

2015 Best Of Our Valley Winners: Food & Restaurants

Written by Suzanne Koch

Tuesday, 12 May 2015 12:39 - Last Updated Tuesday, 12 May 2015 13:14

Food & Restaurants

From burgers to boba, high tea to hot dogs, the Valley is brimming with restaurants, food trucks, grocery stores and culinary events that can satisfy just about any craving.

BY EMILY GLYNN AND MELISSA LARSEN



BEST RESTAURANT TO GET THE MOST BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

>>OREGANO'S PIZZA BISTRO

Chow down on award-winning pizza, pasta, salads and more at Oregano's, a local favorite that can be found almost anywhere in the Valley (the March opening of a new restaurant in Goodyear will make 15 locations). And while it's best known for its Original Pizza Cookie, you'll want to try some of these brand-new menu items: the All Kale Caesar Salad, Fancy Dancy Mushroom Pizza and King Parmesan de Eggplant. oreganos.com.

BEST CULINARY EVENT: SPRING

>>FLAVORS OF PHOENIX

In support of the American Liver Foundation, Flavors of Phoenix puts guests side-by-side with top local chefs who prepare a multi-course dinner tableside. (Silent and live auctions as well as a reception are also included in the event.) The 2015 Flavors of Phoenix is slated for June 4 at Westin Kierland Resort & Spa. go.liverfoundation.org.

BEST CUP OF COFFEE: LOCAL

>>BERGIES COFFEE ROAST HOUSE

Bergies Coffee Roast House opened its doors in early 2009 in the historic Heritage District of Gilbert. Bergies specializes in custom roasting and blending of coffee beans from Central America, South America, Africa and Indonesia. The front lawn area has become an East Valley favorite for gathering with family and friends in a casual setting. bergiescoffee.com.

BEST DATE SPOT AND SPICIEST DINING

>>THE BREADFRUIT & RUM BAR

Whether you are looking to spice up your love life or find the spiciest flavors, locals turn to The Breadfruit & Rum Bar. Couples can enjoy time on the intimate and twinkly Boardwalk (front patio) while savoring selections from The Breadfruit's extensive rum list and eats like pimento-wood-smoked mussels and Red Stripe curried prawns. thebreadfruit.com.



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BEST GROCERY STORE

>>LA GRANDE ORANGE GROCERY & PIZZERIA

Arcadia's La Grande Orange Grocery is oh-so- much more than a retail store that happens to carry the cutest cards and gift items and yummy, quick eats. The hot spot also houses a coffee and breakfast bar (with the likes of French pancakes), cafe, bake shop and pizzeria. lagrandeorangegrocery.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST BURGER

>>REHAB BURGER THERAPY

Folks better come hungry to Scottsdale's Rehab Burger Therapy, where burgers can be ordered in the traditional "rehab" size or the gut-busting "relapse" size. In the fun, beachy environment, diners can choose from crowd-pleasers like the bacon cheeseburger or more unique eats, including the spicy mac- and-cheese burger (topped with a generous portion of the cheesy pasta). rehabburgertherapy.com.

BEST BOBA

>>SNOH ICE SHAVERY

Though Phoenix's Snoh Ice Shavery is known for its lip-smacking Snoh ice, which is a cross between ice cream and traditional shaved ice, its boba drinks also have quite the fan following. Customers can add boba, or chewy tapioca balls, to Snoh's wide selection of sips, from Thai iced tea to honeydew milk tea. snohice.com.

BEST BREAKFAST

>>THE FARMHOUSE RESTAURANT

Driving along Gilbert Road on a weekend morning, you can count on one thing: a crowd of people outside of The Farmhouse Restaurant, which opened in 1989, who are ready for breakfast. The mother-daughter team dishes up a comforting and hearty from-scratch menu that includes 24 omelet selections, The Farmhouse's famous cinnamon roll and tasty griddled entrees. farmhouseofgilbert.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST BUSINESS LUNCH SPOT AND BEST TEA SPOT

>>THE RITZ-CARLTON, PHOENIX

Whether craving a classic English high tea or a hearty lunch with clients or co-workers, The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix is a go-to spot for locals and guests. At tea time in the lobby, the tea sommelier, Jeffrey Hattrick, creates a memorable experience for guests, from the tea blends and tea-infused eats to the live entertainment and gorgeous presentation. Lunchtime at the hotel's bistro 24 means a warm, relaxed atmosphere plus mouthwatering American-inspired dishes crafted with fresh, seasonal ingredients. ritzcarlton.com/phoenix.

BEST COMFORT FOOD

>>CHELSEA'S KITCHEN

Chelsea's Kitchen was envisioned as an Arizona roadhouse serving food that pays tribute to the heritage and history of the area. The result is food that is clean, simple, vibrant and, most importantly, loaded with flavor. At the Arcadia-area restaurant, diners enjoy comforting eats, like deviled eggs, short ribs and surf and turf, most likely on the award-winning patio. chelseaskitchenaz.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST DEPARTMENT STORE DINING

>>MARKETPLACE CAFE AT NORDSTROM

Carrying those shopping bags and searching through sales racks can kick up an appetite. The contemporary food marketplace at Nordstrom is perfect for a casual meal, offering wonderful menu selections to satisfy a discerning palate. Beer and wine are also available. nordstrom.com.

BEST DRIVE-THRU

>>CHICK-FIL-A

From breakfast (hello, chicken biscuit) to dinnertime (who doesn't love a classic chicken sandwich topped with Polynesian sauce?), Chick-Fil-A is the Valley's favorite fast-food drive-thru. chick-fil-a.com.

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BEST FARMERS' MARKET

>>THE CAMELBACK MARKET AT VINCENT'S

Open Saturdays from late October to early May, The Camelback Market at Vincent's gives locals the chance to peruse and purchase local produce, imported exotic fruits and vegetables, crusty breads, buttery croissants, homemade jams, mustards, imported cheeses and Vincent's signature dressings, fresh pasta and pestos. Farmers' market-goers also have the chance to order up Chef Vincent Guerithault's mighty popular wood-fired pizzas. vincentsoncamelback.com.

BEST FROZEN TREAT

>>GELATO DOLCE VITA

After the owners trained in Italy, Gelato Dolce Vita opened in the Valley more than eight years ago. To make this true artisan gelato, there are no shortcuts; for instance, flats of strawberries are hand-cleaned for a batch of strawberry gelato, and hundreds of local lemons, oranges and grapefruits are juiced by hand. Head to the Mesa shop to stick a spoon in flavors like almond, butter pecan and Nutella. gelatodolcevita.com.



BEST CULINARY EVENT: FALL

>>ARIZONA TACO FESTIVAL

This coming October, the popular Arizona Taco Festival plans to serve more than 100,000 tacos and 50,000 margaritas. This year (the 2015 event takes place Oct. 17 and 18) will mark the first time that the festival hosts events outside of the big weekend with pre-parties, educational seminars and taco-pairing dinners. aztacofestival.com.

BEST HOT DOGS

>>TED'S HOT DOGS

The Tempe location of Ted's Hot Dogs was opened in 1983, when the owner Spiro Liaros moved from Buffalo to Arizona. (There are eight locations in Western New York.) The iconic hot dog stand is known for its Sahlen's hot dogs, which are shipped from New York. tedshotdogs.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST BARBECUE

>>HAMMERED HOG

"Cooked real slow. Served real fast." That's how it works at Hammered Hog in Phoenix, whether you're in the mood for a yummy but quick lunch or a big family feast. The super-popular barbecue joint serves up slow-smoked ribs, pulled pork, chopped brisket, hot links, chicken and all kinds of local favorites and drink specials. hammeredhog.com.

BEST ASIAN CUISINE & COCKTAILS

>>THE CLEVER KOI

With a menu that is best described as Chinese-American comfort food, The Clever Koi has made a big impression in the short year it has been open in Phoenix. Diners crave the pig face dumplings, steamed buns, ramen dishes and amazing selection of handcrafted cocktails (like the delicious ginger-spiked Donny Wang Fizz). thecleverkoi.com.

BEST HEALTH FOOD/ SPECIALTY STORE

>>SPROUTS

Arizona is home to 28 Sprouts stores with the company's headquarters located in Phoenix. With an open layout and simple design, shoppers enjoy the easy and relaxed atmosphere. Sprouts prides itself on offering a wide selection of healthy products at affordable prices; plus, the

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store's extensive bulk bins are a way to stock up on healthy ingredients with a long shelf life, like chia seeds and flaxseed. sprouts.com.

BEST ITALIAN

>>MARCELLINO RISTORANTE

With one of the most warm-hearted chefs in the business, Marcellino Ristorante is one of those restaurants you visit for the atmosphere just as much as the food, which is spectacular. Italian-born Chef Marcellino Verzino's menu of authentic Italian treasures includes scallops with pesto, handcrafted gnocchi and tuna carpaccio. However, don't expect Chef to pick a favorite menu item: "Since everything is my own creation, it's like asking if I have a favorite child." marcellinoristorante.com.



BEST SEAFOOD

>>LITTLE CLEO'S SEAFOOD LEGEND

Little Cleo's Seafood Legend is an oasis in every sense of the word. Soak up the vintage 40's décor of different seafood towns around the nation while Executive Chef Eric Ramirez dishes up some ridiculously fresh fish—in the middle of the desert, no less. With a location in the heart of Central Phoenix and a menu featuring Loup de Mer, Pacific white sea bass and a wide selection of oysters, we can bet you'll return time and time again. foxrc.com.

BEST JUICE BAR

>>THE WELL JUICE BAR

Located inside the Sun Devil Fitness Complex, The Well Juice Bar is a favorite among Arizona State University students (the owner is actually a former student) and locals thanks to delicious cold-pressed juices, protein smoothies and delectable salads and sandwiches, including the Turcado with turkey and avocado. thewellasu.com.



BEST ACAI BOWL, BEST HANGOVER CURE BREAKFAST AND BEST HEALTH FOOD OR VEGETARIAN FOOD

>>ORIGINAL CHOPSHOP CO.

At its three Valley locations, Original ChopShop Co. impresses with its fresh, made-to-order selection of breakfast items, chopped salads (the kale Caesar is dreamy), sandwiches and wraps, protein bowls and superfruit bowls. The fresh-pressed juices and protein shakes are also customer favorites. Original ChopShop Co. buys organic produce according to the Environmental Working Group's Annual Dirty Dozen list and cooks up meat with no preservatives, antibiotics or hormones. chopshopco.com.



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BEST CUP OF COFFEE: LARGE CHAIN

>>STARBUCKS

There's a reason why there is a Starbucks on every corner: since it opened in 1971, the chain has made coffee approachable for the masses. Plus, with the addition of the new Flat White and the ever-popular rotating seasonal drinks, Starbucks usually has something brewing to convert new fans. starbucks.com.

BEST FUN LUNCH SPOT

>>THE FARM AT SOUTH MOUNTAIN

Pull up a picnic table. The family- friendly Farm Kitchen at The Farm at South Mountain dishes up tasty sandwiches, fresh soups, seasonal salads and made-from-scratch baked goods that you can enjoy under the towering trees. Don't forget to say hi to the farm's chickens before calling it a day. thefarmatsouthmountain.com.

BEST MEXICAN FOOD

>>BARRIO QUEEN

For a traditional south-of-the-border experience, head to Barrio Queen in Scottsdale. Named one of Esquire's Best New Restaurants in America 2012, the joint boasts the largest tequila program in the state, with more than 300 options, and 20-plus different kinds of gourmet street tacos. A second location is slated to open in Gilbert this spring. barrioqueen.com.

BEST NEW RESTAURANT

>>PIZZA ME!

The recently opened, fast-casual Scottsdale pizzeria dishes up individual, customized pizzas at "wicked fast" speed. The dough, which is made in- house, cooks within minutes, thanks to a unique 800-degree hearth oven. If you're indecisive, expect to wait a tad bit longer. With more than 30 toppings to choose from, the possibilities are endless. pizzame.me.

BEST PET-FRIENDLY RESTAURANT

>>RANDY'S RESTAURANT

There's something for everyone at Randy's. Between breakfast, lunch and dinner, the reasonably priced menu spans across eight full pages. It's adored for its incredible service, hearty, cooked-to-order breakfast specials and pooch-friendly policies. Just make sure to hit the ATM before taking your seat—this Scottsdale gem is cash-only. randysrestaurantaz.com.

BEST PLACE TO WATCH THE BIG GAME

>>MAJERLE'S SPORTS GRILL

After being named one of the "Best 25 Sports Bars in America" by Sports Illustrated, it's no wonder Majerle's Sports Grill is currently celebrating its 23rd year. There are five locations across the Valley, but the 1992 original in Downtown Phoenix is extra special. Not only is it located in the city's oldest commercial building, the restaurant invites guests to reserve the private lounge, equipped with 15 TV's and a full-service bar, for special events. majerles.com.

BEST SUNDAY BRUNCH

>>MORNING GLORY CAFE

Wrap up the weekend right with a stop at Morning Glory Café. The signature breakfast spot, nestled within the organic gardens at The Farm at South Mountain, serves house-baked muffins and pastries, locally made sausages, seasonal omelets and more. Whenever possible (which is essentially 100 percent of the time), menu items are prepared with fresh, local ingredients. thefarmatsouthmountain.com.

BEST SUSHI

>>ROKA AKOR SUSHI & ROBATA GRILL

Accolades aside, Roka Akor Sushi and Robata Grill has definitely earned its stellar reputation. The restaurant receives fresh fish daily, used to craft its premium sushi rolls and sashimi. The seasonal menu also features steak, seafood and vegetable dishes, carefully prepared with Japanese-inspired marinades and sauces. The signature chili ginger and black truffle-infused aioli are particularly delicious. rokaakor.com.

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AFM FAVE

BEST BURGER

>>COLD BEERS & CHEESEBURGERS

Cold Beers & Cheeseburgers Grayhawk opened fall of 2011—followed by three more Valley locations, including a spot at Shea and 116th Streets in April. CB2 offers 16 award-winning signature burgers and more than 100 beers, plus great happy hour specials daily. All menu items are made from scratch, to boot. coldbeers.com.

BEST TEPPANYAKI

>>AH-SO

If you're craving dinner and a show, there's no place better than Ah-So. Choose from a huge selection of vegetables, meat and seafood, and watch from a semi-private table as chefs juggle, flip and ignite your food before presenting a feast of the juiciest teppanyaki you'll ever taste.

The restaurant also has an extensive sushi menu and well-stocked bar for those looking for something more subdued. ahsoaz.com.

BEST VALLEY FOOD TRUCK

>>THE UPROOTED KITCHEN

Although it serves only vegetarian and vegan cuisine, veggie lovers and carnivores alike adore this farm-fresh mobile eatery. The truck frequents the Gilbert Farmer's Market on Saturday mornings, serving signature items like the quinoa breakfast bowl and its freshly baked scones. For dinner, stop by the Agritopia Farmer's Market on Wednesday nights from 4 to 8 p.m. The cheese crisp, stuffed with fresh veggies, sweet potato and avocado, is a favorite. theuprootedkitchen.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST VIEW

>>COMPASS ARIZONA GRILL AT HYATT REGENCY PHOENIX

Perched atop the Hyatt Regency Phoenix is Compass Arizona Grill, the state's only revolving restaurant. Marvel at 360-degree views of the Valley while enjoying the seasonal, Southwestern-influenced menu and extensive wine list. It's the perfect place to catch the sunset, especially if you have out-of-town visitors to impress— they'll never want to leave. phoenix.hyatt.com.



BEST OUTDOOR DINING, MOST AMAZING RESTAURANT INTERIOR, BEST RESORT RESTAURANT AND BEST STEAKHOUSE

>>BOURBON STEAK AT FAIRMONT SCOTTSDALE PRINCESS

Bourbon Steak at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess is truly one- of-a-kind. On any given night, the staff at the Michael Mina restaurant spoils its guests with exceptional cuts of butter- poached beef, poultry and fish, all grilled to perfection over seasoned wood-fueled flames. The steakhouse is also admired for its liquor selection. Round out the meal with a scrumptious glass of wine or handcrafted cocktail. scottsdaleprincess.com.

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FAVORITE LOCAL FOOD BLOG

>>PHOENIX BITES

Need help navigating the local food scene? Phoenix Bites has you covered. The blog features everything from up-and-coming restaurants and culinary festivals to exciting kitchen gadgets and the Valley's hottest chefs. For a constant stream of foodie news, consider subscribing to the newsletter, so you'll always be in the know. phoenixbites.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST BAKED GOODS OR SWEETS

>>CLASSIC CAKES AND CONFECTIONS

As one of Martha Stewart Weddings' top bakeries in the country, you just know Scottsdale's Classic Cakes and Confections fashions some of the most gorgeous and delicious wedding and specialty cakes in the Valley. However, those with a sweet tooth also pop in for custom sugar cookies, lemon bars, mini pies, truffles, petit fours and much more deliciousness—including a few gluten-free goodies. classiccakesandconfections.com.

OLD FAVORITE

>>TEXAZ GRILL

There's a reason folks have been returning to this joint since 1985: its loyalties may lie with Texas, but the Texaz Grill is Arizonan, through and through. The oldie but goodie never fails to deliver a healthy dose of southern hospitality, Lone Star attitude and of course, mouthwatering comfort food. It's particularly proud of its award-winning chicken-fried steak with mashed potatoes and gravy. texazgrill.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST GLUTEN-FREE MENU AND BEST SLICE

>>VENEZIA'S PIZZERIA

Featured on AMC's "Breaking Bad," Venezia's Pizzeria has a reputation to uphold as some of the Valley's best slices. There are four locations serving the East Valley with a new North Phoenix location opening in May. And deli cases at each location are bigger than ever, stocked with specialty Italian-cured meats from New York and giardiniera peppers from Chicago. venezias.com.

BEST SPA CUISINE

>>JOYA TERRACE AT JOYA SPA, OMNI SCOTTSDALE RESORT & SPA AT MONTELUCCIA

Others may scoff, but a day of pampering really does require some serious fuel. Keep your energy levels high and your belly happy between treatments by indulging in the healthful cuisine at Joya Terrace. The restaurant and juice bar serves an array of light bites and cocktails, including the smoked coconut club, Skuna Bay salmon salad and the watermelon refresher. omnihotels.com/hotels/scottsdale-montelucia.



BEST PRIVATE DINING ROOM

>>THE HERB BOX

Escape from the hectic rush of mealtimes and reserve The Herb Box's private dining room for a warm, whimsical experience. The Sage Room can accommodate up to 35 people for lunch, dinner or weekend brunch, and the kitchen is more than happy to create a customized menu to

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satisfy a range of dietary preferences including vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free. Don't forget to leave room for dessert, made-to-order by the restaurant's on-site pastry department. theherbbox.com.