

Ice Cream, with a Twist: Cool Treats for Cool Weather

When the rest of the world goes for hot chocolate, New England's thoughts turn to ice cream. Granted, for some people (ahem), ice cream is a year-round staple, like iced coffee, but for most of New England, a cone in the cold is just the thing to remind us that we're alive!

For this round-up, I investigated four Rhode Island-grown businesses that have a unique take on the ice cream experience. These are my top recommendations for creative and delicious frozen treats.



Helado Taiyaki

This is certainly the most aesthetically interesting cone I've ever seen. "In a world where we first eat with our eyes, this frozen treat is colorful, exciting, and fun," owner Linnette Lopez Torres says. Though her background is in nursing, she's "a foodie at heart," and was always scouting out ice cream shops. Then she discovered *taiyaki*, which in Japanese means "fish cake," and is traditionally served as a dessert filled pastry. Combining this idea with *helado*, Spanish for ice cream, Torres created a new concept: a fish-shaped cone with a tower of soft serve ice cream.

When it came to starting her own business, Torres thought she would open a chicken and waffle food truck. "But then I thought of Taiyaki—no one else was doing that here." It took a year to build the business, and the response was enthusiastic, so she decided to open a store front on Federal Hill.

Each week Helado Taiyaki offer four flavors of soft serve, and there's always a surprise filling at the bottom of the cone: custard, Nutella, guava and a sweet cream cheese. The drizzles are made in house, flavors like strawberry and guava, and there are a variety of toppings from Teddy Grahams to Maria cookies. "That's what I'm bringing to this traditional Japanese dessert, my Latin flair," Torres says.

The Maria Maria is her favorite, and that's the cone I tried. Instead of vanilla soft serve, though, I asked for coconut, and it came topped with a Maria Cookie crumble, Guava drizzle, Teddy Grahams and a skewer of mini-marshmallows. At the base of the cone was the guava and sweet cream cheese that Torres spoke so highly about—the burst of flavor at the end was my favorite part. I can say with confidence this is the only kind of fishing I really enjoy.

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Tizzy K's Cereal Ice Cream

The name says it all—cereal milk ice cream—but even if you're not a cereal person, you've got to try this. The staunchest skeptics have returned to this bicycle-cart turned mobile freezer to compare this ice cream to Italy's finest gelato (did somebody say *gelato*?).

Tess Sullivan, known in her DJ days as "Tizzy K," along with her boyfriend, **Kelly**, co-founded this company after seven months of backpacking the world together. No big deal. After their return, they caught Christina Tosi on Chef's Table, back before Milk Bar restaurants became a phenomenon, and Tess and Kelly road tripped to New York City "like maniacs" to try the Corn Flake soft serve. Their take? Delicious, but "there's a missed market here."

Sure, Corn Flakes are great—but what about Fruity Pebbles? Golden Grahams? Cinnamon Toast Crunch? They began experimenting, beginning with Golden Grahams, and their first batch of cereal milk didn't even last until the next morning because of midnight taste-testing. And with a 16% butterfat base, they aren't just aiming for novelty—"We want to be known as the best and creamiest ice cream," Sullivan says.

You'll find them where they've been since day one, on South Water Street near the entrance of the Pedestrian Bridge. And soon they'll be trading in their bicycle wheels for a shipping container, outfitted to sell ice cream, hopefully just in time for high summer.

"Come [to the Pedestrian Bridge], have a date, see the sunset, and eat ice cream. What more could you want?" Sullivan asks. Honestly? That covers it.

Near the Pedestrian Bridge, PVD

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Kow Kow



The writers at *Motif* are big Kow Kow fans (you can read more here and here), so we really hope you've tried the bubble waffle cones by now. "Bubble waffles—also known as 'egg waffles'—are nice and crispy on the outside, fluffy on the inside," owner **Vilada (Vi) Khammahavong** explains. They look like an inverted honeycomb, folded to form the most literal "waffle" cone you've ever had. "People enjoy when the ice cream melts into the waffle. It's good for flavor and texture," Vi says.

They offer signature flavors, such as Oreo Factory and my personal favorite, Berry Nutty (if you're a black raspberry fan, you'll love this one: topped with a condensed milk drizzle, walnuts, and blackberries). The waffle is customizable, choosing from the original, matcha, choco chip, or vegan/GF waffle, and you can order one or two scoops. In addition, they offer a new selection of specials every month. During June the beloved "Unicorn Waffle" will return, in honor of PRIDE.

If you were used to seeing their truck parked on Waterman, you'll now have to head a few blocks east: as of April 10th (Vi's birthday!) they opened their new brick and mortar location. It's a happening street, where you can grab dinner at **Chomp** or **Tallulah's Taqueria** and then head to Kow Kow for dessert.

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Big Feeling



"Ingredients are number one for us," says **Alex Maddalena** of Big Feeling, an ice cream company that began doing pop-ups in 2019. "I don't think you can make a truly standout product without standout ingredients."

When Maddalena first started the business, he looked at the most common ingredients in ice cream: sugar, vanilla, cocoa—and it turns out they are the most exploitative products, prone to nefarious labor practices. "This led me on a path to find ingredients where people actually care about farmers and growers. And when ingredients are grown right, the ice cream actually tastes twenty times better," he says.

In 2020 their "pandemic pivot" led them to sell four new flavors each week, two ice creams and two sorbets, which tested their creativity. "We build each flavor from the ground up, and we won't release a flavor unless it meets our quality standards. Surprisingly, I feel like our business has grown just by

doing pints on a weekly basis.”

The recipes exist in very scratchy, yellow notepads. “We’re always tinkering with them,” Maddalena explains. When asked what *his* favorite flavor is, he answered, “It probably sounds lame, but my personal favorite is vanilla. It gets a bad rap in the ice cream world, but the vanilla beans we get from a family-owned farm in Hawaii are the most fragrant, plump vanilla beans I’ve ever seen. But I’m also really proud of how far we’ve come with our sorbets. We infuse our syrups with herbs, and ginger, and in a sorbet, you can really highlight more delicate flavors. Sorbets are criminally overlooked.”

One of my favorite aspects of Big Feeling is, well, the feeling behind it. Maddalena explains on their website how the company came to be, and I want to leave you with his words, because they summarize what ice cream can do for all of us:

“I will start by saying that this business was born out of a textbook spell of depression. When at times it felt hard for me to get motivated and to do the things I once loved, it seemed that cooking—nay, making ice cream—was always a trusted antidote to parting the grey skies.

“And even better was sharing that ice cream with those around me—you get to realize what ice cream means to people. Often, one little taste can open up neural pathways and unlock chambers in your memory bank straight to your childhood. Y’know, when the sun felt a bit warmer, sky a bit bluer, and when spending all the change in your pocket on a melty cone was, indeed, money well spent.

“It’s important to reconnect with those memories, especially in uncertain times. And I develop our flavors and recipes with that goal in mind. What can’t easily be described can always be felt. And that’s OK. A big feeling to have—just for you.”

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Bigfeeling.co