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Dinner Reservations Online

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One of the hardest things to do in New York City is getting a dinner reservation at a hot restaurant. Unless you are a celebrity or can plan way in advance, there are some restaurants that are almost impossible to get into. So if you're like me and have a hard time getting your act together to book dinner reservations, you'll like the developments that are taking place in the world of online dinner reservations.

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There are now systems that allow you to get reservations at some of the best known restaurants in various cities (of course, most of these are in, say, the 40 biggest cities, but may be coming soon to other cities). While not every major restaurant is available, many of them are. In NYC, for example, you can score tables at places like 21, Union Square Cafe and Vong.

There are at least four major ones. They vary in the number and kinds of restaurants they list. They also have different ways of being used by restaurant-goers. Most make their money by charging the eatery for each diner (typically a dollar). Others charge patrons a fee for the reservation. Be sure to check if they charge you or not.

Opentable.com: This is, the most user-friendly of the lot. I liked the interface, the real-time bookings (and instant confirmation) and the fact that there are no transaction fees or credit card required to use it. It has 200 restaurants in the New York area and another 1,000 nationwide. By July, it will have seated its 1 millionth customer.

DinnerBroker.com: Has 750 restaurants in 41 cities, with 75 in New York. It doesn't charge for what it considers "off-peak" seatings, but charges \$10 for "prime-time" seatings. The off-peak times vary and there are also some discounts offered, but it isn't always easy to eat at 4 or 5 p.m.

SavvyDiner.com: Has fewer restaurants and works by having you enter your choice and then a person at their end calls the restaurant to confirm the seat and then you are informed.

iSeatz.com: Another free service in 34 cities. Has partnerships with Travelocity and Zagat, so should get a plenty of traffic through them.