

Best of Our Valley 2012: Food & Restaurants

Written by Written by: Melissa Larsen

Breakfast, lunch, dinner. Spicy, sweet, salty. Whatever they're craving, hungry Phoenixians turn to the Valley's best in...Food & Restaurants



Best Private Dining Room

XII, Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa-2011 Winner

Diners at Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa's private dining room, XII, get a front-row seat at a celebrity chef (Beau MacMillan) in action. Plus, Chef MacMillan's menu of locally inspired eats never ceases to please the taste buds. www.sanctuaryoncamelback.com.

Best Bakery

Classic Cakes & Confections-2011 Winner

Repeat winner, Phoenix's Classic Cakes & Confections, impresses with its scrumptious flavors—which range from traditional faves like red velvet to the jaw-dropping Tahitian vanilla butter cake—and flawless presentation. www.classiccakesandconfections.com.

Best Burger

Smashburger-2011 Winner

Fresh toppings and artisan butter-toasted buns top off the 100 percent Certified Angus Beef burgers at Smashburger. The burger joint, which has several Valley outposts, got its name because of the smashing technique used to create the burgers (smashing caramelizes the beef, making it more tender and flavorful). www.smashburger.com

Best Frozen Treat: Yogurt or Low-Cal Alternative

Tasti-D-Lite-2011 Winner

Tasti-D-Lite takes the guilt out of dessert time with its selection of low-calorie—and mighty delicious—soft serve. Most of Tasti-D-Lite's flavors weigh in at less than 70 calories per 4-oz. serving. www.tastidlite.com.

Best Frozen Treat: Ice Cream,

Gelato or Custard Gelato Dolce Vita-2011 Winner

The husband-and-wife team behind Gilbert- and Mesa-based Gelato Dolce Vita satisfy Valley gelato lovers with their selection of classic (think pistachio or hazelnut) and outside-the-box (habañero-chocolate, for instance) flavors. www.gelatodolcevita.com.



Best Resort Restaurant

Deseo, The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa-2011 Winner

From divine ceviche to always-delicious muddled cocktails to the famous chocolate cigar dessert, the Latin-influenced deseo at The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa is all about spice, seduction and, most importantly, scrumptiousness. www.kierlandresort.com.

Best Comfort Food

Eddie's House-2011 Winner

Eddie Matney, who was also named Most Influential in Valley Food, makes Scottsdale a more delicious place to be thanks to his down-home eats at Eddie's House in Old Town. Diners adore the chef's famed What's in This Steak? entree. www.eddiematneys.com.

Best Business Lunch Spot

Bistro 24, The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix-2011 Winner

The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix's bistro 24 dishes up American Regional cuisine in a casual, yet elegant, atmosphere. Those meeting with clients or co-workers enjoy the restaurant's privacy as well as the delectable bistro-inspired fare. www.ritzcarlton.com/phoenix.

Best Date Spot

The Mission-2011 Winner

Lovebirds like to linger over modern Latin fare and top-notch margaritas at Old Town's The Mission. The dimly lit interior, quaint patio and unique dessert offerings make it even more swoon-worthy. www.themissionaz.com.

Best Culinary Event

Scottsdale Culinary Festival-2011 Winner

Whether you're craving a casual outing with pals—with beer in hand—at the Great Arizona Picnic or a multi-course meal at the Friends of James Beard dinner, Scottsdale Culinary Festival offers a plethora of dining and partying experiences to Valley foodies.

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www.scottsdaleculinaryfestival.org



Best Asian Cuisine & Sushi

The Mint-2011 Winner

Those with a hankering for Asian fare, modern presentation and chic digs turn to Old Town's new The Mint. Respected Valley chef Johnny Chu dishes up a ginger-mint duck salad, edamame with truffle butter sauce, wasabi-soy chicken and, his favorite, the House Dynamite.

www.themintaz.com

Best Spa Cuisine

The Golden Door Spa Café at The Boulders Resort-2011 Winner

Just because you're at a spa doesn't mean you should have to stuff yourself with cucumber water and trail mix. Instead, The Golden Door Spa Café at The Boulders Resort offers satisfying salads, healthful wraps and sandwiches, seafood selections and even a gamut of guilt-free desserts. www.theboulders.com

Best Grocery Store and Best Cup of Coffee

Luci's Healthy Marketplace-2011 Winner

Caffeine fiends flock to The Coffee Bar at Luci's Healthy Marketplace in Phoenix for mmm-inducing locally roasted organic coffee. With a fresh-brewed cup of joe in hand, shoppers peruse the market for local and regional labels of meats, seafood, dairy products, snacks, wine and beer and much more. www.lucishealthymarketplace.com

Best Department Store Dining

Café Nordstrom at Nordstrom-2011 Winner

The espresso bar at Nordstrom, located at Scottsdale Fashion Square, whips up grab-and-go eats and drinks for the shopper-on-the-move while the marketplace cafe offers casual salads, sandwiches, pizzas and more. www.nordstrom.com



Best Outdoor Seating and Best Sunday Brunch

Carefree Station Grill & Bar-2011 Winner

When it comes to alfresco eating, Carefree Station Grill & Bar doesn't limit guests to a small patio where tables are stuffed in like sardines. Instead, diners have the option of taking their meal in the garden courtyard, rooftop deck or atrium patio. Regardless of where they sit during brunch time, diners can choose from a menu of chicken-fried steak and eggs, stuffed French toast and many more tempting eats.

www.carefreestation.com

Best Farmers' Market

Phoenix Public Market-2011 Winner

Located Downtown, the Phoenix Public Market showcases in-season foods and one-of-a-kind crafts from local farmers, purveyors and artists in its open-air area. The market's Urban Wine Bar and Grocery is also hoppin' with hungry folks thanks to its delicious breakfast items, salads, sandwiches and more. www.foodconnect.org/phxmarket

Best Breakfast

First Watch-2011 Winner

First Watch is a favorite among a.m. eaters due to its long list of breakfast favorites, including from-scratch multigrain pancakes, over-the-top omelets and even a health-conscious lineup of crepes, cereals and more. There are four Valley locations. www.firstwatch.com

Best Health Food or Vegetarian Food

Fresh Mint-2011 Winner

Chef Mai Ly puts a Vietnamese twist on the vegetarian offerings at Scottsdale's Fresh Mint restaurant. The signature lemongrass curry dish, which can be made with tofu or Japanese eggplant, is a wholesome and flavorful favorite. www.freshmint.us.com

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Best Gluten-Free Menu

The Melting Pot Diners-2011 Winner

who require gluten-free eats don't have to feel left out at The Melting Pot. With a few simple substitutions (like the elimination of Worcestershire sauce), the restaurant's incredible cheese fondue offerings are ready for those with special dietary needs. www.meltingpot.com.

Best Italian

Nick's Italian Restaurant-2011 Winner

For more than 15 years, Nick's has been dishing up mouthwatering Italian eats in some of the Valley's most high-end 'hoods. Stop by one of three Scottsdale locations for New York-style, hand-tossed pizzas, traditional pasta dishes and, for dessert, homemade cannoli. www.nicks-italian.com.

Best Fun Lunch Spot

The Herb Box-2011 Winner

Diners are invited to lunch and linger a while in the fashion-forward digs at Scottsdale's The Herb Box (there are two locations). During their mid-day meal, The Herb Box eaters enjoy tasty flatbreads, butternut squash-corn enchiladas, a selection of specialty iced teas and more. www.theherbbox.com.

Best New Restaurant and Best Mexican Food

Black Chile Mexican Grill-2011 Winner

Black Chile Mexican Grill, a zesty new addition to Biltmore Fashion Park, serves up classic Mexican favorites (think tacos, enchiladas and guacamole) with a modern spin. Plus, with more than 125 tequila labels available, Black Chile never disappoints those stopping by for a co-workers' happy hour or a friends' weekend out. www.blackchile.com.



Best Tea Spot

The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix-2011 Winner

At The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix's Afternoon Tea (which takes place Wednesdays through Saturdays), guests are invited to enjoy bite-size treats, fit-for-a-queen service and, of course, a selection of high-end—and highly delicious—hot teas. The resort also hosts a plethora of seasonally inspired Afternoon Tea events. www.ritzcarlton.com/phoenix.

Best Place to Watch the Big Game

Arcadia Tavern-2011 Winner

A high-tech sound system, comfy booths and plenty of plasma TV's make Arcadia Tavern a good place to watch the big game; a menu of tasty pizza, wings, burgers, cold beer and more make it a delicious place to watch the big game. www.arcadiatavern.com.

Best Juicy Steak

Durant's-2011 Winner

Durant's, which has been serving the Valley for more than 60 years, specializes in out-of-this-world steakhouse fare, including its divine selection of broiled steaks. To truly indulge, sink your fork into Durant's eye-popping 48-oz. porterhouse. www.durantsaz.com.

Best Seafood

Mastro's Ocean Club-2011 Winner

Seafoodies jet to Mastro's Ocean Club at Kierland Commons for caviar, escargot, vanilla-battered shrimp, unique sushi selections and the restaurant's famed seafood tower, all served in a sleek setting. www.mastrosrestaurants.com.

Best Valley Food Truck

Epic Hot Dogs-2011 Winner

This popular food truck's name cuts to the point: They whip up epically delicious hot dogs to the hungry masses. Phoenicians are nuts over the

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Chicago Dog, complete with celery salt and a pickle spear, as well as the bacon-wrapped, fried egg-topped Good Morning Dog. Want to know where Epic Hot Dogs is parked today? Follow them on Twitter (@EpicHotDogs). www.epichotdogs.com.



Best Slice

Venezia's Pizzeria-2011 Winner

New York-style pizzas and authentic Italian tradition make Valleywide Venezia's Pizzerias popular dinnertime destinations for local families. Plus, diners can't beat the pizza joint's daily slice special (a slice and a drink for a mere \$3.61). www.venezias.com.

Most Amazing Restaurant Interior

AZ88-2011 Winner

Even with neighbors like the popular LOVE sculpture and the Scottsdale Center for the Arts, AZ88 still impresses with its hip, modern interiors, courtesy of the talented designer, Janis Leonard. In addition to beyond-slick furnishings, AZ88 houses an ever-revolving selection of artwork, including large installation pieces. www.az88.com.

Old Favorite

Pinnacle Peak Patio-2011 Winner

In a world where restaurants come and go, it's refreshing to come across one that has been thriving in Scottsdale since 1957. Pinnacle Peak Patio not only delights those in the mood for steakhouse fare but also diners who want to step back in time thanks to its dose of wild west fun (think live country music). www.pppatio.com.