

The Dos and Don'ts of Dining Out

By Mikayla Stock

Have you ever wondered if you're making the most of your restaurant experience? After a long week of mass-produced food in crowded spaces with your peers, you may be anxious to escape Cornell's dining scene and explore the offerings of Ithaca's restaurants. When looking to the future, there is a whole new set of considerations that come with knowing we will eventually have to navigate a world where we aren't constantly swiping IDs and spending BRBs like they're fake money.

College is the perfect time to refine your knowledge of extracting the most value from your restaurant outings, gain awareness of the industry's nastiest nuances, and learn how to be a kinder diner.

Whether you're a seasoned restaurant goer or a complete novice, there are many subtleties to note. So, without further ado and in honor of the times when we choose to brave the TCAT to explore Ithaca's eateries (with some help from those who know the industry far better than I do), I am here to bestow upon you my unofficial guide to the dos and don'ts of eating out.

DOS

Adam Monteverde, CIA alum, Chef/Owner of APizza!, and my very own brother, makes the following recommendations for diners:

1. "I always like to start with the chicken entree for my first time at a new [...] restaurant. Really gives you a great window into what the kitchen is capable of, considering that chicken is such a humble ingredient."

2. "Depending on the level of [the establishment], or when it's appropriate, I'll ask the server what to try at that restaurant, always going with the first answer. You can do this with almost every course of your meal."

3. "Tip well if it's allowed."

On another note, I have a few tips of my own:

4. **Do be wary of clams, mussels, oysters, etc.** Even if the quality is top notch, a bad one could be lurking in the bunch.

5. **Do call ahead if you can't make a reservation. Don't show up late expecting your table.** A lost table can mean lost profits when you consider the restaurant's costs that won't be covered if the table remains empty because you no-showed. Communicating any changes in your arrival is essential.

6. **Do always be kind to staff members.** Don't be rude or entitled. Working in a service industry is no walk in the park.

7. **Do be open to trying new things.** The culinary experience is one for the senses, so take it all in.

8. **Do check the cleanliness of the bathroom.** If a restaurant isn't taking proper care of one of the less desirable areas of the establishment, then I don't even want to know what's happening in the back-of-the house.

DON'TS

The beloved Anthony Bourdain made some important points in his article for The New Yorker, "Don't Eat Before Reading This." Here are some highlights:

1. **Don't order fish on Mondays.** Assuming the chef orders fish for Friday morning, most purveyors don't deliver on Saturdays. As Anthony put it, "the chances are that the Monday-night tuna you want has been kicking around in the kitchen since Friday morning, under God knows what conditions." Scrumptious.

2. **Don't order your steak well-done** unless you want the potential of getting the "particularly unlovely piece of steak—tough, riddled with nerve and connective tissue, off the hip end of the loin, and maybe a little stinky from age." Yum.

3. **Avoid the hollandaise sauce.** According to Anthony, eggs benedict is not a favorite to prepare amongst chefs, so the sauce may not be as good for consumption as you would like.

And some tips I've gathered:

4. **Avoid ordering featured items.** These dishes may contain ingredients that the kitchen is trying to sell while they're still edible.

5. **Don't fret over brand name alcohol when ordering drinks.** As Crème's wonderful VP Grace Wilkey reminded me, the house tequila is just fine.

6. **Maybe don't put that lemon in your water.** Why, you ask? It could be that the lemon has been sitting out unwashed for days without refrigeration. Or perhaps I'm just an anxious gal who took her mom's advice on lemon water to an unhealthy level.

7. **Avoid the bar snacks.** Snacks sitting out all night that everyone and their mother has been putting their grubby fingers on sound delicious. Not.

8. **Perhaps you should avoid that bread basket, too.** Debra Ginsburg, author of Waiting: The True Confessions of a Waitress, claims that bread baskets tend to make their rounds from table-to-table. Still want to grab a piece?

So there you go! I give you all of my deepest, darkest secrets to use to your advantage (you're welcome). Keep them in mind the next time you eat out, or feel free to disregard them entirely. Whatever you choose to do, I wish you the best on all of your culinary adventures.

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