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OpenTable Diner Survey Reveals That Valentine's Day Dining is Recession-proof

Restaurant Digest

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76% Plan to Dine Out on Biggest Dining Day of the Year; 93% Plan to Spend as Much or More Money to Dine Out Than They Did Last Year

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. — OpenTable, Inc. (www.opentable.com), the leading online restaurant reservation network, today announced the results of its First Annual Valentine's Day Diner Survey, which reveals how people expect to celebrate Valentine's Day, anticipated restaurant spending and overall feelings and expectations about the holiday. According to the survey, 76% of survey respondents expect to celebrate Valentine's Day at a restaurant. Of those intending to dine out for the holiday, 93% plan to spend as much or more money dining out in 2002 than they did last year. Sixty-seven percent of respondents plan to spend more than \$50 per person and 13% intend to spend more than \$100 per person to dine out for Valentine's Day this year.

"Valentine's Day appears to be recession-proof, which is excellent news for restaurants in this economy," said Nadine Weil, director of marketing at OpenTable. "In addition, our historical reservation data shows that Valentine's Day draws more people to restaurants than any other day of the year."

Valentine's Day Evokes Emotion, Stress

People have strong feelings about Valentine's Day, and it has the ability to cause great happiness as well as great stress. At 53%, the majority of respondents "like" or "love" Valentine's Day. However, one in six dislikes the day, and last year, 16% felt "disappointed" and 10% felt "lonely" on the holiday. In addition to strong emotions, the event can also cause stress. According to the survey, the most stressful aspect of Valentine's Day is calling to make restaurant reservations, particularly at the last minute. In fact, the survey found that booking restaurant reservations is more stressful to people than getting a date. Thirty-eight percent said calling for reservations is stressful vs. 29% for buying a gift, 17% for selecting the ideal restaurant, 14% for deciding what to wear, and 10% for getting a date.

"Valentine's Day is a very important day for relationships, and it can be charged with lots of feelings and expectations," said Weil. "Many find the day stressful, because they want to make sure the evening is perfect, from the right restaurant to the right gift."

Both Sexes Think They Control the Day

Both sexes believe they will do the work to plan Valentine's Day. Ninety percent of male respondents indicated that they make the Valentine's Day plans. However, 64% of female respondents expect to make the plans themselves. The men have it: according to OpenTable's reservation data warehouse, 74% of the people who made the dinner reservations for Valentine's Day 2001 were men.

The survey also indicated that Valentine's Day brings out old-fashioned habits. Not only are men more likely to make the reservations, but they are also more likely to pay. Seventy percent of men surveyed say that they will pay for dinner, while only 5% of women expect to pay.

"Valentine's Day may be perceived as a holiday to market to women, but restaurateurs should take note that men are more likely to make the restaurant reservations. Restaurants that can create and tailor marketing campaigns toward men will be one step ahead," said Weil.

Respondents also gave themselves high marks for organization. Fifty-five percent of respondents say they will make their reservations at least one week in advance. However, OpenTable's historical reservation database shows that last year only 39% made reservations with a week to spare. In fact, only 10% predict that they will make reservations in the last two days, but OpenTable's 2001 database reveals that nearly four times as many people, a total of 37%, made their reservations within two days of Valentine's Day.

The In-restaurant Experience

The survey also showed people's food and wine preferences on Valentine's Day. Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents listed red wine as their favorite culinary aphrodisiac, 58% listed chocolate dessert, and 51% selected champagne. Other common culinary aphrodisiacs listed were foie gras, strawberries, gourmet cheeses and all types of seafood, particularly raw oysters, other raw fish and sushi.

In addition, the survey elicited memorable restaurant stories. For example, Aimee Hebert, proprietor of Sent Sovi, Saratoga, California recalled, "At Sent Sovi, a man walked in with a custom-made dessert plate that said, 'Will you marry me?' on the bottom of the plate. We built a dessert on top of it!"

About the Survey

OpenTable's First Annual Valentine's Day Diner Survey was conducted online across an nth random sampling of OpenTable's 130,000 consumer members. Conducted from December 20, 2001 to January 8, 2002, the survey garnered 1520 responses. All major metropolitan areas in the U.S. were represented.

About OpenTable, Inc.

OpenTable makes dining out more delightful for diners and more profitable for restaurants. The company provides restaurants with incremental reservations, advanced marketing capabilities, and operational efficiency by providing a computerized reservation system that replaces the traditional pen-and-paper reservation book. All reservations -- whether online or over the telephone -- are entered into OpenTable's system. The resulting customer database allows the restaurant to understand and segment its guests and conduct marketing programs based on guest preferences and dining histories.

Diners can go to www.opentable.com at any time to scan for available tables and instantly confirm a reservation. This free online reservation service eliminates the inconvenience of multiple telephone calls, busy signals, waiting on hold and restaurant answering machines. OpenTable extends the convenience of instant, 24by7 restaurant reservations to hotel concierges (OTConcierge), travel agents (OTTravel) and administrative assistants (OTAdmin). The company works with many distribution partners, including American Express, Citysearch.com, Digital Cities, Zagat Survey, washingtonpost.com, the Washingtonian and Fodor's.com.