

TRAVEL

# TAXI!!

KELLI BRETT SPENDS  
AN AFTERNOON IN  
NYC WITH FAMOUS  
FAT DAVE AND THE  
WHEELS OF STEEL.

Photography Nitzan Keynan

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY, because the information you are about to consume should be tucked away in your memory, or somewhere on your cloud storage solution of choice, as your ultimate food experience bucket list. You are about to learn about a food tour that overrides all others on the New York culinary landscape and offers an authentic taste of its heart. On a recent trip to The Big A, I finally had the chance to take this tour, an experience that has been on my list for more than 10 years. I'd first sought out Famous Fat Dave as a guest for my radio show, *The Main Ingredient*, and was transfixed by his vivid descriptions of his five-borough eating tours, conducted in what he fondly calls the wheels of steel: his classic, white, vintage New York City Checker cab. I was hooked from the first gripping description of the deep-fried pickles on his infamous Pickle Tickle Tour (how could you not want to take a Pickle Tickle Tour?) and almost able to taste and smell the mouth-watering surprises hidden around every corner. Although Dave has now crafted a tour type to suit almost any food addiction, it is clear that a love of nostalgia and old-school New York eateries is his obsession.

David Freedenberg couldn't have found a better gig. After college, he drove a bread truck, peddled Nathan's hot dogs on Coney Island, became a cheesemonger in Greenwich Village and then a pickle hawker on the Lower East Side (possibly eating most of these businesses out of any profit during his short tenure). When he started a shift as a yellow cab driver, it would have been rude not to mine his fares for their best food finds and then share those juicy nuggets with friends. From there it was only a matter of time before Famous Fat Dave was born, freestyling his way through the New York boroughs while delivering the ultimate foodie fantasy with a fascinating side serve of history, politics and everything you will ever need to know about the underbelly of Manhattan.

Here's a little taste of an afternoon in the wheels of steel with Famous Fat Dave...

EAT



Famous Fat Dave and  
the wheels of steel;  
Bromman & Carr interior





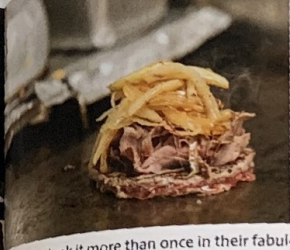
## DAVE'S VIRTUAL TAXI TOUR



A FEW OF THE SIGHTS along the Famous Fat Dave tour. First stop Pino's Prime Meat Market. Ask to see old family photos, marvel at the fabulous fat-marbled meat and



THEN IT'S OFF TO DEFONTE'S a fourth-generation Italian-American sandwich shop, where you can say hello to Nick and order your best-ever classic eggs, potato and



STEP BACK IN TIME AT Brennan & Carr; get ready to throw caution to the wind and embrace roast beef heaven when you order their famous stacked Gargiulo burger. Forget to dunk it more than once in their fabulous beefy broth!



YOU CAN'T LEAVE NY without pickles and pastrami. Jay & Lloyd's Kosher Deli serve the best pastrami and/or corned beef sandwich – you can even have both in one!

never forget those heart-shaped pickles from the heart.



PIZZA DOESN'T GET ANY BETTER than Ciccio's Pizza's crispy thin base with its trademark sesame seed edging. See if you can spot Marco's Sicilian flag tattoo and sit back

with the neighborhood action.





#### PINO'S PRIME MEAT MARKET

149 Sullivan St, Manhattan  
Pino's Prime Meats has been a butcher's shop since 1904, however Pino himself took over from his uncle and changed the name in 1978. His brother is a butcher back in Sicily and his brother's son, Sal, works here on Sullivan St along with Pino's own sons, Sal and Leo. It's a family of butchers so revered that many of the best chefs in the city squeeze into this tiny shop for their steaks and chops. Watch the butchers as they prepare their meat on irregularly shaped blocks, while you munch on divine, sliced, dry black-pepper sausage that has aged as it hangs from their ceiling. Mostly, just soak up the atmosphere and the accents and marvel at the butchers and their silky smooth skin. They reckon it's from massaging all that meat fat! Get ready to travel back in time; it may be 2019 on the street, but once inside Pino's you go back 100 years.

#### DEFONTE'S SANDWICH SHOP

379 Columbia St, Brooklyn  
It's not the ritzy part of town, but step into this fourth-generation Italian-American sandwich shop and be prepared to return to 1922 when the original Nick Defonte realised it was a helluva lot smarter to be selling sandwiches to the guys who worked at the docks than to be actually working there himself. Nick pioneered the chopping and spreading of all sorts of delicacies, piling them into enormous loaves and challenging the average American sandwich concept. The Nicky Special, stuffed with capocollo, salami and creamy fried eggplant, is known as one of the absolute best in New York and has been around forever. The fried eggplant is a house specialty, as is Defonte's hot salad. But it's the classic potato and eggs that you must eat. Say hello to the current Nick Defonte and try not to fall in love as you sink your



teeth into creamy, pillowy omelette stacked with layers of thin-sliced, buttery, sautéed potato and melted mozzarella. If you are not a purist, ask for the roasted pepper version. My fave. But don't tell Nick, I want to go back...

#### BRENNAN & CARR

3432 Nostrand Ave, Brooklyn  
Dave tells me that in 1930s New York it was the done thing to drive your big old American car down to the beach and stop on the way back (once you'd worked up an appetite) for some cheap and cheerful roast beef. This old-school restaurant/bar in Brooklyn's Sheepshead Bay is most famous for hot, roast-beef sandwiches and burgers bathed in broth and it's run by Irish brothers Eddie and Mike Sullivan. Their classic menu prevails except for one monumental change back in the 70s. The Russo brothers, who then owned Gargiulo's Restaurant, in Coney Island, would arrive late at night at Brennan and Carr with a bucket of beer and their own loaves of bread. To save the kitchen staff time, they'd ask for some roast beef and slap it inside their bread along with a beef burger slathered in melted cheese and caramelised onions and then drown it in beef broth. This became known as the Gargiulo burger and for years you could only order it if you were in the know. The Sullivan brothers finally put it on the menu and although it's not pretty, it is something you do not want to miss. Warning – you will not be allowed to eat your Gargiulo without a good dunk so all I can say is take a deep breath, unhinge your jaw and lean on the bar so all of that salty, bubbly, beefy juice will stop at your elbows. Eddie says it's like your first kiss. "Just grab it and go with it..."



OPPOSITE Pino's Prime Meat Market; exterior of Defontes Sandwich Shop  
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Famous Fat Dave tackles a Defonte sandwich;  
the wheels of steel; a Brennan & Carr special; pastrami at Jay &  
Lloyd's Deli; photos decorate the walls at Jay & Lloyd's Deli







Ciccio's Pizza and their pizza dough balls



## JAY & LLOYD'S KOSHER DELI

2718 Avenue U, Brooklyn

Years ago there was a Jewish delicatessen on almost every New York block. These days it is becoming harder to find an independently owned kosher deli. On the way through the bright lolly-pink shop front, Dave tells me to leave my cholesterol concerns at the door. It's clear from the wall menu that this is not going to be a light and fluffy experience, but I can tell you THIS is the place for next-level pastrami and pickles. Pastrami so soft and tender it almost dissolves as it is sliced and tangy pickles cut into heart shapes, as Lloyd (whose father and grandfather had their own delis) proudly calls them "pickles from the heart". Tradition and heart are what J & Lloyd's Deli is all about. Black and white photos and memorabilia on every available bit of wall space; a mini-

museum proudly displaying Lloyd and Jay's kitschy collectables, and a fridge counter packed with every possible form of old school deli-deliciousness. But it is their classic hot corned beef/pastrami combo that you need to order, with a little house-made slaw and those heart-shaped pickles on the side. Lloyd tells me that he has accepted that he and Jay will be the end of the line for this particular deli, in a neighbourhood that has evolved from predominantly Italian and Jewish to multicultural. "The kids are not interested and the concept is just not in fashion." I leave feeling proud to have ticked my best-ever pastrami sandwich box, but sad to think that such a wonderful food story may not continue to evolve.

## CICCIO'S PIZZA

207 Avenue U, Brooklyn

Dave says Ciccio's Pizza calls itself "a neighborhood classic" and it is. On Avenue U in Gravesend, the whole block is peak Brooklyn. Blokes sitting out on lawn chairs sip espressos from Caffe Caggiano, conveniently located next door to Ciccio's. It's one of those old-school communities where everyone knows everyone, thick Brooklynese accents abound and the Sicilian flag has flown in front of the pizzeria since Marco, who also has the Sicilian flag tattooed on his calf, took over from "the old men" who'd worn the pants since 1982. Luckily, Marco didn't need to change a thing. Crispy thin-base pizza with sesame seeds around the edge take it to the next level no matter what the decade. Fresh mozzarella, fresh garlic, fresh basil, fresh tomatoes, fresh, fresh, did I say fresh? Eat here a few times and you will be part of the family.

Do yourself a favour when in New York City and take the Famous Fat Dave tour, with its intimate glimpse inside restaurants that have stood the test of time and the families that have given their all to build them. What better way to explore than through the networks of a curious, smart and endlessly entertaining fellow food obsessive who will give you a taste of NYC that you will never forget. [famousfatdave.com](http://famousfatdave.com) ■



Hear the convo from inside the cab on our podcast *Cuisine Bites* at [cuisine.co.nz](http://cuisine.co.nz).