from here to more outdoor brunch spots, I can't write about patio dining without sharing a reco for **Interstate Kitchen & Bar** in the Santa Fe Arts District (disclosure: It's co-owned by one of my very best friends). With bar full o' bourbon, and brunch items galore, you could get in a lot of trouble right there, whiling away your day sipping at their enormous whiskey list while tucking in on comfort foods like hanger steak and eggs or a hot brown sandwich.

Your next move could go a couple different ways. You might stick to Sante Fe, taking in the art galleries and supplementing with snacks from **Joe Maxx Coffee** or wending your way down the street to old school Mexican deliciousness at **El Noa Noa**.

Or, you could grab a Lyft a few blocks away to the Baker District and enjoy a walkable feast of brunchy options, starting with Broadway's stalwart, **The Hornet**. Get yourself a prime rib hash, or go indulgent with sea salt caramel bread pudding. After that, maybe cross the street to **Punch Bowl Social**, where you can eat in the sun before knocking down some bowling pins inside.

If you're having a beer day (all of the above places on this tour have a healthy mix of local pints), don't miss rooftop at **Historians Ale House** (sister to RiNo Beer Garden), with its rich and delicious pub fare and huge beer selection.

Even though it's kind of cheating to mention **Gozo's** fancy-yet-affordable brunch, if you order a cold-brew negroni and sit by one of their open garage doors, you'll still feel like you're outside.

But the best patio on Broadway would be down the block at **Illegal Pete's**. Select a giant burrito with all your faves, order a beer, and then spend the rest of the day playing bocce, snacking, and drinking. It's a consummate Colorado experience, and the perfect way to finish off your brunch tour.

Whether you find yourself sprawled in a booth for hours, ordering drinks and new bites as the feeling hits, or doing the full brunch-and-walk-and-brunch-some-more, Denver has the outdoor weekend dining options to keep you warm, fed, and happily hazy all day long.

Enjoy.



Eric Elkins spends way too much time and money eating and drinking his way through Denver. He's the CEO of WideFoc.us Corp, a social media agency celebrating 11 years in business, and writes young adult novels on the side. His blog about being a single father can be found at datingdad.com.

& 1 more thing

Please and thank you — Even if you're truly hangry, a smile, some basic courtesy, and a bit of patience goes a long way with your servers. Remember, they were probably working late the night before, and had to be back in time to feed the early risers. Working brunch can be a full-on sprint for hours at a time, so be gracious and tip generously.