

{ worth the **trip** }

Vail's Most Exclusive Burger

By Jennifer Nalewicki

The most exclusive dining experience in Vail is also one of the town's most casual. Located inside the kitchen at Flame, the steakhouse at the Four Seasons Resort, Back of House (BoH) Burger Bar is a chef's table available by reservation only.

Much like the speakeasies of yore, BoH doesn't advertise, relying instead on word of mouth. I learned about it through an acquaintance when I announced I was going on my family's annual ski trip this past winter and was open to dining suggestions. As soon as she described BoH's gourmet burgers and boozy milkshakes I was on the phone making reservations with the concierge.

I'll admit it felt odd pushing past the kitchen's swinging doors and into a space that's typically off limits to diners. The hostess led my group to a high-top table located a mere stone's throw from the "line," where chefs were busily grilling dry-aged Wagyu rib eyes and searing tender cuts of pork belly for guests at Flame. Once we settled in, Jason Harrison, who at the time of my visit was the resort's executive chef, came by to introduce himself and explain how BoH works.

It turns out that BoH was the brainchild of a line cook at Flame. Harrison knew he wanted to do a chef's table, but in a style that was different from the highfalutin multi-course menus most people expect. A burger bar—done in the style of a "fun-dining restaurant" rather than a fine-dining restaurant, felt like the perfect fit. BoH began as a pop-up restaurant in 2012 and proved so popular

that it became a permanent fixture, open to the public year-round with twice-daily seatings.

"Within the first week people were calling to set up reservations," says sous-chef Dagan Stocks. "Eating a burger is a [form of] nostalgia, but being in the kitchen also takes you out of your comfort zone."

Its laid-back vibe is a big part of BoH's sudden popularity. But what really keeps diners coming back for seconds (and thirds—there are plenty of regulars) is the food. The restaurant sources most of its ingredients from local farmers and ranchers: 7X Beef in Hotchkiss provides the beef, a baker in Avon bakes the buns and farmers in Lyons and Arvada supply the produce. (So complete is the restaurant's reliance on local food, in fact, that a beverage manager's suggestion to put a Colorado flag next to every local menu item was vetoed for lack of menu space.)

The offerings at BoH change seasonally, but typically include a fully loaded burger like the Big Mamba (house-made Wagyu beef patty, mixed peppers, fried egg, mushrooms, Gruyere and chipotle aioli), plus several beef alternatives like the Columbine, a riff on chicken and waffles using locally raised chicken that's fried and topped with chipotle-apricot slaw and sandwiched between two bacon, green onion and cheddar waffles.



Recently, BoH expanded its offerings to include a milkshake class where guests, under the tutelage of a "milkshake mixologist," can assemble a custom-made treat using homemade ice cream, dozens of toppings and a bar's worth of liqueurs. Some diners have even impressed the restaurant's staff with their shake-driven creativity, as when one guest created a strawberry-basil shake spiked with Sambuca and ground pepper.

Certainly, BoH is a bit pricier than your run-of-the-mill burger joint: Adults get appetizers, a burger and a shake for \$35 while kids can eat for \$15 each.

But part of what guests are paying for—and what really makes BoH special—is its exclusivity. Specialty burgers are only available to BoH diners—they're not on the menu at Flame—and only guests at BoH get a chance to interact with the chefs in their natural environment. In the past, several regulars have tried—and failed—to get room service to smuggle a burger to their hotel rooms, but they're always met with the same advice: Get a BoH reservation, and enjoy the food in the kitchen where it came from. **eA**

GO FIND IT!

Back of House Burger Bar
Inside Flame Restaurant at the
Four Seasons Resort
1 Vail Road, Vail
970.477.8650
FlameRestaurantVail.com/Menus

Photographs courtesy of Four Seasons Resort & Residences Vail