

Sharing my Red Lobster and Cheesecake Factory experiences in Albany, New York

MtlRestoRap

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ALBANY, NEW YORK – Readers of *The Montrealer* are well aware of how much I love Red Lobster and wish we had a franchise here in our city. The same can be said for The Cheesecake Factory. Nobody should be surprised then that on my recent trip to Albany, I made sure to dine at each of these spots.

True, there are two Red Lobster locations I frequent when in Ottawa, but that did not stop me from making a beeline for their Wolf Road location in Albany.

I was greeted by the manager on duty, Daniel Rogers. Upon learning that I was from Montreal, he began speaking French to me. He's from Atlanta but picked up the language in school. In addition, he comes to Montreal often. This location can seat about 230 people in a very large dining room, separated by a bar in the middle. They also have a seasonal patio for about 20 people. The parking lot is quite large, a good thing since it tends to fill up before dinnertime.



We ordered the Lobster Lover's Dream and the Lobster Lover's Duo with two sides and their trademark cheddar biscuits. Both meals include Roasted Caribbean rock and Maine lobster tails. The Dream is also paired with lobster-and-shrimp linguini. For sides we chose the orzo rice and the creamy lobster mashed potatoes. I could not resist a bowl of New England clam chowder, piping hot. We were too full to take advantage of any dessert choices.

This Red Lobster is located at 170 Wolf Road. It opens at 11 am each day. You can call 518-459-1040. To learn more about Red Lobster go to www.redlobster.com

The Albany Cheesecake Factory location opened on August 29, 2006 at the Colonie Centre. This 10,800 square foot locale seats 300 diners and you can always expect a lineup at the door. You will be handed a beeper and an estimate wait time.

In Albany, Senior General Manager David Albert runs a well-oiled machine. He has been at the helm of this busy location for 18 years and has an uncanny memory for customers. I had not been there for four years, yet I did not have to reintroduce myself to him or his assistant GM Richard Harris.

The service here is always impeccable and the food superb.

The Cheesecake Factory (www.thecheesecakefactory.com) is known for its extensive menu, generous portions and legendary desserts. In fact, there are more than 250 menu selections, and this includes more than 50 lower calorie "SkinnyLicious®" selections—all handmade, in-house with fresh ingredients – and more than 50 signature cheesecakes and desserts. Favorite choices include appetizers, pizza, seafood, steaks, chicken, burgers, pasta, specialty items, salads, sandwiches, omelets and the desserts.

I know many people who stop here on purpose just to enjoy the experience. Toronto has one too now, yet



Daniel Rogers at Red Lobster

Montreal continues to be left out in the cold. Perhaps there is a fear that the language police here would insist it be called La Fabrique de Gâteau au fromage.

We began our meal by sharing a crab wonton meal as a starter, along with a cheese flatbread pizza. For the main courses, the SkinnyLicious offerings, notably the grilled turkey burgers which we can report are out of this world, always top our list. For us the latter came with a side salad. In addition, our order included a filet mignon medium rare with rice and magnificent mashed potatoes with gravy on the side.

There are multiple fish, pasta and beef options, meal-sized salads and a whole lot more. Give the menu a look online. As for dessert, well this place is called The Cheesecake Factory. The windows display of pies kind of knocks your socks off when you enter the premises. After dinner you can review the menu one more time, which includes a calorie count. My favorites include the Godiva chocolate cheesecake, the Oreo dream extreme cheesecake, the ultimate red velvet cheesecake and the Reese's peanut butter cheesecake. This is one dessert menu where I don't even think about the calorie count.

You can call them directly at 518-453-2500.



Richard Harris at The Cheesecake Factory

Mike's Resto Notes: Geez Resto Bar Café may be the best kept secret in NDG

After attracting a steady clientele on Somerled Ave. in NDG for many years. Geez Resto Bar Café relocated to St. Jacques Street in NDG after the pandemic. This quaint little bar can seat 88 people indoors and on a seasonal terrasse. Owners Steve Towell and Mark Fraser offer a locale with great burgers, beer on tap, live music, comedy and even a dart league.

Needless to say, I was impressed during my recent visit. I thoroughly enjoyed the double bacon cheeseburger, served with their special hot sauce, lettuce, tomato and onion. The sauce represents their own private and secret recipe and yes, it is quite tasty. They could do well for themselves by bottling and selling it in local supermarkets. I also had some crispy fries on the side, dipping them in their homemade gravy. My friend opted for their crispy chicken burger and gave it a big thumbs up. You can also get poutine, chicken wings, coffee, espresso, latte/cappuccino, ice coffee and hot chocolate. They did offer steaks at a certain point, "but since we never freeze our meat and that

was not a big seller we decided to remove it from the menu."

Geez Resto Bar Café is located at 6710 St. Jacques. Log on to www.geezrestobarcafe.com or call 514-419-2033. Opening hours are 10am to midnight weekdays and 8am to midnight on weekends; for the kitchen it is 11am to 9pm.

HELLO 123: I am not someone who considers himself either a proponent of plant-based products nor have I ever described myself as "vegan." Enter Hello 123 (hello123forever.com), a plant-based restaurant and bar on Monkland Avenue in NDG. The owners had invited me to give it a try some time ago. Recently, I took them up on the invitation and indeed I was pleasantly surprised. I enjoyed some messy wedges, the shiitake shawarma wrap, the La-La-La-Lasagna to go and the mocha chocolate cheesecake. The latter is made with cashew nuts, but when the final product came to the table there was no sign of them. This tasted like the chocolate cakes I have grown to love over the years. It did not last long on my plate.



Steve Towell at the grill at Geez

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