

Safe Bets

The deal on the
*20 best casino
restaurants*
from Atlantic City
to Bethlehem

Remember when casino dining meant standing in line at the buffet or sitting at a table inside a dated steakhouse? Thankfully, those days are long gone and today's restaurant options have grown leaps and bounds. Whether backed by celebrity chefs or local notables, casinos today are gambling on giving their customers unparalleled fine dining experiences, and lately they've been hitting the jackpot. Here, we present the 20 best places to pull up a chair, and we've outlined the dishes you should be ordering no matter if you are on a lucky streak or just down on your luck.

by *Erica Bauwens and Peter Proko*

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WHAT'S NEW

The biggest news in Atlantic City is that six casinos have been approved for online gaming as New Jersey becomes the third state, after Nevada and Delaware, to allow for Internet gambling.

The Borgata, Bally's, Caesars, Tropicana, Trump Plaza and Trump Taj Mahal have all received the green light for the online venture, with Golden Nugget said to soon follow. The sites are currently open to the public, but use geolocation technology, meaning players need not be from New Jersey to gamble, but they must be located inside the state's borders in order to register and gain proper access to play games.



The Golden Nugget unveiled a high-limit slot lounge. Featuring wider seats, private

restrooms and a jackpot to credit meter function, helping to avoid interruption of play on jackpots.

Also, at the Golden Nugget, the Grotto now offers a family-style menu and half-price bottles of wine on Sundays.

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AMADA | SPANISH TAPAS REVEL

Chef Jose Garces certainly has the Midas touch. Having already built a successful restaurant empire in Philadelphia, the Chicago native is known for small plates and big fanfare. This second installment of his flagship tapas house at Revel offers virtually the same stellar menu as its city counterpart, but that's where the similarities end. An open dining room highlighted by floor-to-ceiling windows showcasing the Atlantic Ocean lets you know exactly where you are while you're dining on artistically crafted plates like the *revuelto* (soft scrambled eggs with shrimp and wild mushrooms), bacon-wrapped dates with almonds and La Peral cheese.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** Order the roasted suckling pig with all the fixings. It needs to be ordered 48 hours in advance and costs anywhere from \$225 to \$450, but it's a feast you won't soon forget.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** Order the *foie gras*, which is seared and served with orange *crema* and brioche French toast. It's a sinfully rich menu option that tastes more expensive than it actually is.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** The Broken Hugs mixes tequila, chile, basil and grapefruit for a citrusy, spicy cocktail that truly is the sum of its parts.

♠ **JUST DESSERTS:** Make sure you save room for the olive oil cake with plums and pistachios served with a dollop of honey and cinnamon ice cream.

VIC & ANTHONY'S | STEAKHOUSE GOLDEN NUGGET

With steel grey and deep red accents at every turn, the dining room in Vic & Anthony's might look modern, but the menu presents classic steakhouse fare. From appetizers like Petrossian caviar and a shellfish tower to dishes like the veal chop Milanese and shrimp scampi, you'll find plates that might have been served up to the notorious gangster of the A.C. Boardwalk decades ago. Only at Vic & Anthony's, these dishes are anything but ordinary. That's because this Golden Nugget staple has redefined luxury, using only the best ingredients to create the ultimate Atlantic City experience.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** A 12 oz. filet mignon will get you your money's worth of top-quality beef. Then add on some additional toppings, like jumbo lump crab, for an indulgent reward of a meal.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** Steak tartare is one of their most mouthwatering appetizers, featuring traditionally prepared tartare with lattice-cut potato chips, cornichons and whole grain mustard.

AMERICAN CUT | STEAKHOUSE REVEL

This sleek dining room of dark woods and warm colors on the lower tier of Revel is where you'll find chef Marc Forgione's signature approach to fine dining with a twist of vintage meat and potatoes flair. The steaks come dry aged, wet aged and in the form of velvety *wagyu* beef. The bone marrow with escargot and the cornflake crab cake show Forgione's playful yet serious side, while the well-executed halibut *en croute* shows that he is also technically proficient.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** The Tajima *Wagyu* is a 10-ounce strip steak that comes from Japanese cattle and costs more than \$100. It's worth every penny. You can also get it raw for half the price, an experience all its own.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** The OG 1924 Hotel Caesar Salad is a trip back in time to when waiters making salads tableside was the standard. The theatrics of it all will make your table the center of attention.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** The Mary is Crazy cocktail features chef Forgione's signature bloody mix along with Belvedere vodka and stuffed olives.

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♣ **JUST DESSERTS:** The A.C. Carbomb is a clever concoction boasting chocolate bread pudding with bananas that have been brûléed in Irish whiskey and butterscotch and made complete with Guinness ice cream.

ROBERT'S STEAKHOUSE |

STEAKHOUSE
TRUMP TAJ MAHAL

After just one year at the Trump Taj Mahal, Robert's Steakhouse and head chef Will Savarese are already enjoying some Atlantic City celebrity. Savarese, the CIA graduate who left behind the hot kitchens of New York City for the Jersey Shore, is specializing in big juicy cuts of beef and accompanying sauces, and sides that have made the steakhouse experience a quintessential part of American dining. But don't neglect the rest of Robert's menu, which is packed with proteins like chicken and lamb and plenty of fish and shellfish options to please any palate.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** Go for the gold; the Gold Label Kobe New York strip, that is. If you can spring for the \$140 selling price, you'll get the juiciest, finest quality cut in the world.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** You don't need to be losing to opt for the Robert's burger, which uses prime beef and comes topped with smoked paprika and served with hand-cut fries.

♥ **JUST DESSERTS:** Robert's grandma's rice pudding is nothing like the gluey chunky mess we're used to. This creamy re-creation goes to the next level with passion fruit and pears poached in Earl Grey tea.

MIA | ITALIAN
CAESARS

Afar from the escalators ushering you into Caesars stands Mia, a stoic restaurant with Roman columns, long-flowing curtains and carpeted steps leading you into the dining room. Philly's own Chris Scarduzio mixes his menu with modern takes on beef and fish along with more traditional Italian favorites like his signature cavatelli. Order any of the pastas as an appetizer to save room for the more accomplished entrées like the bronzino cooked in a caper and olive brown butter sauce and served with heirloom cherry tomatoes.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** The pizza *tartufo* is more than just a pizza, thanks to ingredients that include fresh truffles, lobster and melted *foie gras* atop forest mushrooms and reggiano Parmesan.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** Chicken parm may sound ordinary, but thanks to a sweet, tangy San Marzano tomato sauce, creamy fresh mozzarella and the bitter bite of broccoli rabe, it's anything but.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** The self-named Mia-Tini blends

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Robert's Steakhouse in the Taj Mahal, chosen as one of our 20 best casino restaurants, introduced a three-course prix fixe menu for \$49.95, available Monday through Wednesday.

Relish, the casual 24-hour café that doubled in size when it replaced Michel Richard Central restaurant at Revel earlier this year, introduced a new menu, which includes bites for the kids.

SugarHouse Casino is investing \$6 million in a property-wide refresh and renovation that is planned for completion by year's end. Inside the casino's restaurant,

The Refinery, an acoustical wall is being added to better separate the performance area from the casino gaming space during live music performances, and to improve the gaming experience for nearby players. Outside the casino, SugarHouse's riverfront deck is being widened to accommodate a larger, enclosed high-limit lounge, in addition to a new bar and lounge.

vodka, triple sec, sour mix and the unexpected star, limoncello, for an Italian take on the classic cocktail.

♣ **JUST DESSERTS:** Think of the cannoli napoleon as a deconstructed take on the classic Italian dessert. Here, the filling is separated by wafers and comes with pistachio and chocolate, and is garnished with candied citrus peels.



CHART HOUSE | SEAFOOD GOLDEN NUGGET

The view from this dining room is really hard to beat. Located at the Golden Nugget, Chart House juts out into the bay, giving you a look at the marina, with the Atlantic City strip painted across the background. We may come to Chart House for the view, but we stay for the food, which merges seafood plates with an impressive list of steakhouse additions. Menu regulars like miso-glazed salmon wrapped in prosciutto or the 12 oz. prime rib are a good choice, but the extensive selections of fresh fish available day-to-day, cooked in olive oil, blackened or baked, are always worth exploring.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** Tomahawk lamb chops come in thick cuts, marinated then seared for a crispy outside and perfectly cooked middle, before being served with roasted vegetables and potatoes.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** Chart House has perfected an affordable and delectable happy hour menu. Plates ranging from \$5-7 share space with \$4-7 martinis, wines and cocktails.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** The aptly named Chart House Cosmopolitan is the restaurant's signature cocktail, and pays homage to the classic cosmo with vodka, triple sec, fresh lime and cranberry juice.

♣ **JUST DESSERTS:** The super-sized Chart House soufflé is made for sharing between three or four guests. But we

can't help but get a little greedy when it comes to this Grand Marnier treat, topped with your choice of either chocolate or raspberry sauce, or crème anglaise.



AZURE BY ALLEGRETTI | SEAFOOD REVEL

A stunning sea view surrounds you at Revel's Azure, which sits tucked away from the bustling casino floor on the edge of the resort. The wall of windows encompasses the space, giving diners a breathtaking look at the Atlantic Ocean under the stars. And while the view may be jaw-dropping, the dishes coming out of chef Alain Allegretti's kitchen are just as impressive. Specializing in seafood, Allegretti's team draws inspiration from New American and French Riviera cuisine, with dishes like whole roasted Mediterranean bronzino and pan-seared salmon sitting alongside seasonal and locally caught selections.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** Let chef Allegretti do the work with his "Taste of Azure" tasting menu and wine pairing. The \$75 option includes four of the chef's signature dishes, like braised short ribs and roasted sea bass; then ends with a dessert. Tack on another \$45 for their wine pairing, hand-selected to boost every bite.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** Azure's lobster bisque comes with flambéed crab and lobster meat, sitting in a silky bisque and topped with a tarragon sour cream. It may not be the most expensive item on the menu, but it's one of the most indulgent.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** Brace yourself for the Sidecar Sesqui-centennial, a \$55 concoction featuring Grand Marnier 150, and a hint of lemon juice and orange curacao.

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tion to a new outdoor terrace adjacent to The Refinery. The expanded deck space will be a full-service, outdoor dining area. The area once occupied by the previous lounge will be converted to additional gaming space for the casino's VIP players, thereby bringing the number of table games at SugarHouse to 60. The renovations will also allow for the introduction of an oversized slot machine known as "Big Bertha." The current renovations precede a \$155 million property expansion now in development.

The Pier Shops at Caesars welcomed some new shops, including Bare Feet Shoes, Karina Boutique and White Lotus. Non-fashion newcomers include Auntie Anne's and Cinnabon.

Valley Forge Casino Resort in King of Prussia recently completed a \$2.8 million renovation of 243 guest rooms at the Radisson hotel, with new carpeting, drapes, finishes and lighting. Another

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SCARDUZIO'S STEAKHOUSE SHOWBOAT

Iver at Showboat, Chris Scarduzio veers from his Italian heritage to create a menu full of quality cuts of beef and expertly rolled sushi. You can nosh on light bites in the lounge, but you'll want to make sure you reserve a table for plates like the mustard-crusted Norwegian salmon or the prime dry-aged Delmonico. The Asian influences on the sushi menu are blatant, but not surprisingly, well executed.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** When you're this close to the sea, you'll want to order the grand shellfish plateau: a towering offering of jumbo lump crab, king crab legs, both lobster and shrimp cocktail, and clams.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** The Asian barbecue chicken wings on the lounge menu are just like the ones you order from your favorite watering hole, except much more flavorful and here they don't serve them with Wetnaps.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** The cucumber and green tea martini is served with gin, muddled green tea, cucumber and fresh ginger.

♣ **JUST DESSERTS:** You could probably skip dinner altogether to get to the waffles and ice cream—waffles topped with pistachio and caramel ice cream, chocolate sauce, roasted pineapple and bananas.



FIN | SEAFOOD TROPICANA

It always feels like summer at Fin in the Tropicana, where seafood reigns supreme. It's hard to find a better selection of locally caught shellfish anywhere else in Atlantic City. Pair that with a sprawling list of sushi and sashimi options, and you've got more than your share of small plates that pack serious flavor. The warm gold and bright blue colors that fill the space will make you feel like you're in the Mediterranean, but if you're feeling homesick mid-meal, just look out to Fin's magnificent view of the ocean. Or head out to their heated outdoor cigar bar—which offers specialty cigars from across the world—for some fresh salt air.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** The three-tier shellfish tower

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Fin
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gives you a full taste of Fin's bounty, featuring clams, oysters, Alaskan King crab, snow crab, colossal lump crab meat and one whole lobster.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** Stay local with a Jersey flounder Po Boy. The fried fish sandwich comes on toasted French bread with Cajun remoulade and fresh lettuce and tomato, along with a pile of handcut "Fin" fries.

♥ **JUST DESSERTS:** The banana chocolate torte comes with caramelized bananas and vanilla bean ice cream, a luxurious and rich ending to a great meal.



IL VERDI | ITALIAN TROPICANA

Tropicana's Il Verdi takes an artful approach to northern Italian cuisine, which has a distinct focus on a few simple ingredients done extraordinarily well. Mediterranean inspiration stands out in the restaurant's heavy selection of seafood and shellfish, while familiar pasta dishes like penne bolognese get an upscale rebirth with handcrafted pasta and top notch accompaniments. This is far from your typical Italian joint, and the Old-World elegance of the dining room, where Italian period paintings dot the elegantly simple walls, allows guests to create their own desired ambience.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** Grab a seat at the chef's table, right in the heart of the kitchen. There you'll receive a seven-course meal customized, with wine pairing, specifically for you.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** You've never had calamari like Il Verdi's, where they toss their squid in chili pepper flour before frying it off and serving it with house-made marinara.

♣ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** Il Verdi was recently awarded the Award of Excellence from *Wine Spectator* magazine; check out their wine list and you'll see why.

♥ **JUST DESSERTS:** The Amaretto cheesecake takes a classic favorite to the next level with the almond liqueur, then ends with fresh berries, chocolate and strawberry sauce and lots of whipped cream.

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recent update—the addition of the Valley VIP zone—transformed the gaming floor to make it more of a destination for higher-limit slot players. Also, Deuces Wild, the resort's country/rock-themed nightclub that recently celebrated its one-year anniversary, added comedy to its repertoire, bringing in national and local talent every Thursday.

Over this summer, Parx Casino in Bensalem added two new dining options: the SangKee Noodle House, an authentic Asian-style noodle bar created by renowned Philadelphia chef Michael Chow; and Earl of Sandwich, an upscale sandwich shop featuring fresh-baked artisan bread, open seven days a week. Also, Parxgrill is now offering specials such as 30 percent off bottles of wine valued at \$75 or more from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, half-off appetizers at the bar every Thursday from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., and a \$35 seasonal prix fixe

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IZAKAYA | JAPANESE BORGATA

Michael Schulson spent time living in Japan so he could perfect the cuisine. Now you don't have to get lucky at the roulette table to strike it rich at the Borgata. The sushi, sashimi and *robatayaki* take center stage, but don't overlook items like the spicy tuna cracker, edamame dumplings or the teriyaki-grilled pork chops. Truth be told, we've sampled almost every dish here and have yet to find one we didn't like.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** The broiled Chilean sea bass comes with clams and udon noodles, but it's the depth of the miso broth that elevates this plate.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** Grab a seat at the sushi bar and drown yourself in sake and the sashimi sampler.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** The sake side car takes the timeless drink and fuses it with Asian flavors.

♣ **JUST DESSERTS:** The tongue-in-cheek crispy rice sushi roll features vanilla ice cream coated in the rice and topped with chocolate chips, peanut butter and toffee.



WOLFGANG PUCK AMERICAN GRILLE | NEW AMERICAN BORGATA

Wolfgang Puck is one of the most well-known celebrity chefs in the world, but finding one of his namesake fine dining restaurants on the East Coast is a difficult task. Puck bypassed Philadelphia and even New York City on his takeover, so we can't help but feel proud to find his New American-inspired eatery in the heart of the Borgata. The space itself is divided into two rooms; the Tavern—an upscale bar setting—and their sophisticated but bustling dining room. Alongside seasonal entrées inspired by locally sourced ingredients, including lots of seafood, you'll find wood-fired pizzas cooked out in the open space of the restaurant in their specialty oven.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** How about a celebratory steak? Wolfgang Puck's got a mesquite-grilled, bone-in New York strip, served with crispy potatoes and drizzled with an armagnac-peppercorn sauce that's built for a winner.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** One of our favorite dishes in the

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—In the Kitchen with— → GEOFFREY ZAKARIAN ←

Interview by Erica Bauwens



You may recognize Iron Chef Geoffrey Zakarian from his time as a judge on *Chopped*, the Food Network's cooking competition that forces chefs to combine mismatched ingredients and create a multi-course meal. But, did you also know that he serves up some wonderful plates at The Sunroom at Borgata's Water Club? He took a break from time in the kitchen to speak with us.

On his approach in the kitchen ... My inspiration really comes from creating the food I believe people like to eat, and I certainly love to eat. It has to have that "yummy" factor.

On the experience of competing for the Iron Chef title ... Shall I say nerve wracking?! But ultimately, you don't get anywhere without taking risks. It was the hardest single hour I ever spent. Incredibly physical. What viewers don't realize is that there are cameras, wires and cables everywhere. It's like an obstacle course that we have to navigate!

The difference between being judged on Iron Chef and being a judge on Chopped ...

They are two different animals. *Chopped* is difficult because the time is so short and the ingredients so silly. Plus you are all alone. On *Iron Chef*, you are competing against your peers and you have help but the creative outcomes have to be exceptionally high.

On opening a line of restaurants on the Norwegian Cruise Line ... I think that people demand a fine-dining product every-

where they go now because food has become a mainstream lifestyle issue that everyone wants more of. Restaurants offer content, to be enjoyed—no different than TV shows or movies.

The holiday dishes he's looking forward to preparing for family ... Chestnut sausage stuffing. And prime rib of beef.

What the future holds ... Hopefully more of the same blessings; I work hard and get up in the morning and go to work. The rest seems to follow. I am a lucky guy.

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Wolfgang Puck American Grille
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restaurant comes from the restaurant's tavern menu. A generous mound of truffle potato chips covered in a creamy Maytag bleu cheese sauce and fresh chives, all for \$11.

♥ **JUST DESSERTS:** The list of sweet endings is pretty extensive, but we put our money on the Hammonton blueberry crumble. It's topped with blueberry compote and blueberry ice cream, all sourced from neighboring Hammonton.

IL MULINO | ITALIAN TRUMP TAJ MAHAL

At Il Mulino, opulent elegance meets Old World Italy, resulting in refined plates that encompass the flavor of the Abruzzi region, from the beef *carpaccio* to the rack of lamb in a dry red wine sauce. The formally dressed wait staff wows as much as the menu, with impeccable service and attentiveness that makes you feel appreciated and not smothered.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** You can eat like a king when dining on the *osso buco*—a tender veal shank that's been roasted in red wine with porcini mushrooms and served over a bed of risotto infused with saffron.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** The *straciattella alla fiorentina* is a simple, rustic soup consisting of satisfying chicken broth, spinach, eggs and finished with Parmesan cheese.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** Try one of the flavored *bellinis*.

♠ **JUST DESSERTS:** The pastry chef here makes one of the best tiramisus this side of Italy.

PACIFIC PRIME | STEAKHOUSE VALLEY FORGE CASINO RESORT

Chef Tony Clark has brought steakhouse style right into the Valley Forge Casino Resort, offering beautiful and inventive food that you can't find just anywhere. Everything on the menu, from appetizers like oysters gratin and Hudson Valley *foie gras* to the braised monkfish *osso buco* and the roasted chicken *pot au feu*, has an amplified air of refinement, and makes relaxing after a long day at the tables an easy task. And with specialty menus, like holiday and brunch options, constantly rotating in and out of the kitchen, no two visits are ever the same.



♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:**

It's hard to beat a porterhouse, served a la carte for \$54. Then take your pick of sides, like the \$16 lobster mac-n-cheese or \$10 jumbo baked potato.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:**

For only \$20, you can enjoy a plate of California salmon caviar, served with *bellinis*, egg whites and yolks, and diced shallots and chives.

BUDDAKAN | ASIAN FUSION CAESARS

Restaurateur Stephen Starr's ode to Asian flavors can be found inside the Pier Shops at Caesars, but once you step foot into the entryway, you're transported immediately to the Far East. You'll first notice the gigantic Buddah sitting at the head of the dining room's communal table. It may seem like the place to be, but it can get noisy if not sitting with a large group, so opt for a more secluded seat. Start with the chicken and ginger dumplings or the spicy rock shrimp *bao* buns before working your way up to the wok cashew chicken in a plum wine sauce or the filet mignon crusted in wasabi.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** Nothing makes us happier than the angry lobster dish here. It may sound odd, but there's nothing to be mad about with this bowl of three pounds of lobster in a spicy red curry with vegetables.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** It's worth popping in here just for a cocktail at the bar and to order up the zen-ful doughnuts. Served in a take-out container, these sugary, pillow-y orbs come with a trio of banana, chocolate and sweet cream sauces.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** The specialty drinks here are all worthy of attention, especially the Envy, which is made up of Absolut Berri Acai vodka, green apple, blueberry and Thai basil.

♠ **JUST DESSERTS:** Aside from the doughnuts mentioned above, we can't resist the Sichuan peanut *semifreddo*—silky milk chocolate mousse enhanced with ginger and dried chili for a bit of kick.

LUKE PALLADINO | ITALIAN HARRAH'S

Palladino made a name for himself in Atlantic City years back when he operated not one but two restaurants at the Borgata.

These days, he's serving up handmade pastas and assorted other Italian favorites at his namesake restaurant inside Harrah's, where he caters to the casino crowd with an approach as fresh as his farm-to-table menu. For example, the calamari, a staple on Italian menus, is given new life here after Palladino pickles the long hots and then adds caramelized onions and serves them with a tarragon puree.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** The veal chop Milanese is a winning dish if there ever was one. Pounded out thin and coated in panko, the veal chop is served atop peppery arugula with cherry tomatoes, shaved cheese and a lemon vinaigrette to make it all sing.

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Luke Palladino

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♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** The antipasto misto features your choice of cured meat, cheese, breadsticks, peppers and olives. It's more filling than you'd think.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** If you like Manhattans, ask the bartender to pour you a Milano—Makers Mark and Carpano Antica Sweet Vermouth. It's understated but not in a pretend way.

♣ **JUST DESSERTS:** Fork your way through the ricotta cheesecake with the biscotti crust. A hint of limoncello and blackberry compote make this sweet ending one to remember.

OLD HOMESTEAD | STEAKHOUSE BORGATA

The folks behind this classic steakhouse inside the Borgata take their meat seriously. Who else can say that they not only hand massage their Kobe beef, but they also trademarked it? Old Homestead has been a fixture in NYC for more than a century, so it's no surprise that their A.C. offshoot mirrors the buttoned-up success they've had in the Big Apple.

The steaks rule the day here, but don't overlook the quality seafood, especially the jumbo shrimp from the raw bar.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** The mouthwatering Gotham rib steak is the restaurant's signature cut and, at 34 ounces, it may be difficult to polish off yourself, but it's worth the attempt.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** The Kobe meatball is eight ounces of oh-so-tender beef served with fresh ricotta and a luscious tomato sauce.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** The black cherry in the Black Cherry Coke comes by way of Cruzan black cherry rum. Its dark richness is the perfect complement to seasoned steaks and chops.

♠ **JUST DESSERTS:** The big fat chocolate cake.... Need we say more?



PARXGRILL | STEAKHOUSE PARX CASINO

In Pennsylvania, the Parxgrill has quickly become a destination restaurant, not just a place for hungry gamblers to grab a bite.

The décor is ultra modern, but the menu is heavy on familiar plates like braised short ribs and crab cakes. A respectable wine list and a quaint bar area make it the ideal place to grab a drink before your reservation or linger after your meal.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** Go for the lobster tail and be sure to add the stuffed crab for a little bit of overindulgence.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** The 14-ounce center cut grilled pork chop is juicy and tender, and filling enough that you'll have plenty of

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menu from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday through Wednesday.



Sands Casino Resort Bethlehem received quite a facelift this year: Croissanterie, which offers freshly ground slow-drip coffee, croissants, baguettes and more, opened in July; Steelworks Buffet and Grill (formerly Cobalt Café), which features an all-you-can-eat buffet and à la carte menu opened in August, as did Joli Bakery and Café in The Outlets at Sands Bethlehem, offering French artisan breads and pastries and distinctive coffee.

Speaking of The Outlets, new stores that opened in 2013 include Cardinal Camera and Electronics, Limited Editions Eccoci Collections, Famous Footwear and Puma. Lastly, a full-service day spa known as European Body Concepts opened its doors in July. At the casino itself, Sands added more table games this year, giving it more than 180, including a 36-table poker room, and more than 3,000 slot machines.

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Parxgrill
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energy to hit the tables.

♥ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** The namesake Bay Breeze showcases Absolut Grapevine mixed with cranberry and pineapple juices garnished with a lime wedge.

♠ **JUST DESSERTS:** The chocolate peanut butter bombe is a decadent dessert with layers of peanut butter and chocolate mousse, topped with dark chocolate, whipped cream and berries.



FORNELLETTO | MODERN ITALIAN BORGATA

The re-invented Italian coming out of chef Stephen Kalt's kitchen still manages to surprise us. You'll find elevated favorites like gnocchi with gorgonzola and red grapes and veal parm with *fior di latte* mozzarella, alongside inventions like veal *osso buco* ravioli and pumpkin *agnolotti*. It's a smaller space than some of the Borgata's other restaurants, and much more intimate, with low lighting and a Tuscan-themed layout adding to the ambience. The dining room's entire back wall displays their expansive wine collection, all available on the restaurant's 26-page wine list, which features a stunning selection. Whether by the bottle or by the glass, not to mention a "Top 50 Under \$50" list, you won't have a hard time finding a pairing.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** A hearty veal chop comes served alongside a baked spaghetti pie, which gets finished off with salty pancetta and creamy ricotta cheese.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** There's never a bad

time to dive into some quality pizza, like Fornelletto's *funghi* pie with oyster mushrooms, goat cheese and mozzarella.

♥ **JUST DESSERTS:** The Neapolitan cake layers rich devil's food cake between strawberry, vanilla and pistachio gelato, then finishes the dish off with shaved chocolate.



EMERIL'S CHOP HOUSE |

STEAKHOUSE
SANDS BETHLEHEM

A chef with a name as recognizable as Emeril Lagasse has to be doing a few things right, and his Sands Bethlehem is testament to his brilliance. First, there's the stunning space itself, a modern and open eatery with a winding wine wall and equally impressive bar. You'll find chic and eclectic seating options for large and intimate parties, with an inspiring menu to match. You won't find the Louisiana "Bam!" that is so synonymous with the Lagasse name, but you will find his careful attention to ingredients that's decades in the making.

♣ **IF YOU'RE WINNING:** For \$125 you can dive into the raw bar's Grand Plateau: a one-and-a-half pound lobster accompanied by colossal king crab legs, oysters, shrimp and clams.

♦ **IF YOU'RE LOSING:** Emeril lets his Cajun roots shine with his New Orleans barbecue shrimp, coated in a rich and spicy sauce and served with a crispy polenta cake.

♥ **JUST DESSERTS:** Chocolate-covered morello cherries go wild, getting the special treatment in luxuriously rich bittersweet chocolate before taking a dip in homemade marshmallow.

♣ **DYNAMIC DRINK:** For a unique drink, ask for the house-made banana-infused Jameson, and you'll receive a mason jar with the bananas still soaking. ■