

Tucson's Top Restaurants of 2012

Written by Shannon North

The "Fab 15"

AZFootHills.com's TOP TUCSON RESTAURANTS of 2012



AZFootHills.com debuts its first annual "Tucson's Tops" restaurant list. We figured with its deliciously diverse dining scene, it was high time that Tucson got its own taste bud-tantalizing list. What follows is a savory showcase highlighting some of the city's top dining destinations, in no particular order.

Union Public House



Adding a whole new dimension to the growing Tucson restaurant scene, Union delivers a wide variety of artfully prepared favorites (ahi nicoisse salad, chicken and waffles) and drives comfort food up a notch in the process. "Honest Food and Clever Libation in a Stylish Atmosphere" barely scratches the surface of all they've got going on here. But the macaroni and cheese, pot pie and smoked cherry pork chop with gouda and bacon is a pretty good glimpse. www.unionpublichouse.com.

ConTigo



Proving that Latin fusion is both innovative and delicious, Contigo makes the list for flavor, flair and their remarkable consistency at turning out dishes that delight the palette. Short rib tacos, banana leaf tilapia and some of the best "empanadhinass" (filled with a mixture of beef, olives and egg) we've ever sampled lets you know this charming Latin cocina is here to stay. Try the super-savory and innovative cocktail menu for the full effect and don't forget their tapas! www.eatatcontigo.com.

Wildflower

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Superb calamari, sweet corn agnolotti and black mussels with charred tomato and garlic are just the beginning. Wildflower's seasonal menu may bring change, but never disappointment. Summer salads (we love the warm Maine lobster), fresh pasta and delicious seafood specials are only some of the reasons – the martinis are one for sure – that locals come back, again and again. www.foxrc.com.

Monkey Burger



Ah, the burgeoning burger craze. It seems like there are new ones popping up all over; Tucson certainly has had more than a few fresh patties in town. But Monkey Burger gets it right and wins for consistently fresh, fabulous fare. Their innovative burgers include The Sonoran which marries Chihuahua cheese, shredded cabbage, bacon and avocado salsa into a mind-blowing burger moment. The basics – super rich shakes and perfectly crisp fries – solidify this popular spots as one of the best bites in town. Go early (and hungry) to avoid the lines. www.MonkeyBurgerrestaurant.com.

The Grill at Hacienda Del Sol

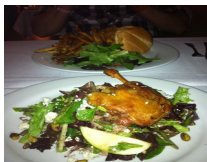


The iconic Hacienda is a historic must-visit nestled in the Catalina Foothills. Amidst the charming rooms and beautiful grounds sits one of the city's best and most notable special-occasion spots, The Grill. Steaks and seafood, all served with a subtle Southwestern twist, are the stars here; the warm atmosphere and unrivaled views, a close second. Rounding out their offering is a delectable Sunday Brunch with the best eggs benedict in town. Reservations and a peruse through their well-rounded wine list are a must. www.haciendadelisol.com.

Jax Kitchen

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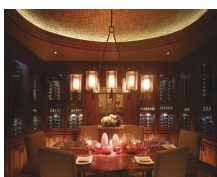
Another tucked-away, yet uber-delish dining spot that delivers from start to finish. Whether kicking off with steak tartar, baked goat cheese or duck confit tacos, you know you're in the right spot, just by the appetizers. Fans rave that you can't go wrong with the cast iron pork porterhouse, others site the New York strip and eggs (quail, of course) as the reasons to return. We go for the succulent roast chicken twice-baked potato and side of truffle asparagus...and always save room for dessert. www.JaxKitchen.com.

The Abbey



The "little sister" to the equally tasty Jax across town lands on the list due to its inventive and delicious Sunday brunch menu. While dinner is nothing to shake a stick at – fresh fish, gnocchi with buffalo ragu, lamb pot pie – brunch is the all-star. The French toast is the stuff of legend (bread pudding-esque with perfect maple syrup.) Samplers say it's where you'll find the best breakfast burrito in town. Lighter fare, such as the perfect egg-white sandwich (we get it every time) and fresh fruit, round out a rousingly good menu. www.TheAbbey.com.

Core Kitchen + Wine



Nestled against the Tucson Mountains, inside the stunning Ritz Carlton, Dove Mountain, Core delivers phenomenal fare paralleled only by its ambience and adjacent views. Stylish service delivers chile-lacquered New York strips; locally-sourced produce stars in heirloom tomato salad or the baby beet with Humboldt Fog goat cheese. Capped off by one of Tucson's top wine list – Champagne lover's take note – it is no wonder Core is at the center of everyone's dining map. www.ritzcarlton.com/DoveMountain.

Scordato's

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Taking vast Italian cooking knowledge (they own neighbor Vivace as well) and tossing it with the freshest ingredients has produced what locals herald as the best pizza in town. Crisp on the outside and slightly chewy on the inside, Scordato's does pizza perfectly. Fresh salads and a divine desert line-up – warm chocolate mousse cake - make this rising star a sure bet to keep burning brightly. www.pizzeriavivace.com.

Fleming's Prime Steakhouse



What do you get when you team a bustling bar with a strong lineup of succulent prime steaks, fresh seafood and super sides? Tucson's top steakhouse and wine bar. Whether looking for a romantic date night or perfect place to celebrate with friends, this is your spot. You won't find a better combination of service, cuisine or cocktails; it delivers every time...and so does the chocolate soufflé'. www.flemingssteakhouse.com.

Maynard's Market + Kitchen



Parallel to the tracks (railroad tracks, that is) in downtown Tucson, Maynard's got the memo; downtown's overhaul has spawned a rapidly expanding dining scene. By securing a prime spot and creating one of the city's most innovative menus, Maynard's marked their territory. Fresh oysters, coq au vin and a mouth-watering Sunday brunch – red velvet pancakes, soft shell crab benedict, croquet Madame – are some of just a few of the stand-outs in this all-star lineup. Need a late night sip? Their hand-crafted cocktails earn high praise. www.maynardsmarkettucson.com.

L'Rendezvous



Tucked away in an unassuming mid-town corner lies what many locals consider Tucson's top French fare. The bistro produces decadent steak au poivre, tender escargot and lobster bisque that could rival any. The tableside preparation – from beef, to fish to divine bananas foster – gives

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this Old World charmer authenticity; not to mention national recognition from various food and wine sites. Can't make it across the pond? Get a truly French fix here. www.lerendez-vous.com.

The Dish



With only 34 seats, it's easy to see why this popular mid-town restaurant gets packed, quickly. Locals and tourists alike return for the fontina tart, rock lobster tails and too-die-for rack of lamb. The swift service and adjacent Rum Rummer wine store/partner don't hurt either. No reservation? Grab a bottle and sip slowly. It's worth the wait. www.dishbistro.com.

El Charro Café



In a town known for outstanding Mexican cuisine, it's hard to pick a favorite. This Tucson landmark (with four city locations) wins for outstanding, authentic cuisine, especially their mouth-watering tamales. Everything from burros to birria, tortas to tres leches cake, is prepared with the freshest ingredients, by the most talented hands. Family owned and operated since 1922 ensures this local landmark is staying put. www.elcharrocafe.com.

Bluefin Seafood Bistro



Uber-fresh fish in the desert is not an anomaly at this neighborhood seafood bistro. Pacific Northwest oysters, sea bass ceviche and the best fish and chips in town are served up with warm hospitality. The seafood bouillabaisse, perfect Maine lobster roll and spot-on seared scallops are just a few of the stand-out menu's stars. Happy hour and a noteworthy Sunday brunch seal the deal. www.bluefintucson.com.