

THE CONNOISSEUR UP NORTH

TC on a budget: Dining out on \$25 a day

You know that show on TV's Food Network in which a terminally dimpled young lady jets into some city and spends half an hour of air time proving how well she can eat there on "only" \$40 a day?

Well, we think she's a spendthrift. More than that, she's a cheapskate; her budget doesn't include tips.

We'd like to invite her to Traverse City, where she could not only eat well on only \$25 a day, but do it for days on end, and include tips, and even have money left over at sundown.

On Day One, we'll do it without ever leaving Front Street. Start with a \$3.75 breakfast of toast, eggs and fruit at the Green House.

Add \$1.40 for coffee, leave a proper tip, and you're out \$6. At lunchtime, it's off to Crema at Front and Park, where \$6.99 gets you a "Cherry Capital" romaine salad of chicken, cherries, pecans and bacon bleu-cheese dressing. Drop a buck in the tip jar, and



BY SHERRI & GRAYDON DECAMP Local columnists

you've got \$11 left.

That lets you have dinner at a happenin' place like North Peak. Spend \$8.50 on a grilled-chicken pizza from the wood-fired oven, complete with artichoke hearts, garlic-herb olive oil, dilled Havarti, sun-dried tomatoes and roasted garlic. Your \$1.50 tip brings the day's outlay to \$24. Heck, if you'd had the white cheddar and bacon pizza for \$7.95, then maybe you'd want to score a little Kilwin's fudge for dessert.

See what we mean? You're not exactly eating field rations here, and our tips, while rounded a bit, are all in the 15-20 percent range.

On Day Two we'll go farther afield and get ethnic. Let's start at Taqueria Margarita on South Airport Rd. with a hearty \$5 breakfast of huevos rancheros. With coffee and tip, make it \$7. Then we'll have an Asian chicken half-wrap for lunch at Another Cuppa Joe at Grand Traverse Commons. For \$3.25 it provides just about the whole food pyramid: chicken, onion, peppers, cucumber, lettuce, carrot, rice noodles, crushed peanuts and a spicy peanut dressing on sun-dried tomato lahvosh. Add a half-dollar tip and you've spent \$3.75.

For the day, you're out \$10.75 and you still have \$14.25 for dinner, so pork out on solid, American ethnic at Scott's Harbor Grill, where \$11.95 will get you a half platter of St. Louis style ribs glazed with tangy, smoky barbecue sauce and generous sides of BBQ beans and creamy cole slaw. Tip for the predictably fine service and you're still under budget.

If you really want to stretch out the day, you could turn to Scott's "lite-at-night" menu and order two warm soft-shell corn tortillas with grilled Ahi tuna



Barbara Kausler, left, purchases lunch at Mary's Kitchen Port as Kathy Ziegler, right, and Linda Kirt, center, pack it up to go.

Record-Eagle/Doug Tesner

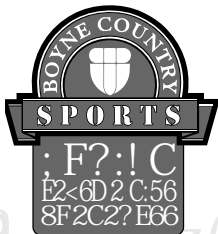
finished with Baja slaw, pico de gallo, sour cream, guacamole and salsa. That, complete with black refried beans, is \$8.95 — make it \$10.75 with tip. Now your total for the day is only \$21.50, which leaves all sorts of extra possibilities. You could even invest the surplus, since the Big Board alone lists about 50 stocks for less. But nah! Just head back downtown to North Peak for a \$3.50 pint of Steelhead Red.

For fun, let's stipulate really nice weather and order one carryout meal to take down by the bay. Have a \$7 breakfast at The House, 826 W. Front (try egg sandwich on English muffin with apple-cured bacon, Gruyere and Dijonnaise, plus fresh fruit and coffee and tip), then go to Mary's Kitchen Port at lunchtime and order a fantastic salad and some soup to go. The salad sells by weight, but our last half-pint of "tuba" pasta salad and 10-oz cup of creamy clam chowder cost \$4.50. For dinner, splurge at Ciao

Bella, where \$8.95 gets you a grilled, herb-marinated chicken breast, complete with salad, starch and vegetable. Add \$1.55 for a tip. Out of the \$25 you started with, you've got three bucks left, and again, you haven't left Front Street. So what'll it be this time? The stock market or ice cream?

We could go on like this for days. We remember a \$10.95 all-you-can-eat perch special one Friday night at CW's Bluewater Bistro in the Holiday Inn. For \$9 you can have a "pizza bella" at the Park Place Hotel's Beacon Lounge — sausage, pepperoni, mushroom, tomato and three cheeses, with good live music thrown in. At Stella, the hottest new spot in town, a three-cheese white pizza runs a mere \$7.

And we haven't even left Traverse City yet. Imagine the possibilities! So come on, Food Network. Get real. Or better yet, come on up to TC and see for yourself. But if you come, please bring enough to tip the hard-working help.



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