CHICAGO'S BEST DOWNTOWN TRENDY, FUN, UPSCALE
SECONDARY "OUTSIDE" TARGET MARKET ITALIAN RESTAURANTS

9/2/26

(Parentheses ( ) After Neighborhood In Red Indicates Distance From River North Target Market Area)

A Tavola (Daniel Bocik family owned & operated since 1995)
Ukrainian Village/West Town (2.6 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.2) images

Andros Tavern (Greek) (Eat Well Hospitality/Doug Psaltis & Hsing Chen)
Bucktown/Logan Square (5.7miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.2) images

Antico (Brad Schlieder)
Bucktown/Logan Square (3.9 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.4) images

Bacchanalia (Multi-generational Pieri Family owned & operated for 47 years)
Pilsen/Lower West Side (7.0 miles) (Heart of Italy Neighborhood, S. Oakley)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.2) images

Bruna's (Opened in 1933 by Bella Bruna Cani**.** Luciano Silvestri owned & operated since purchasing it from original owner in 1980)
Pilsen/Lower West Side (7.0 miles) (Heart of Italy Neighborhood, S. Oakley)
Click HERE for Yelp (3.8) images

Club Lucky (Jim Higgins & Robert Paladino owned & operated in family spirit since 1990)
Bucktown/Wicker Park/West Town (3.0 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (3.9)images

Coda di Volpe (Billy Lawless of Gage Hospitality & Ryan O'Donnel of Ballyhoo)
Southport Corridor/Lakeview (5.5 miles)
Click Here for Yelp (4.4) images

DeNucci's (Ballyhoo Hospitality)
Lincoln Park (2.2 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.3) images

Enoteca Roma (Sorano family owned & operated since 2004)
Wicker Park/West Town (3.3 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.0) images

Febo's Closed (Opened in 1929. Multi-generational family owned & operated by Duke Sorini & Leo Cecchio until closing in 2000, Duke passed a few years before the closing. Miss that bartender shtick).
Pilsen/Lower West Side (7.0 miles) (Heart of Italy Neighborhood, S. Oakley)

Franco's Ristorante (Multi-generational Ruffolo Family owned & operated since 1989)
Bridgeport (Unified Community Area) (6.0 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.4) images

Ignotz (Multi-generational Wroblewski family owned & operated since 2004)
Pilsen/Lower West Side (7.0 miles) (Heat of Italy Neighborhood, S. Oakley)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.5) images

iL Milanese (Riccardo Michi, Massimo Di Vuolo & Carlo Maggi)
Lincoln Square/North Center (Two Community Areas) (7.5 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.4) images

La Fontanella (Closed) (Opened by the Mannone family in 1971. Later owned & managed by Franco & Maria Gamberale for 34 years before closing in 2020.
Pilsen/Lower West Side (7.0 miles) (Heart of Italy Neighborhood, S. Oakley)

La Gondola (**Closed**) Opened in 1984 by Dominic Amodeo & Luciano Libreri. Purchased by Christi & Andy McGuire in 2005, the Lakeview neighborhood significant restaurant closed in 2024.

Mano a Mano (Doug Psaltis & Hsing Chen, the same team behind Andros Taverna & Asador Bastian)
Logan Square (5.8 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.3) images

Nettare (Conner O'Byrne)
Ukrainian Village/West Town (2.4 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.3)images

Osteria Langhe (Aldo Zaninotto)
Logan Square (4.5 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.3) images

Peanut Park Trattoria (Dave Bonomi & Anthony Fiasche)
University Village/Near West Side (3.5 miles) (Little Italy Neighborhood, Taylor Street)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.1) images

Pompei (Originally opened as a bakery, Multi-generational Davino family owned & operated since 1909)
University Village/Near West Side (3.5 miles) (Little Italy Neighborhood, Taylor Street)
Click HERE for Yelp images

Riccardo Enoteca (Riccardo & Veronica Michi. Same team behind Riccardo Enoteca and Riccardo Osteria)
Lincoln Park (2.1 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.3) images

Rosebud on Taylor (Multi-generational family owned since 1976 by Alex Dana/Rosebud Group)
University Village/Near West Side (3.5 miles) (Little Italy Neighborhood, Taylor Street)
Click HERE for Yelp (3.9) images

Sal's Trattoria (Joseph Arnold, Preston Owen & Dakota Neckvatl)
West Lakeview/Lakeview (4.1 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.5) images

Sapori Trattoria (Kosti Demos/Forte Hospitality Group)
Lincoln Park/Lakeview & Lincoln Park Border (3.2 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.4) images

Segnatore Closed (The Orbit Group/Kristina Magro, Ben Fasman & Matt Troost)
Humboldt Park (3.7 miles)
Click HERE for Yelp images

Tortello (Dario Monni & Jill Gray)
Wicker Park/West Town (2.3 miles
Click HERE for Yelp (4.3) images

Tufano's Vernon Park Tap(Multi-generational family owned & operated since 1930, Currently managed by grandson Joey DiBuona)
University Village Area/ Near West Side (3.5 miles) (Little Italy Neighborhood, Taylor Street)
Click HERE for Yelp (3.9) images

Tuscany on Taylor (Multi-generational family owned & operated by Phil Stephani since 1990)
University Village/Near West Side (3.5 miles) (Little Italy Neighborhood, Taylor Street)
Click HERE for Yelp (4.0) images

While included in the DCFG's "outside" secondary Italian target market restaurant list above, ***Riccardo Enoteca*** *(2.1),* ***DeNucci's*** *(2.2),* ***Tortello*** *(2.3),* ***Nettare*** *(2.4)* *and* ***A Tavolla*** *(2.6) are reasonably close to the target market. As a result, some might consider them in the target market.*

Restaurants less than 2.0 miles from River North are included in the secondary Italian target market list, including ***Mart Anthony*** *(1.2),* ***Oggi Trattoria*** *(1.8) and* ***Provare*** ***(1.8)****. As a result, they are not shown above*

Riccardo Trattoria, Riccardo Enoteca & Riccardo Osteria *are all family owned and operated by the same team. Dating back to 2006, Riccardo Trattoria was the first to open. Enoteca followed in 2007 and Osteria in 2019. Riccardo Trattoria & Enoteca are located in Lincoln Park while Osteria is on the quiet side of the West Loop.*

Of the twenty-seven restaurants on the secondary outside target market Italian list above, ***ten are in Little Italy type neighborhoods****, including five in the Taylor Street area (Near West Side) and five in the S. Oakley Street Pilsen area.(Lower West Side). The two areas are about three miles apart. As you can see, many of these restaurants are multi-generational family owned & operated.*

Following the demise of Big Jim Colosimo for his reluctance to enter the illegal alcohol business, the closure of his restaurant and the repeal of prohibition, "Bella" Bruna Cani opened Bruna's in The Heart Of Little Italy on Oakley in 1933. Febo's was opened a few years earlier.

Having made our culinary bones in the 70s with handsome Italian barbers recently arrived from Italy at places like Bruna's and La Fontanella (the little fountain), we were surprised and shocked. We were surprised because we couldn't believe how the good the food was and shocked because we didn't know the restaurants existed.

The Oakley restaurants were generally viewed as more authentic, cozy and less pretentious neighborhood time capsules. Alternatively, Little Italy on Taylor was viewed as the larger, higher profile, commercial and political epicenter of Italian dining in Chicago, drawing celebrities, politicians, tourist and larger crowds. In reality, both areas dished out fabulous food at their high point.

Beyond Bruna's and La Fontanella, we dined at Rosebud and Tuscany on Taylor for many years, but stopped dining there more than a decade ago. We stopped dining at those restaurants because the quality of the food fell off the roof, but we still have fond memories of them. Indeed, we miss the craft savvy Italian immigrant waiters, the tomato pulping machines at Tuscany on Taylor, the Fettuccine Salsa Cruda and the Polpo alla Griglia chopped up at the table and served over a bed of radicchio, with fresh squeezed lemon juice and a shot of balsamic. We also miss those giant baked clams casino, the cannelloni/manicotti combinations and Veal Saltimbocca alla Romana pan glazed with sherry dished out by the Italian Village in the early 70s. All washed down with the legendary Tignanello.

Like the Italian Village after the second generation retired, we were disheartened by Taylor Street's fall from culinary grace. After fifty years, the Rosebud on Taylor closed in 2023 and reopened a few year later. In all fairness, we haven't revisited the Rosebud on Taylor since it reopened. If you truly crave large portions of world class old school Italian red sauce dishes, the reopened Carmine's on Rush is among the best. The thirty-seven-year veteran of the family-owned Rosebud Restaurant Group, chef Arturo Gonzalez, has clearly mastered his trade, particularly the baseball sized Shrimp De Jonghe. On the other hand, the Carpaccio Di Polo developed by chefs Jose Sosa and Michael Padilla at Ummo is a modern heavenly treat.

The Italian restaurant scene in Little Italy peaked many decades ago. There are some good restaurants on this Secondary Italian Outside Target Market List, including those outside the old Italian neighborhoods. Nevertheless, if you crave upscale Italian food, there is little reason to leave the wide variety of world class choices in the Near North Side and the West Loop area, particularly if you reside in the area. The demise of the old Italian neighborhoods also killed the availability of edible Italian sausage at the retail level. Other than the legendary family-owned Nottoli & Son on Belmont, making fresh Italian Sausage since 1947, we don't know any retail source of good Italian sausage.

Most Recognized Historic Italian Neighborhoods.

Chicago's most recognized historic Italian neighborhoods today include Little Italy on Taylor Street and the less known Heart of Italy (Little Tuscany) on Oakley Street in the lower West Side. The foreign-born population of Little Italy crested in the 1930s with over 70,000 residents while the total population peaked before the urban renewal projects started. In sharp contrast, the core Heart of Italy never had more than a few thousand residents.

Heavily populated by Southern Italians and Sicilians, Little Italy was established in the late 19th century, peaking from 1900-1950. The urban renewal projects like the UIC, disrupted and downsized the neighborhood in the 1960s.

The Heart of Italy was mostly populated by Northern Italian immigrants, primarily Tuscans, that came to work in nearby industries. Reflecting on the neighborhood, the Tuscans brought their culinary and cultural traditions with them.

Oakley remained more stable and tight knit than Taylor because it wasn't swallowed up by institutional expansion. While the resident demographics have shifted, the name rebranding was designed to emphasize its status as a premier dining destination.

Lost Identity

Little Italy on Taylor lost its core identity and deteriorated as an ethnic enclave much faster than the Heart of Italy on Oakley. While both neighborhoods experienced a decline in the Italian population, the time and forces behind their transformation were different.

The demise of Talyor Street's identity was not a gradual shift, but rather a swift byproduct of mid-century urban renewal. In the early 1960s Mayor Daley used eminent domain to clear large parts of the neighborhood to build the UIC campus. The infrastructure displaced many Italian families and bulldozed many local businesses in short order. The simultaneous construction of the Eisenhower and Dan Ryan also played a role in chopping up the neighborhood.

Given the Loop proximity and the UIC, Taylor Street rapidly transformed into a college-centric neighborhood dominated by students and medical professionals. By the late 20th century, Taylor street was largely Italian in name only, functioning as a community strip of restaurants rather than a living ethnic community.

The much smaller Heart of Italy on Oakley preserved its authentic enclave identity decades longer than Taylor Street. Not subject to government sponsored urban renewal or campus expansion, its decline was a slow generational shift. As older Italian residents passed away and moved to the suburbs, the neighborhood integrated into the surrounding working-class Mexican neighborhood of Pilsen.

In summary, Little Italy and the Heart Of Italy have experienced cultural and structural shifts due to the changing neighborhood dynamics. Somewhat different by neighborhood, both are experiencing urban renewal, demographic change and gentrification. The evolving dynamics have also ***eroded the deep-rooted traditions and cohesive culture.***

Little Italy is experiencing meaningful gentrification, institutional expansion and cultural dilution. The Heart of Italy is struggling with geographic isolation, an aging population and commercial pressure from surrounding redevelopments. The shrinking of "Ristorante Row" is another challenge for the neighborhood.

Given the generational retirement, shrinking margins and changing neighborhood dynamics, ***the landmark Heart of Italy restaurants may be facing permanent closure. Febo's and La Fontanella have already closed****. The well regarded Segnatore in Humboldt Park closed in May of 2026, After 70 years, the changing neighborhood dynamics at Grand, Milwaukee & Halsted intersections fueled the closure of the iconic family-owned Como Inn in 2001. After twenty-five plus years, neighborhood dynamics and Chicago's anti-business practices were responsible for the closing of the family-owned Bella Note on Grande Avenue in 2023.*

Italian Restaurants & Population

Chinese, Italian and Mexican are the most popular cuisines in the US today. As you can see from the DCFG lists, there are "molti ristoranti italiani" in the Chicagoland area.

Excluding pizzerias and casual spots, there are probably ***800 or so dedicated Italian restaurants across Chicagoland.*** *The large number of Italian restaurants is no doubt partially due to the deep historical immigration patterns and a love for the comfortable red sauce.*

Most of the Italian population has moved out of traditional city neighborhoods and into the northwest side and western suburbs. *The highest concentrations include Elmwood Park, the neighboring Norridge area and western suburbs like Melrose Park, Addison and Westchester. Click HERE for a percentage of Italian population by Zip Code.*

The "Chicago Outfit" used the corrupted Cicero as their headquarters for management of citywide corruption in the mid-1920s. The "Hole in the Wall Gang" also operated out of Cicero in 70s and 80s. Ironically, there are no noteworthy Italian restaurants in Cicero today and the neighborhood Italian population is among the lowest.

Mob movie fans should note that the Godfather scene where Michael excuses himself for a bathroom trip and returns to execute his vendetta with Sollozzo and McCluskey at a small Italian restaurant in the Bronx, was allegedly based on a real life 1931 incident. To seize control, Lucky Luciano (Salvatore Lucania) set up a meeting with Joe the Boss Masseria at Nuova Villa Tammaro, a small Coney Island Italian restaurant in Brooklyn. Making another bathroom trip, Bugsy Siegel, Albert Anastasia, Vito Genovese & Joe Adonis allegedly stepped from the shadows - interrupted the seafood linguine consumption and accelerated Masseria's trip to the next life. Closed in the late 1950s, the restaurant sold souvenirs and survived long after the historic underworld event. Ironically, Luciano did not like coming to Chicago, he thought it was too violent. Still open today, Joe Gallo had a similar experience while eating clams in New York's Little Italy at Umberto's on Mulberry Street.

With a 2025 ***statewide Italian population of about 686,000,*** *Illinois is ranked 8th and well below New York's 2.1 million. On a per capita state basis, Illinois doesn't rank in the top ten. On a county basis,* ***Cook County is home to 265,000 Italians****, second to NY's Suffolk's 310,000, but again, not listed in the top ten on a per capita county basis.*

Getting granular, ***the Chicago MSA has 573,000 Italians****, third behind Philadelphia and NY.* ***On a big city MSA per capita basis, Chicago ranks seventh with 6.2%****.*

Looking at these demographics in simple language, ***Cook County contains 39% of the Italians in Illinois while the larger MSA (14 counties) contains 84% of the Italians in Illinois.*** *Illinois is the nation's largest soybean producer and second largest corn producer. As you can see, there aren't a lot of Italians farming in Southern Illinois.*

Pennsylvania's largest cities are dominant on the Big City Per Capita MSA list on the following page. We always wanted to know why American Bandstand was produced in Philadelphia and now we know why. Frankie Avalon (Avallone), Fabian (Forte), Bobby Rydell (Ridarelli) & Al Martino (Jasper Cini).

See Intravartolo below for the big US cities with the highest per capita Italian population.

Big City US MSAs (2M+) With The Highest Percentage Of Italian Americans On A Per Capita Basis

1.Pittsburgh MSA- 14.9%
2.Philadelphia MSA- 11.9%
3.Boston MSA- 11.6%
4.New York City MSA- 10.8%
5.Cleveland MSA- 9.1%
6.Tampa MSA- 7.3%
7.Chicago MSA- 6.2%
8.Detroit MSA- 5.8%
9.Baltimore MSA- 5.5%
10. Denver MSA- 5.3%

US MSAs with the Highest Number of Italian Americans

1.New York City MSA- 2,099,109
2.Philadelphia MSA- 741,529
3.Chicago MSA- 573,170
4.Boston MSA- 572,197
5.Pittsburgh MSA- 361,276
6.Los Angeles MSA- 334,258
7.Miami MSA- 306,918
8.Detroit MSA- 250,813
9.Washington, DC MSA- 249,721
10. Tampa MSA- 242,896

U.S. Counties with the Highest Number of Italian Americans

1.Suffolk County, New York- 309,456
2.Cook County, Illinois- 264,220
3.Nassau County, New York- 228,354
4.Los Angeles County, California- 224,380
5.Maricopa County, Arizona- 206,865
6.Middlesex County, Massachusetts- 194,786
7.Allegheny County, Pennsylvania- 181,684
8.Monmouth County, New Jersey- 148,079
9.San Diego County, California- 142,249
10. Bergen County, New Jersey- 140,023

U.S. States with the Highest Number of Italian Americans

1.New York- 2,116,020
2.Pennsylvania- 1,360,949
3.Florida- 1,297,929
4.New Jersey- 1,271,419
5.California- 1,268,906
6.Massachusetts- 757,451
7.Ohio- 692,235
8.Illinois- 685,600
9.Texas- 594,355
10. Connecticut- 549,410

See the following pages for dated history on some of Chicago's most tumultuous historic Italian neighborhoods.

Chicago had dozens of distinct Italian Settlements during the peak years of immigration. The earliest Italians arrived between 1850-1860. The second wave was between 1880-1914. Most Italian Americans in Chicago descended from that wave. Between 1945-2005 another 20,000-25,000 arrived in the last wave. Some of the more tumultuous historic neighborhoods are discussed below.

Taylor & Oakley During Prohibition

Chicago's gangsters were far more involved with Little Italy than the Heart of Italy during prohibition. While both areas were Italian-American enclaves, they had different demographics, geographic purposes and criminal footprints.

The Genna crime family, allied with Torrio & the Brooklyn born Capone, controlled the Taylor Street neighborhood.

Their industrial scale bootlegging turned the entire neighborhood into a decentralized alcohol factory. In short, Taylor Street was ground zero for the "Beer Wars" in the 1920s. Anyone attempting to sell alcohol from rival factions was dealt with fatally, which resulted in many casualties, including some of the Genna brothers.

Taylor Street was also a gang breeding ground and home to the notorious "42 Gang." Plucked by Accardo, the farm team ultimately produced mob kingpins like Paul Ricca and Sam Giancana.

The Heart of Italy had a different cultural and economic makeup that kept it largely insulated from the high-profile crime activity during that era. Unlike Taylor Street, it was primarily populated by Northern Italians and known as a quiet and stable neighborhood.

The Prohibition era organized crime was heavily rooted in Sicilian and Neapolitan syndicates, like the Genna Brothers & Capone, the nation's most infamous gangster. As a result, the Outfit did not have a natural fit with the Oakley neighborhood. As a community of food, it was known for tradesman, handcrafted markets and family-owned restaurants.

Other Historic Neighborhoods

Suffering from extreme poverty, dense overcrowding, fierce territorial competition, lack of investment, political corruption and distrust of authorities, Chicago's history features distinct eras of localized crime, exemplified by the 20th Century locations known as "Dead Man's Corner" (Bloody Maxwell) and "Murderers Row."

The notorious locations were known for violence and high body counts. They also evoke the era of impoverished immigrant enclaves, corrupt policed districts and pre-prohibition gang wars.

These areas are unrecognized today because their physical structures were demolished, their geographic layouts changed and the unique historical elements that fueled the violence no longer exists.

Dead Man's Corner

*Behind the notoriously corrupt Bloody Maxwell Police Station at 14th & Sangamon, the intersection earned the name as the original "**Dead Man's Corner'** during the 1880-1920 era.*

*As the heart of a neighborhood referred to as "**Bloody Maxwell**" by the Chicago Tribune in1906, the dense, impoverished melting pot for waves of newly arrived immigrants and street gang rivalries was a frequent site of the most violent and relentless gun battles between police and local criminals in all Chicago.*

Overlapping with Taylor Street, Italians, Greeks and Jewish immigrants lived in the crowded neighborhood which was influenced by organized crime during the prohibition era.

Completely absorbed and transformed by the UIC campus, the ramshackle tenements, saloons and notoriety are a distant memory.

Death Corner/Murder Corner

*Populated after Taylor and Oakley Street, but before Capone rose to power in 1925, the area also known as "**Little Scilly** & "**Little Hell"** was dubbed the most dangerous neighborhood in Chicago.*

Located at the intersection of West Oak & Milton (now Cleveland Ave) on the Near North Side, the neighborhood became the epicenter of "Black Hand" extortion and early syndicate vendettas.

*With a population of about 20,000 Italians, the corner functioned as a real "**Murderers' Row"** from 1905-1920. Fearing retaliation, residents adhered to omerta, leaving the police unable to resolve the execution style killings.*

The impoverished tenement heavy neighborhood was demolished in the 1940s-1950s to make way for public housing later known as Cabrini Green. After decades of poverty, gang violence and structural decay, it was also demolished in stages between 2000-2010 to make way for modern development, leaving the history of the area less than a distant memory.

See Wikipedia for more on Chicago's Historic Italian Neighborhoods,

See ZIPatlas for Zip Codes with the highest percentage of Italians.

See World Population Review for a map of Italian population by state.

"Buon Cibo. Buon Vino. Buon Amici"

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