

# 5 Underrated DTLB Places You Gotta Visit

Like any downtown, DTLB is full of hidden gems, little oddities that offer spectacular surprises and genuinely great things. This isn't a top list or a ranking; just five spots we feel are under the radar but should be in the spotlight.

## Aroma di Roma Centro (444 W Ocean Blvd.)

Long Beach: look at this patio. This can be yours. While sipping a cappuccino. While downing a blood orange Pellegrino. While mowing through a caprese salad with heirloom tomatoes. While opening your morning up with their outright wonderful Uova Benedetto, a plate of two poached eggs on top of prosciutto, provolone, soft-pressed foccacia and topped with with pesto, basil and olive oil. Unquestionably beautiful. Genuinely great grub. With. This. View. Dolce vita indeed.

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## Java Junction (111 W Ocean Blvd., Suite 103)

Tucked off onto what is the south side of 1st between Pacific and Pine—don't be fooled by its address; it just happens to be in the Landmark Square (aka Wells Fargo) Building but but faces 1st—is Java Junction. A staple for City Hall and Metro riders, this true hole-in-the-wall might seem like your average downtown caffeine spot but it actually serves some decent Vietnamese grub when you're craving some bún or phở or a bahn mi. Heck, you can even score a spring roll and some Thai iced tea. Yup, tucked behind the muffins and chips and urns of coffee, a woman at the stove churns out Vietnamese and Thai food for the lunch crowd. Surely, DTLB has yet to have its version of Phở Hồng Phát—probably Long Beach's best spot for phở—but this is a quick, cheap, and easy way to fix your fix.

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### Frutilandia (865 E 7th St., Suite B)

Admittedly, well, we've already told you of this joint's wonder wonders. This little place sits at the top because it is so off the radar but is packed with a ton of wonder, the kind of place where one shouldn't leave without dessert that's because, as is the obvious thing about Frutilandia: it's about the fruit'n'sweets. We're talking bionicos (or what's basically a Mexican fruit salad: chopped fresh fruit, crema la Mexicana, condensed milk, coconut, raisins, and gastronomic magic). Mangonadas (sometimes called Chamango thanks to its mix of Chammy sauce, mangos, lime juice and chili powder). Raspados (shaved ice that you can get tossed with mango or Chamoy or or or...). Hell, they probably have the best tostilocos in DTLB (that's tortilla chips topped with cueritos, cucumber, jícama, lime juice, Valentina hot sauce, chamoy, Tajín, salt, and a Mexican favorite, Japanese peanuts).

But perhaps Frutilandia's best kept secret is when night time comes. Come around 6PM, they create the best pupusas in Long Beach. Yup. Out of control delicious. On top of it all, some of the best burritos, tacos, and bacon-wrapped hot dogs these side of South Gate and Huntington Park. On Fridays and Saturdays, they serve food until 2AM and midnight on Sundays. It is a win-win.

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### The Big Catch (150 E. Broadway)

Rightfully so, the epicenter of DTLB's seafood scene is Pier 76 (which isn't overrated or underrated—just simply delicious and, unlike Big Catch, has only one other location compared to Big Catch's four). But for those seeking something a bit more Southern, a bit more Cajun, and definitely a bit more fatty, look no further than Big Catch. Their Cajun Pasta? A bowl of

carby greatness, complete with chunks of calamari and shrimp amidst green onions and spice. Their soft shell crab sammie? A deep-fried wonder smashed between a mound of coleslaw, hot sauce, and two brioche buns.

Even better? Their happy hour is daily, Monday through Sunday, from 3PM to 7PM. You can score \$1.25 oysters and \$4 draft craft beer and vino. That's definitely some gumbo to get down on.

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### Mabel's Pralines (625 Pine Ave.)

If you want "prawlins from N'awlins," look no further than Mabel's. This hole-in-the-wall serves some of the best Southern sweets this side of the Mississippi from master confection maker Sandra Christmas, delivered like a gift from her hometown of Baton Rouge.

"Over all the years we have never changed one ingredient," Sandra said. "When you experience our authentic pralines, you will agree that the exclusive and decadent taste will take you back to your grandma's kitchen."

One more tip: the banana puddin'. It is up there with the best.