

Every Day Has Its Dog

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Today Matt Forster takes readers on a Michigan and Ohio road trip to sample some of the Midwest's best hot dogs!



House of Doggs

Lately I've become kind of a hot dog fanatic. Here in Southeast Michigan, of course, I can easily find the classic Detroit Coney dog a nearly every corner diner—from the Coney chains like [Leo's](#) and [National Coney](#) to local joints like my most recent favorite, [Dan's Country Coney](#) nearby in Ortonville. Most of these dogs are more or less the same ingredient-wise, so I stick with places that won't burn the hot dog (unbelievably, it does happen) and those that do

something a little creative. Dan's, for example, has a Coney dog wrap. The concept changes the chili-to-bread ratio, in a good way. I am also far enough north that a Flint-style Coney from [Angelo's](#) is always an option. But, to be honest, I often find the variety lacking.

I travel around the country a lot and get envious of what other states have to offer. In Denver I found classic Detroit Coney dogs at a place called [Bernie's Hot Dog Co.](#) They also serve up a Chicago-style hot dog that's to die for. Both are pretty authentic since the owner hails from Detroit and lived a while in the Windy City. He also has a Denver dog with green chili and shredded cheese and a pack of others.

Having witnessed this resurgence of hot dog joints, places that celebrate an entire menu of classic dogs and serve more than just the regional favorite, I started looking for creative dog vendors closer to home. I've been pleasantly surprised at some of the outstanding hot dog houses in our own Midwestern backyard.



House of Doggs

Up in Traverse City is one of my favorites, [House of Doggs](#). HOD has a wall-sized menu and a space that captures a rock-n-blues vibe. Surrounded by so many great restaurants (within an easy walk you'll find the Blue Tractor Cook Shop, the Soul Hole, North Peak Brewing, etc. etc.) it's obvious that HOD would have to be a step above the usual fare to compete. And it is. There are a mess of dogs on tap: Southern style with coleslaw, a Honky Tonk dog with bacon and cheese, and the HOD Fusion topped with potato chips (just to name a few).

Last month I was excited to “discover” the [Senate](#) in Cincinnati’s Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. I put that in quotes because if you know downtown Cincy, you already know the Senate. This place is a bit more swank than the usual hot dog joint. A long bar lines one wall, and above the bar the widescreen televisions don’t play ESPN. Rather, at least when I was there, they were showing the movie *Ghandi*. The hot dogs too, are a bit more high end, served on a wooden cutting board. I started with tomato bisque and ordered the dog-of-the-day, the Jimmy the Greek dog. This all-beef dog was piled high with a mess of gyro meat, tzatziki, fresh tomatoes, red onions, and feta cheese. And I mean a *mess*. I am not one to eat a hot dog with utensils, but here it was mandatory, and even then I left wearing more than I came in with.



Senate

The other options on the menu are just as exotic and mouth-watering. The Korean has kimchi and braised short rib. The Trailer Park dog is wrapped in bacon and topped with American cheese, coleslaw, and kettle fried BBQ potato chips.

At the other end of the spectrum, and closer to home over in Brighton, Michigan, I found a delightful little dive earlier this summer when I was out scouting for a book project. Heading out for a week of camping, I passed a sign around lunch time that boasted, World’s Greatest Coney Dogs Since 1972. How could I resist?! It was [Coney Joes](#), a small eatery tucked in behind the shops on Grand River Avenue. To my surprise, they had more than just Coney dogs. So I ordered two: one Coney and one Chicago. Coney Joes did not disappoint, though I will admit I ate out in the parking lot since the small dining area was a bit cramped and didn’t really feel all that inviting.



Coney Joe's

By way of variety, the folks at Coney Joes put the mustard on thick, underneath the chili. I am not sure this does much, but it did mean they got more mustard on there than I am used to, and when onions toppled off the side, they weren't deadly shirt-staining bombs, just mildly shirt-staining raw onions with a little chili on them. This place definitely deserves a return visit. The curly fries are pretty good, but the menu also advertises ostrich and turkey Burgers and tater tots.



Coney Joe's

There are, of course, dozens of places I haven't explored yet. (And some I have that I didn't mention here.) No list would be complete without at least a nod to Superdawg (or the Portillo's chain) in Chicago, Skyline Chili in and around Cincinnati, Lafayette Coney Island in Detroit, The Wienery in Minneapolis, Coney Island Wiener Stand in Fort Wayne, Yesterdog in Grand Rapids... I could go on.

House of Doggs (231-922-1348, www.houseofdoggs.com), 120 South Union Street, Traverse City, Michigan

Senate (513-421-2020, www.senatepub.com), 1212 Vine Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

Coney Joes (810-227-5310), 116 West Grand River Avenue, Brighton, Michigan

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