

Zagat Releases 2009 D.C./Baltimore Dining Survey

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Charleston Sweeps Baltimore for Popularity and Food, Locals Go Green and Online

In its twenty-third year surveying local restaurants, Zagat Survey has just released its 2009 Washington D.C./Baltimore Restaurants guide. The new Zagat guide contains ratings and reviews of 1,155 of the region's best eateries. Over 7,200 locals from D.C., Baltimore, Annapolis, Frederick, and the Eastern Shore cast their ballots. They dined out an average of 2.9 meals per week.

"We've noted an increase in the average cost of a meal around the country," said Tim Zagat, co-founder of Zagat Survey. "Fortunately, dining out in the Baltimore area has remained relatively inexpensive, and residents are taking advantage by eating out more than ever."

Prices: This year, dining inflation in the Baltimore Area was a mere 1.6%. A typical meal in Baltimore costs \$34.23. In comparison, a meal in Las Vegas costs a whopping \$44.44. At the other end of the spectrum is New Orleans, which comes in at \$26.18. Relatively low inflation may explain why local residents say they are eating out more than two years ago, even if they are spending more.

Tipping: The locals are also tipping a generous 19.2%, although 75% of them cite "poor service" as the most irritating part of dining out. All other irritants combined - including noise, prices, food, parking and crowding - amount to only a quarter of complaints.

Winners: In addition to being named the Most Popular restaurant, the Southern-style New American Charleston was voted number 1 in both the Food and Service categories. Sushi King, Samos, Sushi Sono and Tersiguel's rounded out the top five in the Top Food category. As for popularity, the following restaurants ranked No. 2 - 5 in order: Prime Rib, Helmand, Petit Louis Bistro and Ruth's Chris.

This Year's Winners by Cuisine Type:

Afghan/Indian - Helmand	Italian - Tratt. Alberto
American (New) - Charleston	Mexican/Spanish - Jalapenos/A
American (Trad.) - Blue Moon Cafe	Seafood - O'Learys/A
Chinese - Jesse Wong's HK	Steakhouses - Prime Rib
Crab Houses - Faidley's	Sushi - Sushi King
French - Tersiguel's	Thai - Thai Landing
Greek/Med. - Samos	

Italian Wins: By a 22% plurality the region's surveyors say Italian food is their favorite cuisine, followed by American (17%), French (12%), Thai (10%), Japanese (10%), Mexican (8%), Indian (7%), and Chinese (7%).

What a Crab: The new guide includes a special index, Crab Houses, which is unique to the Baltimore survey. This year's top rated Crab House is Faidley's, followed by Mr. Bill's Terrace Inn, Costas Inn, Cantler's Riverside Inn and Obrycki's.

Best Buys: In addition to identifying the very best of every cuisine, the guide also includes a list of 20 Best Buys led by Five Guys, Chicken Rico, Atwater's, Andy Nelson's BBQ and Big Bad Wolf BBQ.

On-line Reserving: Local multi-taskers are beating their bicoastal rivals when it comes to making reservations online. According to this year's survey, an extraordinary 37 % of regional diners make their reservations online versus 17% in New York and 14% in Los Angeles. Only San Francisco and Atlanta are higher at 43% and 40%, respectively.

Going Green and Health-Conscious: Baltimore/D.C. residents are clearly moving in a "greener" direction. Seventy percent of surveyors consider eating locally grown food to be important, while 68% favor low-carb, low-fat, heart-healthy menu items. Food preparation is also a concern to surveyors, as 66% want trans fats banned from food preparation and 62% are willing "to pay more" for sustainably raised food.

The Guide in Detail: The guide not only features expansive ratings and reviews of the best restaurants in Baltimore, it breaks them out by location, cuisine and special features, including Business Dining, Historic Places, Power Scenes and Pre-Theater Dining as well as offering neighborhood maps for both cities. To appease budget-conscious diners, the guide lists 40 Best Value restaurants in Washington and 20 more in Baltimore.

The 2009 Washington D.C./Baltimore Restaurants guide (\$14.95) was edited by Olga Boikess, Marty Katz and Shelley Gallagher and is available at all major bookstores, through ZAGAT.com, or by calling 888/371-5440.

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