

RESTAURANT REVIEW 25 RED LOBSTER Chesterfield Valley January 20, 2015

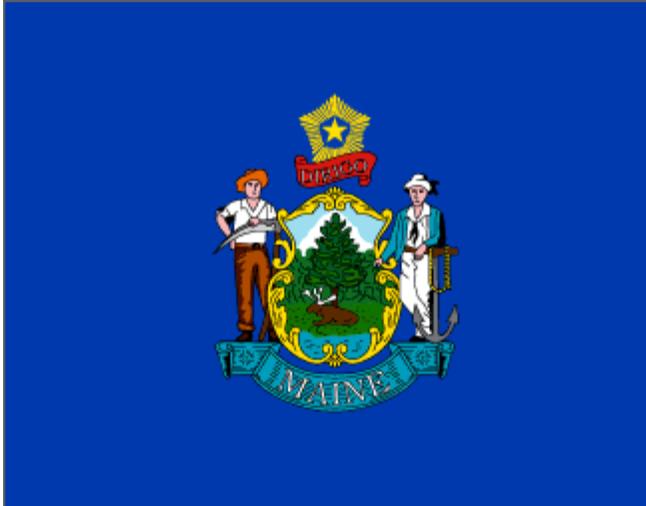
When my wife, Diana, and I lived in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC we ate a Red Lobster almost once a week. As much as I had enjoyed and preferred independent and family run restaurants while living in St. Louis and Kansas City there was a dollar and sense problem about going to them in the Washington, DC area. The land prices, rents, taxes and utilities were so high and it was difficult to compete with nation chains that had fixed menu prices everywhere but Hawaii and Alaska. The local places were often 20-percent higher and sometimes not as good.

Sure we went to local places but not nearly as often as we did in Kansas City or we do now. In Maryland our neighbor and her daughter would meet us at Red Lobster every Sunday during the winter when I wasn't covering a minor league baseball game. Even if tables were available we would often wait 10 or 15 minutes so we could sit in the section with our favorite waiter, Stan, this kind of made it seem more like a local joint. Since we have returned to St. Louis it is unusual for us to eat at a national chain more than once a month.

Over the last few years going to Red Lobster once every six months or longer we noticed that portion size and sometimes quality were shrinking. Six months after Darden allegedly (there have been some trade reports that Darden has in interest in the company that bought Red Lobster) sold off Red Lobster we thought we try them again.



Here is some free advice I left with the manager. Since Red Lobster is under new management do something different. If you notice outside they are flying a Missouri State flag. There are no lobsters in Missouri. Corporate headquarters needs to send out a State of Maine flag to every restaurant and have it flown outside.



The tale of two dinners: Diana chose the four course feast that included soup and salad, a main course plus dessert. She went with the Shrimp and scallop pasta, a garden salad **with blue cheese on the side**, a cup of clam chowder and the caramel cheesecake all for \$16.99.

The cheddar biscuits which have been around on the table of Red Lobster for almost 40 years were okay. They are only truly great when they are served hot, which happens sometimes. However Olive Garden's breadsticks always arrive hot, so I don't know what the problem is.



My wife's salad arrived with dressing on it. She likes a much smaller dose of the blue cheese dressing and that is why she asks for it on the side. She didn't eat much of it. The waitress was told about this when she asked if everything was alright. She immediately offered to get another salad and my wife told her it was not necessary. To the credit of Red Lobster, the waitress, to our pleasant surprise did deliver a salad to go with a separate container of dressing.

For a place that prides itself as a slice of New England, the Clam Chowder is like it came out of a can, which I'm sure it did, certainly a very large can. It was missing that thick creamy flavor and thick stock you would get at a mom and pop clam strip joint on Cape Cod or a lobster shack in Maine. It might be better if Red Lobster offered it in take home cans. I always thought Red Lobster should have sold its tater sauce in grocery stores, because it was that good, the clam chowder is average.



Diana was not crazy about her Shrimp and Scallop Pasta. Both the shrimp and scallops were very small. The blah Alfredo sauce did not save it.

The Good and the Bad! My order started with a Clam Strip Appetizer (\$3.29). This was a disappointment. I always found this item to be pretty good. But on this day I received more small broken off pieces of clam strips than actual clam strips.

However my entree was great. I ordered the half portion Rainbow Trout (\$13.29). It was perfect, with excellent flavor and just the right amount for a person who had already had two biscuits, a salad and some sad tiny clam strips.



The real treat was the delicious sautéed green beans. I am not normally a person to fuss about presentation choosing to go with taste instead. However the scoop of potatoes looked like they came out of an Army mess hall, although they were warm and tasted okay.

The cheesecake that came with my wife's dinner was small, but what would you expect for a \$17 meal? The presentation was nice and it tasted great.



The day we dined was the day before the "Shrimp Feast" promotion. Red Lobster was advertising a new item, Shrimp Tempura. I went back in the afternoon on Tuesday January 20 just to try the Shrimp Tempura.

Unfortunately I could not just have a single order of Shrimp Tempura. I had to have it with at least one of five other shrimp entrees. I didn't feel like getting any of the other dishes, so I ordered a double order of Shrimp Tempura (\$15.99). That was a mistake. Of course it came with the salad, biscuits and more potatoes.



The tempura coating was fine for the first five. Then it got old. The reason for that was the almost nonexistent amount of shrimp under the coating. The pulled shrimp was

clearly not from a large variety and was pencil lead thin. After the first five, the next five were tired and the lack of shrimp was annoying as it was harder and harder to taste any shrimp.

The mashed potatoes were still served up from a scoop and this time they were cool.

Frankly I felt a little cheated like there had been a bait and switch. The TV commercial hyping the "New Tempura Shrimp" got me through the restaurant's doors, but instead of letting me try a single order for say \$9.99 or \$10.99, they wanted to increase my calorie and cholesterol intake by getting a double entree order all while increasing the bill.

I still have a soft spot in my heart having gone to the Crestwood Red Lobster in 1974 on dates and actually being able to afford lobster on a limited budget. I still will likely return in six or seven months, but the once a week days are long over. My wife says I will have to go alone for any return trips.