

Rating Criteria: Restaurants

The Star Rating Process

The Forbes Travel Guide process of rating each establishment includes:

- **Facility inspection:** Every property is visited by a trained facility inspector, who uses a checklist to evaluate cleanliness, physical condition and location. This inspection is unannounced and results in a Forbes One, Two or Three Star rating. Spas are the only exception -- the minimum standard for a Forbes spa rating is three stars.
- **Service evaluation:** Based on the facility inspection, properties that might qualify for a Forbes Four Star or Five Star Award certification will receive a visit from a second, this time, incognito inspector. This inspector makes an anonymous visit and performs an incognito evaluation based on more than 150 service standards. During service evaluations, inspectors behave as regular guests and never reveal that they represent the Forbes Travel Guide. This inspection largely focuses on the guest experience and the consistency in service, not just the physical facilities and quality of the meal.

Only facilities that meet the Forbes Travel Guides rigorous standards are rated and listed in both the travel guides and on the website. Deteriorating, poorly managed establishments are deleted. A Forbes Travel Guide listing and review constitutes a positive quality recommendation; every listing is an accolade, recognition of achievement.

Star Definitions

★★★★★Five Star Restaurants: The Five Star restaurant delivers a truly unique and distinctive dining experience. These restaurants consistently provide exceptional food, superlative service and elegant décor. An emphasis is placed on originality and personalized, attentive and discreet service. Every detail that surrounds the experience is attended to by a warm and gracious dining room team.

★★★★Four Star Restaurants: These are exciting restaurants with often well-known chefs which feature creative and complex foods and emphasize various culinary techniques and a focus on seasonality. A highly-trained dining room staff provides refined personal service and attention.

★★★Three Star Restaurants: Three Star restaurants offer skillfully-prepared food with a focus on a specific style or cuisine. The dining room staff provides warm and professional service in a comfortable atmosphere. The décor is well-coordinated with quality fixtures and decorative items, and promotes a comfortable ambience.

★★Two Star Restaurants: The Two Star restaurant serves fresh food in a clean setting with efficient service. Value is considered in this category, as is family friendliness.

★One Star Restaurants: The One Star restaurant provides a distinctive experience through culinary specialty, local flair or individual atmosphere.

Forbes Star Rating Criteria & Expectations - Restaurant

The following are suggested criteria of what a guest can expect at each star level. They are not individually mandated and are a representative sampling of the hundreds of points covered during our inspection process. Additionally, at each level the restaurant establishment is required to meet or exceed the requirements of the previous star rating. For example, a Three Star hotel meets the criteria expectations of a Three Star restaurant, a Two Star restaurant and One Star restaurant, and so forth.

★**One Star Restaurants:** A One Star restaurant provides a distinctive experience through culinary specialty, local flair or unique atmosphere. Value is considered in this category. Service is limited (i.e. self-service, counter service) in many cases.

Restaurant Products

- ☉ Any foods will be fresh and appetizing in appearance
- ☉ Buffets or other self-service areas are hygienic, convenient and professionally presented
- ☉ Foods provided in buffets are fresh, well-stocked, colorful and appetizing in appearance

Restaurant Facilities

- ☉ Self-parking area (if belonging to restaurant) is free of debris, garbage and in good condition including surfaces, curbs and paths
- ☉ All outdoor walkways and approaches are well-maintained and cleaned
- ☉ Outdoor awnings, signs, marquees, flags and plantings are clean and in good condition
- ☉ Reception and common areas (corridors, waiting area), floors, walls and ceilings clean and free of debris, damage, visible wear and marks
- ☉ Temperature is comfortable throughout entire dining and common areas
- ☉ Food pick-up area, corridors and doorways from kitchen are well-organized and hygienic in appearance
- ☉ Floors throughout the dining area are in good condition, free of notable damage and wear
- ☉ Floors throughout the dining area are very clean, free of dust build-up and debris
- ☉ Dining room walls, partitions and ceilings, especially those adjacent to dining tables, are clean and hygienic
- ☉ Music system, if in use, at appropriate volume and clear sound, free of distortion and static
- ☉ Dining tables and chairs are very clean and hygienic in appearance
- ☉ Lighting is adequate to permit easy reading of menu
- ☉ The tops of tables have a consistent appearance and are neat
- ☉ Clean paper napkins, if used, are of superior thickness and quality
- ☉ Menus are clean, are in good condition (not excessively worn) and are easy to read

Restaurant Service

- ☉ Services are adequate, efficient and cordial and able to meet customer needs
- ☉ All staff encountered are helpful to guests
- ☉ Food is served in a way that is easy to eat or transport
- ☉ Payment is convenient and guest is thanked after transaction is completed

Examples of One Star restaurants include:

Virgil's Real Barbecue, New York NY

Mabel's Lobster Claw, Kennebunkport ME

The Smokey Pig, Ashland VA

Mystic Pizza, Mystic CT

Goode Company Texas Bar-B-Q, Houston TX

★★Two Star Restaurants: *A Two Star restaurant provides freshly-prepared food with a cordial and efficient waitstaff in a clean and well-maintained setting. These restaurants are often family-oriented or have a clear theme represented in the menu and the surroundings. Guests at a Two Star restaurant can expect to find all of the characteristics of a One Star restaurant, plus:*

Restaurant Products

- ☉ Trays, check folders or equivalent are used
- ☉ Wine, where appropriate, is available including at least one red and one white by the glass
- ☉ A selection of beer is available, including some imports and specialty beers
- ☉ Cubed ice, not crushed, is served

Restaurant Facilities

- ☉ Signs and notices are professional, matching décor not "homemade"
- ☉ Service doors in all public areas are clean, free of marks and damage, and closed
- ☉ Objects d'art and wall hangings are neat, secure and dust free
- ☉ Staff uniforms are matching/coordinated
- ☉ Dining room walls, partitions and ceilings, especially those adjacent to dining tables are extremely clean and hygienic
- ☉ Windows, frames and window treatments adjacent to dining tables are extremely clean and hygienic
- ☉ Music system, if in use, consists of CD or equivalent and is interruption-free, not commercial radio
- ☉ Dining tables and chairs are in very good condition, free of notable damage and wear; wobble-free
- ☉ China, glass and stainless steel tableware; no plastic utensils or other items on tabletop unless appropriate to theme or atmosphere
- ☉ All china, glass, silverware and condiments on tabletops in good condition, free of wear and damage
- ☉ Ashtrays throughout public areas are well-maintained and free of excessive debris
- ☉ Public washrooms are very hygienic and neat with well-stocked paper and soap

Restaurant Service

- ☉ Table service is available
- ☉ Service is pleasant, competent and able to assist guest with beverage and menu selection

Examples of Two Star restaurants include:

Ginza, Boston MA

Bookbinder's 15th Street Seafood House, Philadelphia PA

Churrascaria Plataforma, New York NY

Marche, Chicago IL

★★★Three Star Restaurants: *A Three Star restaurant offers skillfully-prepared food with a focus on a specific style or cuisine. A dining room staff provides warm and proficient service. The décor is well-coordinated with fixtures and decorative items of excellent quality and in keeping with the atmosphere. Guests at a Three Star Restaurant can expect to find all of the characteristics for a Two Star Restaurant, plus:*

Restaurant Products

- ☉ Bottled water is available, including still and sparkling
- ☉ Wine by the glass selections include at least two reds and two whites; no "jug" wine
- ☉ The wine list includes a range of wines as related to theme of restaurant

- ☉ The beer selection includes a selection of imports and domestic specialty brews
- ☉ The beverage selection includes brands related to the restaurant theme (i.e., specialty beer, cocktails, wines, soft drinks)
- ☉ The spirit selection includes a variety of premium labels
- ☉ Cappuccino, espresso and café latte are available and freshly prepared
- ☉ A variety of teas is available

Restaurant Facilities

- ☉ A comfortable area is provided for waiting and queuing
- ☉ Coat storage is available (guests do not have to keep at table)
- ☉ Host stand is well-organized, professional in presentation, and free of loose papers and errand memoranda exposed to guests
- ☉ Dining room has interesting décor. All elements are in keeping with theme.
- ☉ Staff uniforms are of good quality; all materials are in good condition and not showing visible signs or wear or dirt
- ☉ No soiled dishes are observed stored at side stations in dining area
- ☉ Dining tables are not situated in areas where waiting guests stand nearby
- ☉ Dining tables are not exposed to drafts from doorways or excessive kitchen traffic
- ☉ Clean cloth napkins used, of at least good poly/natural combination
- ☉ Tablecloth is used, or equivalently elegant/distinctive table top as related to atmosphere
- ☉ Menu presentation is elegant, no plastic or laminate; superior print quality or calligraphy
- ☉ Tabletop items are tasteful and of appropriate level of quality and elegance as related to theme of restaurant
- ☉ Guest restrooms is easily accessible and in immaculate condition

Restaurant Service

- ☉ Staff is familiar with wine and beverage offerings and can be of assistance with selection or obtain assistance where necessary
- ☉ Staff can be of assistance explaining menu items or making recommendations
- ☉ Staff is conscious of service timing and avoids unnecessary delays in meal or rushing diners
- ☉ Staff is well-trained and technically proficient in table service
- ☉ Service is pleasant and friendly throughout meal

Examples of Three Star restaurants include:

Lucia's, Minneapolis MN

Vidalia, Washington DC

Union Square Café, New York, NY

Dahlia Lounge, Seattle, WA

Coyote Café, Santa Fe, NM

Forbes Four and Five Star Criteria and Expectations

At the Forbes Four and Five Star level, both a facility inspection and service evaluation will be performed. For each property, hundreds of criteria including cleanliness, physical facilities and employee attitude and courtesy, are measured and evaluated to produce a mathematically derived score. At the Forbes Four and Five Star level, 25% of the overall score is based on the facility inspection and 75% is based on the service evaluation.

"Service" can seem pretty subjective, but the staff at Forbes Travel Guide use strict standards and a good stopwatch to make their findings as accurate and objective as possible. For restaurant ratings, inspectors dine at the restaurant one evening,

interacting with staff, ordering cocktails, ordering at minimum a three course dinner, testing wine service as well as taking advantage of other services that a standard guest would encounter.

Inspectors respond "yes" or "no" to standards that are classified in a way that assess efficiency, graciousness and warmth, technical skill level as well as food quality to name a few. For every "no" answer, a hotel loses one point, and there's very little grey area. For example, upon being seated, guests are offered cocktail service within 1 minute. It either happens or it doesn't, there's no middle ground. Inspectors also write pages of commentary during the evaluations.

The Forbes Four and Five Star Restaurant Incognito Service Evaluation

The restaurant service evaluation looks at the following areas:

- ◆ Reservations
- ◆ Arrival
- ◆ Efficiency and Timing
- ◆ Food Quality
- ◆ Technical proficiency and knowledge of food and beverage service
- ◆ Personalized Service
- ◆ Pace of Meal
- ◆ Departure

Sample Service Questions from Restaurant Incognito Evaluation

The restaurant evaluation tags each question with the same classifications as the lodging evaluation, with the addition of the ambiance category. All questions are answered with a YES or NO and then allow for comments/remarks from the inspector. Also, each question has the applicable *classification* tag in parentheses following the statement.

- Staff makes eye contact, and keeps focus on the guest; not distracted or talking to others whilst at guest's table (Courtesy/manners)
- If asked for an off-menu item or an adjustment to a menu dish, the staff will react graciously and accommodatingly (Graciousness, thoughtfulness and sense of personalized service)
- Throughout the meal, all beverages are readily refilled; never empty more than thirty seconds, and guest never has to pour from their own bottles (Efficiency = timing)
- It will never be necessary to signal for the staff; as they will have anticipated all requirements and automatically provided or offered them (Guest comfort and Convenience)
- An amuse bouche is offered (Sense of luxury)
- Staff can describe with considerable detail the preparation methods and ingredients of each menu item (Technical execution skill and knowledge)
- Staff maintains alert posture; no hands in pockets, folded arms: Staff avoids excessive personal chatting amongst themselves: Staff does not smoke, drink or eat in guest view (Staff appearance)
- For dishes that have been ordered with a specific doneness, the preference is matched exactly (Food/beverage quality)

- At relevant restaurants, exceptional cheese will be available and distinctively presented (Food/beverage quality)
- Glassware, china, cutlery and serving pieces in excellent condition and completely clean and hygienic appearance (Cleanliness and condition)
- The restaurant lighting is comfortable, enabling menu reading, but privacy and ambience (a small light for menu reading may be provided alternatively) (ambiance)

Forbes Four Star Criteria

★★★★**Four Star Restaurants:** *A Four Star restaurant presents food that is creative, complex and emphasizes seasonality and culinary technique. A highly-trained dining room staff provides refined personal assistance and attention. Guests at a Four Star Restaurant can expect to find all of the characteristics for a Three Star Restaurant, plus:*

Restaurant Products

- ☉ Valet parking available and easily located
- ☉ An amuse bouche is offered
- ☉ All foods are extremely fresh; never appearing tinned or frozen unless specifically advised on the menu
- ☉ Food presentations are colorful, interesting and include contrasts of texture or temperature
- ☉ Fresh orange and grapefruit juices are available and used in mixed drinks
- ☉ A variety of cognacs, liqueurs, and eau de vie are available

Restaurant Facilities

- ☉ Common areas feature elegant live plants and/or fresh floral displays
- ☉ Staffed, secure coat check is available (climate-dependent)
- ☉ All staff uniforms are of excellent quality, appropriately pressed and free from any sign of wear or dirt
- ☉ Superior all-cotton or linen napkins used, crisply pressed and presented
- ☉ Table is padded with silencer or thick padding
- ☉ Flatware is of high quality and heavy weight; entirely free of tarnish or wear
- ☉ China patterns are varied for selected dishes and courses; not all dishes are served on identical china
- ☉ Restaurant lighting is comfortable, enabling menu reading, but privacy and ambience maintained
- ☉ Background music is pleasant, yet unobtrusive to conversation
- ☉ The dining room temperature is comfortable and unnoticed by guests
- ☉ The restrooms are immaculately clean and stocked; materials and design of equal elegance to dining room
- ☉ Dining room exhibits a well-organized and professional appearance; tables are uniformly set

Restaurant Service

- ☉ Reservation service is very warm, appreciative and attentive
- ☉ Staff proactively approaches guest when arriving
- ☉ Arrival is anticipated and guests are greeted warmly
- ☉ If reserved, tables are ready within five minutes of appointed time and reservation details are accurate
- ☉ Bar service is warm, polite and gracious; staff does not partake in personal discussion in guest earshot or view

- 🍷 Bar checks will be automatically transferred to the restaurant bill
- 🍷 Bottled still and sparkling waters are offered to all guests
- 🍷 All guests are served simultaneously, course by course, and cleared simultaneously, course by course when all guests have finished eating
- 🍷 Wine service is helpful and understanding, not pretentious or condescending in any way
- 🍷 Staff is present at departure and warmly thanks guests

Examples of Four Star restaurants include:

L'Espalier, Boston, MA

Aureole, New York, NY

Montagna, Aspen CO

Le Reve, San Antonio, TX

Forbes Five Star Criteria

★★★★★**Five Star Restaurants:** *A Five Star restaurant is one of few flawless dining experiences in the country. They consistently provide their guests with exceptional food, superlative service, elegant décor and exquisite presentations. Every detail that surrounds the experience is attended to. Guests at a Five Star Restaurant can expect all of the characteristics for a Four Star Restaurant, plus:*

Restaurant Products

- 🍷 Mixed drinks will be served club service
- 🍷 Wines ordered by the glass will be presented in the bottle and poured at the table
- 🍷 Amuse Bouche is of exceptional quality and presentation
- 🍷 Food presentations are perfectly executed with evident care given to each individual item on each plate
- 🍷 Food is flawless, a delightful and interesting experience
- 🍷 Only solid cubes of ice are used (no hollow cubes)
- 🍷 Mignardises or petit fours are served at conclusion of meal
- 🍷 A cheese course is offered

Restaurant Facility

- 🍷 All staff are attired in a manner that is exceptional and commensurate with atmosphere of restaurant
- 🍷 Décor is exceptional in all visible areas
- 🍷 Fixtures and decorative items are of excellent quality and consistent in keeping with, and adding to atmosphere
- 🍷 Linens are of exceptional quality and design
- 🍷 China is of exquisite quality and patterns are varied for selection dishes and courses
- 🍷 Glassware is of highest quality and specifically matched to individual wine or spirit
- 🍷 Public washrooms feature well-maintained cloth towels, fresh plants or flowers and elegant fixtures

Restaurant Service

- 🍷 Reservations are graciously accepted and are closed with an anticipatory remark
- 🍷 Confirmation of reservation is at the convenience of guest
- 🍷 Valet Parking service is prompt and efficient
- 🍷 Table is immediately ready upon guest arrival
- 🍷 Service at bar is of equal level of professionalism, warmth and graciousness as dining room, host and reservation staff.

- The guest's name is used effectively as a signal of recognition, but discreetly
- A sommelier is present and extremely informative, warm and of assistance
- Service is warm, gracious and anticipatory and committed to providing the guest with a fantastic dining experience
- Pace of meal is never noticed by guest; there are no awkward delays or rushed events
- Napkins are replaced when guest is away from table or between certain courses
- Coats checked are retrieved ahead of the guest during departure
- Staff is warm and gracious upon departure and makes a point of thanking guest for visiting

Examples of Five Star restaurants include:

The Inn at Little Washington, Washington, VA

The Dining Room at the Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco, CA

per se, New York, NY

Le Bernardin, New York, NY