

Best of Our Valley 2011: Food & Restaurants

Written by Written by Melissa Larsen

Barbecue, breakfast and burgers, oh my! Tempt your taste buds with the winners in Food & Restaurants



Best Burger
The Grind

Get 'em while they're hot...and juicy...and delicious. Arcadia's The Grind gained fans quickly—the restaurant opened in 2010—due to its coal-fired cuisine. The Sweet and Spicy burger with candied jalapenos, fried ratatouille and watercress as well as the Steakhouse BLT burger are tops. 602.954.7463, www.thegrindaz.com.

Best Asian Cuisine & Sushi

Pure Sushi Bar & Dining

Fresh ingredients, one of the Valley's most stunning restaurant interiors and specialty rolls like the Sakesake and the White Monster varieties make North Scottsdale's Pure Sushi the spot to get your sushi on. 480.355.0999, www.puresushibar.com.

Best Barbecue

Lucille's Smokehouse BBQ

When Valley dwellers get a hankering for sweet and succulent barbecue, they turn to Tempe's Lucille's Smokehouse BBQ. The restaurant's finger-licking ribs, brisket, tri-tip and more are slowly smoked with hickory wood. 480.966.7427, www.lucillesbbq.com.

Best Breakfast

The Good Egg

According to voters, The Good Egg is much better than good. Mouthwatering omelets, frittatas, Southwest-inspired a.m. eats and several healthful morning meals are favorites at the breakfast joint's many Valley locations. www.thegoodeggaz.com.



Best Fries

Onyx Bar & Lounge at The Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale at Troon North

Fries might just be the world's most hard-to-resist snack. Why even try denying yourself a helping of Onyx Bar & Lounge's heavenly papas fritas, sided with jalapeño aioli? 480.515.5700, www.fourseasons.com/scottsdale.

Best Business Lunch Spot

bistro 24 at The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix

Execs looking for a sleek spot to power lunch turn to Phoenix's bistro 24, where they can savor French bistro fare with a twist. The bill of fare includes delicious rustic pizzas, artisan cheese plates and more. 602.468.0700, www.ritzcarlton.com/phoenix.

Best Candy Store

Sweeties Candy of Arizona

Family-owned and -operated Sweeties Candy of Arizona is serious when it comes to gummies, gobstoppers and more. The store carries 75,000 pounds of old favorites and new sweet sensations in 5,000 square feet of space. 480.899.4245, www.sweetiescandyaz.com.

Best Chips & Salsa

Jalapeno Inferno

For the past 10 years, Jalapeño Inferno has been doling out authentic Mexican eats in North Scottsdale. Even before the meal starts, diners' taste buds are tantalized by a mix of flour and corn chips and variety of salsas. 480.585.6442, www.jalapenoinferno.com.

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Best New Restaurant

Frank & Albert's at Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa

Voters love their comfort food—especially when served with a local twist. The new Frank & Albert's, named after Frank Lloyd Wright and Albert Chase McArthur, delights diners with its charred chicken lollipops, classic meatloaf served with chipotle ketchup and delish pizzas. 602.381.7632, www.frankandalberts.com.

Best Comfort Food

Tuck Shop

With a bill of fare that includes fries and gravy, mac and cheese, chicken and waffles and red beans and rice, it's no wonder why Phoenix's Tuck Shop took home Best Comfort Food honors. 602.354.2980, www.tuckinphx.com.

Best Culinary Event

Phoenix Cooks!

Foodies make their way to Phoenix Cooks! every fall for chef demos, food-focused shopping and food, wine and beer samplings from more than 50 restaurants, resorts, wineries and breweries. Best of all, the event raises funds for Phoenix Children's Hospital. www.phoenixcooks.com.

Best Cup of Coffee **Second-Year Winner**

Press Coffee

Shoppers at CityCenter of CityNorth stop by Press Coffee for top-notch Americanos, lattes, cappuccinos, espressos, macchiatos and many other lip-smacking sips. 480.419.6221, www.presscoffeeandwine.com.



Best Juicy Steak and Old Favorite

The Stockyards

Since 1947 (when it was a favorite of local cattlemen, bankers and politicians), "Arizona's Original Steakhouse" has been providing diners with only the finest corn-fed beef. In addition to a delicious menu featuring A-plus wild-boar-and-venison sausages, diners saddle up at The Stockyards for a sense of Arizona history. The restaurant does have a place on the City of Phoenix Historic Register, after all. 602.273.7378, www.stockyardssteakhouse.com.

Best Seafood

Eddie V's Prime Seafood

After 10 years at DC Ranch, Eddie V's Prime Seafood is now serving its fresh under-the-sea specialties at Scottsdale Quarter. In addition to right-off-the-dock deliciousness is Eddie V's cool atmosphere and nightly live music. www.eddiev.com.

Best Frozen Treat: Gelato

Gelato Dolce Vita

After attending gelato courses and working at gelaterias in Italy, Gelato Dolce Vita's husband-and-wife team is now scooping up an ever-changing rotation of flavors in their Mesa and Gilbert shops. www.gelatodolcevita.com.

Best Frozen Treat: Ice Cream or Custard

Chaparral Homemade Ice Cream

For more than 30 years, Chaparral Homemade Ice Cream has been treating Arizonans to lip-smacking scoops in flavors like banana nut, peanut butter fudge, sweet cream and more, including sugar-free selections. www.chaparral-icecream.com.



Best Frozen Treat: Yogurt or Low-Calorie Alternative

Tasti D-Lite

Those with a sweet tooth step to Tasti D-Lite for frozen dessert that contains 100 calories or less per four-ounce serving. And there's no skimping on scrumptiousness as evidenced by the shop's White Russian, coffee cake and green tea selections. www.tastidlite.com.

Best Expansion or Renovation

Over Easy at the Ice Den

Before slipping on skates, Ice Den visitors can carb up with homemade biscuits and gravy, pancakes, malt waffles and more at Over Easy, a Phoenix

breakfast favorite that was added to the Ice Den in late 2009. 480.585.7465, www.coyotesice.com.

Best Health or Vegetarian Food

Loving Hut

Loving Hut doles out vegan cuisine that proves plant-based diets don't have to be bleh. Local health nuts stop by the Glendale and Phoenix locations for Loving Hut's Philly Dream (a take on the Philly cheese steak) and soy cheesecake. www.lovinghut.us.

Best Fun Lunch Spot **Second-Year Winner**

The Herb Box

One of the yummiest ways to wind down after a busy morning is taking your mid-day meal at Scottsdale's The Herb Box. Order freshly made lemonade and cilantro-lime crab dip with crisp plantain chips to set your p.m. off right. www.theherbbox.com.



Best Mexican Food, Best Southwestern Experience, Best Outdoor Seating and Best Sunday Brunch

Carefree Station Grill & Bar

Located in Carefree's Spanish Village, the charming dining destination features a menu that spotlights "the influences of Southwestern, a little Mexican and 'whatever we like.'" Turns out, Valley voters like it too. Diners enjoy delectable dishes like buffalo meatloaf and ancho-rubbed pork in the alfresco feasting spots including the covered atrium, garden and scenic rooftop bar, BevHeaven. At brunchtime, Carefree Station pleases palates with its great à la carte offerings, including Southwestern eggs Benedict and deconstructed carne-and-egg fajitas.

480.488.8182, www.carefreestation.com.

Best Farmers' Market

Downtown Chandler Farmers' Market

On Thursday evenings, Dr. A.J. Chandler Park welcomes locals seeking jams, salsas, honey, tamales and craft items, to name a few of the home-grown, homemade goods on display at the weekly market. www.downtownchandler.org.

Best Fried Snack

Fried Chicken from Lo-Lo's Chicken & Waffles

Even celebs can't get enough of Lo-Lo's divine fried chicken. The likes of Muhammad Ali, Charles Barkley, Snoop Dogg and Shaquille O'Neal have feasted on the Scottsdale and Phoenix restaurant's finger-lickin' chicken. www.loloschickenandwaffles.com.

Best Greek Food

My Big Fat Greek Restaurant

Opia! Since 2002, My Big Fat Greek Restaurant has impressed with its Greek specialties, like spanakopita and moussaka. And with more than 10 Arizona locations, a delectable gyro is never far away. www.mybigfatgreekrestaurant.com.

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Most Amazing Restaurant Interior

BLT Steak at JW Marriott Camelback Inn Resort & Spa

While BLT Steak's Valley views impress, so does the gorgeousness that the resort steakhouse has going on between its walls. From cozy wood floors, a cool blackboard wall and a sleek bar area, BLT Steak's got looks on its side. www.bltscottsdale.com.

Best Grocery Store

AJ's Fine Foods

Talk about a one-stop shop. AJ's Fine Foods proves to be so popular due to its selection of services, including a bakery, a butcher's corner, a wine cellar, a fromagerie and its delicious dine-in or take-out bistro offerings. www.ajsfinefoods.com.

Best Date Spot and Best Private Dining Room **Second-Year Winner**

Sassi

Whether it's the Southern Italy ambience, award-winning wine lists, cozy alfresco seating or comforting, authentic pasta dishes that warms the hearts of Valley diners, Scottsdale's Sassi takes home Best Date Spot for the second time. Plus, the restaurant's stunning private dining spaces elevate a small party into a gold-star gathering. 480.502.9095, www.sassi.biz.

Best Place to Watch the Big Game

Majerle's Sports Grill

Makes perfect sense: The Valley's favorite spot to catch the big game is owned by one of Arizona's most well-loved athletes, Dan Majerle. At the three local Majerle's Sports Grill locations, diners can enjoy quality eats, awesome patios and top-of-the-line audio/visual equipment. www.majerles.com.

Best Restaurant Dessert

Crescent Moon at The Four Seasons Scottsdale at Troon North

From chocolate Diablo cake with chipotle and hibiscus sorbet to horchata crème brûlée paired with exotic fruit salsa and a cinnamon tortilla, the Southwest-influenced desserts at Crescent Moon know how to satisfy a sweet tooth. 480.515.5700, www.fourseasons.com/scottsdale.



Best Bakery, Best Cupcake and Best Dessert **Second-Year Winner**

Classic Cakes and Confections

Cooking since her childhood days in Russia, Classic Cakes and Confections' Ella Levinson whips up some of the Valley's most gorgeous and gourmet desserts by hand along with her husband, Neil. Some of the Phoenix-based bakery's most mmm-inducing flavors include chocolate Grand Marnier, coconut meringue and lemon curd, in addition to sensational seasonal flavors. 602.795.9662, www.classiccakesandconfections.com.

Best Diner

5 & Diner

From meatloaf to milkshakes, 5 & Diner devotees visit the restaurant's nine Arizona-based locations for traditional diner fare. www.5anddiner.com.

Best Slice

Venezia's Pizza

Family-owned and -operated Venezia's Pizza dishes up New York-style slices at its four Valley outposts. 'Za enthusiasts line up for The Empire State pizza

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(featuring 10 toppings) and healthful salad pizzas. www.venezias.com.

Best Tea Spot

The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix

Every Wednesday through Saturday, Earl Grey and oolong devotees prep their pinkies for High Tea at the Lobby Lounge at The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix. The tea is rounded out with oodles of petite treats. 602.468.0700, www.ritzcarlton.com/phoenix.

Best Treat to Send

ONEHOPE Wine

You don't have to be an oenophile to get on board with ONEHOPE Wine. Partial proceeds from the sale of each bottle go to various charities dealing with AIDS awareness, fighting autism, supporting the troops and more. www.onehopewine.com.

Best Hawaiian or Tropical Cuisine

The Breadfruit Authentic Jamaican Grill

Those wishing for a taste of Jamaica don't have to go any farther than Downtown Phoenix. The Breadfruit dishes up Jamaican favorites (think jerk chicken, coconut curry and oven-roasted plantains) using the freshest ingredients. 602.267.1266, www.thebreadfruit.com.

Saddest Closure

Zen 32

After more than 14 years in Phoenix, the beloved sushi spot sadly closed its doors in August. Zen 32's owner, though, is keeping busy at his other two popular dining destinations: Delux and Revo Burrito.