

10 great L.A. meals for under \$10: New food lovers' guide



By **Rene Lynch**

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Who says dining out in L.A. needs to leave a dent in your wallet? Certainly not Cathy Chaplin. Her new book, "[The Food Lovers' Guide to Los Angeles](#)," is out this week and just in time to make a swell stocking stuffer for the foodie who has everything. (Hint: Your loved one is a "foodie" if they never miss a chance to engage in lively debate over use of the term "foodie.")

This guide certainly pays homage to the type of exquisite high-end dining that Los Angeles is known for -- [Matsuhisa](#), [Urasawa](#), [Melisse](#) and other four-dollar-sign, break-the-piggy-bank-'cause-it's-totally-worth-it meals.

PHOTOS: 10 unbelievable L.A. meals for under \$10

But about 70% of the more than 400 restaurants, bakeries, markets and food trucks covered in the book fall in the one-dollar-sign range -- as in, one person could eat their fill for an average of \$10 or less.

"That's what I believe L.A. does best," said Chaplin, who is also the voice behind the [Gastronomy](#) blog. "You can find these restaurants throughout the county, in pockets throughout the community, where you can eat very well without spending a lot of money."

We asked Chaplin to guide us to her top 10 L.A. eats that all come in at less than \$10. And did she deliver, as you can see by the photo gallery above.

She hit seemingly every mark -- Japanese, Argentinian, Indian, Chinese, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Mexican -- while still leaving money in our pockets for some last-minute Christmas shopping. And *of course* she included a burger. (A jaw-dropping burger at that. See for yourself.)

Now, there are some things to remember when you are dining at such hole-in-the-wall establishments, Chaplin said. The service is likely to be hit or miss. And the ambiance might leave something to be desired. But it's all about the food, right? "Sometimes you just cannot believe the prices," she said. If you feel like you are getting the better end of the deal, "you can overcompensate on the tip," she added.

Chaplin had explored many of the restaurants in and around L.A. while writing her blog. But the book gave her an opportunity to branch out into new areas, and revisit old favorites, all in the name of research.

"It was a great excuse to go out and try everything I ever wanted to try," she said. "I blew my advance on it, but it was totally worth it."

The book explores food in and around L.A. by culture as well as geography. It also includes a guide to the region's many ethnic markets, helpful for those who want to take a crack at making authentic fare at home. (The guide includes several restaurant recipes as well, such as Huckleberry Bakery & Cafe's beloved salted caramel bars.)

The book also includes a calendar of annual food festivals in and around L.A., as well as a robust list of food writers to follow for the latest food news and finds throughout L.A. and beyond. There's also a shout-out to food writers who lent their expertise to the guide.

"L.A. is humongous, and there are so many passionate food bloggers out there, I really relied on their collective enthusiasm," Chaplin said.

Looking forward to 2014, what does Chaplin see?

"One of the most exciting trends that's happened in L.A. is second-generation chefs taking their grandmas' recipes and putting an extraordinary twist on it." She cited [Diep Tran's Good Girl Dinette](#) and [Roy Choi's hotly anticipated Pot](#) as examples. "I think we're going to see a lot of that in 2014."

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A taco al pastor at the original King Taco in honor of Raul Martinez Sr.

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