

Travel

10 great places to tuck into a warm bowl of chili

Welcome cool weather with a hot bowl of chili this October, aka National Chili Month. "Chili, that most democratic of foods, is savored all over this country, and local twists and tweaks abound," says **Marie Dalby**, editor in chief of *Chile Pepper* magazine. "In New Mexico, it's laden with green chiles, and in Ohio, it's served with a layer of spaghetti." And though you can get it at restaurants large and small, much of what makes chili a truly special food is the subculture of chili cook-offs. The International Chili Society World's Championship Cook-off runs today through Sunday. Dalby shares with USA TODAY's **Shawn Sell** some spicy festivals and restaurants for your next hearty bowl.

ICS World's Championship Cook-off

Omaha

"Ladies and gentlemen, start your stoves: Starting today, chili cooks from all over the USA take part in this extravaganza that spans three days, awards \$40,000 in prize money and offers serious bragging rights to the cook whose chili floors the judges," Dalby says. "Competition is open to those who have qualified by winning a sanctioned cook-off during the preceding year." 877-777-4427; chilicookoff.com

Hard Times Café

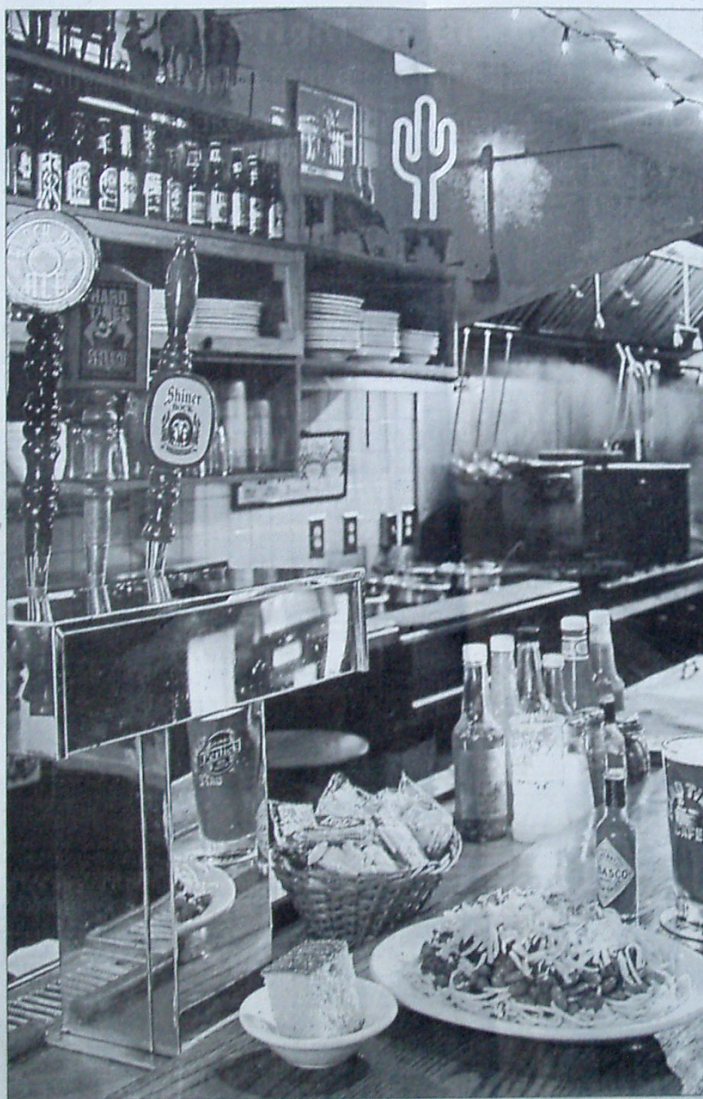
Alexandria, Va.

"This 1930s-style 'chili parlor' has locations throughout Virginia, Maryland, Indiana and North Carolina and serves up great food from good people at cheap prices," Dalby says. "Co-founders Fred and Jim Parker are no strangers to the competitive-chili circuit, offering zesty variations of their secret recipes on the cafe's website." 703-837-0050; hardtimes.com

Skyline Chili

Cincinnati

"This chain produces Cincinnati-style chili inspired by Greek recipes — about as far from Texas chili as you can get — but nonetheless with an incredibly devoted following of happy diners," Dalby says. "At home on coney dogs or over spaghetti, this chili is never more delicious than when it's under a thick topping of cheddar cheese." 513-241-4848; skylinechili.com



"Great food, cheap prices": The Hard Times Café in Alexandria, Va., is one of many locations in Virginia, Maryland, Indiana and North Carolina. Variations on its recipes can be found at the Hard Times' website.



By Selena Jahara, Green Bay Press-Gazette, for USA TODAY

Midwest chili: Chili John's serves it over spaghetti noodles, with or without beans, and as bold or as mild as a customer desires.

Chili John's

Green Bay, Wis.

"Started in 1913 by a Lithuanian immigrant, Chili John's signature dish has some similarity to the Cincinnati chili paradigm (i.e., noodles are *de rigueur*), but the addition of spicy oil makes this chili unique," Dalby says. "There is also an outpost in Burbank, Calif., started by the son of the original Chili John." 920-494-4624; chilijohns.com

Cin Chili & Company

Houston

"This small business of chili spices and chili gift kits was started by Cindy Reed Wilkins, herself a championship chili cook. Cin Chili's chili mix just won top honors at a recent competition," Dalby says. "If you want to be the coolest chili kid on the block, you can hire Cindy to come cook her championship chili for your next party." 832-372-7049; cinchilli.com

Tournament of Roses Chili Cookoff

Pasadena, Calif.

"This large chili showdown, also sanctioned by the International Chili Society, is held Dec. 31 as part of the Tournament of Roses' Fanfest Expo Village," Dalby says. It's located in the stadium's south parking lots. 626-449-4100; tournamentofroses.com/events/fanfest.asp#chili

Looking for more travel ideas? Review "10 Great" lists on the Internet at 10greats.usatoday.com

Texas Chili Parlor

Austin

"The motto here is 'E Pluribus Chili' — which really says it all," Dalby says. "There's actually a release that the parlor (in theory) makes you sign when you order a bowl of the adult-rated XXX Lone Star chili." For a milder bowl, try the black bean and sausage chili. 512-472-2828; www.cactushill.com/TCF/home.htm

Florida State Chili Cook-off

Clearwater

"Held on Nov. 5 this year, the 'Chiliblast' features music, food and kids' activities," Dalby says, "plus a whole lotta good chili." 727-781-6330; floridachili.com

Garduños of Mexico Restaurant and Cantina

Las Cruces, N.M.

"Located in New Mexico, 'the heart of chile country' and home of the famed green chile, Garduños serves up a tasty bowl of chili verde," says Dalby. "The annual Labor Day weekend Hatch Chile Festival is held nearby." 505-521-7222; gardunosrestaurants.com

World Class Chili Parlor

Seattle

"Located in Pike Place Market, this great Left Coast Texas-style chili boasts heat levels adjustable to your palate's desire," says Dalby. "When you order a bowl, make sure you also get a side of jalapeño cornbread." 206-623-3678; worldclasschili.com