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Keep on Truckin'

The number of mobile eateries offering gourmet fare is growing.

By Maria Blackburn

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CREDIT: CHRISTOPHER MYERS

On a rainy Tuesday, with only 30 minutes to spare, Kathy Patterson dashes out of her office into the streets near the University of Maryland Medical Center looking for lunch. Walking at a brisk clip, she bypasses any number of sandwich and fast-food joints before she reaches her destination: The Gypsy Queen Cafe.

This is a tradition she looks forward to every week, she explains, as she takes her place in line behind several other diners to order. But this is no ordinary cafe. It's a 27-foot truck painted with psychedelic swirls of purple, green, and pink, a mobile eatery that changes locations every day, keeping diners apprised of where it will be via social media. And the menu offerings are decidedly unlike the ho-hum hot dogs and plastic-wrapped sandwiches found at a typical sidewalk cart or construction-site trailer.

Instead, there are crab-cake tacos with Old Bay aioli, sweet-corn hush puppies in a waffle cone, and black truffle sliders. This is street food with a decidedly gourmet twist. As Patterson waits for her Santorini beef wrap with Greek dressing, she shares how happy she is about the gourmet food trucks popping up all over the city.

"Food trucks really add something to the lunchtime scene here," she says. "We're tired of chicken salad and ham sandwiches and want a variety of interesting foods."

Baltimore has long been an outdoor food kind of town. From the pit beef at the Sunday JFX Farmers' Market and the downtown hot dog carts to the loncheras or taco trucks stationed around Fells Point, there are a number of places to grab a quick bite and eat in the open air. But the gourmet food-truck trend, so popular in cities like Los Angeles, Portland, OR, and New York, has largely evaded Charm City. That is, until two years ago, when Kooper's Chowhound Burger Wagon came on the scene, soon followed by several other food vans.

The city wasn't quite prepared for the food-truck influx, and there was a brief skirmish over regulations. The mayor and her staff ironed out the issues in May by establishing rules about permits and setting up food-truck zones.

Now, at lunchtime, you're likely to see diners lined up at more than a half-dozen gourmet food trucks—in areas like Harbor East, Mt. Vernon, and Charles Village—cooking up everything from juicy bison burgers and vegan chilled cucumber-and-avocado soup to cookie-dough cupcakes and crêpes Suzette.

The mobile eateries not only offer variety, but they're an event, says Shawn Smith, the co-owner of Curbside Cafe, a burrito truck that started making the rounds in Baltimore in May 2010. "Food trucks create a feeling of excitement," he contends.

But what distinguishes one food truck from another? And how do you know what to order? Here's what you'll find when you belly up

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Gypsy Queen Cafe's Crab-Cake Tacos with Red Chili and Old Bay Aioli

For the crab cakes:

2 pounds lump crabmeat
2 eggs
½ cup homemade or store-bought mayonnaise
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
2 tablespoons Old Bay
1 cup cubed white bread
2 tablespoons butter

For the tacos:

Corn tortillas
Shredded cabbage
Cilantro sprigs
Red Chili and Old Bay Aioli (recipe follows)

Carefully fold all crab-cake ingredients together. Form into small balls and lightly flatten.

Melt butter in a cast-iron skillet on medium heat and cook the crab cakes until golden brown, about three minutes per side.

To assemble, warm each corn tortilla in a hot pan or griddle, fill with crab cakes. Add shredded cabbage and cilantro sprigs, and drizzle with Red Chili and Old Bay Aioli.

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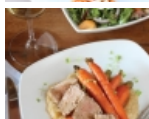
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Red Chili and Old Bay Aioli

1 cup homemade or store-bought mayonnaise
1 tablespoon crushed fresh garlic (about 2 cloves)
1 tablespoon chipotle in adobo sauce
1 teaspoon Old Bay
¼ cup fresh cilantro

Mix ingredients together in a small bowl.

—Recipes courtesy of Annmarie Langton, Gypsy Queen Cafe

Curbside Cafe's Black Beans

1 (10-ounce) can black beans
1 ½ tablespoons ground cumin
1 ½ tablespoons chili powder
2 tablespoons sea salt
2 tablespoons fresh garlic, minced
1 ½ tablespoons fresh ginger, grated
3-4 sprigs fresh cilantro
1 tablespoon ground black pepper
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Drain beans, rinse, and place in large pot. Add enough water to just reach the top of the beans. Mix in remaining ingredients, cover, and heat over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until boiling. Reduce to low heat and simmer for 30-40 minutes, stirring often. Remove cilantro sprigs.

To serve, drain bean mixture with a slotted spoon and wrap in a corn or flour tortilla with rice, topped with lettuce, onion, avocado, tomato, chopped cilantro, cheese, and hot sauce, or serve as a side over rice. The beans taste better the next day after the flavors have had a chance to develop, and they freeze well.

—Recipe courtesy of Shawn Smith, Curbside Cafe

Icledgems S'mores Cupcakes

For the cupcakes:

2 cups sugar
2 cups all-purpose flour
¾ cup cocoa
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
4 eggs
¾ cup oil
2 teaspoons vanilla
1 cup water
1 cup graham crackers, broken into dime-sized pieces
1 cup chocolate chips
1 cup mini marshmallows
Marshmallow frosting (recipe follows)
Large marshmallows and squares of chocolate for decorating

Blend together sugar, flour, cocoa, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Add eggs, oil, vanilla, and water, and beat until well-mixed. Stir in graham crackers, chocolate chips, and marshmallows.

Scoop the mixture into cupcake tins lined with paper liners, and bake at 350 degrees for 15-20 minutes until cake springs back to touch. Set out to cool. Makes 24 cupcakes.

to the window and place your order at one of the city's growing fleet of gourmet food trucks.

Oh, before we begin, a few things to note about food trucks: Many don't take credit cards, so bring cash. And although most trucks try to maintain regular days at certain spots, check the whereabouts of your truck of choice through Facebook or Twitter before hitting the streets.

Kooper's Chowhound Burger Wagon

www.kooperschowhound.com

Twitter: @BRGRwagon

Concept: Freshly handmade and grilled beef, bison, turkey, and veggie burgers.

The Scoop: A few years back, when Patrick Russell, owner of Fells Point's Kooper's Tavern, Sláinte, and Woody's Rum Bar, was looking to expand his restaurant business with director of operations Bill Irvin, the nation was in the throes of a recession and getting a loan to open another restaurant seemed impossible. Instead, in fall 2009, they decided to take Kooper's popular burgers on the road. The snappy yellow-and-brown food truck, splashed with images of Kooper the yellow Lab, is considered the first in the city's wave of roving food trucks and draws crowds with its build-your-own burger menu. Favorites include The MacGuinness, a one-half-pound Angus beef and bacon cheeseburger, and Elvis Got the Blues, which comes with apple-smoked bacon and Maytag blue cheese. Choose your toppings and sauce. The crisp fries—sweet potato and regular—round out the meal. Prices: \$8-10.

Gypsy Queen Cafe

www.gypsyqueencafe.com

Twitter: @thegypsytruck

Concept: Baltimore street food with gourmet flavors.

The Scoop: Truffles. Maryland crab. Braised pork with espresso barbecue sauce and caraway slaw. You're not hallucinating if some of the items on the Gypsy Queen Cafe's extensive menu remind you of Helen's Garden, the now-closed Canton restaurant owned by Tom Looney and Ed Scherer and where Annmarie Langton was executive chef. They're back to serving Baltimore diners, only this time from their mobile food truck. Instead of being stashed back in the kitchen, Looney and Langton can chat with diners and sing karaoke while cooking. "I've always wanted to be on the road, and food trucks have a connotation of cowboys and chuck wagons," Looney says. "They are independent and cool and quirky, and Baltimore is famous for being like that." From the tender crab-cake tacos with smoky chipotle Old Bay aioli to the crisp fried flounder po' boy and waffle cones of mac and cheese with bacon "bling," the menu is filled with regular items and specials that are satisfying, yet vibrant and fun. "What we're trying to do is make good food and meet great people," says Langton. "I love the fact that I can see the smiles on people's faces when they walk up to the truck and look at the menu. I missed that when I was in the kitchen." Prices: \$6-10.

Icledgems Baking

www.icedgemsbaking.com

Twitter: @icedgemsbaking

Concept: Some 60-plus varieties of cupcakes, with about 20 kinds offered per day on the truck.

The Scoop: Just over a year ago, baker Christine Richardson was working out of a rented commercial kitchen when she realized that her refrigerated delivery van could be used for more than dropping off cakes to clients. So she filled it with 500 cupcakes and sent it out into the streets of Baltimore. Before long, the white van with the pink polka dots was selling out of cupcakes daily. "It's just a little treat," says Richardson, who opened a storefront bakery in Reisterstown last September. Icedgems has excellent basic flavors like vanilla, chocolate, and red velvet, but their more creative cupcake varieties really shine. Try the rich s'mores cupcake with its chunks of graham cracker, chocolate chips, and marshmallow frosting; the cookie-dough-stuffed Cookie Monster; or the dainty Elizabeth, a lemon cake filled with raspberry preserves and frosted with lemon buttercream. "We cook from scratch," Richardson says. "Our cupcakes may have calories, but they are good calories." Prices: \$2.50 per cupcake, \$12.50 for six, \$24 per dozen.



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20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

Marshmallow Frosting

1 pound unsalted butter, softened
1 pound, 4 ounces powdered sugar
Milk, optional
Marshmallow Fluff

Blend butter and sugar, adding milk if needed for a smooth consistency, and mix on medium speed for 5 minutes. Stir in an equal quantity of Marshmallow Fluff.

Pipe frosting to decorate tops of cooled cupcakes. Add a larger marshmallow and a piece of dark chocolate to top for garnish. Brûlée the top of the marshmallow with a kitchen blow torch.

—Recipe courtesy of Christine Richardson, *Icedgems Baking*

Creperie Breizh's Buckwheat Galette Stuffed with Dijonnaise Mushroom

For the buckwheat galette:

½ pound buckwheat flour
1 tablespoon oil
2 eggs, beaten
½ teaspoon salt
2 cups water
Butter for cooking galettes

For mushroom Dijonnaise filling:

1 tablespoon oil
1 tablespoon butter
½ pound mushrooms, cleaned and sliced
Salt and pepper
½ cup heavy cream
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

To make galettes, place flour in a bowl, and make a well in the center. Add oil, beaten eggs, and salt in the well. Mix with a spatula, starting in the center and working toward the outside of the bowl. Add the water gradually while beating the batter to obtain a smooth batter, free of lumps. (An electric mixer on low speed works fine.) Let the batter rest for a couple of hours.

To cook the galettes, heat a non-stick frying pan over medium heat until well heated. Add a little butter, and heat until melted. Pour a little bit of batter into pan and let cook until you can slide a spatula under the galette and flip it over to finish cooking the other side just as you would with a crêpe. It should have a nice golden color. Garnish with shredded Swiss cheese or cheddar, let melt, add the filling, and serve.

(You can make the galettes ahead of time. Then, reheat them in a non-stick frying pan, garnish with cheese, and fill with the mushroom mixture.)

To make mushroom filling, in a skillet, heat oil and butter over medium heat. When butter is foaming, add mushrooms, salt, and pepper, and sauté for 15 minutes until golden brown.

Mix cream with Dijon. Pour the mixture over the mushrooms, and mix with a wooden spoon. Reduce the heat slightly, and let the cream thicken for about five minutes.

To assemble the galettes, add filling and roll them like a cigar, or place filling in the middle and fold the sides of the galette toward the middle, letting the filling peek out in the center. Garnish with chopped parsley if desired.

—Recipe courtesy of Eric Coatrieux, *Creperie Breizh*

Curbside Cafe

Facebook: [Curbside Cafe Baltimore](#)

Twitter: [@Curbside_Cafe](#)

Concept: Gourmet burritos.

The Scoop: Shawn Smith and Lesa Bain got the idea to start a food truck after they found themselves swooning over the grilled-cheese sandwiches and sweet-potato fries that a sidewalk vendor was selling from a cart to the late-night bar crowds in Hampden. "Burritos are the perfect food," Smith says. "You can do anything with them, and you don't even need a fork." The burritos they sell from their petite red-and-white truck are filled with your choice of Cuban-style chicken with a citrus chipotle marinade, spicy chana masala, black beans, seasoned Black Angus steak, or a combination. Toppings can include cheddar cheese, sour cream, corn salsa, lettuce, red onion, and avocado, and a choice of Heartbreaking Dawns condiments, including jalapeño pineapple and habaño mango. Or grab a pineapple Jarritos soda and an order of Plantain Delight, a heap of hot, starchy fried plantains loaded with whatever toppings strike your fancy. Prices: \$5-9.

Creperie Breizh

Facebook: [Creperie Breizh](#)

Twitter: [@CreperieBreizh](#)

Concept: Authentic French crêperie on wheels.

The Scoop: "We just wanted to offer something different from your everyday fare," says Missy Coatrieux, who co-owns this mobile crêperie with her chef/husband Eric. Breizh is the Breton name for Brittany, where Eric is from, and where crêpes are taken very seriously. The plain crêpes and buckwheat galettes (thin, flat cakes) that Eric whips up on the navy-blue trailer's two Krampouz crêpe irons are the real deal—thin and crisp, the perfect wrappers for such savory and sweet filling combinations as the Provençale (tomatoes, Gruyere, and pesto), the Loire Valley (goat cheese, strawberries, and baby spinach with honey Dijon), or the Bananatella (sliced bananas and Nutella). There are weekly and seasonal specials, too. What's the most popular crepe? "It depends where we are," says Missy. "At Johns Hopkins, it's the Provençale with chicken; at Loyola, it's the Normande, which is chicken, apples, and Brie. And at MICA, they like to come up with their own creative combinations." Prices: crepes, \$3-6.

Souper Freak

[www.souperfreaks.com](#)

Twitter: [@SouperFreaky](#)

Concept: Homemade soups, sandwiches, and salads from around the world.

The Scoop: As a kid, Irene Smith traveled internationally with her family. Wherever she went, she ate soup. There was beer-and-cheese soup in Ireland, gazpacho in Spain, white-bean soup with vegetables in Portugal, and back home in Potomac, MD, there was the chicken soup with fluffy matzo balls made by a friend's grandmother. "Soup is healthy and delicious and just makes you feel good," says Smith. So the former civil-rights lawyer decided to try her hand at serving soup and sandwiches from a 27-foot-long bright-orange truck. The menu changes daily, and has five soups, three salads, and four sandwiches, including vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free offerings. Among the favorites are a posole, filled with chicken and hominy and topped with fresh salsa and tortilla strips; a variety of gazpachos; and a shrimp melt that combines crab-imperial-stuffed shrimp with melted cheese on flatbread. Ask for a sample of soup before you order to help you decide. Smith recently told a customer as she doled out a taste of Tuscan ribollita, "Just try one of my 600 other soups, and I'm sure you'll find something you'll love." Prices: \$3-7.

Miss Shirley's Café

Facebook: [Miss Shirley's Cafe](#)

Twitter: [@missshirleys](#)

Concept: Gourmet Southern food.

The Scoop: It didn't take long for Miss Shirley's Café to become a go-to place in Roland Park and the Inner Harbor for decadent Southern-inspired breakfasts and lunches. A third restaurant is slated to open in Annapolis in the fall, and, in the meantime, the Miss Shirley's Café truck aims to bring their stacks of buttermilk and blueberry pancakes, bowls of gumbo, and overstuffed Alonzo sandwiches (smoked turkey, Brie, apples, and honey mustard on ciabatta) to diners in the streets. The truck's menu isn't as expansive as the restaurant's but includes many Miss



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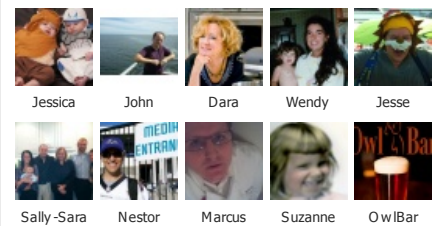


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Shirley's classics, such as fried green tomatoes, the California Chicken BLT, and sweet-potato fries with mango ketchup and

citrus aioli. Prices: \$5-19.

And don't miss these food trucks:

Cazbar On the Go (www.cazbar.pro, 410-528-1222): Succulent kebab and döner sandwiches, crisp falafel, creamy hummus, baba ghanoush, and other mezes come to you courtesy of the popular Mt. Vernon Turkish restaurant Cazbar. Find the cheery red truck serving lunch and dinner around town or call, and they'll come to you.

Dangerously Delicious Pies (www.dangerouspies.com, Twitter: [@BaltoPieTruck](https://twitter.com/BaltoPieTruck)): Grab a slice of a Berger-cookie-stuffed Baltimore Bomb; a slab of sausage, tomato, and fennel; or a piece of crumb-topped mixed berry at this sleek black pie truck, founded by baker/rocker Rodney Henry of Dangerously Delicious Pies.

The Silver Platter (410-274-2619, Facebook: [The-Silver-Platter](https://www.facebook.com/The-Silver-Platter)). Lobster mac and cheese with truffle essence, seared scallops over fresh local corn cooked with thyme and cream, Baltimore pit-beef sandwiches, and New England lobster rolls are just a few of the treats that executive chef Chris Cherry and managing partner Damian Bohager are cooking up at this shiny silver truck. Find them parked at 421 Central Avenue in Harbor East from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays and at local festivals on weekends.

The Great Cookie, Mobile (www.thegreatcookie.com, Facebook: [The Great Cookie](https://www.facebook.com/The-Great-Cookie), Twitter: [@thegreatcookie](https://twitter.com/thegreatcookie)): Rich and buttery snickerdoodles outsell chocolate-chip cookies at a rate of five to one at this truck, an offshoot of Jason Fruman's Owings Mills-based chain of seven cookie shops. Also, stop by for many other freshly baked cookie varieties, including oatmeal raisin, butter crunch, fudge chocolate chip, white-chocolate macadamia, and brownies.

Tacos Jalisco: For more than a decade, this silver truck stationed at the corner of Broadway, between Bank and Gough Streets, in Fells Point has been doling out delectable tacos stuffed with beef, lamb, and tongue; chicken gorditas; tamales; and other Mexican favorites. The truck serves from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day but Thursday.

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