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LIKE A LOCAL: THE 7 BEST STEAK RESTAURANTS IN HOUSTON

TravelMag | Holly Riddle | November 26, 2018

FROM EPIC EATERY TO EPIC EYESORE

Albuquerque Journal | Joline Gutierrez Krueger | November 25, 2018

TRAVELMAG

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When you think Texan cuisine, what likely comes to mind is barbecue, Tex Mex and steak. Lots and lots of steak. The bigger, the better. After all, everything is bigger in Texas, right? But not all steakhouses are the same. If you're planning a getaway to Houston, here are the best spots to find a mouthwatering steak.



Carnivores will be right at home in Houston's beef-loving dining scene (Photo: Tom Wieden)

There is steak, and then there is Texan steak. Every country in the world has its own version and preferences, but only Texas specializes in larger-than-life cuts that could be standalone meals all on their own. Whether you take your beef rare or well done, with a side of fries or a baked potato, plain or with a dash of A-1 sauce, a good steak comes down to a few key elements — namely, the chef and his or her cooking methods. Thankfully, Houston's cowboy heritage has made way for a group of men and women who know how to honor the hallowed tradition of cooking the perfect cut of beef just right. Here's where you can find them. (Excerpt from full list)

Pappas Bros. Steakhouse

Catering to the testosterone-driven need to feed on prime beef and then enjoy a cigar in style, Pappas Bros. Steakhouse is the place to win over a work associate or impress your friends. Boasting a “once in a lifetime dining experience,” Pappas Bros. takes special care with every menu item, like the lobster deviled egg appetizers, turtle gumbo, gooey pecan pie and, of course, the expansive steak selection.

Albuquerque Journal

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The Claim Jumper restaurant near I-25 and Jefferson has been abandoned since 2017. It opened to huge crowds as Landry's Seafood House in 1996. (Adolphe Pierre-Louis/Albuquerque Journal)

Things started off so well.

In the fall of 1995, we watched it rise from the southeast embankment off Interstate 25 and Jefferson, a gleaming restaurant of whitewashed brick and wooden deck and a large pond from which fountains sprinkled and the reflection of red neon lights from its marquee sparkled in the water like rubies.

It all looked so grand, so Gulf Coast, so seafood, a welcome and rare sight in this landlocked city of ours. Food gurus talk about how the success of a restaurant depends on location, location, location. Landry's Seafood House had that, or nearly so, situated on the opposite side of the freeway from what is now restaurant chain row.

That's how it began 23 years ago. Today, at the site of such grandeur is an abandoned, smelly wreck awaiting demolition.

It has been deteriorating like that since the last restaurant to occupy the site shut its doors in July 2017.

Perched as it is above I-25, the place has become one of the most prominent eyesores in the city.

But let's travel back in time to the way it was.

Let's remember how Landry's Seafood House drew huge crowds on its opening day Jan. 29, 1996, without any advertising. We were just so giddy to try out this famous chain's fare of fish and bayou fantasy.

"That's the way we like to do it," company president Tilman Fertitta told the Journal then about the brisk business at the 46th opening in his ever-expanding chain of restaurants. "They just turned on the lights."

A Journal article described the interior of the 5001 Jefferson NE location as having "big, open rooms and vintage signs designed to recreate the airy, energetic atmosphere of 1940s Gulf seafood houses."

Back then, Tillman had promised to open another Landry's restaurant if the Jefferson location did well. A Joe's Crab Shack was also on its way, he vowed.

Classified ads in the Journal offered the "opportunity of a lifetime" to employees looking to join its "high volume seafood restaurant chain with unique waterfront locations" – ranked No. 5 in Forbes' Best 200 Small Companies in America and No. 1 in Nation's Restaurant News' Hot Concepts of the Nineties.

What could possibly go wrong?

For one thing, Landry's Seafood House faced competition with the arrival in 2001 of Pappadeaux Seafood Kitchen, an even grander version of a Gulf seafood house right across the freeway, minus the pond.

And for another, the food was, well, not so grand. In 2002, the Journal restaurant critic found the "fish-camp-cum-theater-lobby" atmosphere of Landry's Seafood House charming but the cuisine charmless, describing the fish as excruciatingly salty, the sauces elephantine, the crab dangerous because of the shards of shells buried within the meat like land mines.

And still we kept eating. Maybe we didn't mind elephantine sauces, or maybe we just liked looking out at that pond and imagining we were having big fun on the bayou rather than off the interstate.

The Seafood House kept dishing out its Pontchartrain Tilapia and its Snapper Amore until 2013, when it was replaced by the beefier Claim Jumper Restaurant and Saloon, also a part of the Fertitta chain.

And, then it happened. Claim Jumper employees said they showed up for work as usual July 24, 2017, and were told their services were no longer required.

Just like that, Fertitta and the huge Landry's chain took its frying pans and left New Mexico.

We never got that additional restaurant or that Joe's Crab Shack, which still disappoints.

Landry's, it seems, had been good at selling the sizzle, but not the steak. Or the seafood.

(Excerpt from full article)