



[TOP 5]

The Top Five Restaurants Serving Thanksgiving Dinner

BY KAY WEST

STAR CHEFS, HOT RESTAURANTS AND dining trends come and go, but every November, the most predictable cover on every food magazine is a fat and glistening roast turkey. In November 2006, *Saveur* proclaimed it "American Beauty." The following November, it was "A Splendid Feast." Few meals provoke more images of tradition and family than the one that calls family to the table for Thanksgiving. The big bird with perfectly crackled golden skin, the herb-infused dressing (or stuffing, depending on your geographical frame of reference), ruby red cranberries, cinnamon-dusted yams, fluffy mounds of mashed potatoes, heaping bowls of vegetables and a lineup of flaky-crust pies inspire the home cook to tie on the apron, hunker down in the kitchen and emerge days later with a spread worthy of *Gourmet*. That's the timeless, and some might say foolish, pursuit of generations of women. (Forgive the exclusion of you fellows out there who like to piddle

around in the kitchen on occasion, but let's get real. Your primary pursuit on the third Thursday in November is to claim the La-Z-Boy and remote control.)

Show me a woman who turns off her oven and refuses to spend a week preparing a meal that's required to be consumed in less time than it takes two football teams to play the first half, and I'll show you a thankful woman. Ladies, this Nov. 27, break free of the tyranny of brining, stuffing, trussing and basting, peeling, chopping, slicing and dicing, stirring, folding, whipping and beating! Women of America, take back your Thanksgiving! Pick up the phone and make reservations at one of these Nashville dining establishments that puts the Thanksgiving feast back where it belongs—in the hands of professionals.

1. UNION STATION HOTEL—All aboard for the most wonderful time of the year at Union Station Hotel, the 108-year-old building that once served as Nashville's train terminal, and last October unveiled a \$10 million refurbishment. Prime 108, named for one of the engines that carried trains through the station, is the hotel's premiere restaurant. The stately room with 22-foot ceilings, original walnut paneling and stained glass windows claims the northwest corner of the building. The prix fixe Thanksgiving menu, which will be served family-style in Prime 108 and other dining rooms ringing the gorgeous lobby, maintains the kitchen's daily dedication to organic produce and hormone-free meats. The tradition-tempered repast features butternut squash bisque, applewood-smoked turkey breast and confit of turkey leg, sage focaccia and spoon-bread dressing, wild mushroom and truffle giblet gravy and jumbo yeast rolls with cinnamon honey butter. 1001 Broadway, (615) 726-1001

2. THE HERMITAGE HOTEL—The resplendent Grand Ballroom, Veranda and Veranda Landings of Nashville's only 5 Star-5 Diamond hotel become the city's most luxurious dining room for the families who return year after year for a meal that fulfills the grand expectations of its setting. From 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., guests help themselves from a buffet in the breathtaking lobby of the Hermitage Hotel. American Bronze Heritage turkey, sorghum-glazed local country ham and slow-roasted steamship round of beef form the sturdy foundation for side items like Southern oyster and cornbread stuffing, braised Brussels sprouts with pearl onions and pancetta, roasted heirloom pumpkin succotash and parsnip and Yukon Gold potato puree. From 5-8 p.m., tableside service for a three-course meal takes place in the elegant Capitol Grille. Entrée choices cover the bases of turkey, pork, beef or seafood. 231 Sixth Avenue N., (615) 338-5135

3. GAYLORD OPRYLAND HOTEL—For many folks, Thanksgiving is not so much a holiday unto itself but the official starting gate for Christmas.

There's no place that more stupendously celebrates the season than the Gaylord Opryland Hotel, which presents the 25th anniversary of "A Country Christmas" from Nov. 14-Jan. 4. The extravaganza that envelops the sprawling Opryland compound includes the Brightest Star Fountain Show, the Hall of Trees, an outdoor Nativity display, ICE!, the Radio City Christmas Spectacular featuring the world-famous Rockettes, and the all-new Louise Mandrell's Joy to the World Christmas Dinner and Show. Get a jump start on Holiday '08 with the Thanksgiving dinner buffet from noon-8 p.m. at Water's Edge Marketplace on Delta Island, then walk it off and get in the spirit with a stroll through the hotel and grounds, illuminated with nearly two million lights. *Opryland Drive, Donelson, (888) 999-OPRY*

4. MONELL'S DINING AND CATERING—So many families gather at Monell's for Sunday supper that one suspects owner Michael King has taken ads out in church bulletins all over town. But it's word of mouth and the gospel of old-fashioned country cookin' that's built a devout clientele for this unassuming Germantown restaurant, as welcoming and generous as Grandma's house. If your granny has retired her roasting pan—and her skillets, as well—you'll find the next best thing when Monell's sets the tables in the restored original neighborhood home for its 14th annual Thanksgiving meal. Turkey and cornbread dressing, baked ham, roasted pork loin, skillet-fried chicken, mashed potatoes, mac 'n' cheese, sweet potato casserole, green beans, salads, breads and desserts will be passed extended-family-style. Help yourself to seconds and thirds. Monell's at Franklin's Historic Jail will be feeding families in Williamson County, and Monell's at FitzGerald Manor in Gallatin will also be open, all from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. 1235 Sixth Avenue N., (615) 248-4747

5. MARTHA'S AT THE PLANTATION—Seven days a week, ladies and gentlemen who lunch and Southern foodies come to Martha's at the Plantation for a taste of regional culinary heritage and pride, preserved and passed along by one of the cuisine's most accomplished curators. Martha Stamps plans to spend Thanksgiving with her own family, off the Plantation, but your family can still partake of her craftsmanship thanks to the ever-popular Thanksgiving takeover menu. Of particular note are the deep-fried turkeys, a Louisiana specialty that keeps even bone-dry breast meat moist and flavorful. Pull out the good dishes for side items like Creole cornbread and sausage dressing, oyster dressing, apple-pecan cole slaw, mashed roasted sweet potatoes, roasted fall vegetables, Martha's spicy kale, pear-cranberry chutney and homemade yeast rolls. Save room for deep dish sweet potato pie with gingersnap crust. Order in advance and pick up the day before. 5025 Harding Road, (615) 353-2828