

Oil, Oregano, and Tradition: The North End's Best Italian Sub

By: Stephanie Rasmuson

On a brisk 8-degree day in Boston, I gathered a group of very willing test subjects. We zipped our coats up to our chins, and set out on a mission that felt both noble and necessary: to crown the Best Italian Sub in the North End.

The streets were calm and quiet, the kind of winter stillness that makes you notice the brick buildings, narrow alleys, and centuries of history a little more. Between bites and bundled-up walks, we soaked it all in; cold hands, warm sandwiches, and strong opinions included.

Our first stop was Bricco Salumeria, tucked away in a hidden alley just off Hanover Street. If you weren't looking for it, you might miss it entirely, but once inside, it felt like stepping into a classic Italian market. The shelves were stocked with imported meats and cheeses, house-made pasta, and all the staples that make the North End what it is. Outside, Bricco surprised us with one of the coziest setups of the day: a warm fire pit lounge that felt especially luxurious given the freezing temperatures.

The Italian sub at Bricco was unapologetically traditional. The bread had a satisfying crunch without being overwhelming, allowing the fillings to take center stage. The meat was fresh and flavorful, though more restrained than some of the other contenders, and the banana peppers and vinegar brought a sharpness that tasted exactly like what many of us picture when we think of a classic Italian sandwich. One taster put it best when they said the Bricco sub "leaves you screaming *Italy*."

While it wasn't the biggest or boldest sandwich of the day, it delivered on authenticity, value, and nostalgia, earning an overall group score of 7.89 out of 10 and the title of most traditional Italian experience.

From there, we braved the cold and walked over to Monica's Mercato on Salem Street. The temperature outside may have been unforgiving, but the atmosphere inside Monica's was instantly warm and inviting.

The space was filled with Italian décor, shelves of imported wines, meats, cheeses, and fresh pasta, and a steady hum of conversation. As we waited for our sandwiches, we watched the staff assemble a beautifully arranged charcuterie board behind the counter, effortlessly convincing us that Monica's should be top of mind for any future wine club meeting or girls' night.

Monica's Italian sub was all about balance. The bread had great crunch and thickness without overpowering the fillings, and the meat-to-cheese ratio felt thoughtful and satisfying. It wasn't overloaded with vegetables, but what was there worked well, creating a sandwich that was easy to eat and didn't feel heavy halfway through.

Several tasters noted that while it may not have been the flashiest sub of the day, it was one they could happily return to again and again. Monica's earned an overall score of 7.59 out of 10, standing out as a reliable, well-executed Italian sub that feels familiar in the best way.

Our final stop was Table Mercato on Hanover Street, and the energy shift was immediate. The shop was packed, lively, and buzzing, offering a more modern interpretation of the Italian market.

As a gluten-free girl myself, I was especially excited to see a wide variety of Italian imports that catered to dietary needs, gluten-free pastas, olive oils, homemade sides, cookies, cheeses, and more while maintaining quality and authenticity.

Then came the sandwich, and Table Mercato did not hold back. The focaccia bread alone stole the show, delivering incredible crunch with no soggiess in sight. The meat and cheese were stacked high, almost daring you to take on the first bite. The seasoning, peppers, and vinegar were bold and confident; everything about this sandwich felt abundant.

One taster described it as "so good you wish your stomach had more room," and that sentiment echoed around the table. While some felt the stack could verge on too much, there was no denying that this sandwich made a statement. Table Mercato earned the highest overall score of the day, 8.56 out of 10, taking first place for best overall Italian sub.

By the end of our walk, fingers numb and notes thoroughly debated, one thing was clear: each sandwich excelled in its own way.

Bricco Salumeria delivered the most authentic, old-school Italian experience and the best value, perfect for those who want exactly what they expect from a North End classic.

Monica's Mercato struck a balance with a dependable, well-constructed sub that's easy to love and easy to revisit.

And Table Mercato claimed the crown with its bold flavors, unbeatable bread, and modern approach to an Italian staple.

In the end, the real winner may have been the North End itself: a neighborhood where even on the coldest days, great food, rich history, and a little friendly debate can turn a simple sandwich crawl into something worth remembering.