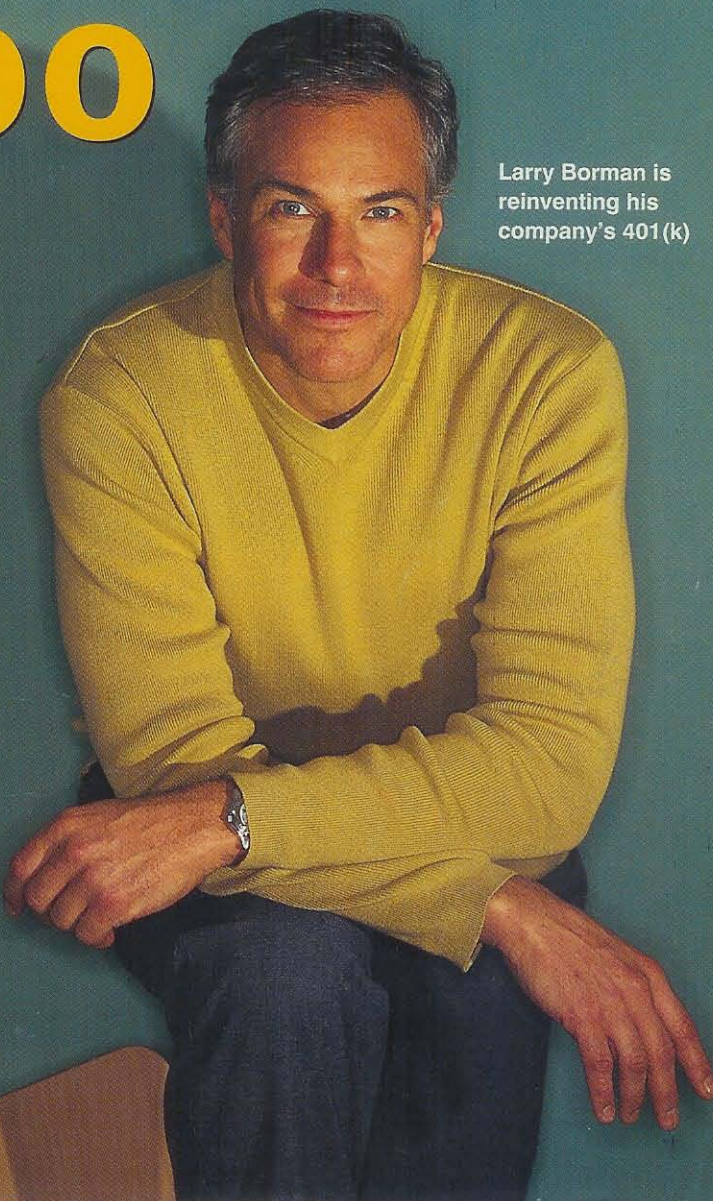


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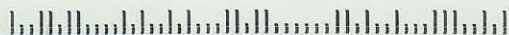
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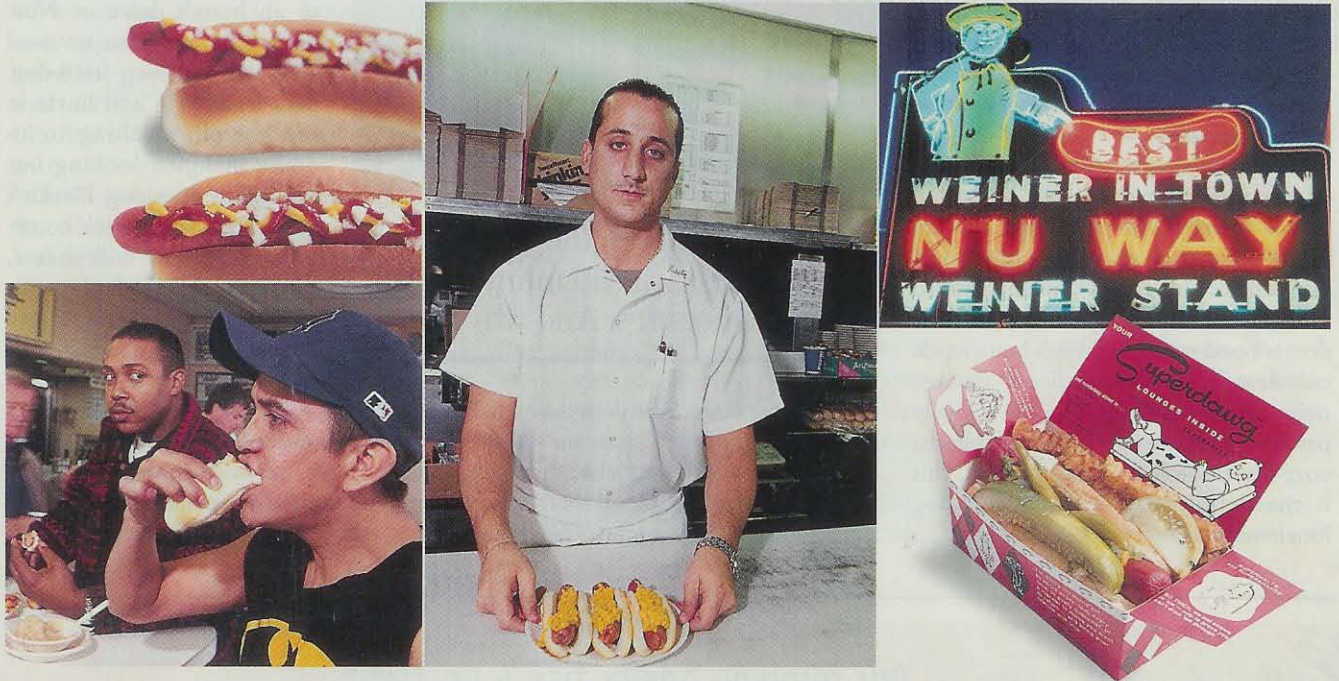
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Lost in America by Paul Lukas

# Frank Discussion

At these nine local eateries, a hot dog on the road is a memorable meal.



The standard dog (top left) becomes a notable regional dish at (counterclockwise from lower left) Rutt's Hutt (2), Superdawg and Nu-Way Weiners.



Counterclockwise from top left: Rita Maas; Alfredo Miccoli (2); Matthew Gilson; Ken Krakow

**Y**OU'RE AT THE AIRPORT. Your flight is delayed, so you decide to kill some time by getting a hot dog at a Nathan's Famous in the terminal. Like most airport food, it's mediocre—the dog is dry, the bun stale. You wrestle with a few of those annoying mustard packets and end up with a yellow splotch on your shirt. Just then you hear the announcement that your flight is boarding, forcing you to wolf down the rest of the hot dog as you hurry to your gate.

Sound familiar? Fortunately, travel and hot dogs can be a much better pairing than this. America is teeming with hot-dog restaurants (there's no official count, but the number is clearly in the thousands), many of which put a unique regional spin on the humble wiener. And while you may associate hot dogs primarily with summer activities like cookouts and ball games, frankfurters are the year-round lunch of choice in many parts of the country. And why not? After all, hot dogs are cheap, fast, tasty, filling, nostalgic and—when mustard packets aren't involved—fun.

What follows is a list of my favorite hot-dog venues. If yours is missing, my apologies. (To share your choice with MONEY readers, go to [www.money.com/contents](http://www.money.com/contents).) Given the multitude of doggeries out there, it would be silly to pretend that any list could be truly comprehensive, and I make no such claim. I've also intentionally omitted several highly touted spots that I feel are overrated (Tony Paco's in Toledo, Lafayette Coney Island in Detroit), declining in quality (the original Nathan's, sadly, in my own beloved Brooklyn) or just not my scene (Pink's in L.A., where everyone seems more interested in celebrity spotting than in eating). In any case, the eateries listed here are all very, very good, each with a special take on this quintessentially American food. And you'd be hard-pressed to spend more than \$5 for lunch at any of them. For locations and phone numbers, see the box on page 145.

**Gold Coast Dogs, Chicago:** The Chicago hot dog—served on a poppy-seed bun and topped with a veritable tossed salad of tomato wedges, pickle spears, bright green relish,

**Lost in America** *continued*

chopped onion, hot peppers and celery salt—is a regional treat unlike the dogs you'll find anywhere else. But while most of Chi-town's countless doggeries steam their franks, this no-frills lunch joint, despite being nothing special to look at, serves a stupendous charcoal-grilled dog with a snappy outer skin that puts it atop the Chicago heap—a tremendous meal. For a more traditional steamed Chicago dog, plus great atmosphere and wonderfully playful signage and menu graphics, try **Superdawg**.

**Nu-Way Weiners, Macon:** Nu-Way, a Macon institution since 1916, serves red hots—literally. The tasty dogs here are bright red, which provides a nice bit of visual flair. This is also a prime spot to sample a southern specialty: the slaw dog, topped with Nu-Way's homemade coleslaw. With a magnificent vintage neon sign hanging out front, a lovely painted window, friendly waitresses, cozy booths and a sociable crowd, this is the definitive downtown hot-dog lunch venue.

**The Original Hot Dog Shop, Pittsburgh:** Here we have the Holy Grail. This nondescript corner eatery, which opened in 1960, serves the single most amazing hot



**Frankfurters are the year-round lunch of choice in many parts of the country. And why not?**

dog I've ever eaten. The dogs have a tight outer casing, so they snap and literally burst with flavor when you bite into them. And what flavor! The nicely charred exterior gives way to an unmistakably beefy

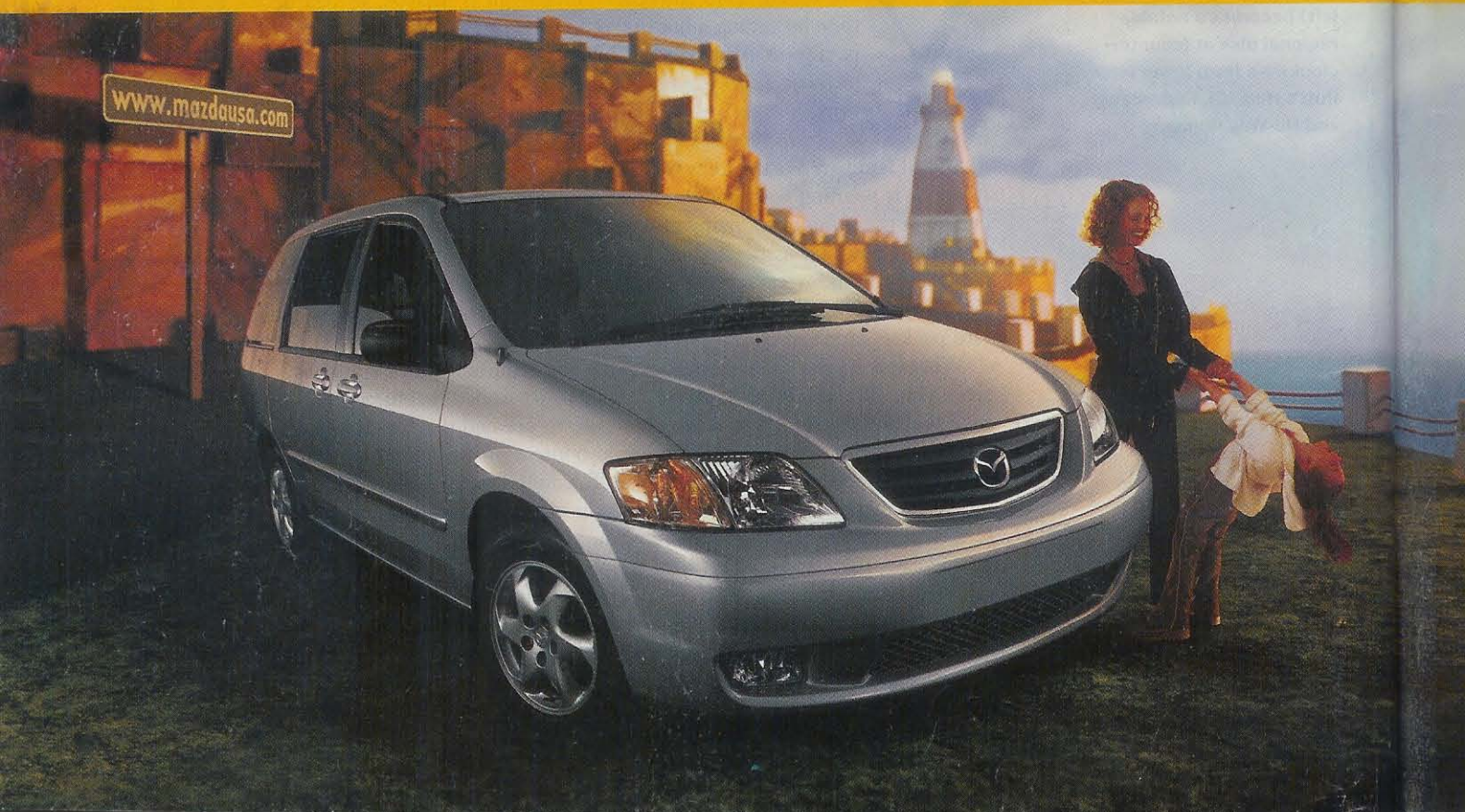
center that's head and shoulders above most other franks. This isn't just a great hot dog—it's a great *piece of meat*. And don't miss the excellent twice-fried french fries, made to order and served in insanely huge portions.

**Rutt's Hut, Clifton, N.J.** and **Blackie's, Cheshire, Conn.:** These two venues, both within an hour's drive of New York City, offer an unusual specialty: the deep-fried dog. The franks rip and burst in the hot oil, resulting in an oddly mangled-looking but irresistibly juicy dog. Blackie's has an old-style lunch counter and excellent milk shakes, while Rutt's Hut has a gorgeous old tap room where you can quaff a beer with your dog. Either way, pace yourself—fried dogs are addictive.

**Skin Thrasher's, Anderson, S.C.:** This marvelously homey neighborhood lunch-eonette, with a Formica counter and a few tables with metal folding chairs, is

Matthew Gilson (right)

Our minivan easily fits 6 up front.



the only spot on this list that serves nothing but hot dogs—no burgers, no fries, no onion rings. The dogs are superb, especially when topped with Skin's mild but tasty chili, and they go down great with the establishment's favored drink: eight-ounce glass bottles of Coke. The extremely friendly lunchtime crowd—a melting pot of businessmen, cops, kids, housewives and retirees—is always on its best behavior, prompted by a sign on the wall: THE LANGUAGE YOU USE IN CHURCH IS GOOD ENOUGH TO USE IN HERE.

**Ted's Jumbo Red Hots, Tonawanda, N.Y.:** Culinarily speaking, western New York State is known primarily for chicken wings. Unbeknown to many, however, the region is also a hotbed of hot-dog mania, and Ted's Jumbo Red Hots is a premier spot in the area. Unlike every other venue listed here except Gold Coast in Chicago, Ted's grills its dogs over charcoal, which imparts a sensational smoky flavor. Terrific onion rings too. For the full local experience, order a cup of logan-

berry juice (a regional favorite), and get dessert at Anderson's custard stand just down the road.

**The Varsity, Atlanta:** This huge, shiny space, which claims to serve more Coke than anyplace else in the world, dates back

to 1928. It's also a bit of a scene—the 150-foot stainless-steel counter where you place your order is manned by a small army of counter clerks, each of whom chants the Varsity mantra: "What'll ya have, what'll ya have, what'll ya have?"

What you'll have is a couple of dogs, preferably topped with the Varsity's excellent chili. Sides are great too, with fries and onion rings of spectacularly artery-clogging proportions and tasty fried fruit pies for dessert—if you have room. **ES**

*Award-winning travel writer Paul Lukas knows from hard experience that warm water and a bit of dishwashing liquid will remove a mustard stain.*

## Top dogs

You can get a prime version of the classic American frank at any one of these nine restaurants.

### Gold Coast Dogs:

418 N. State St.,  
Chicago; 312-527-1222

**Superdawg:** Milwaukee  
& Devon Aves., Chicago;  
773-763-0660

**Nu-Way Weiners:** 430  
Cotton Ave., Macon;  
912-743-6593

**The Original Hot Dog  
Shop:** 3901 Forbes Ave.,  
Pittsburgh; 412-621-7388

**Rutt's Hut:** 417 River  
Rd., Clifton, N.J.;  
973-779-8615

**Blackie's:** 2200 Water-  
bury Rd., Cheshire, Conn.;  
203-574-9153

**Skin Thrasher's:**  
203 Hudgens St.,  
Anderson, S.C.;  
864-225-9229

**Ted's Jumbo Red Hots:**  
2312 Sheridan Dr.,  
Tonawanda, N.Y.;  
716-836-8986

**The Varsity:**  
61 North Ave. N.W.,  
Atlanta;  
404-881-1706

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