

## Where do Canadians like to eat when on the run? What are their favourite new restaurant menu items?

### BrandSpark International surveys 8,500 Canadians about their favourite restaurants and new menu items



**Toronto (February 24, 2016)** – Where do Canadians like to eat and how are their dining habits shaping the country? Marketing research firm BrandSpark International conducted a national survey of more than 8,500 Canadians about which quick service restaurants (QSRs) they frequent and how their dining habits are shaping the country and restaurant menus. The results were announced today in the second annual BrandSpark Best Restaurant Awards that identify Canadians’ favourite QSRs. Highlights include: The changing face of McDonald’s (with more people recognizing them for best tasting coffee than burgers); the continued battle for coffee and specialty coffee supremacy; and Subway taking the lead on healthy menu items overall. In addition to the Best Restaurant Awards, the company also announced the winners of the companion Best New Menu Items Awards.

#### The changing face of McDonald’s – today known for coffee versus burgers

McDonald’s either won or tied in 14 of the 28 categories in the 2015 Best Restaurant Awards, including winning best QSR for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and drive-thru in 2015 and in 2014. “On the surface this appears to be quite promising for McDonald’s,” said Mark Baltazar, Vice President and Partner, BrandSpark International. “The company clearly benefits from their strong top of mind awareness tied to their long history and heavy advertising. They are the dominant restaurant for both kids’ occasions and for best tasting fries. However, when we delve deeper into the research we see that from the sheer number of ties – a three-way tie for best lunch and a four-way tie for best dinner being the most obvious – the competition is intense and gaining ground. It is interesting to note that what people know McDonald’s best for is changing – with far more people citing them for ‘best tasting coffee’ than ‘best tasting burger’.”

The “best tasting burger” category was won by A&W for the second year in a row, with their ongoing quality focused campaign and ingredients guarantee clearly having an enduring impact. “In fact, A&W has been leveraging their Best Restaurant Award win by highlighting it prominently in their first external newsletter to customers,” added Baltazar.

#### Canada’s coffee war is getting hotter

Also for the second year in a row, Tim Horton’s won for best tasting coffee by a margin of 20% over second place McDonald’s. The honour of best tasting specialty coffee went to Starbucks in 2015 as it did in 2014.

“As we stated last year, ‘Canada’s coffee war continues to brew’,” said Baltazar, “Even though Tim Horton’s won for best tasting coffee two years in a row, the margin for the number one spot appears to be shrinking. And while Starbucks remains a distant third for coffee overall, they did expand their lead in the specialty coffee market, which is really where their core strength lies. It’s an open question whether Tim Horton’s or McDonald’s will be able to chip away at this lead.”

In the Best New Menu Item Awards the best new coffee honour went to A&W for their Organic Fairtrade Coffee. “Time will tell whether the quality associations the brand has built for burgers can extend into this category as well,” added Baltazar. Starbucks won for both the best new specialty coffee and specialty tea beverage for their Caramel Flan Latte and their Blossoming Peach Tea Latte. “This demonstrates how innovation can be used to help re-enforce and extend market leadership,” added Baltazar.

## Consumer choice for healthy menu items are driven by the “mains” not the “sides”

In the Best Restaurant Awards, after tying with Wendy’s last year, Subway won best tasting healthy menu items in 2015. Wendy’s continues to win for best tasting salad by a 22% margin. Wendy’s also won for best new salad in the Best New Menu Item Awards for their Asian Cashew Chicken Salad.

“The fact that Wendy’s won for best salads is impressive and combined with their leadership on hot and spicy menu items gives them some important differentiation in the marketplace. However, Subway winning in the healthy menu items overall informs us that offering great salads or healthy ‘sides’ isn’t enough for Canadians to consider a QSR offering healthier options. With Subway coming in as sole winner this year it is clear that for overall healthy menu items, consumer choice is driven by the ‘main’ course offerings – which for many salads are not,” said Baltazar.

BrandSpark International has been conducting consumer research in the restaurant arena for more than 15 years. BrandSpark is also the research company behind Restaurant Canada’s Chef Survey about Canadian menu trends, Canada’s most credible consumer packaged goods (CPG) awards programs, the Best New Product Awards, and the BrandSpark Most Trusted Awards.

“We wanted to leverage our expertise in Canadian consumer insights and awards recognition programs in the CPG category and bring it to Canada’s QSR industry,” added Baltazar. The Best New Restaurant and Best New Menu Item survey was administered online, with more than 8,500 Canadians participating in open-ended questions and unaided responses.

### Select BrandSpark Best Restaurant Award Winners\*: 2015 Winners Compared with 2014 Winners

Category	2015 Winner(s)	2014 Winner(s)
<b>Best for Breakfast</b>	Tim Horton’s tie with McDonald’s	Tim Horton’s tie with McDonald’s
<b>Best for Lunch</b>	Tim Horton’s tie with McDonald’s tie with Subway	Tim Horton’s tie with McDonald’s
<b>Best for Dinner</b>	McDonald’s tie with Wendy’s tie with A&W tie with Subway	McDonald’s tie with Wendy’s
<b>Best Tasting Coffee</b>	Tim Horton’s	Tim Horton’s
<b>Best Tasting Burgers</b>	A&W	A&W
<b>Best Tasting Healthy Menu Items</b>	Subway	Subway tie with Wendy’s
<b>Best Tasting Healthy Menu Items</b>	Subway	Subway tie with Wendy’s
<b>Best Tasting Salads</b>	Wendy’s	Wendy’s
<b>Best for Families with Kids</b>	McDonald’s	McDonald’s
<b>Best Tasting Food Overall</b>	A&W tie with McDonald’s tie with Tim Horton’s tie with Wendy’s	McDonald’s

\*For a complete list of BrandSpark Best Restaurant Award Winners, please visit [www.BestRestaurantAwards.com](http://www.BestRestaurantAwards.com).

In addition to the Best Restaurant Awards, the study gathered insights about topics ranging from why particular restaurants were selected as favourites, how restaurants can continue introducing winning innovation, and the different ethnic flavour profiles consumers are most interested in trying at restaurants. BrandSpark also catalogued major changes across the regions and demographics.

As a companion to BrandSpark’s Best Restaurant Awards, the company also surveyed Canadians about their favourite Best New Menu Items.

**Best New Menu Item Award 2015 Winners**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Winner</b>
<b>Best Breakfast</b>	A&W: All Canadian Breakfast
<b>Best Beef Burger</b>	Carl Jr.: The Mile High Bacon Thickburger
<b>Best Wrap/Burrito</b>	Pizza Pizza: Pizza-dillas
<b>Best Chicken Burger/Sandwich</b>	Wendy’s: Jalapeño Fresco Spicy Chicken Sandwich
<b>Best Ice Cream/Milkshake</b>	Dairy Queen: Salted Caramel Truffle Blizzard
<b>Best Specialty Tea Beverage</b>	Starbucks: Blossoming Peach Tea Latte
<b>Best Specialty Coffee</b>	Starbucks: Caramel Flan Latte
<b>Best New Coffee</b>	A&W: Organic Fairtrade Coffee
<b>Best New Poutine</b>	Carl Jr.: Bacon Poutine
<b>Best New Salad</b>	Wendy’s: Asian Cashew Chicken Salad
<b>Best New Coffee</b>	A&W: Organic Fairtrade Coffee

**About BrandSpark International:**

BrandSpark International is a leading brand, marketing and product innovation insights firm. Its comprehensive and innovative research approaches get at the heart of how consumers think, why they act the way they do, and what companies need to do about it to grow their business. BrandSpark has been helping restaurant brands grow for more than 15 years.

For more information about the BrandSpark Restaurant Awards, how to leverage the insights and credential from this unique study and program, please contact:

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