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Portland restaurants you can actually get into

By **Alexandra Hall** Globe correspondent, Updated July 15, 2019, 3:00 p.m.



The bar at Floods, a new spot in Portland's West End. ALEXANDRA HALL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Is there anyone left on the planet who doesn't know what a gastronomic tour de force Portland is? Its restaurants win seemingly constant national awards, it's a media darling, and its current human-to-restaurant ratio is something like 20,000:1. (It's actually 100:1 according to the Convention & Visitors Bureau of Greater Portland.) But what all of that means is, come summertime's crush of food-loving tourists from all over the country, the city's most renowned restaurants are all but impossible to get into.

The truth is that in July, you've got a better shot at getting your kid into Harvard on a full scholarship than walking in and nabbing a table at Beard Award-decorated favorites like [Fore Street](#) or [Drifters Wife](#). Ditto [Central Provisions](#) and [Eventide](#), which don't take reservations and have a line at the door starting long before they open. And let's not even talk about your chances of getting a parking spot anywhere in Old Port, home to the city's largest concentration of well-known restaurants.

None of that, however, is any reason to eschew the city and its extraordinary feasts all summer. Instead, it's a perfect excuse to branch out and try some spots that may not currently be on the hot list, but are spectacular nonetheless. Whether it's because they're new and not yet discovered, older and no longer the flavor of the month, a local secret, or off the beaten path, these are some of the best places you can actually get into right now. And yes, some of them even have parking.

Tipo Central Provisions may be nigh impossible to get into, but co-owners Paige and Chris Gould have extended their magic touch to this sister spot serving luscious contemporary Italian. It's in the Back Cove neighborhood (a 10-minute drive from Old Port), and they take reservations. Come for the asparagus agnolotti with Meyer lemon, roasted muscat grapes, and vin cotto; stay for the free parking lot. *182 Ocean Ave.,*

Portland, 207-358-7970, tiporestaurant.com .

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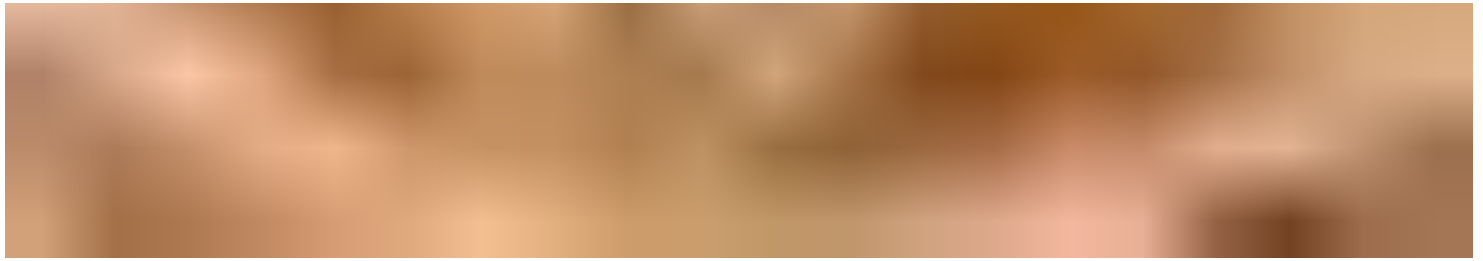
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Baharat Now that the hullabaloo has died down since it transitioned from a food truck to a suave little Middle Eastern bistro, you can stride in (well, walk-in; it's no reservations) from 3 to 5 p.m. during happy hour and down delectable mezze for just \$5 apiece. It's a tad out of the way (yet still easily walkable from Washington Avenue), but does it really matter? Sitting with a plate of lamb kofta with pomegranate molasses with sunlight streaming through the place's open garage doors, it feels like you could easily be across the world. *91 Anderson St., Portland, 207-613-9849,* baharatmaine.com .

Union Too often hotel restaurants don't get their due, but Chef Josh Berry is easily one of the most impressive culinary heroes of the city. For proof, all you have to do is eat a bowl of his lemongrass-scented mussels with homemade spicy green curry on a crusty baguette slice. They take reservations every day of the year; serve breakfast,

lunch, and dinner seven days a week; and can take large parties. So your odds of getting a table are (almost) as good as those mussels. *390 Congress St., Portland, 207-808-8700, unionportland.com* .





Pork curry ramen at Pai Men Miyake. ALEXANDRA HALL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Pai Men Miyake Miyake, the endlessly lauded den of sushi master Masa Miyake, has justifiably itself earned a cult. But that makes getting in more than a little tricky. So turn yourself toward its lower-profile offshoot, a noodle bar in the West End, and lap up some of the richest, most soul-warming ramen in the Northeast. Reservations aren't offered, but spots at the bar are plentiful, and the summer outdoor area makes tables easy to finagle. *188 State St., Portland, 207-541-9204, miyakerestaurants.com/paimen.*

Piccolo The name means “little” in Italian, so don't come expecting loads of seating. But what at first seems like an impediment can become an advantage; Piccolo is so small, it's sometimes forgotten about. So you stand a darn good chance of sliding into a seat and tucking into a plate of cavatelli with lamb neck ragu from chefs Damian Sansonetti and Ilma Lopez. (The latter was a two-time 2017 James Beard Award semifinalist for her pastry work here and at Chaval, the couple's bigger, better-known restaurant.) *111 Middle St., Portland, 207-747-5307, piccolomaine.com.*

Isa Bistro Isaul Perez and Suzie St. Pierre (yup, another husband-and-wife team) are happy to take reservations at their East Bayside bistro. You'll be glad you did after one bite of their addictive octopus with chickpeas and chimichurri, or the lobster tacos with fennel and guajillo aioli. Venture around back of the building and you'll find parking. *79 Portland St., Portland, 207-808-8533, isaportlandme.com.*

Otto OK, so you don't have to go to Maine to down one of their beloved pizzas, since the Maine-based company also has [Massachusetts outposts](#). But there's something extra delectable about eating lobster right at its source. Enter Otto's "lobster masher" pie — a layering of fresh claw and tail meat, mashed potato, scallion, and bacon, offered only this summer to celebrate Otto's 10-year anniversary, and available at any of the five locations around the city, all of which are easy walk-ins. *250 Read St., Portland, 207-358-7551; 225 Congress St., Portland, 207-358-7870; 576 Congress St., Portland, 207-358-7090; 125 John Roberts Road, South Portland, 207-772-0900; 159 Cottage Road, South Portland, 207-517-3051; and 367 Main St., Yarmouth, 207-846-1325, ottoportland.com .*





Clams and mussels on toast at Floods. ALEXANDRA HALL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Floods Greg Mitchell of Palace Diner (the retro-cool heavyweight in Biddeford that no food media seems able to stop talking about) has just thrown his stake in the ground of Portland's West End. There he's whipping up umami-laden dishes like clams and mussels on toast, and a cheeseburger so exquisite it redefines the genre. "It's a place you can roll up in shorts and sandals after a day at the beach or in your finest threads for a special evening and we'll welcome you all the same," says Mitchell. And while business has been steady so far, he says they've got plenty of room for walk-ins, and are taking reservations. Get in there before the spotlight discovers the place, and those seats start disappearing as quickly as the cheeseburgers do. *747 Congress St., Portland, 207-613-9031, floodsme.com.*

Alexandra Hall can be reached at alexandrahall@gmail.com.

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