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Top 10 Picks for DC's Summer Restaurant Week

24 AUGUST, 2009

by Lisa Shapiro

tags: Art and Soul, Cafe Atlantico, DC Restaurant Week, Dino, Hook, Ici Urban Bistro, Kaz Sushi Bistro, PassionFish, Rasika, Tosca, Vidalia

Restaurant Week occurs twice a year during the slow restaurant season in the winter (usually January) and the late summer (usually August). This year's **Summer Restaurant Week in DC** is 24 – 30 August. Many DC restaurants, however, extend their promotions an extra week or sometimes an entire month. Restaurant Week offers diners an opportunity to try a host of new places – at reasonable fixed prices.

To get the most “bang” for your buck, this reviewer suggests sampling expensive restaurants with superior reputations. For example, I choose never-visited restaurants that are consistently on *Washingtonian's* “100 Very Best Restaurants” list. Or perhaps diner dollars would be better spent trying a place that serves a cuisine that one has always wanted to try, but has been too timid to risk for a hefty bill.

For 2009, dinner prices have increased. Three courses now run \$35.09, while lunch remains the same deal it's always been: \$20.09 (the year in dollars and cents) for a starter, main course and dessert. Some restaurants are offering their full menu while others have a special Restaurant Week menu.

The following are my Top Ten DC Restaurant Week picks based on reputation, quality of food, menu offerings, or my own Restaurant Week experience.

1. **Vidalia** – James Beard Award winning chefs Jeffrey Buben and R.J. Cooper have driven this restaurant to be one of DC's most highly regarded. In 2009, Vidalia was listed as #7 on *Washingtonian's* “Very Best” list, earning three and a half stars out of four. Their **Summer Restaurant Week menu** offers many choices for appetizers and entrees. I went to lunch at Vidalia in February for Restaurant Week and had, to date, the best Restaurant Week experience ever. Their brisket was, moist, tender, flavorful, and delicious. I also tried the shrimp and grits which is one of Vidalia's “signature” dishes.



mussels from Dino

2. **Tosca** – Executive Chef Massimo Fabbri is highly regarded and loved even by other top DC area chefs. With their superior reputation for beautiful pasta, which is house-made fresh daily, Tosca

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ranked within the top 25 of *Washingtonian's* "Very Best" list two years in a row, earning three stars out of four. Their **Restaurant Week menu** offers diners their full dinner menu, including some of Chef Fabbri's signature dishes black sea bass tartar, veal ravioli, risotto with saffron, and carrot pappardelle with a rabbit ragu.

3. **Art and Soul** – Under the direction of two-time James Beard Award-winning Chef Art Smith, Art and Soul made *Washingtonian's* "Very Best" list within the first year of its opening. Executive Chef Travis Timberlake has crafted an excellent summer Restaurant Week menu by offering many of his Southern-inspired dishes that are available on the regular lunch and dinner menu. This is a great opportunity to sample some of his extraordinary cuisine at an exceptional value. On the **Restaurant Week dinner menu**, enjoy fried chicken with country potato salad; ravioli with herbs and spring vegetables; salmon with pea risotto, golden-beet relish, and preserved-lemon vinaigrette; pork chop with charred-stone-fruit relish and sweet-onion broth; crispy whole trout with spring-bean salad and rhubarb vinaigrette. Art and Soul's Restaurant Week promotion extends through 6 September.

4. **Rasika** – At one of Washington's best Indian restaurants, Chef Vikram Sunderam offers deliciously authentic Indian cuisine. Rasika is ranked within the top 25 of *Washingtonian's* "Very Best" list, earning three stars out of four. Chef Sunderam's restaurant week lunch menu is the most promising at this excellent value and includes its much-praised palak chaat, lamb roganjosh and for dessert, carrot halwa with cinnamon sabayon. For dinner, enjoy some his best dishes, the palak chaat, black cod lightly sauced with star anise, dill, and honey and for dessert enjoy the carrot halwa with cinnamon sabayon. Bread or rice comes with each main course. Rasika is offering their special Restaurant Week menus through 5 September.



dessert at Dino

5. **PassionFish** – Passion Food Hospitality restaurant group owners, Chef Jeff Tunks, Gus Dimillo, and David Wizenberg, have a longstanding tradition of offering any entrée on their **regular menus** while offering selected appetizers and desserts for the **Restaurant Week prix fixe menu**. This year is no different. I went to PassionFish in February for Restaurant Week and was very impressed. On the Restaurant Week menu for selected appetizers are some of their best dishes including their crab and corn chowder, classic Peruvian style ceviche and Yucatan shrimp + ceviche "cocktail". I recommend the monkfish "osso bucco" amatriciana, jumbo lump crab cakes and crème brulee for dessert.

6. **Café Atlantico** – Celebrity Chef José Andrés is offering the full regular menu in addition to special prix fixe menus. Make sure to order dishes that are not included on their **pre-theatre menu** which sell year-round for \$35. Restaurant Week dinner entrées include duck confit with brussels sprouts, apples, raisins, and pinenuts; portobello mushroom with huitlacoche, chihuahua cheese, roasted beets, and beet oil; braised beef short ribs with grilled eggplant and squash; Veracruz-style salmon with tomatoes, olives, onions, avocado, and capers; grilled skirt steak with mushrooms, green beans, and truffled potato espuma. Café Atlantico is extending their Restaurant Week promotion until 6 September.

7. **Hook** – Fresh sustainably-sourced seafood combined with local and organic produce is the focus of Chef Jonathan Seningen at this Georgetown dining room. With a solid reputation for delicious quality food, especially during Restaurant Week, this summer, Hook offers extensive **lunch and dinner menus** with choices such as salmon with chickpeas, tomato, spinach, and cayenne; including some of his best and signature dishes like the Arctic char with sweet potatoes, brussels sprouts, and celeriac purée; mahi mahi with prosciutto, black-eyed peas, and spinach; yellowfin tuna with white-bean purée, bok choy, and boquerone mustard.

8. **Dino** – Dean Gold takes great pride in his warm and inviting Italian wine bar and dining



room located in the Cleveland Park neighborhood. Dino serves excellent authentic Italian fare at an exceptional value all year, but has gone the extra mile by offering one of the most generous **Restaurant Week dinner deals**: any three courses from the regular menu, plus a free glass of house-infused grappa or moscato. I recommend the Saltimbocca, described on the menu as veal and pork meatballs with onions, garlic, herbs, egg & bread crumb, with spicy tomato oregano sauce and the Linguine alla pescatore, which is fresh mussels and mahogany clams with house made pasta, garlic, tomatoes, wine & parsley. Dino's promotion will be extended through 13 September.



Ici Urban Bistro dining room

9. **Kaz Sushi Bistro** – Rammy-winning Chef, “Kaz” (Kazuhiro) Okochi offers deliciously fresh and innovative sushi. At lunch, diners are offered a choice of two preset menus. On the lunch menu enjoy a choice of miso soup; bento box (seaweed salad, Asian short ribs, spicy California roll, or miso-marinated salmon, and spicy green mussels). For dessert, choose between green tea ice cream or mango sorbet. For dinner appetizers, try the deliciously fresh and innovative scallop ceviche piña colada; or seared sockeye salmon with wasabi/tuna sauce; spicy shrimp fritter; crispy calamari salad; teriyaki pork ribs; grilled miso-marinated salmon. For main course, choose either three nigiri or two maki. I recommend the lychee panna cotta with mango sorbet for dessert.

10. **Ici Urban Bistro** – Ici Urban Bistro offers a fresh and contemporary twist on traditional French cuisine. Executive Chef, Olivier Perret, a native of Burgundy, France, has been on board just a few months and is already captivating DC diners with his innovative and contemporary approach to traditional French cooking. His **Restaurant Week menu** includes some of his specialties such as pan seared halibut with mango and wilted arugula, veal jus or duck confit with garlic mashed potatoes, balsamic and star anis reduction.

Restaurant Week Promotion Extensions

- 🍷 2941: through 28 August
- 🍷 701 Restaurant: through 6 September
- 🍷 Art and Soul: through 6 September
- 🍷 Café Atlantico: through 6 September
- 🍷 Co-co Sala: through 2 September
- 🍷 Dino: through 13 September
- 🍷 Ici Urban Bistro: through 1 September
- 🍷 Il Mulino: through 31 August
- 🍷 Nage Bistro: through 6 September
- 🍷 Rasika: through 5 September
- 🍷 Zaytinya: through 6 September



Lychee panna cotta with mango sorbet at Kaz Sushi Bistro

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