

ON THE ROAD

TASTES

One bird six ways

Creative chefs are taking chicken seriously—with delicious results.

Nashville hot chicken. Korean fried chicken. Khao man gai. Over the past decade, a gaggle of regional chicken specialties have taken the West by storm. Served in fun, bird-themed restaurants, these delectable dishes are well worth crossing the road for.

• With *Iron Chef America* champ Viet Pham at the helm and a sly nod to cult



Perfect pairing: Pretty Bird's fried chicken sandwich and crinkle fries.

movie *Dumb and Dumber* in its name, **Pretty Bird** has all of Salt Lake City lining up for tongue-numbing, Nashville-style hot chicken. Choose your spice level (from mild to “hot behind,” a pun on restaurant kitchen lingo) and your preparation—a quarter-chicken plate or a sandwich stuffed with a crispy, boneless thigh, pickles, slaw, and tangy buttermilk dressing—and go to town.

• The star menu item at Portland fave **Nong's Khao Man Gai**—the namesake

Thai chicken-and-rice dish, steeped in intoxicating chicken oil—earned owner Nong Poonsukwattana a James Beard nomination, a national following, and, after years of hawking it from a small food cart, a bona fide restaurant with two brick-and-mortar outposts. Illustrated placards instruct newbies on how best to enjoy the multi-item plate, by alternating bites of aromatic poached chicken with sips of the accompanying ginger-and-garlic-spiked broth.

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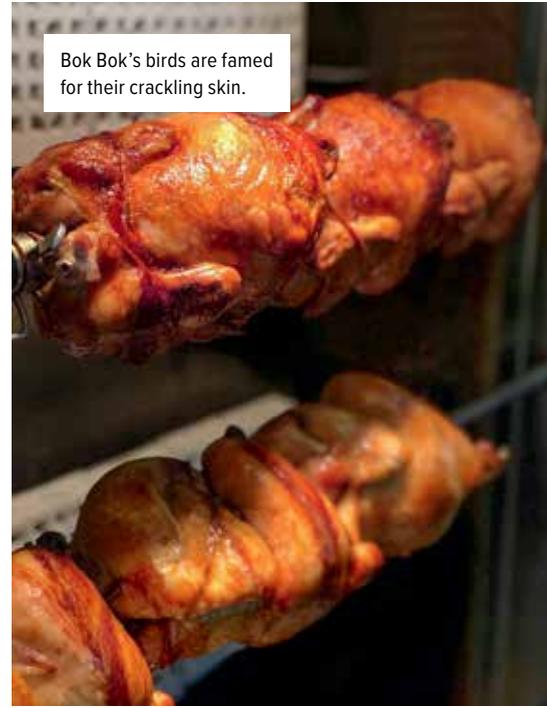
• Wafts of enticing, wood-fire barbecue smoke greet visitors to **What a Chicken**, a lively Mexican spot in pastoral Petaluma, Calif.—the town that once produced 10 million eggs per year. These days, for well under 10 bucks, diners at the small eatery get two hunks of seasoned grilled chicken, a choice of sides such as Spanish rice or handmade tortillas, and a creamy horchata or fruity agua fresca.

• When **Bok Bok Chicken** opened, Silva Chamanian's golden, spit-roasted birds had Las Vegas diners squawking for more. Fast forward 12 months, and now the owner—who draws inspiration from her mother's recipes for Lebanese and Armenian dishes—presides over a veritable empire of four restaurants and counting. Can't decide whether to enjoy your bird with zesty fattoush salad or savory-sweet quinoa eech (tra-

ditionally made from bulgur)? Ask the counter staff for samples. Just save room for the gatnabour, a rice pudding imbued with cinnamon and rose water.

• **Chi Mac** brings South Korea's trend of chimaek (fried chicken and beer) to Seattle. In a dining room featuring chicken-themed street art and a bubbly K-pop sound track, groups gather around heaping trays of wings glazed in sauces such as soy garlic and spicy gochujang. A handful of sides, including roasted corn gooey with cheese, round out the succinct menu, but the most popular pairing is a frosty mug of Cass, a beloved Korean lager.

• Cultural mash-ups rule the roost at San Diego's **Crack Shack**, a chicken-and-egg-themed joint. Coop Deville, BAE, and other cleverly named sandwiches and plates meld diverse flavors,



Bok Bok's birds are famed for their crackling skin.

as in the matzo ball pozole and the kimchi barbecue sauce. The kiddos, meanwhile, can turn to the Lil Cluckers menu for classics such as chicken nuggets. —GARRICK RAMIREZ

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