

## Barbecue Trends

The protein-driven category continues to innovate into new formats and flavors

**AS WE MOVE FROM SUMMER TO FALL**, barbecue surely won't be forgotten. Nearly 60 percent of restaurants feature barbecue on the menu, as it has the versatility to be used for sandwiches, pizza, wings, and even burgers, according to Datassential's MenuTrends database.

Despite the time and labor that goes into authentic barbecue, consumers still have a high affinity for the protein-driven category. While consumers are drawn to the independent barbecue restaurants and willing to wait in line for hours just to get a taste of authenticity and quality, there are plenty of other ways to experience the flavor of barbecue today because it has expanded far beyond its roots.

Sweet, honey and spicy are some of the most commonly paired descriptors on barbecue menus. Both regional and global barbecue are pushing the bounds and creating some complex food profiles.

### Regional Barbecue

Authentic regional barbecue is viewed as more of a specialty item on menus. Each barbecue region in the United States specializes in its own style. Texas barbecue is known for beef-centric menus, while Missouri barbecue is more focused on the sweet, tomato and molasses-based sauce.

According to Datassential's FLAVOR database, Kansas City barbecue is loved by 17 percent of the U.S., and isn't just known for ribs — the true star is burnt ends. Once ignored by many chefs, burnt ends have now been repurposed as appetizers or used in stew/gumbo to capture the melted-down fat into a smoky, crunchy bark.

And whether you are looking for smoked sausages from a Memphis barbecue joint, or blackened chicken from St. Louis, each state has its own method that makes the experience one of a kind.

### Global Barbecue

Barbecue is all-encompassing and found in cuisine throughout the world.

Yaki is the Japanese word for grilled and is used for a variety of street foods, such as okonomiyaki, takoyaki, yakisoba, yakitori, and much more. Yakitori is the preparation of skew meat or vegetables, grilling over charcoal, and smothering it with a sweet soy sauce and mirin glaze known as tare. It's still a burgeoning trend



### Smokestack Sandwich (\$4.99)

BBQ the way it should be. Slow-smoked pork, tender and juicy, piled high on a buttery brioche bun and topped with zesty chipotle sauce and crispy onion straws.

**SCORE**  
**93**  
**Superstar**

Unbranded PI: **54%** ★★★★★

Branded PI: **70%** ★★★★★

Uniqueness: **39%** ★★★

Frequency: **24%** ★★★★★

Draw: **53%** ★★★★★

Star ratings reflect each item's performance vs. other menu items within the same category.  
 ★★★★★ Top Performer (>90th percentile)  
 ★★★★★ Above Average (70 to 90th percentile)  
 ★★★ Average (30 to 70th percentile)

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(in the inception stage of Datassential's Menu Adoption Cycle), found on less than 1 percent of menus. But yakitori has a high affinity with millennials — the largest segment of the population.

Younger generations like Gen Z have a high affinity for Korean barbecue, which has grown on menus by 40 percent in the last four years. This has influenced many trends, such as Asian street tacos with bulgogi, food truck nachos, and Korean-style wings.

As we've seen throughout the years, barbecue can't be pigeon-holed into one bucket and continues to innovate into new formats and flavors. **CSN**