

Chain Restaurant's A-List

When it comes to making a decision for that family outing or a hot date, the restaurant industry has not made it easy on us. They have managed to provide us with just enough choices to leave us thoroughly confused and perpetually undecided. Fortunately for us, ABC's Consumer Reports has decided to take matters into their own hands, scouring the country to find restaurant chains with the perfect balance of food quality, service and ambiance.

Many of these chains are owned by much larger corporations and are fairly new additions to the restaurant world. The following is a list of the report's top restaurants where the average meal falls somewhere between \$15 and \$19.

- Claim Jumper
- Romano's Macaroni Grill
- Johnny Carino's
- Abuelo's Mexican Food Embassy
- Texas Roadhouse
- Red Hot & Blue
- Famous Dave's

Family restaurants, where meals go for less than \$10, were also taken into account. Cracker Barrel, Le Peep and The Original Pancake House were among the favored. However, as some chains climbed their way to the top of the list, others found themselves near the bottom because of a few deciding factors.

Noise, crowds and long waits guaranteed many restaurants their low ranking. The Cheesecake Factory, in particular, left 75 percent of their guests waiting for more than 10 minutes for a table, and 22 percent having to wait for more than half an hour. With long wait times come noisy crowds and a less than enjoyable dining experience. Even though the popular chain has more than 200 menu items to choose from, in addition to their cheesecakes, they seem to have been a victim of their own success.

This closer look into the key elements of the most successful restaurant chains has also uncovered some growing trends. First of all, it seems that 90 percent of chains now offer takeout services. Consumers still want great food, they would just like to choose where they eat. In fact, if at all possible, they would like to stay in their cars. Therefore, the latest takeout trend seems to entail employees taking food orders out to the consumer's car.

Restaurants are also becoming more flexible, with a willingness to prepare food in different ways in order to accommodate a customer's unique request. They are also beginning to provide the public with their food's nutritional information. These insightful details have been rather non-existent in the past.

Such advances are continuing to shape the industry, constantly improving the quality of our dining experiences.

For more information on the chain restaurant A-list, contact the FoodWise Group at www.foodwisegroup.com.

Sources include: ABC News, Consumer Reports