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OpenTable: Free, easy restaurant reservations

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By Sara Benson

Time is something I never have enough of, and anything that makes my travel planning easier is fantastic, as long as it doesn't cost too much. That's why I love OpenTable, a free and easy way to make online reservations at 7,000 restaurants in 47 states (yes, even Alaska) and six international destinations (most usefully, Mexico, Canada and the U.K.).

Deal: In the time it takes for a restaurant hostess in Los Angeles or Las Vegas to put you on hold, at OpenTable you can view the restaurant's menu online, peruse guidebook reviews, send special instructions to the maitre d', finish booking your table and then e-mail invitations to all your friends.

Once you register for a free online account at OpenTable, you start earning dining rewards points. For each restaurant reservation you show up for, you'll receive 100 points (up to 1,000 points at specially featured restaurants). When you accumulate 2,000 points, you'll get a \$20 gift certificate valid for any OpenTable restaurant.

Have you used OpenTable? Dish about the good, the bad and the ugly in the Comments section below.

More details: I've used OpenTable twice, and both times it worked out exceptionally well. The first time was at a restaurant in Los Angeles. When we arrived, not only were we seated right away, but we also got special treatment: free cocktails and the best table in the house. Other diners looked on enviously, wondering who we were or what we'd done to deserve it. I used OpenTable again to make a reservation at a busy, trendy restaurant in Las Vegas. Although the venue claimed they were full when I called, the site found me an open table about an hour later than my desired dinner time.

Caveat: For complete terms and conditions of OpenTable's dining rewards program, [click here](#).

Why Use This Service: No more wasting time on the phone and dealing with ditzes as you try to score a table. OpenTable may be especially handy for making reservations for the upcoming Las Vegas Restaurant Week.

Why Not: There's always the chance of a glitch and that the restaurant won't receive your computerized reservation. If that happens, there's no way to contact OpenTable by phone to have the situation remedied.

Critique: OpenTable's database of participating restaurants represents only 7,000 properties so far. The good news is, almost 20% of those restaurants are in California. Users can suggest new restaurants they'd like to see added online.