

Find great grub in any city

Before you hit the road, check out these websites, apps, and other resources

When you're traveling, wandering around looking for a place to eat can make everyone cranky—especially if you end up at a pricey restaurant with subpar food. Lots of websites, apps, and even GPS units are designed to help you find the perfect dining spot. The problem is that there's almost too much advice out there. The day we Googled the term "Orlando restaurants" we got 23.3 million hits. Las Vegas turned up 27.9 million. We had our travel expert wade through websites, apps, and other options to find great sources you can turn to when you're on the road. Below are some of the best ways to get great restaurant recommendations and discounts, too.

GOOD FREE ADVICE

YELP.COM. For sheer breadth of coverage, it's hard to beat this site. And browsing by food type is easy; New York City alone has more than 80 categories, including Burmese, Hungarian, and Ukrainian. You can



EAT LIKE A LOCAL
Get great tips from sites like Chowhound.

also search by price range or categories such as "Good for Kids." But watch out for paid "sponsored results" from advertisers, which often appear on top of the listings in a colored box.

OTHER OPINION MEGASITES. There are millions of user reviews of restaurants all over the world at big sites such as TripAdvisor, IgoUgo,

MyTravelGuide, and Epinions.com. The problem is volume. At TripAdvisor alone there are thousands of restaurant reviews. Here's our advice for narrowing down the list of choices when scanning reams of opinions.

- Skip reviews that seem too personal or too biased. The reviewers might have other agendas.

- Don't put too much stock in any

CALLING ALL FOODIES!

Smart phones are a great way to find restaurants when you're in an unfamiliar place. But when our editors tried some of the apps available, we found winners and losers. (We didn't test them in our labs.) One loser: The free iPhone app *Where Do Kids Eat Free Today?* It didn't have listings in several big tourist towns we checked, and the only choice offered in some locations was the Denny's chain. Here are a few apps we like.

- **LocalEats (99 cents to \$2.99)** offers info on "the best 100 restaurants" in 50 cities and is compatible with the Apple iPhone, BlackBerry Storm, and Google Android.
- **GrubHub (free)** and **CityMint (free)**, both available for the iPhone, allow you to order takeout and delivery but in a limited number of cities.
- **Zagat to go (\$3.99 a month or \$19.99 a year)**, for Windows Mobile Pocket PC, has a cool "find nearby" feature that uses GPS.



COUPLE IN RESTAURANT: COMMERCIAL EYE/STONE/GETTY IMAGES

one review; look for trends.

- Ignore opinions with language that sounds too much like advertising. They could be from employees or someone who has a stake in a place.

- Avoid good and bad extremes and go with the midrange comments.

- Check posting dates. Old opinions might no longer be relevant.

FOODIE SITES. If you're serious about getting a great meal, you might find the postings on Chowhound.com and the site of nonprofit eGullet.org more satisfying than those on bigger user-review sites. Use the search engines at those sites to listen in on foodies dishing about local restaurants. (Looking for sushi in New York City? Plug in "best sushi in New York" to hear what the locals have to say.)

HOMETOWN PRESS. Just about every major city has a regional lifestyle magazine, and they're usually loaded with reviews. (New York Magazine's website, at www.nymag.com, is a standout.) Local newspaper sites also post reviews by local critics.

Just be aware that too many glowing evaluations could mean that the publisher is more concerned with restaurant advertising than reviewing. **COUPON SITES.** The Web is filled with coupon deals. One good source is the Entertainment 2010 series of books (www.entertainment.com) that covers 149 locations in the U.S. and Canada.

Each one sells for \$15 including shipping, which is a bargain because every edition has hundreds of coupons. The books list a variety of categories—family dining, take-out, fast food, etc. And once you register online using the code found in your book, you'll get additional coupons, including some for 50 percent off and 2-for-1 deals.

LOCAL PROS. Many cities have a tourism office or convention-and-visitors bureau that lists local restaurants and might have meal deals.

For example, the New Orleans site (www.neworleanscvb.com) provides details on 31 cuisine categories in 10 neighborhoods. And the Kansas City site (www.visitkc.com) features discounts and printable coupons.

ADVICE FOR A FEE

ZAGAT. If you're feeling overwhelmed by too many opinions, one way to distill all that info is to let someone else sift through it. The Zagat Survey empire was built on user reviews that are aggregated into a numerical rating system. The drawbacks? It's not free: Guides are \$5.95 to \$15.95. And Zagat doesn't cover the entire map. But it does have restaurant guides for 31 domestic cities and regions, and 10 international locations.

OTHER VETERAN GUIDES. AAA Diamond TourBooks, which are free to paying members, and Forbes Travel Guides (until recently Mobil Travel Guides), \$13.95, are well respected. But you should know that restaurants apply to be graded by AAA. And like reviews in the 100-year-old Michelin Guides, which go for \$16.99 to \$28 a city, AAA's and Forbes' summaries are produced by professional reviewers, not users.

MORE TIPS FOR EATING ON THE ROAD

- **Trust but verify.** Hotel concierges say they're unlikely to steer you to a bad place, but be warned that some accept finder's fees. So it can't hurt to get a second opinion by checking some of the free sites listed above.

- **Troll for freebies.** Airports, hotel lobbies, and train stations often offer local dining guides and coupon books that can save you big money.

- **Talk to the natives.** Don't forget the simplest method of all for finding great local grub—ask store clerks and taxi drivers.

QUICK CONSULT

Dining etiquette



Peggy Post, an etiquette expert, is the author of "Excuse Me, But I Was Next" (Morrow, 2006).

When is it appropriate to send back an order? Send back food only if it is not what you ordered, has not been prepared as requested, tastes spoiled, or contains a hair or

a pest. Speak calmly and discreetly when making such a request.

What if you're getting poor service? Don't wait until you pay to complain. Tell your server or the restaurant manager immediately and give him or her a chance to rectify the problem. That avoids your having to request that an item be removed from the bill.

What to tip? If all goes well, tip the full amount, 15 to 20 percent in the U.S. If not, reduce the tip but don't give less than 8 percent, even if the service is bad.

How can you ensure you'll have a nice meal with your kids?

- Here are a few tips.
- Prep children by explaining the process in advance; you might want to consider a pre-vacation dry run at a casual restaurant.
 - Tell the hostess you'd like to be seated near other families or away from quiet couples.
 - Take along quiet toys (think books and crayons).
 - Order ASAP and stay seated.
 - Employ a time-out if needed by quietly escorting a toddler from the dining area.
 - Know when to leave. It might be better to have coffee and dessert elsewhere.