

ROAD TRIP: HIGHWAY 61

**DELTA DINING ON THE BLUES HIGHWAY**

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*Get your fill on the road*

Soon after the Civil War, the woods and swamps of the Mississippi Delta were cleared into a cotton kingdom. That transformation enriched landowners through the hard work of former slaves, the lavish lifestyle of so few supported by the hard toil of so many. This dichotomy yielded bittersweet rewards, the most famous of which is American music. The plantations dotting this flatland are known as the birthplace of the blues. But another reward was good food. The old opulence of the planter class survives, and you will find lavish suppers at the seeming ends of the earth. And lunch is a big deal, too, with every small town boasting a premium spot where farmhands refuel and county politicians schmooze. Welcome to Highway 61, the Blues Highway: 220 miles running straight through the complex history of the South. Roll down the windows, turn up the music—and get ready to eat.

**TUNICA**

South of Memphis, the land opens wide and life immediately slows. Your first stop, the **Blue and White**, will pull you right into history. A one-time fuel station (with a newsstand and bus station to boot), it has been open since the inception of Highway 61. A perfectly spiced helping of **fried chicken** will whet your appetite for your journey to the culinary past.  
[blueandwhiterestaurant.com](http://blueandwhiterestaurant.com)

**CLARKSDALE**

Ready for something different? Clarksdale, an epicenter of blues tourism, shows the Delta at its most diverse. Take the region's most truly local food: **hot tamales**. Smaller and juicier than their Mexican predecessor, Delta tamales have thrived for over a century, thanks largely to the care of African-American cooks. Everyone has a different favorite, but in Clarksdale you can sample two of the

Delta's best: **Dreamboat BBQ & Tamales** and **Larry's Hot Tamales**.  
[dreamboatbbq.com](http://dreamboatbbq.com) and 662.592.4245 (Larry's)

**MORE CLARKSDALE**

Early Deltans were of varied ethnicities; Lebanese merchants opened many of the region's first groceries. **Chafik Chamoun** started as a grocer, too, but his customers were more enticed by his lunch—**kibbe**, made from wheat, spices, and beef and served baked, fried, or raw. Twenty-five years ago, when he took over his cousin's restaurant, he threw his name on the front, and **Chamoun's Rest Haven** still dishes out Lebanese cooking to a big lunch crowd. There's also a growing set of Deltans

focused on eating local and fresh. At **Oxbow**, chef **Hayden Hall** whips up something new every day for lunch. He's known best for his **tuna tacos**, topped with Sriracha aioli and ginger slaw—fast becoming one of Clarksdale's must-eat foods.

662.624.8601 (*Chamoun's Rest Haven*) and [oxbowclarksdale.com](http://oxbowclarksdale.com)

**MERIGOLD**

Every fancy cupboard cabinet in the Delta is stocked with **Lee McCarty's** rustic-elegant pottery, and at his studio in Merigold, you can buy your own. To try before you buy—and eat well—drop in for lunch at **The Gallery**, McCarty's homey tea room a few blocks across town. Don't miss his famous "Merigold tomatoes" or the ice cream-topped **chocolate cobbler**, all served on McCarty's ceramic creations.  
[mccartypottery.com](http://mccartypottery.com)

**CLEVELAND**

Halfway through the Delta and not a bite of soul food? The **Country Platter** will rectify that. Fifty years ago, this restaurant, then known as Lilley's Soul Food Café, was a gathering spot for civil rights leaders. Settle in for **smothered pork steak**, and bring your appetite; if you dine in, it's all you can eat. Downtown, you'll find the **Delta Meat Market**, the region's newest star. Thirteen years of cooking in Charleston and Nashville instilled an ambitious culinary vision in **Chef Cole Ellis**, who recently brought his skills back to his hometown. The lunch menu changes daily, but opt for something meaty: Ellis does the curing and smoking in-house. Don't forget to grab one of Mississippi's growing collection of **craft beers** on tap.

662.846.7051 (*Country Platter*) and [deltameatmarket.com](http://deltameatmarket.com)



**LELAND**

At **Fratesi Grocery**, a local fixture since 1941, you'll find gas, ammo, and bait—and a deli case packed with prosciutto and house-ground Italian sausage. Not unusual here as Italian families came to the Delta to help build levees, but found a niche in food. The lunchtime cluster of dust-covered pickups makes it clear: the food here—including the famous **fried-olive po' boy**—is some of the best around.  
662.686.2253



**ROLLING FORK**

After a long stretch of barren, beautiful two-lane highway, take a break in Onward, home of the Teddy bear. Here, over a hundred years ago, President Roosevelt declined to shoot a tied-up bear, an event that inspired the famous toy. **The Onward Store**, a former plantation commissary, now offers a fine-dining surprise: a weekend dinner menu with elegant takes on Southern favorites, including **local farm-raised catfish**.  
[theonwardstore.com](http://theonwardstore.com)



**VICKSBURG**

The high bluffs of Vicksburg mark the end of the Delta. For an appropriately funky finish, stop at **The Tomato Place**, a colorful farm stand tucked into the hills south of town, for a fresh-fruit smoothie and one of their many variations on the **B.L.T.**  
[thetomatoplace.com](http://thetomatoplace.com)

*Note: As you plan your travels to this unique area, be sure to call ahead. Many restaurants are closed on Sundays and Mondays or have limited hours.*