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## Good Eats, Wherever You Are

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You've spent all day enduring the rigors of travel. Finally you arrive at your hotel, tired and hungry, in an unfamiliar city. It's time for a decent meal. Where do you go?

There are lots of great restaurant guides. But you don't need a traditional guide to enjoy a memorable meal. Instead, follow these tips to improve your chances for a great night out.

Ask those in the know. Hotels often have reciprocal deals with restaurants, a you-scratch-my-back-and-I'll-scratch-yours understanding. And they may try to impress you by sending you to the most expensive place in town. Instead, ask the locals—business associates, your cabbie

or others you encounter during the day. And ask them "Where do you like to eat out?" to improve the odds of finding an interesting place. "Where's the best restaurant?" is liable to land you in a fancy, over-priced joint.

Avoid the chains. Enough said.

You cannot be all things to all people. That's true for restaurants, too. You've seen them: Chinese buffets serving steak, burgers and fried chicken; Mexican restaurants offering stir-fry dishes; and my favorite, the Boston donut shop that also sells sushi. Restaurants that prepare one cuisine well don't need to diversify by adding others. Avoid them.

Look for the crowds. Central Grocery in New Orleans; Ben's Chili Bowl in Washington; El Siboney in Key West. They all share this telltale sign of a good restaurant: The line of patrons waiting for food stretches out the door and half-way down the street. Follow their lead.

Find out what's local. You know that BBQ is king in Kansas City and lobsters are never better than in Maine. Odds are there's something locally famous where you're traveling, too. Figure out what it is. And remember that it might be an ingredient rather than an entrée, like asparagus in Germany in the spring or apples in Seattle in the fall.

Seek out cash-only establishments. Ralph's Italian Restaurant in Philly takes one form of payment: Cash. The owners don't want to be bothered with credit cards. And they don't have to. The food is so delicious, they set their own rules and everyone plays by them. That's a good sign for lovers of good food.



Take a risk. When you venture away from the tried and true you're bound to have surprises, some of them good, some of them bad. But you'll never discover the joys of local eating if you always stick with chain eateries and hotel restaurants. Take a chance and try something new.

Bon appétit!

– Amy S. Eckert, RED Editorial Staff

–Photo courtesy Meet Minneapolis.