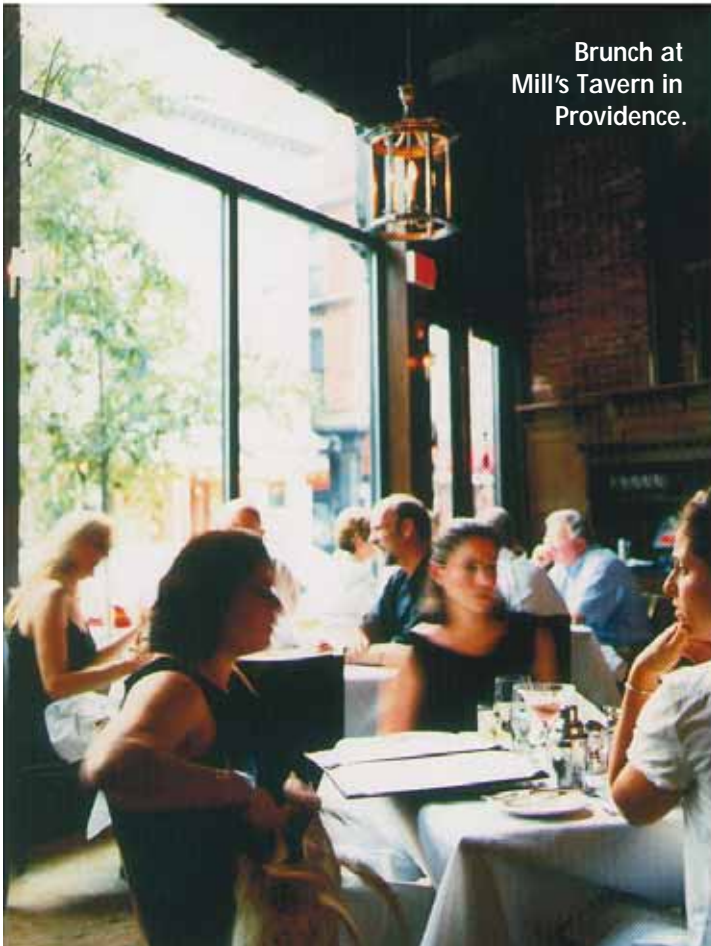


# TRAVEL + LEISURE

Brunch at  
Mill's Tavern in  
Providence.



## divine providence

### FOOD

Before **Al Forno** (577 S. Main St., 401-273-9767; dinner for two \$85) introduced its haute grilled pizza to Providence, RI, 23 years ago, the city's culinary terrain was desolate — more ramen than risotto. But thanks to the yearly influx of more than 20,000 college students, and the recent revival of this industrial town (spearheaded by flamboyant former mayor turned-convict Vincent "Buddy" Cianci Jr.), Providence has caught up with nearby Boston as a food-lover's destination. Here, a few of the city's best restaurants:

**DOWNTOWN** On a once decaying edge of the city, **Empire** (123 Empire St.; 1-401-621-7911; dinner for two \$65) is a neighborhood favorite for chef Loren Falsone's modern Italian dishes (papardelle with pork-rib ragu, tempura-dipped calamari). • Pull up a stool beside the granite-topped raw bar at **Mill's Tavern** (101 N. Main St.; 401-272-3331; dinner for two \$100) for oysters and a dry martini. The grill room's braised short ribs, like everything else on the menu, are oversized and delicious. • The boho-style dining room **Cav** (14 Imperial Place; 401-751-9164; dinner for two \$100), which doubles as an antiques store, is matched by its eclectic menu: seared scallops with sugar-beet mousseline, hijiki-encrusted tuna, asparagus vichyssoise. • **Olga's Cup & Saucer** (103 Point St.; 401-831-6666; lunch for two \$22) supplies artisanal bread to many of the city's restaurants and serves overstuffed calzones and tarts to a hungry lunch crowd. It's worth the wait for a table under the apricot tree out front. • The latest addition to the riverfront area is **Big Fish** (370 Richmond St., opened in August; 401-751-3474; dinner for two \$80), from veteran Providence restaurateur John Elkhay. With dishes like "wicked good" fried clams and seared "everything" tuna, the menu promises a tongue-in-cheek approach to seafood.

**FEDERAL HILL** **L'Epicureo** (238 Atwells Ave.; 401-454-8430; dinner for two \$80) offers regional Italian classics with a twist: lobster ravioli topped by grilled sea scallops, and a salmon fillet covered in mint-yogurt sauce. • Locals and college students pack into the boisterous **Providence Oyster Bar** (283 Atwells Ave.; 401-272-8866; dinner for two \$90) for Rhode Island littlenecks and coconut shrimp. • Visit **Constantino's Venda Ravioli** (265 Atwells Ave.; 401-421-9105; lunch for two \$15) for picnic essentials: salted capers, marinated artichokes, Gorgonzola-stuffed olives, and hot soppressata. • At **Pastiche** (92 Spruce St.; 401-861-5190; dessert for two \$13), a café off cobblestoned DePasquale Square, the chocolate hazel nut torte takes the cake.

—AMY FARLEY