







Choosing a Place to Eat

How Diners Decide

With **51% of consumers dining out*** at least once a week, it's clear restaurants are a major part of many people's lives. We know that going out to eat has become an experience in itself, but the question we wanted to know was: how do diners choose where to go?


In this report, you'll learn:

-  How choosing a place to eat differs based on context
-  Why every stage of the dining experience has become social
-  How values and public image are more important than you'd think
-  What diners crave for their restaurant experience

To find out what factors into dining selection, we surveyed over 500 Americans about their dining habits and decisions and conducted qualitative interviews to get to the heart of our question.

* Toast Restaurant Technology Report, 2017



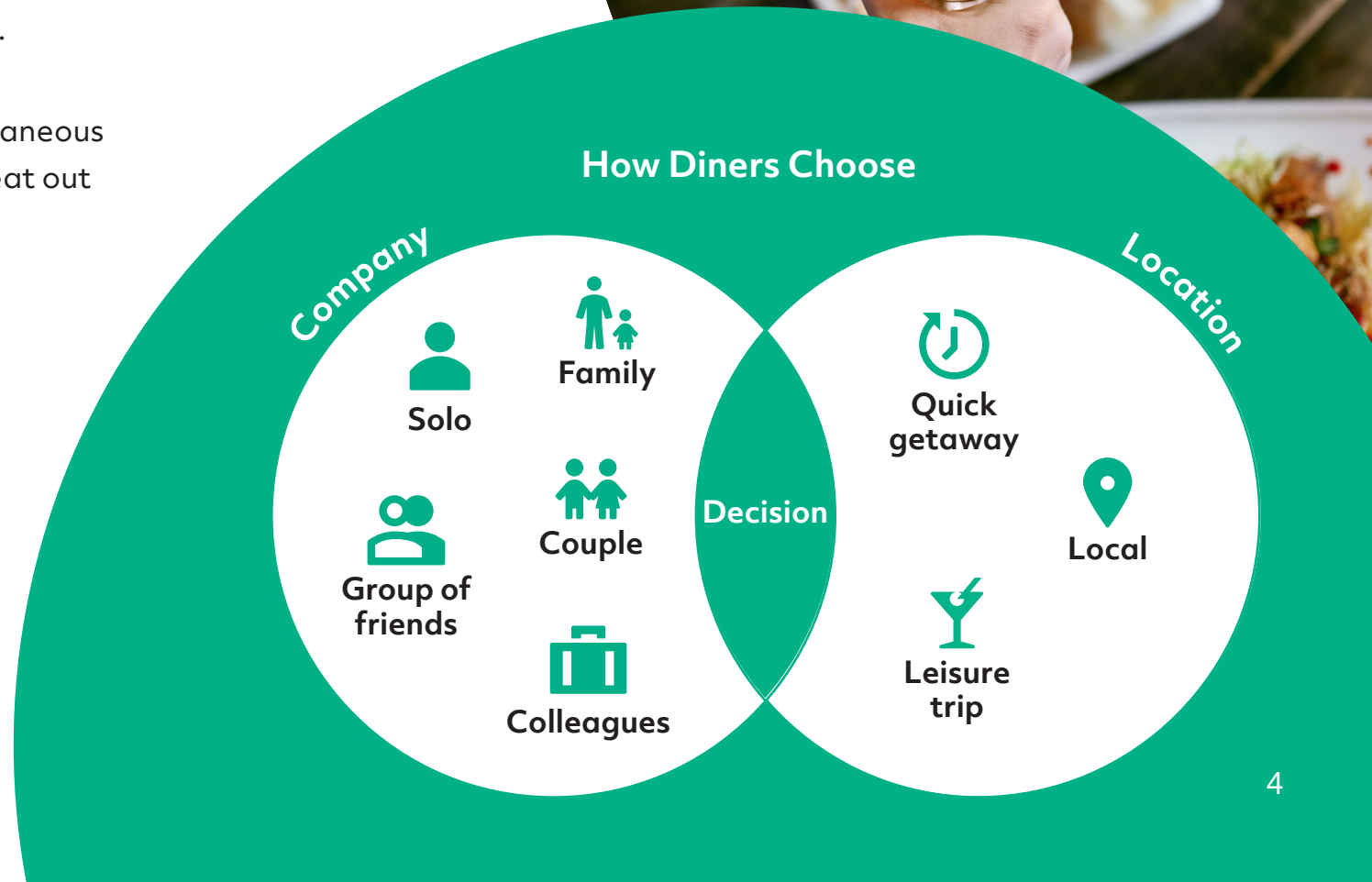


Chapter 1:
**Choosing a
Place to Eat
Differs Based
on Context**

Why diners choose a particular restaurant depends on the reason they're going out in the first place, including whether they're alone or in a group of friends or family. The same person may go out for beers with their friends at a local pub on Friday and pick an upscale Italian restaurant with a date on Sunday.

Diners look for different things in a restaurant based on their specific circumstance. Eating alone as a business traveler looks very different from taking extended family out for a birthday celebration. So it's no surprise that these different scenarios imply different ways diners choose where they're going to go.

Increasingly, dining out is a spontaneous event. Often, a diner decides to eat out the same day or while on-the-go. Particularly when it comes to travel, a diner may plan their flights, hotels, and activities, but choose their dining more spontaneously.



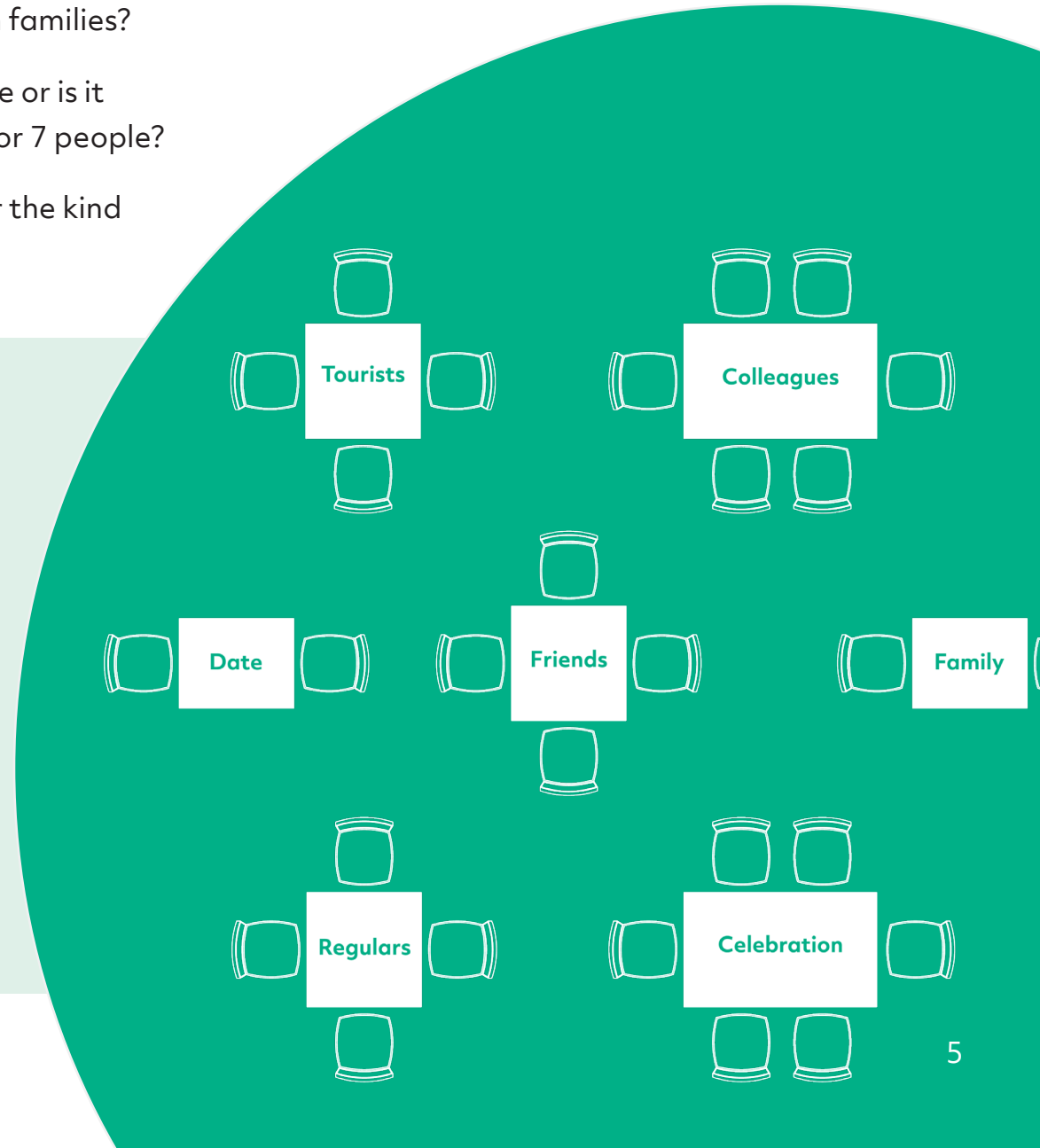
Ask yourself:

- What kind of person comes to your restaurant?
- Is your place a local college hangout or packed with families?
- Are people mostly making reservations to dine alone or is it a place with lots of tables for larger parties of 5, 6, or 7 people?
- Is your place a planned, special occasion location or the kind of place with lots of casual walk-ins?

Action: Observe Your Guests

Chances are you already have an idea of what your restaurant is about. Spend a day as if you were a wildlife observer at your restaurant — count your table distributions and make notes on exactly who is coming into your restaurant during each shift.

The good news is there are decision-making similarities across experiences, regardless of if someone is dining alone or with others or if they are traveling or are dining locally.



Dining Alone

When going it alone, diners choosing where they want to eat aren't as influenced by friends or other people around them. In fact, **56% of people dining alone say they're influenced by a site like TripAdvisor.**

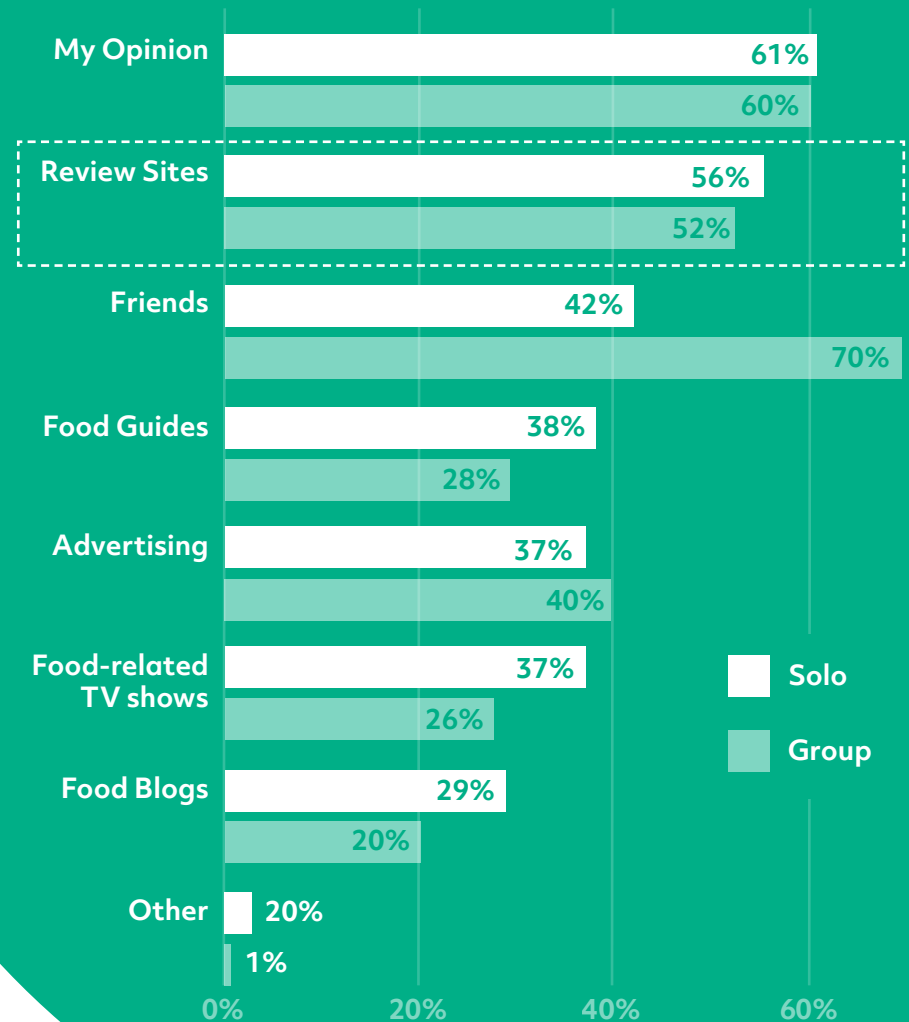
Dining Together


When a group gets together, it's no surprise that group dynamics influence where they go out to eat. **77% of our group dining respondents reported that their friends had the greatest influence on their dining decision**, adding a layer of consensus on top of the usual research online.

Whether people are alone or in a group influences other aspects of the restaurant selection process and we'll explore those further in upcoming chapters.

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Main Dining Decision Factors When Traveling

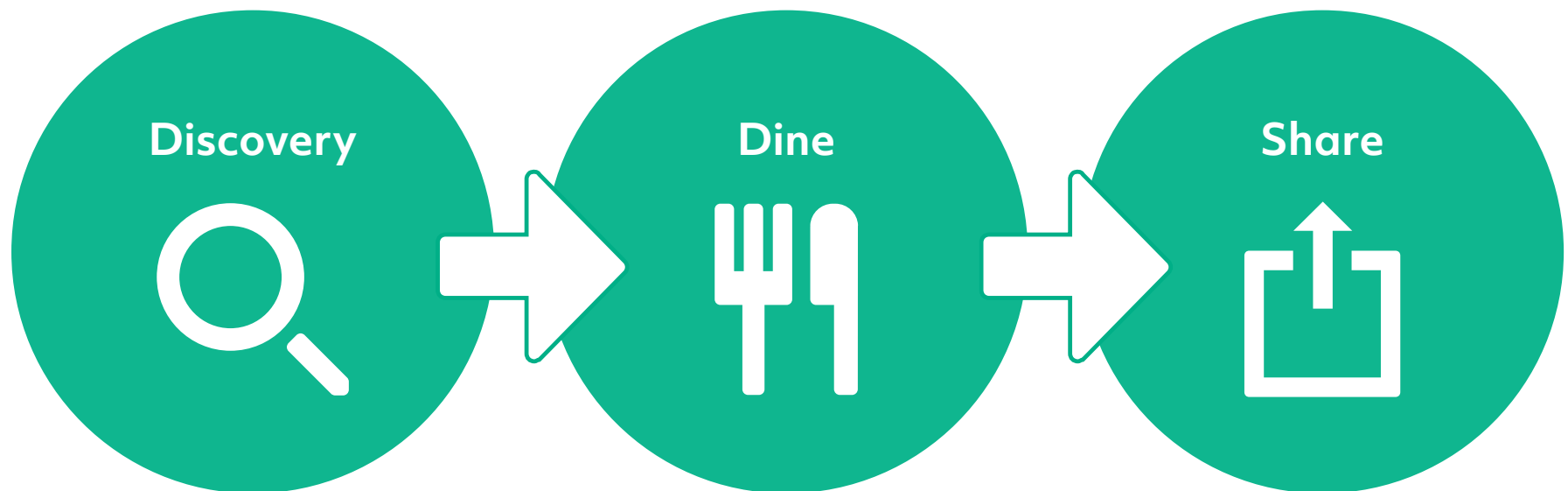




Chapter 2:
**Every Stage
of the Dining
Experience
is Social**



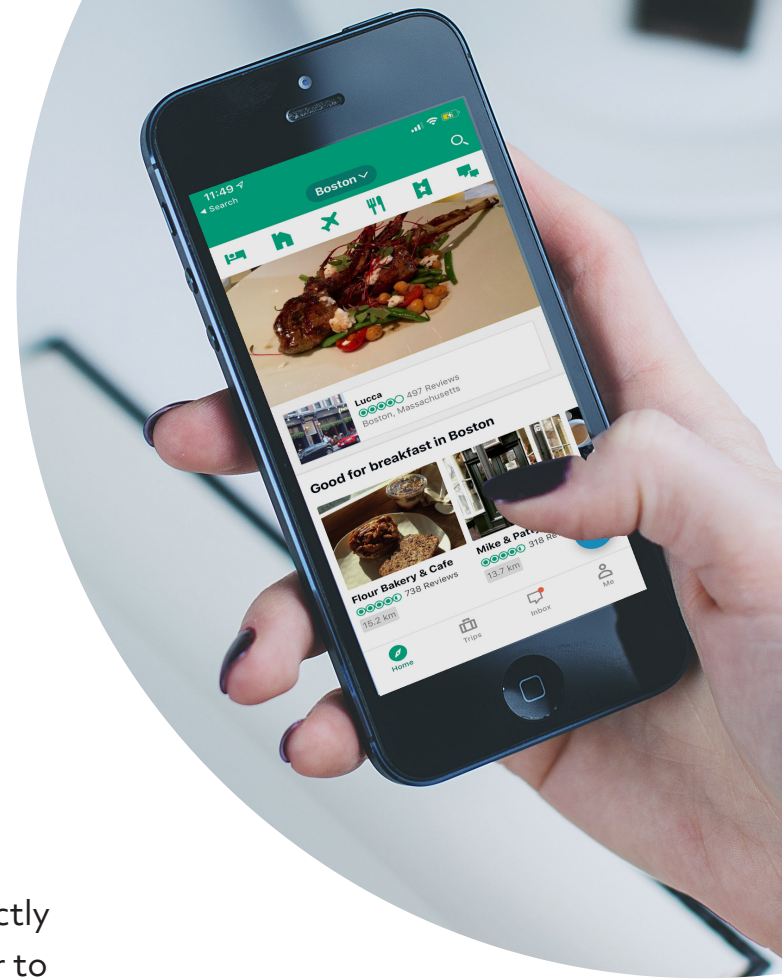
All stages of the dining experience are social from discovery, to dining, to sharing on social media.
Going out to eat revolves around social connection.



Discovery

When potential diners are trying to decide where they're going to eat, they consult many resources — often within the same search — including friends, review sites like TripAdvisor, and food media. What do these all have in common? **Since diners have limited time and money to spend on any given experience, they want to make it count. And they often use multiple sources of information to validate their selection.**

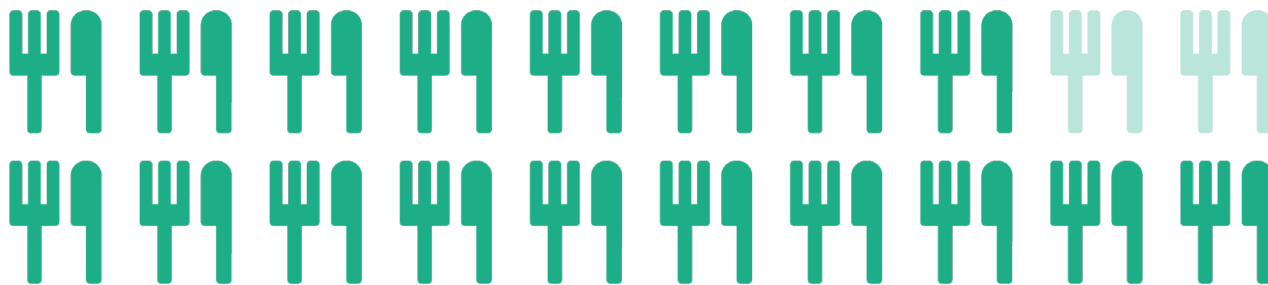
More consumers than ever trust online review sites and social media for recommendations on where to eat both at home and while traveling.



Overall, Diners Trust TripAdvisor

In the U.S., 90% of respondents to a recent survey told us that TripAdvisor directly influences their decision-making process. 78% of respondents used TripAdvisor to research restaurants at home, and a whopping 93% used TripAdvisor to research restaurants while traveling.

90%



Influences on Diner Decision-Making, June 2018

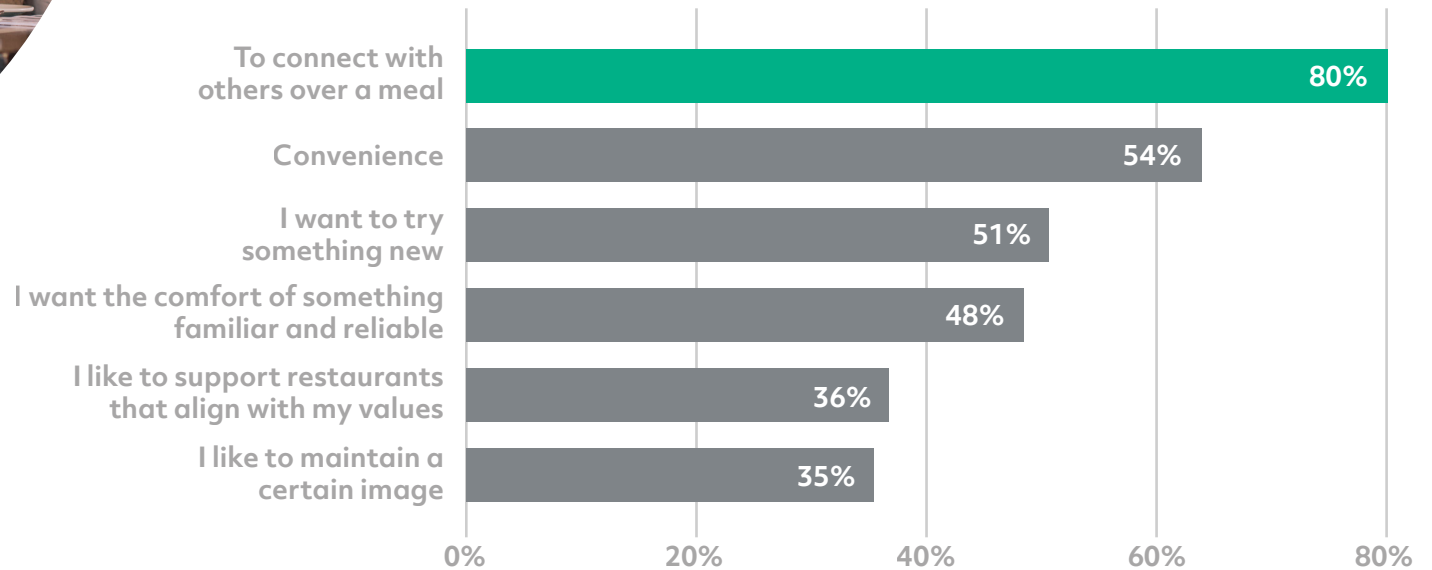


Dining is a Social Opportunity

One of the main reasons people dine out is to connect with other people

People enjoy connecting with others over a meal, both locally and when travelling. This could be with family, with a friend, or with a group.

Why Do You Dine Out?

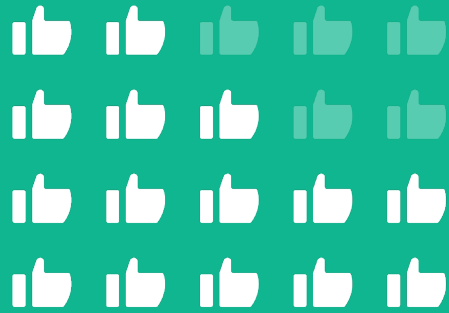


Action Item: Focus On Fostering Human Connection

Think back on what you observed about your guests from page 5. Does your typical diner need quiet and private ambiance or are they seeking a high-energy place to mingle?


When you design your experience, think about the ways the space can either connect or separate your diners. Your setting, atmosphere, technology, and noise level can all impact whether or not diners can enjoy being with their dining companions.


74% of those dining with one other person on a leisure trip shared their experiences on social media



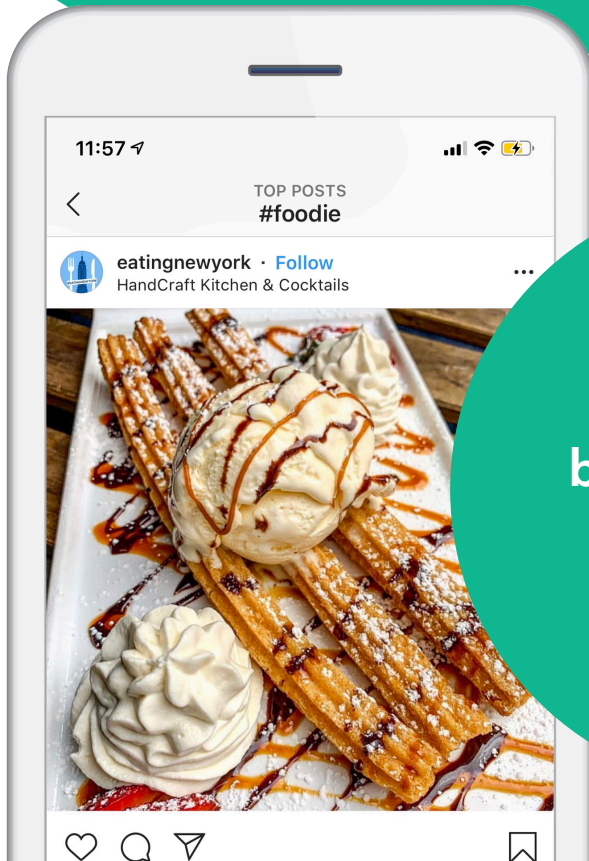
Connecting isn't just limited to in-person

Most people—74%—share some aspect of their dining experience on social media, especially on Facebook and Instagram.

 Larger groups of diners are even more likely to share, with 90% posting to Facebook.

 Instagram came in a close second at around 50%.

When someone shares their dining experience on social media, they're creating a virtual connection with people in their network. The good news for restaurants? **Encouraging social media sharing means free marketing.**



“Some places I want to visit because I want to Instagram a particular food item.”

A neon sign in a restaurant with the text "Just be yourself, everyone else is taken!". The sign is mounted on a wooden wall and is illuminated with a blue light. The background shows a restaurant interior with wooden walls and a window.

Action: Get Social

Make your restaurant social-media friendly by adding your social media handles or hashtags to your menu or building share-worthy experiences in your cuisine. Think about the subtle ways that show off your restaurant's personality, like:

- A checkholder that's an old library book
- An eye-catching wall mural or neon sign
- Creating a colorful tablescape
- Building aesthetically pleasing mise-en-place, even if it's not "fine dining"
- Incorporating live entertainment into your experience

It's not about making your restaurant unique or different — you already are. It's about showcasing who you are in a way that lends itself to today's culture of online sharing. And the small creative touches can drive serious online momentum.

"If something is out of the ordinary, I would definitely want to share that on social media"

Your Online Reviews

It's a common myth in the hospitality industry that diners only share negative experiences when they write online reviews. But more often than not, diners write reviews to share their positive experiences.



Of consumers reported that they wrote a review in the past year because they wanted to share a **good experience** they had in a restaurant



Of consumers report the expectations set in reviews are consistent with their actual experience

When it comes to online reviews, responding to them can make a big difference.

88% of TripAdvisor users are more likely to visit a restaurant that responds to reviews.

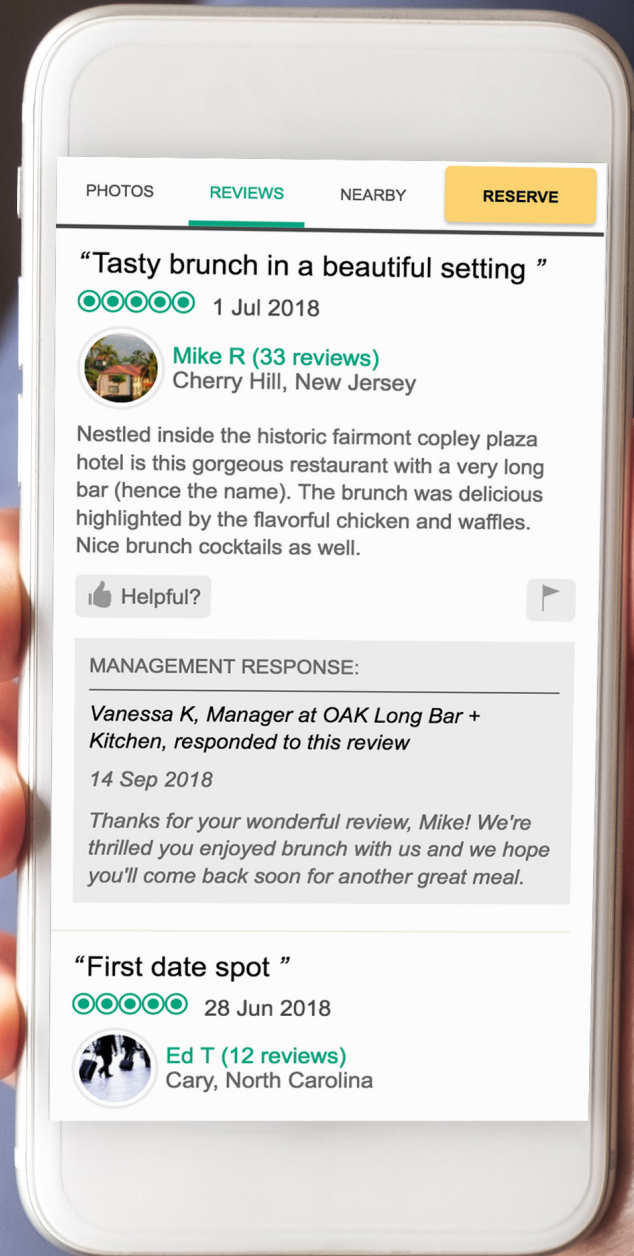
Responding to both positive and negative diner reviews can ultimately help you attract new diners. Travelers take management replies very seriously. In fact, 65% of TripAdvisor users agreed that a management response to a negative review improves their perception of the property.



88%

TripAdvisor users who read Management Responses

Influences on Diner Decision-Making, June 2018



Anatomy of a Great Response

“Thank you for sharing your feedback. I’m so glad you enjoyed our laid back atmosphere. As a proud member of the community we believe in a farm-to-table menu full of local and seasonal ingredients. I’m sorry the meal wasn’t seasoned properly. I will address that personally with the chef. Thank you again for your feedback and we hope you’ll give us another chance.”

A great Management Response...

- .. starts with a thank you
- .. shows diners you’re listening
- .. uses keywords
- .. is positive
- .. is human
- .. invites them back

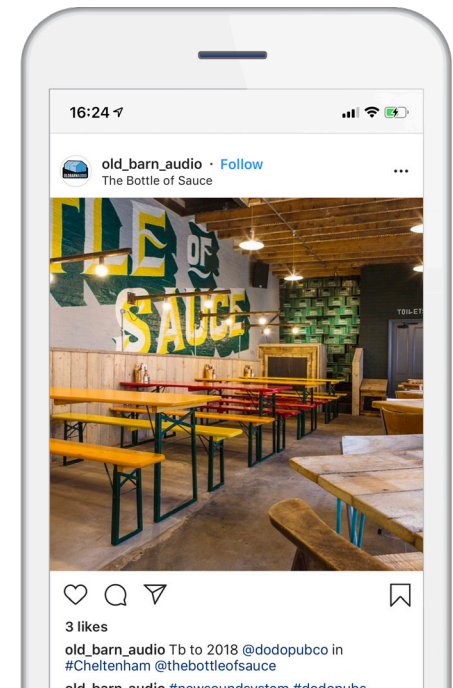
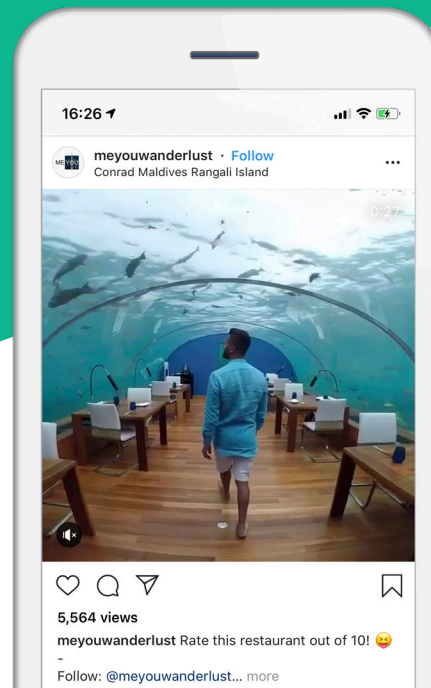
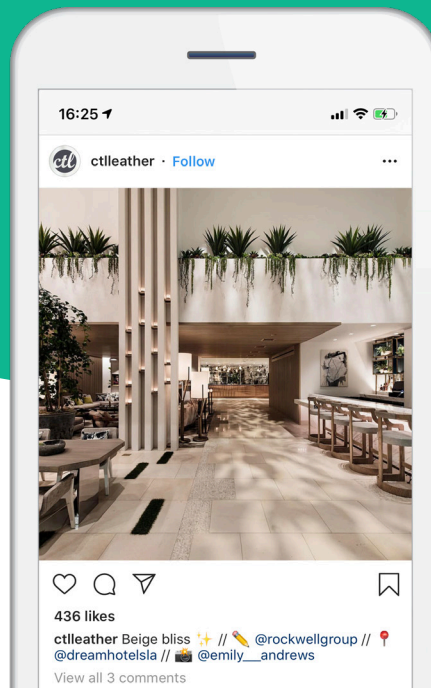
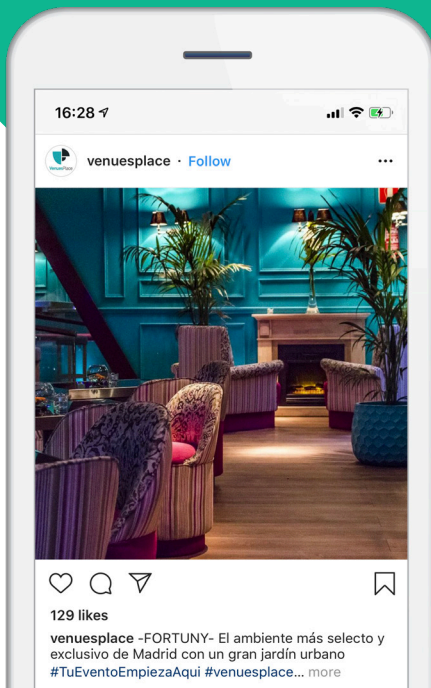
Action: Show diners you care about their experience by responding to reviews.

- Commit to listening. You won’t be able to make changes for the better if you don’t know what feedback you’re receiving in the first place.
- Don’t fear the feedback. It will only help you operate more smoothly.
- Track your trends so you know what you’re doing really well on and what could use improvement.





Diners want memorable and shareable dining and drinking experiences.

As a restaurateur, you know that the food is only one very important piece of the puzzle when it comes to running your restaurant. How your restaurant makes diners feel—whether they're celebrating a big event, having their first date, or just relaxing after a long week of work—defines how your guests remember your restaurant and whether they would recommend you to others.

What defines memorable and shareable? An experience that stimulates all the senses, not just taste. While great food remains the backbone of any restaurant, you should also engage sight, sound, smell, and touch from start to finish as a diner walks in.



Action: Work On Designing Your Restaurant Experience To Engage All 5 Senses, Not Just Taste.

-  **Sight:** How does your restaurant look to a diner? Beyond general cleanliness, is it engaging to the eye? Think about your lighting, your tablescapes, and your overall decor. Your lighting plays a huge role here — whether it's an intimate atmosphere or cheery and well-lit. You'll also want to make sure your design elements — signage, menus, and so on — are aesthetically pleasing and have font sizes large enough to read.
-  **Sound:** Have you thought about how noise is distributed throughout your restaurant? According to Zagat, 24% of diners cite excessive noise as their number one complaint. Investing in ways to help diners hear each other or in a musical background that matches your brand will differentiate you from the competition.
-  **Smell:** Have you ever walked by a bakery, smelled a fresh croissant, and stopped everything to walk in? Scent plays a huge role in dining choices. Choose which smells you want to combat and which ones you want to use to make diners' mouth water.
-  **Feel:** The overall feeling of being in your restaurant — is the space airy and open or cozy? This is also where food presentation comes into play. When you choose your table linens, servingware, and seating fabrics, think about how they'll feel to someone dining at your restaurant.

Use the other four senses to elevate taste to another level, not overpower it. Each decision you make should complement your cuisine and tie back to your restaurant's brand.



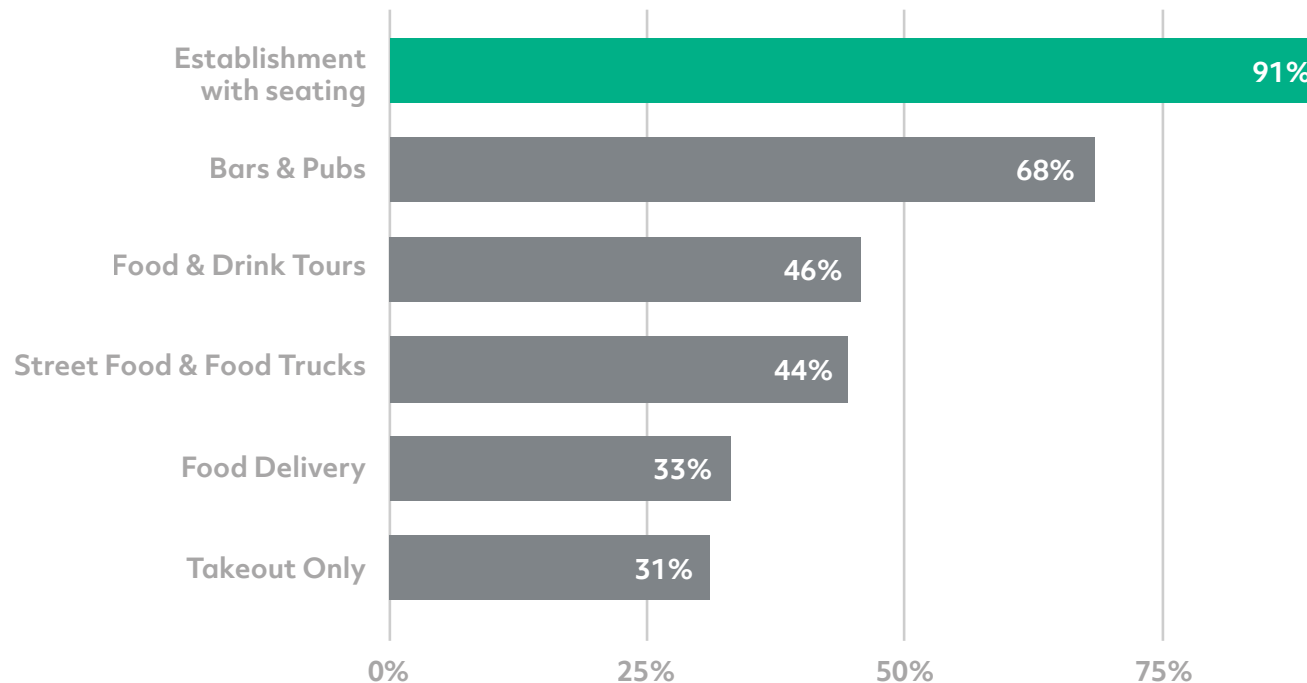
“They brought us to a beautiful table, we had an incredible meal.”



“It's the quality of the experience that matters.”

These experiences aren't just limited to a traditional restaurant format. Those in search of a good meal are willing to push the boundaries on what defines a restaurant - whether that's a street cart, food truck, or a food tour.

Whether diners are locals or travelers, a dine-in restaurant experience still leads in preference but alternate dining experiences are gaining in popularity.



Action: Expand Your Brand

Think about how you can expand your brand by opening up different experiences in your restaurant. Experiment with chef's tables, wine pairing dinners, market tours and cooking classes, specialty dinners or taking your concept mobile with a food truck.

But it doesn't have to be over-the-top


An awesome experience doesn't have to be a flashy menu item, avant garde installation, or even delivery for your restaurant. It comes down to the hospitality you offer.

Take Eventide Fenway, a fast-casual seafood restaurant. John Myers' number one goal is to deliver food to the customer as fast and seamlessly as possible. So rather than yelling name after name after name, servers ask for a phone number for the table as guests sit down, who then receive a text when their order is ready. This allows Eventide to maintain a quiet, relaxing atmosphere without sacrificing speed. It's unexpected and delightful to have that atmosphere in a restaurant that is traditionally so loud—and it's something they couldn't have done five years ago.

Action: Make Memories

When it comes to driving traffic to your business, think about what memories you hope to create, not just the food you offer.





Chapter 3:
**Values and
Public Image
are More
Important Than
You'd Think**

Our study showed values and public image proved more important to diners than we had suspected. When diners go out to eat, they're looking for a restaurant that shares their values—for instance, a family-run restaurant or one that only uses local suppliers.

This is really two sides of the same coin. Diners choose restaurants based on their own identity — “I’m adventurous, so I want to try that new place,” — but diners also make conscious choices based on how they think their choices will be perceived by others. Does their choices of restaurant support how they want others to perceive them?



More than 1/3rd of those dining with a group locally considered their values and public image important when deciding a place to eat





“I am always trying to eat healthier and more naturally”

Example: 2018 Trend Sustainable Menu Items

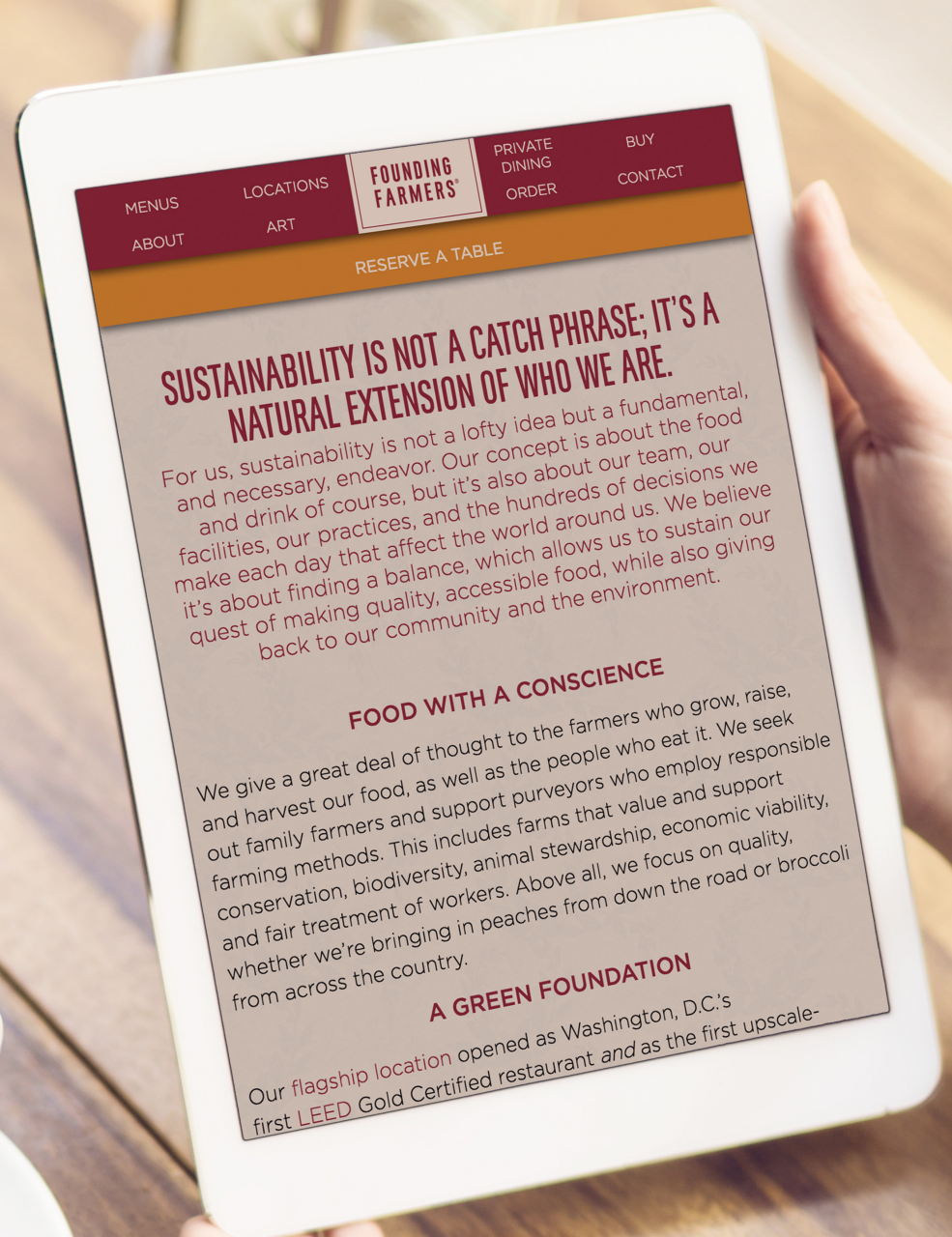
One of the biggest trends we’re seeing this year goes beyond healthy food and farm-to-table. With consumer motivation toward more responsible and sustainable choices, we see an emphasis on new food sources (like the Impossible Burger) and reduced food waste. This is an opportunity for restaurants to share their like-minded commitments to sustainability with consumers.


Action: Know Your Brand

Every restaurant is different, and yours is no exception. What makes yours stand out from your competitors' down the street? Clearly articulating who you are and what differentiates you may strongly influence diners' value-based decisions. Send a clear message by creating a differentiated mission statement for your restaurant and sharing it on social media.

Action: Update Your Business Categories on TripAdvisor

Make sure your business details like which meals you serve and what amenities you offer - are listed on TripAdvisor. Then, choose the top 5 cuisine categories that best describe your menu by selecting "Cuisines and Amenities" under the "Manage Listing" tab in the Management Center. Haven't yet claimed your listing? Visit TripAdvisor.com/Owners.

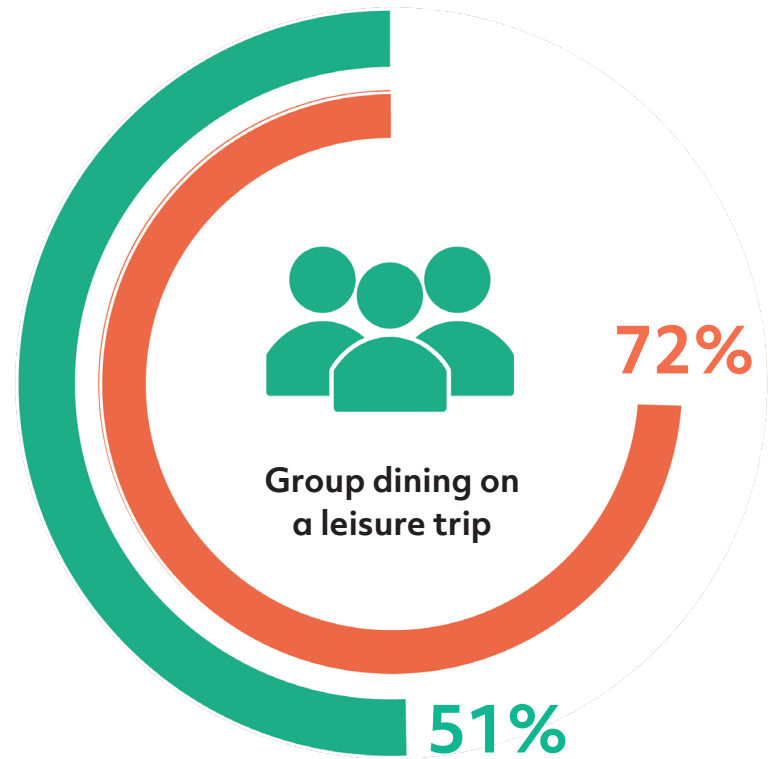
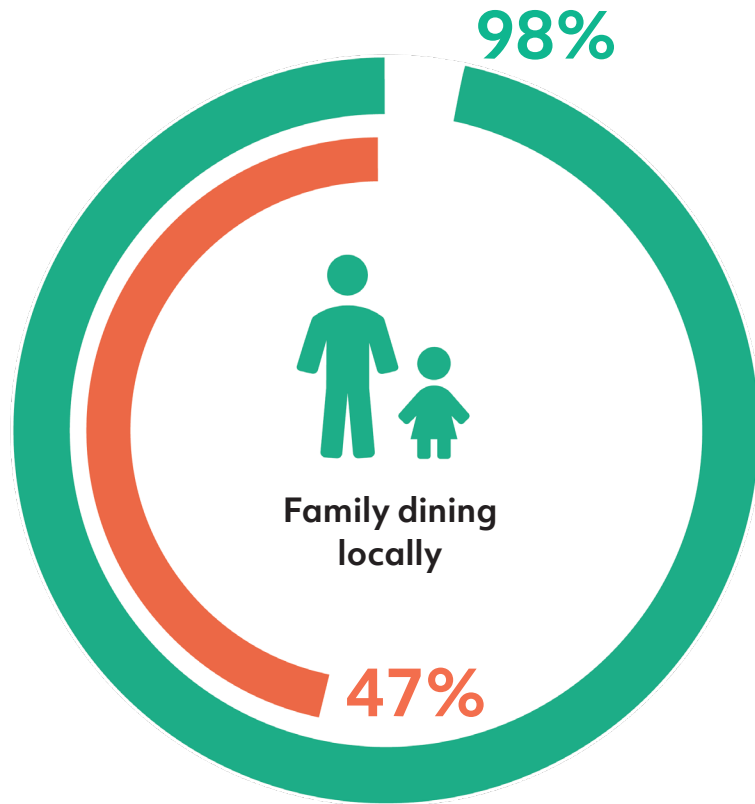




Chapter 4:
**Diners Crave
the New and
the Familiar,
but at Different
Times**

Travelers and Locals Approach “the New” Differently

Whether diners are looking for something new and innovative or something tried-and-true is heavily influenced by their dining companions and location.



 Familiar food experience

 New food experience

Travelers Look for the New and Different

By its very nature travel is an adventure, so people tend to splurge and try new things. It's an opportunity to step out of a comfort zone and try something unusual or trendy.

“New” doesn't necessarily mean brand new — often, it's local cuisine they may not have experienced before. Travelers want to immerse themselves in local culture as much as possible, and food is one of the primary ways they can do that. Whether it's having the perfect barbecue in Austin, duck confit in Paris, or sushi in Tokyo, travelers seek out iconic local dishes to help complete their experience.

“I would go out of my way to find something local.”





Action: Emphasize Your Cuisine

If you draw in a lot of tourists to your restaurant, make sure you emphasize what makes your cuisine truly local and authentic when you market to concierges, in travel brochures, or on TripAdvisor. You might even mark local favorites on the menu to showcase your can't miss interpretations of your hometown cuisine.

Some travelers may not know which dishes are popular in your area. Consider training your servers to ask if your diners are from out-of-town and pointing them in the direction of your best local dishes.

**"I want a vibe
of what the culture
is really like."**

Locals Look for Convenience and Familiarity

For locals, convenience and familiarity are important. They're less likely to be looking for a surprise and are looking for a reliably good experience. When it comes to locals, the "new" means something trending, not necessarily something wildly different from what they're used to on a regular basis.

This is where your online presence makes a difference — for diners trying to find a new spot, understanding exactly what you offer allows them to feel more secure in their decision.

Capture Diner's Attention

Looking for new diners? Online advertising is a great way to grab their attention. TripAdvisor Ads gets restaurants in front of diners who are ready to pick their next great place to eat. Read more about TripAdvisor Ads at [TripAdvisor.com/Restaurant_Ads](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Ads)



Conclusion





When diners choose to go out to eat, they're not just looking to fill their stomachs. They're looking for memorable, shareable experiences. The way your restaurant makes someone feel, from the moment they discover it online to when they walk out your door, matters. That means it's no longer just about great food, but the overall experience your restaurant offers - including the mood set by your online presence.

Solutions from TripAdvisor

Most restaurateurs admit they spend less than 10% of their time on marketing with 71% admitting they should do more to promote their business.

It's a lot to think about — but we're here to help. We know that no one got into the restaurant business because they love marketing.



Build Your Brand

We help restaurants tell their story on one of the world's largest restaurant sites by managing business details, posting pictures, and responding to reviews, all for free.



Fill More Tables

Showcase what makes your restaurant special with TripAdvisor Premium's page-enhancing features — spotlighting Favorite Reviews, choosing Top 3 Reasons why diners love you, and creating an eye-catching Storyboard to influence dining decisions.



Reach New Diners

Every month, over 200 million diners come to TripAdvisor to search for their next meal. TripAdvisor Ads make it easy to capture the attention of diners already in the area — and send them directly to your restaurant's listing page.

Claim your listing today at [TripAdvisor.com/Owners](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Owners)

Methodology

The research effort started with 20 interviews in the Boston area during October 2017. These findings informed the design of a survey, completed by 420 respondents across the United States during November 2017. The survey had a sample size of 420 respondents, and is therefore statistically significant (95% confidence level with a 4.78% margin of error).