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Table Talk

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Want to improve your chances of getting into that impossibly "In" restaurant on your next vacation? Below are a few tips from experts in the travel and restaurant industries:

1. Stay at the right hotel

Staying at a Hotel with a well-connected concierge (usually a pricey hotel) can make all the difference. The owner of Mistral, a trendy Boston restaurant, says he often holds some 8 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. slots for calls from concierges at the Ritz-Carlton and Four Seasons. The reason? When business slows, these concierges help fill tables.

2. Visit the restaurant

At the French Laundry, a favorite Napa Valley hangout in Yountville, Calif., eager out-of-towners are learning to come by in the morning to put their names and cell-phone numbers on a waiting list for the same night. They're contacted when there is a no-show or cancellation, says Laura Cunningham, general manager of the restaurant.

3. Use connections between restaurants

If you happen to be a regular at Aureole in New York, for example, ask someone at the restaurant to help you get a reservation for your trip to Las Vegas. The Palm steakhouse has a formal program for this, making reservations at Palm steakhouses in different cities for regular clients on the road.

4. Tip the maitre d'

This is tricky, because many well-known restaurants forbid the practice. But industry insiders say it is still prevalent. "I'd say \$50 to \$100 would get you in lots of places," says Robert Boyle, president of Topnotch Resort and Spa in Stowe, Vt.

5. Use the Internet

A growing number of restaurants have Web sites so diners can book tables online. One site to check is OpenTable.com, where diners can book tables at 75 restaurants, including Fleur de Lys in San Francisco and Vong in Chicago.

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