

## **Caribbean Cuisine Gives American Fare an Island Flair**

### **Consumers can ‘feed their island spirit’ and enjoy a Caribbean escape at Bahama Breeze**

Like a fresh breeze from the tropics, Caribbean ingredients are becoming increasingly popular as a way to add island flair to traditional American fare. Helping lead that trend is Bahama Breeze, the restaurant that gives you the feeling of a Caribbean escape, with the food, drink and atmosphere found in the islands. The menu features everyone’s favorites — seafood, chicken, steak and salads — accented with flavorful and colorful Caribbean-inspired ingredients.

Caribbean cuisine’s growing popularity reflects the nation’s increasing multicultural demographics. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, people from the Caribbean account for 9.9 percent of the nation’s foreign-born population, and Latin America accounts for 52 percent. This has greatly escalated interest in Latin and island-inspired flavors. In fact, according to the National Restaurant Association, restaurants with Latin influences are growing 3.5 times faster than any other restaurant group, and many eateries are adding the region’s flavors to their menus.

With lots of fresh seafood, distinctive chicken dishes and flame-grilled steaks, the menu at Bahama Breeze incorporates fresh ingredients indigenous to the islands, such as pineapple, coconut and the fresh spices found region-wide. “Bahama Breeze really tries to bring the freshness and variety of the Caribbean to American dining,” says Rick Crossland, Bahama Breeze executive chef and a lead judge for the Caribbean Culinary Federation.

“The region’s many cultural influences have led to new ways of using foods we’re all familiar with, becoming what we now refer to as Caribbean cuisine,” adds Crossland. “For a chef, the fusion of these influences offers unlimited possibilities, and the wonderful thing is that these flavors are familiar to people of so many different backgrounds. They have become part of our American melting pot.”

According to Crossland, Caribbean food is sometimes misperceived as being hot and spicy. “Actually, island cuisine features bold but not overpowering flavors,” he says, “many of which are very familiar to American consumers, including spices like cinnamon, nutmeg and ginger; herbs like cilantro and basil; and fruits like coconut and mango.”

*more*

The most popular appetizer on the Bahama Breeze menu is **Coconut Shrimp**, which are also available as an entrée for lunch and dinner. Popular entrées include **Jerk Chicken Pasta**, Jamaican-style marinated chicken in a smooth cream sauce; **Grilled Fresh Salmon Tostada**, served with crispy tortillas, three cheeses and field greens; and **West Indies Ribs**, tender, fall-off-the-bone baby-backs prepared with a sweet and smoky guava barbecue sauce. And for a sweet finish to an island-inspired meal, guest favorites include the **Chocolate Island**, milk chocolate mousse in milk chocolate and vanilla bean sauce, and **Rebecca's Key Lime Pie**, baked fresh in each restaurant.

Bahama Breeze also recently introduced several new items to its menu, including **Breeze Wood-Grilled Chicken Breast**, moist and tender with citrus butter sauce; **Grilled Chicken Tostada**, sliced wood-grilled chicken over crisp flour tortillas with three melted cheeses, field greens and avocado; **Spinach Dip and Island Chips**, an islandy blend of spinach, artichokes and cheese with a hint of nutmeg; and **Lobster and Shrimp Pasta**, sweet Caribbean lobster and shrimp in every bite.

Also new is a fresh fish sheet offering guests a choice of several fresh fish species — including tilapia, salmon and mahi mahi — and preparations, including **Almond-Crusted with lemon butter sauce**, **Havana with Latin caper-garlic tomato sauce** and **Simply Grilled with lemon-garlic-herb butter**.

###