Exploring the Best of Birmingham Food and Drink in 2025

A City with a Culinary Conscience

Birmingham has long been the UK's quiet powerhouse when it comes to food. While London grabs the headlines, this city in the West Midlands has been quietly assembling one of the most diverse and interesting dining scenes in the country. Walking through Digbeth or Kings Heath, you smell charcoal from a Jamaican jerk pit one minute and the deep, earthy aroma of a Pakistani curry house the next. That mix is not accidental. It comes from decades of migration, trade, and a stubborn local preference for real flavour over gimmicks.

If you are serious about the birmingham food and drink landscape, you quickly realise that it defies easy categories. This is not a city where a single cuisine dominates. The Balti triangle put Birmingham on the map in the 1970s and 1980s, but the story has moved far beyond that. Today you find modern British gastropubs, Vietnamese street food stalls, Middle Eastern grills, and Korean fried chicken joints all within a mile of each other. What ties them together is a certain no-nonsense attitude. Birmingham diners do not tolerate pretence. They want honest cooking, generous portions, and value that does not feel like a compromise.

The Tandoor as a Starting Point

Of all the cooking techniques that have found a home here, the tandoor deserves special attention. The clay oven, buried deep in the kitchens of countless Indian and Pakistani restaurants, produces food that is hard to replicate on a standard grill. The intense dry heat sears meat quickly, locking in juices while giving a smoky char that no gas flame can match. Seekh kebabs come out crisp on the outside and almost fluffy inside. Chicken tikka gets that bright red surface and tender flesh that keeps people ordering it year after year.

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One place that understands this well is Smokey Barrels, an Indian restaurant and sports bar on Coventry Road. The kitchen there is built around the tandoor, and the menu reflects a real commitment to that method. Mixed grills, lamb chops, masala fish - these are not afterthoughts. They are the main event. The chefs have clearly spent time learning how to manage the oven's heat, and it shows in the texture of the meat. It is the kind of cooking that reminds you why the birmingham food and drink scene earned its reputation in the first place. People travel from all over the Midlands to eat food cooked this way, and once you try it, you understand why.

View the location on Google Maps

What Makes a Great Curry House Today

A good Indian restaurant in Birmingham does not rely on nostalgia. The best ones evolve. They keep the classics - a proper chicken tikka masala, a rich lamb rogan josh - but they also experiment with regional dishes from Hyderabad, Goa, or Kerala. They source better spices. They pay attention to the quality of the rice and the oil. And they understand that diners today are more knowledgeable than ever. A customer who has eaten at Dishoom or Gymkhana in London knows what good Indian food tastes like. They will not be fooled by a sauce that tastes like it came from a jar.



That is why places like Smokey Barrels matter. They are not trying to be something they are not. The menu is honest. You get tandoori mixed grills, classic curries, vegetarian dishes, and even pub classics for those who want something familiar. There is a children's menu too, which is a thoughtful touch for families. The spice menu is halal, which opens it up to a wide range of customers. And the bar pours nine beers on tap, plus cocktails and pitchers, so you can wash down that lamb chop with something cold and crisp. It is a proper local spot, not a chain trying to impersonate one.

The Sports Bar Element

Birmingham has always been a sports city. The passion for football here is intense, but boxing, F1, cricket, and rugby all have dedicated followings too. A restaurant that can combine serious food with live sport is a rare thing. Too often, sports bars treat food as an afterthought - frozen wings, limp fries, beer that is only passable. Smokey Barrels takes a different approach. The big HD screens show Premier League football, boxing matches, Grands Prix, and cricket tournaments, but the kitchen does not drop its standards when the match is on. You can watch a game and eat a proper tandoori mixed grill at the same time. That is not easy to pull off, but they manage it.

The beer garden adds another layer. Birmingham summers can be short, but when the sun is out, having outdoor space makes a huge difference. Free on-site parking is another practical bonus. Anyone who has driven around the city centre on a match day knows how frustrating parking can be. Being able to park for free and walk straight into a restaurant that serves both food and drink is a real advantage.

Private Hire and Big Groups

For groups, the restaurant offers private hire for between 70 and 150 guests. That is a useful option for birthday parties, corporate events, or post-wedding gatherings. The combination of a full bar, a tandoor kitchen, and multiple screens showing live sport means you can keep a mixed crowd happy without splitting up. Not many venues in Birmingham can say that.



Beyond the Restaurant: The Wider Scene

Of course, no single restaurant defines the birmingham food and drink scene. The city is too big and too varied for that. You have the Michelin-starred places like Purnell's and Carter's of

Moseley, where the cooking is precise and the ingredients are seasonal. You have the street food markets at Digbeth Dining Club and Salt Yard, where you can eat everything from bao buns to loaded fries for under a tenner. You have the old-school pubs in the Jewellery Quarter that still serve a decent ploughman's lunch. And you have the curry houses on Ladypool Road and Stratford Road that have been feeding families for generations.

What makes Birmingham special is that all of these exist side by side. There is no hierarchy. A Michelin-starred tasting menu and a £6 curry from a takeaway can both be excellent in their own way. The city's food culture is democratic. It rewards skill and authenticity, not marketing budgets or Instagram aesthetics.

Practical Tips for Visitors

If you are visiting Birmingham specifically to eat, here are a few things worth knowing. First, book ahead for dinner on Friday and Saturday nights, especially at the more popular places. Second, do not be afraid to explore outside the city centre. Some of the best food is in areas like Sparkhill, Alum Rock, and Moseley. Third, go with a group if you can. Ordering a mix of grilled meats, curries, and breads is the best way to experience what the city has to offer. Fourth, try something you have not had before. If you always order chicken tikka masala, push yourself to try a lamb nihari or a fish moilee. You might find a new favourite.

Closing Thoughts

Birmingham food and drink is in a healthy place right now. The city has managed to hold on to its working-class roots while also embracing new influences and higher standards. The result is a dining scene that feels genuine, diverse, and full of life. Whether you want a quick bite after landing at Birmingham Airport or a long dinner with friends before a show at the NEC, there is something here that will suit you.



Smokey Barrels, located at 1741 Coventry Rd, Birmingham B26 1DS, UK, and reachable at +44 121 764 5519, is an Indian restaurant and sports bar on Coventry Road, Birmingham, around ten minutes from Birmingham Airport and the NEC. The kitchen is built around the clay tandoor, serving mixed grills, chicken tikka, seekh kebabs, lamb chops and masala fish, alongside curries, vegetarian dishes, pub classics and a children's menu. The spice menu is halal. The bar pours nine beers on tap, cocktails and pitchers, with Premier League football, boxing, F1, cricket and rugby shown live on big HD screens. There's free on-site parking, a beer garden, and private hire for 70 to 150 guests.