Post-lockdown Toronto is one big outdoor buffet, with streetside barbecues, walk-up windows and open-air snacking spots galore. Here, 25 insanely delicious things to try right now.

Schmoozing over tall cans on the patio at Bread & Wine by Bar Neon, a back-alley pop-up in Bloordale Village.
A Trini chicken sando

LONG BEFORE TORONTO restaurants were given the green light (yet again) to reopen patios, one Junction bar found a way to at least pretend a party was in full swing. People drawn to the happy reggae blasting from 3030’s speakers were rewarded with the sight of chef Adisa Glasgow (a.k.a. Young Animal) cooking up a storm in the tiny outdoor dining space (it’s like a patio version of a Juliet balcony). With the garage door rolled way up, music playing and a table lined with beer and wine available to go, it really did feel like takeout-plus. The thing to get here is the Colonel: juicy fried chicken topped with cheddar, slaw, spicy mayo and pickled onions, and shoved between flaky Trinidadian bara. 3030 Dundas St. W., Instagram: @younganimalto

THE CLOUD OF SMOKE over the intersection of Bathurst and Wilson is no cause for alarm. It’s actually a cause for celebration, because it means there’s about to be some porky, charcoal-grilled goodness from whole-hog enthusiasts hard at work in front of Wilson’s Haus of Lechon. As the name suggests, they specialize in platters of ridiculously unctuous hunks of roast pork—the belly is the pig’s pièce de résistance—with shatteringly crispy, salty, slow-roasted skin. A combo comes with rice and spring rolls, and can easily feed two—or one person banking on a long nap afterward. 365 Wilson Ave., Instagram: @wilsonshausoflechon

REMEMBER WHEN FOOD TRUCKS were a thing but then the city put the squeeze on them? Well, this summer is their time to shine—red tape pending, of course. This new, pastel-hued diner on wheels (its name is Gerty, by the way) is from a couple of folks who were working at SoSo Food Club when the pandemic hit, and then found a safe place to park Gerty near Yonge and Eg. Bonus: there are even a few picnic tables with umbrellas, so you don’t need to find a curb to crouch on. Pay them a visit from Wednesday to Sunday for smash burgers, fried chicken, fully loaded Fries Supreme (think Taco Bell but way better), sugary sprinkle doughnuts and more. 2444 Yonge St., Instagram: @homeappliancesfoodco

HOME APPLIANCE FOOD CO.
It’s hard to improve on the classic pairing of a cold beer and a sunny summer day, but Godspeed Brewery chef Ryusuke Yamanaka has just the thing. His street-style snack cart at the entrance to the brewery’s Little India retail shop is stocked with fried Japanese snacks of the crispy, golden-brown variety. His two mainstays: wooden skewers of craggy karaage fried chicken, which are like darts aimed at the bull’s eye of your brain’s pleasure centre (especially when paired with one of the brewery’s equally crispy lagers); and the curry pan, deceptively delicate football-shaped dough pockets filled with spiced veggie or beef curry.

242 Coxwell Ave., godspeedbrewery.com

Young enough to still love freezies but old enough to feel guilty about all that dye and refined sugar? Enter Geladona, a new maker of artisanal frozen treats. Their chubby ice pops come in all kinds of fun Brazilian flavours—soursop, redcurrant, guava, passionfruit, acai—and they’re made with 100 per cent real fruit and all-natural ingredients. Order the guilt-free freezies on their website for delivery to your door, or pay a visit to Geladona’s Dickie Dee–style bike cart parked outside of midtown bakery Padaria Toronto.

5 Manor Rd. E., geladona.com
Once your average neighbourhood watering hole, Pepper’s Food & Drink now wears many fun hats: snack shop, bottle shop, lunch counter. It’s like the American truck stop of your dreams (if American truck stops are something you dream of). Beneath the softly glowing bowling alley menu board, chef Julian Ochangco cooks up kimchi steamed buns, burgers and curly fries, boxes of fried chicken, chili cheese dogs, Hamburg steak plates and deep-fried mango-peach pies. Enjoy your haul on the streetside patio, or take it to go and wander the nearby railpath.

189 Wallace Ave., Instagram: @peppers.189

It may not have the ear-catching animatronic jingle of an ice cream truck, but Oretta’s pastel-painted gelato cart, which makes regular appearances outside the restaurant’s King West and soon-to-open midtown locations, is just as likely to tempt anyone in the mood for a serendipitous sweet on their way past. Pick a copetta or a waffle cone, then add rotating flavours like tart lemon, creamy Nutella-hazelnut, and ultra classics like nougat and pistachio.

633 King St. W., 2131 Yonge St., oretta.to

There’s a new burger option for beachgoers this summer: GG’s (short for Goodness Gracious) sits at the mouth of Ashbridge’s Bay, serving a nostalgia-packed assortment of smash-patty burgers (chef Rob McKim’s custom blend, or Beyond Meat) on plump sesame buns, fried chicken sandwiches, chili cheese dogs, homemade pies and freshly spun milk-shakes, all ready for a nearby picnic table or beach blanket. We’re partial to the patty melt—which packs finely diced beef on buttered Texas toast with caramelized onions, cheddar and mustard into a tidy, take-it-with-you bundle—and a side of onion rings. Just be sure to grab extra napkins.

1681 Lake Shore Blvd. E., ggsburgers.com

As if there weren’t already enough reasons to visit the west end’s church of cheese, Cheese Boutique co-owner Afrim Pristine has parked a food truck down the street and is handing over the keys to a different chef every weekend until fall. Restaurant guests have included Le Swan for smash burgers and juice bags of rose, Antler with confit duck poutine, and Coco Hot Plate serving up spicy Sri Lankan sandwiches. Still to come: Lauren Morer of Elle Cuisine, Kyle Kindinella of Enoteca Sociale and more. Go for the artisanal goods, stay for lunch—or get it to go for a lakeside picnic.

6 Ripley Ave., Instagram: @cheese_boutique

Walking down a narrow Bloordale alleyway, Bar Neon’s pandemic pivot appears like a mirage: a rust-coloured shipping container, lit up by strings of Edison bulbs. The words painted on its side advertise bread and wine, but it packs so much more than that into its 104 square feet. Yes, you can pick up a freshly baked loaf of sourdough and an interesting bottle of wine (or three), but you can also grab a gyro—pillowy pita wrapped around fresh fillings like springy lamb sausage—some chunky potato wedges and an ice-cold can of beer, then turn around and walk five paces to the nearest green space to enjoy your spoils.

Cosmos Nature Ln. (just northeast of Bloor West and Margueretta), Instagram: @neon_breadandwine

This stall at Yonge Street’s permanent outdoor food court is serving up the ultimate treat to beat the summer heat. A plastic cup comes filled to the brim with mango slush topped off with chamoy (a fruity, citrusy, tangy sauce) then sprinkled with some kicky Tajin and finished with a straw wrapped in chewy tamarind candy. So long, Slurpee.

World Food Market, 335 Yonge St., Instagram: @frutalibre_to
Thanos Tripi has already made the corner of Ossington and Humbert into his own Hellenic enclave, with Mamakas Taverna on one side and Bar Koukla on the other. This summer, Tripi is adding a Greek island to his portfolio, turning the parking lot across the street into a licensed 60-seat destination for fresh-off-the-grill Greek street food on the go. Just follow the scent of Berkshire pork and chicken on the charcoal spit, plus grilled octopus and lamb skewers, and one of the city’s most perfectly assembled souvlia wraps, bursting with tzatziki, red onion, tomato and fries in a warm, grilled pita. Wash it all down with a house-made canned seltzer. And for dessert, Greek fro-yo topped with baklava crumbles. 77 Ossington St., mamakas.ca

A dreamy ice cream sandwich

There are no limits when it comes to the ice cream sandwich, so long as there’s a slab of sweet, drippy goodness smushed between two layers of something to hold it in place. Wong’s Ice Cream in East Chinatown takes it one step further with its Skyflake Ice Cream sando, wrapping flavours like Korean banana milk and strawberry mochi with not one but two outer layers of confectionary goodness: a house-made brownie, followed on the outside by the Philippines’ iconic Skyflake crackers, giving the whole thing a tidy profile and a crunchy-soft textural dance in every bite. 617 Gerrard St. E., wongicecream.com
One of Toronto’s izakayas is, like many of us, spending as much time as possible in a park this summer. Imanishi has taken over the shipping container that functions as McCormick Park Café, and is serving up its signature Japanese sandwiches to hungry loungers, sunbathers and Frisbee flingers every Wednesday to Sunday. The compact bundles of crustless white bread come filled with spicy fried chicken chunks, prawns, mackerel or, the classic, lightly fried pork tenderloin slathered in honey mustard, tartar sauce and tangy tonkatsu barbecue sauce. 66 Sheridan Ave., imanishi.ca

Curbside cooking, the now-familiar and welcome pivot of choice for many restaurants, is nothing new to a crew of three neighbouring Little Jamaica mainstays. Hot Pot Restaurant (pictured), Rap’s and Spence’s have been manning barbecues on the sidewalk for years, sending mouth-watering plumes of charcoal smoke into the air. Each has its own loyalists, but folks in the know arrive later in the evening or in the early-morning hours for containers loaded with heaping portions of rice and peas, slaw and—the main attraction and source of all that smoke—saucy, fall-off-the-bone chicken straight from the grill. Spence’s Bakery, 1545 Eglinton Ave. W.; Rap’s, 1541 Eglinton Ave. W.; Hot Pot Restaurant, 1545 Eglinton Ave. W.

Empanadas are one of the world’s most perfect hand-held foods, and Argentina is renowned for its myriad regional varieties. They all come together under one roof at Tanto, where chef Julian Iliopoulos pivoted toward the flaky pastry pockets as a pandemic side gig. He fills his dough with chicken and olives, corn and spinach, and a cheesy mushroom version packed with provolona. But the headliner is the spicy beef mixed with raisins and spiced with plenty of paprika and other seasonings. 922 Queen St. W., super-empanada.com

Gruyere, emmental, gruyere

Hot-off-the-grill jerk chicken

KATSU SANDOS

IMANISHI

TOP-NOTCH HAND PIES

SUPER EMPANADA
TORONTO’S SHIPPING CRATE–based play place is open once again, with plenty of spaced-out picnic tables and Acapulco chairs for all your physically distanced socializing needs. And the market’s lineup of temporary tenants this summer includes Momofuku Noodle Bar, serving up spicy chilled noodles with kicky Sichuan beef sausage and pillowy bao stuffed with thick slabs of pork belly, as well as refreshing boozy cocktails. (Noodle Bar is also taking over the kitchen at Blood Brothers Brewing, pairing tasty katsu sandos with Tiny IPA, a collaboration beer between Momofuku and the west-end brewery.)

28 Bathurst St. (at Stacked Market) and 165 Geary Ave. (at Blood Brothers), noodlebar-toronto.momofuku.com

Thanks to the pandemic’s loosening effect on booze sales, Gerrard and Greenwood’s Le Conciliabule has become the kind of cozy neighbourhood wine boutique we all used to dream about in the Before Times. But the teeny-tiny French bakery has long drawn lineups for its incredible breads, viennoiserie and sandwiches. The takeout window is perfect for pre-ordering some canéles and a magnifique croque monsieur, practically bubbling over with béchamel, en route to Greenwood or Monarch Park. (Whether you also grab a few bottles of natural wine to take along is up to you.) 1300 Gerrard St. E., leconciliabuleto.com

17 MOMOFUKU

18 A KILLER CROQUE MONSIEUR
ONE OF THE FEW GOOD THINGS to come out of Covid is the art of the elevated picnic. This is the year we swapped PB&J sandwiches and bags of chips for things like afternoon tea and fully loaded charcuterie spreads. And this new spot for bivalves in Bloorcourt will make your al fresco feast even fancier. Step up to Island Oysters’ takeout window for a to-go tray of freshly shucked oysters complete with all the fixings, including the most adorable teeny-tiny bottle of Tabasco you ever did see. Enjoy them at one of the streetside picnic tables or head one block east to Salem Parkette, throw down a blanket and make the pigeons extra jealous. 3 Bartlett Ave., islandoysters.ca

THE CITY’S NEWEST BAR is on the move and coming to a park near you. Nomad is the pandemic pivot from the team behind Ossington restaurant Pastiche, and it’s serving up summery cocktails and spiked freezies alongside foods like muffuletta sandwiches and charcuterie cones from an emerald-green 1973 VW Kombi. Pop-up places and times are sort-of secret, so keep an eye on their Instagram stories for the where and when—and then put in an order for a super-boozy Painkiller to numb the pain of the last year and a half. Nomadto.ca, Instagram: @nomad.toronto

THIS MOTHER-SON food business, which has a laneway walk-up window in Corso Italia, specializes in wholesome sandwiches, grain bowls and street food with a South African bent. Founders Dan and Lauren Gütter (Jack and Lil were Lauren’s folks) call it padkos in Afrikaans—food that’s easy to pack and travel with. So wherever you’re headed, grab some freshly sliced biltong—South African beef jerky—and the signature roast beef sandwich (or sarmie) with tomato chutney on sourdough focaccia, which, like all of Jack and Lil’s breads, is made in house. 684 St. Clair Ave. W., jackandlils.com
LITTLE SISTER, midtown’s long-running Dutch-Indo food bar, has a new downtown location, and on weekends, chef-owner Michael van den Winkel can usually be found out front, standing over a small propane flat top. But this is not your typical street meat: the Dutch Dog is a full foot-long pork and chicken wiener smothered in curry ketchup, mayo and tangy slaw, and the Lilit burger is a Balinese specialty blending chicken and coconut into its patties. And then there’s the pulled pork lettuce wraps, loaded with all kinds of spice and texture in the form of tomato sambal, crushed peanuts and pork crackling. 102 Portland St., littlesisterto.com

WE’VE ALL WAITED IN PLENTY of lines this year, but the payoff upon reaching the front of the queue for Famiglia Baldassarre’s walk-up window is far more delicious than any shot in the arm. Since 2018, the Geary Avenue pasta factory has drawn throngs for its daily lunch special, which is served Tuesday to Friday at noon, and might feature a hearty portion of hand-cut tagliatelle with slow-simmered ragu, or gnocchi the size of wine corks tossed in a bright-yellow saffron sauce. The offerings change daily and are perfect for grabbing and taking to one of the nearby parks for a portable pasta feast. 122 Geary Ave., famiglia-baldassarre.mysopify.com
HAAN PALCU-CHANG made a name for himself as chef at Favorites Thai BBQ. But everyone needs a side hustle, so during the pandemic, he devoted himself to learning the craft of falafel-making and, with his partner, Janet Getter, launched an every-few-weeks pop-up serving platters with all the trimmings. Palcu-Chang’s specimens are bright green and booming with cumin and coriander thanks to the addition of hawaij, a Yemeni spice mix. The most important ingredient: heat. They’re meant to be eaten as soon as they come out of the fryer at the peak of their crispness, so it’s advisable to grab an order and devour it right where you stand. Instagram: @saftasfalafel

WHEN THE PANDEMIC snipped business at Dat Tran’s Riverside hair salon, he used his (ahem) noodle. He purchased a shipping container, painted it jade green, plonked it in the parking lot behind his salon and turned it into Tong Mein, a 160-square-foot restaurant selling noodle soup to go. His chilled bowls are perfect for steamy summer days, chock full of cold noodles, delicious proteins (jerk beef, grilled shrimp, firm tofu or marinated chicken), good-for-you veggies and savoury ginger-tamari sauce. Tran has already expanded: keep an eye out along the lakeshore for Tong Mein’s noodle bowl bicycle cart. 639 Queen St. E. (behind Album Hair), tongmein.com