

Business travel

Every Tuesday

Zagat picks best places for nearby, off-airport dining

Early for a flight or just landed? Good food could be a short ride away

By Gary Stoller
USA TODAY

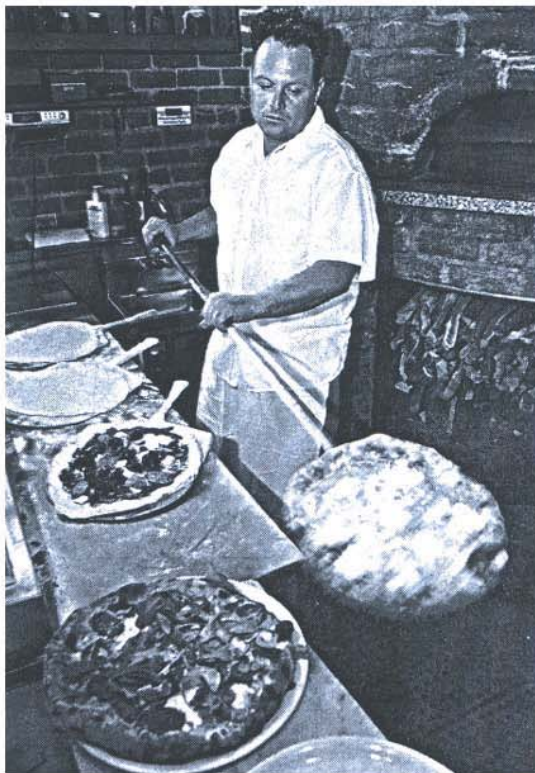
Some of America's best food can be found at restaurants near the biggest airports, giving hungry travelers with extra time opportunity for a welcome break.

"Great food with real local flavor is just a short cab ride away," says Tim Zagat, CEO of Zagat Survey.

At USA TODAY'S request, Zagat Survey pinpointed restaurants with the top-rated food quality within a 12-minute drive of the country's busiest airports. Zagat Survey publishes guidebooks based on reviews by restaurant customers.

Zagat Survey found all kinds of tasty eateries — from power-lunch steakhouses to ethnic dives — at 22 of the 25 busiest airports. It couldn't recommend a stellar restaurant near Philadelphia, Orlando and Detroit airports.

Because airlines have eliminated or cut back on meals, the Zagat Survey list is especially good news. Travelers who have time to kill during a layover or a flight delay can catch a cab. Or those who arrive early for a flight or are famished after landing can make their own way.



By David Klutznick/The Arizona Republic

Mama mia: Chris Bianco of Pizzeria Bianco, near the Phoenix airport, was named best chef of the Southwest by the James Beard Foundation.

Out-of-town business

The nation's No. 1 close-by off-airport restaurant? Chez Nous, Zagat Survey says. It's a traditional French restaurant in a former Pentecostal church in Humble, Texas, about a dozen minutes from Houston's George Bush Intercontinental.

"The neighbors don't know where we are, and the majority of our business is people from out of town," says Scott Simonson, managing partner of the 130-seat eatery.

He recommends the rack of lamb, the chateaubriand and the blue crab, mango and avocado tower. A full meal can take two hours, but he says fliers who need to rush can just order appetizers or entrees, and his staff will hustle to accommodate them.

Zagat Survey ranks Mikaku, a Japanese restaurant near Washington's Dulles, as the No. 2 off-airport restaurant. It has sensational sushi and "unique Japanese tapas," in-

Top 5 choices

Zagat Survey rates the following restaurants the Top 5 for food quality within a 12-minute drive of America's 25 busiest airports.

1. Chez Nous (Houston George Bush airport)
2. Mikaku (Washington Dulles)
3. Francesco (Miami)
3. Pizzeria Bianco (Phoenix)
5. Pasta Shop and Ristorante (Las Vegas)

cluding beef with chili flakes, Zagat's reviewers say.

Upgraded airport restaurants

The news isn't entirely bad for travelers at the big airports that have no nearby restaurant on the Zagat list. Philadelphia and Orlando — like many other airports in recent years — have upgraded the restaurants in their terminals. Phil-

adelphia airport's Cibo Bistro & Wine Bar serves upscale Italian cuisine and pours 30-plus wines by the glass. Orlando airport's Hemisphere was "first rate," according to a 2003 review in *The Orlando Sentinel*. The Detroit airport offers Pizzeria Papalis, known locally for its deep-dish pizza.

But few airports can offer the quality food and the top chefs that Zagat Survey has found in surrounding neighborhoods. Take Pizzeria Bianco, about a five-minute drive from Phoenix Sky Harbor airport. Chef Chris Bianco was named the best chef in the Southwest by the non-profit James Beard Foundation — a rare distinction for someone in a pizza place.

Bianco's pies, which are made with handmade mozzarella and mostly organic ingredients from local growers, bring in plenty of travelers, he says. Says Bianco: "When someone eats my pizza, I want them to experience the soul of the restaurant."



Get more picks and a printable guide of restaurants near airports at travel.usatoday.com



For updated flight information, send text message with **CARRIER NAME** and **FLIGHT NUMBER** (i.e., UAL 1743) to **44636 (4INFO)**.

Best bets close to USA's busiest airports

Zagat Survey says the best food within a 12-minute drive of the nation's busiest airports can be found at the following restaurants. All are not open daily or for every meal. Call to make sure a table is available and credit cards are accepted.

Airport	Top restaurant nearby	Restaurant address /telephone	Cost ¹	From Zagat Survey
Atlanta	Feed Store	3841 Main St., College Park 404-209-7979	\$25	Despite a few rough edges in service, this continental restaurant in the owner's grandmother's former farm- and garden-supply store prepares beautifully presented dishes that burst with flavor.
Baltimore-Washington	Timbuktu	1726 Dorsey Rd., Hanover, Md. 410-796-0733	\$26	Softball-size crab cakes and huge stuffed mushroom caps make this seafood establishment a favorite watering hole, but the barracks setting is not for a romantic rendezvous.
Boston	Carmen	33 North Square 617-742-6421	\$39	This North End neighbor to Paul Revere's house is a special place with delicious, innovative Italian dishes. Don't expect privacy.
Charlotte	McIntosh's Steaks & Seafood	1812 South Blvd. 704-342-1088	\$53	There's no better steak in town than at this superb locally owned South End surf 'n' turf with impeccable service, dark-wood interior and basement humidors.
Chicago O'Hare	Gibsons Steakhouse	5464 N. River Rd., Rosemont 847-928-9900	\$54	This A-list steakhouse is for people who hanker for aged prime beef.
Cincinnati/N. Kentucky	Montgomery Inn	400 Buttermilk Pike, Ft. Mitchell, Ky. 859-344-5333	\$31	A BBQ mini-chain known for steamed, melt-in-your-mouth ribs and sauce so good you won't mind wearing it. The reluctant say it's living on its rep.
Dallas/Ft. Worth	Boi Na Braza	4025 William D. Tate Ave., Grapevine 817-329-5514	\$50	Prepare for an all-you-can-eat spectacle of expertly prepared fare — meat, meat and more meat — at this warm Brazilian churrasceria where friendly gaucho-clad waiters ferrying giant skewers sometimes make you forget there's also a wonderful salad bar.
Denver	Moonlight Diner	6250 Tower Rd. 303-307-1750	\$16	Hearty plates of soul-satisfying American fare are served at this throwback diner-deli with retro '30s and '40s memorabilia. It's not red-carpet cuisine, but the menu has fat, juicy burgers, homemade soups and morning glories like the diabolically rich banana bread french toast.
Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood	Anthony's Runway 84	330 State Rd. 84, Fort Lauderdale 954-467-8484	\$40	The spirits of Sinatra and Dino live on at this old-school, airplane-themed red saucer that transports diners to Jersey via plentiful portions of exceptional family-style Italian fare.
Honolulu	Hiroshi Eurasian Tapas	500 Ala Moana Blvd. 808-533-4476	\$46	The tapas concept comes to Hawaii with this innovative Eurasian. Every plate is a piece of art, and the sommelier offers interesting wine flights. Too bad the same can't be said of the drab decor.



Houston
George Bush
Intercontinental

Chez Nous

217 South Ave. G,
Humble
281-446-6717

\$50

This charming treasure set in an old church is a French gastronomic oasis in the middle of a dining desert. Look for excellent duck, sinful desserts, friendly service and quaint ambiance.



By Sebastien Ettinger

Check, please:
Grilled salmon
with Tuscan
beans and sausage,
\$27.

Las Vegas	Pasta Shop and Ristorante	2495 E. Tropicana Ave. 702-451-1893	\$26	Imaginative specials, tasty sauces and the freshest pasta in Vegas, say fans of this excellent neighborhood Italian on the East Side. It's good at making you feel at home.
Los Angeles	Café Del Rey	4451 Admiralty Way, Marina del Rey 310-823-6395	\$44	This culinary lighthouse overlooks millions of dollars' worth of yachts and has breathtaking sunset views and inspired Pacific Rim-influenced Cal-French creations artfully placed on lovely plates. A few carp that it's costly.
Miami	Francesco	325 Alcazar Ave., Coral Gables 305-446-1600	\$43	Grabbing the No. 1 ranking for food in the Miami area, this Peruvian serves tiraditos that melt in your mouth, out-of-this-world squid ink pasta and amazing sevice. The decor may be unspectacular, but the efficient staff and terrific cooking make for an experience as close as it gets to Lima.
Minneapolis-St. Paul	Napa Valley Grille	Mall of America, 2nd Floor Bloomington 952-858-9934	\$39	With grapevine upholstery and plenty of polished wood, the lovely surroundings recall Northern California at this upper-class chain. It offers an outstanding wine list and seasonal Cal cuisine. Some say it feels too corporate.
New York JFK	Don Pepe	135-58 Lefferts Blvd., Ozone Park 718-845-7587	\$40	Superlative Italian classics are served family-style at this crowded, cash-only garlic paradiso, but there's no decor to speak of.
New York La Guardia	Agnanti	19-06 Ditmars Blvd., Astoria 718-545-4554	\$31	This real taverna's eclectic menu of fresh Greek home cooking rewards travelers with the stuff of dreams at reasonable prices. The setup is simple, but caring hospitality keeps it packed and gregarious.
Newark	Je's	34 William St. 973-623-8848	\$18	This friendly place in a nondescript storefront offers down-home soul food, including delicious ribs, peach cobbler and the best mac 'n' cheese around. It also serves breakfast items all day.
Phoenix	Pizzeria Bianco	623 E. Adams St. 602-258-8300	\$25	This adorable pizza temple cops the state's No.1 rating for food quality and draws droves of devotees who deem the outstanding pies the best in the country. Recent publicity has brought mind-numbing waits, so insiders suggest sipping wine at the adjacent Bar Bianco.
San Francisco	Pisces	1190 California Dr., Burlingame 650-401-7500	\$27	Innovative, mouthwatering California-style seafood abounds at this charming, crowded, special-occasion spot in a nifty revamped railroad station. Some dissenters rail at the narrow and loud dining room that rattles every time a train goes by and a new, uninspired menu.
Seattle-Tacoma	Bai Tong	15859 Pacific Hwy. S. Seattle 206-431-0893	\$18	Incredibly tasty, hot, hot, hot, authentic Thai cuisine where the digs are nothing fancy.
Washington Dulles	Mikaku	3065J Centreville Rd., Herndon, Va. 703-467-0220	\$26	Step into Tokyo at this delightful sushi house with great service in the middle of nowhere. Some debate whether the decor is tasteful or austere, but you'll be served terrific raw fish and unique Japanese tapas, including beef with chili flakes and roasted duck in sweet soy sauce.

1 - estimated cost for dinner with one drink and tip

Source: Zagat Survey