

Americans spent more than \$189 billion on fast food in 2016¹ — roughly \$1,700 per person.² What was America's favorite restaurant? That depends on how you look at the data.

Not surprisingly, McDonald's ranked highest in sales, outpacing its closest competitor, Starbucks, by more than a 2 to 1 margin. If convenience was the main reason for choosing a Big Mac over a Flat White, however, the numbers don't show it. On average, any given McDonald's store grossed more than twice as many dollars in 2016 as a Starbucks.³

If we look at sales per store as the metric for determining our fast-food preference, Chick-Fil-A is the runaway winner. The average store grossed \$4.4 million in 2016—blowing away the McDonald's average of \$2.5 million per store. Texas-based burger chain Whataburger was Chick-Fil-A's closest competitor in per-store sales, bringing in \$2.7 million per location in 2016. Americans living near a Chick-Fil-A apparently heeded the cows' advice to "Eat Mor Chikin".

Click on the rankings below to see how your favorite restaurant stacked up.

[Top 5 graphic on the U.S. map]

--

[State rankings by restaurant could be a cool interactive graphic — a drop-down of states that pulls the names of top restaurants by state and maybe a drop-down of top 10 or 20 restaurants where you click and it tells you which states it's most popular in]

Fun Facts: [all of these are true according to our data, but may not be true in reality]

Despite living near America's longest coastline⁴, Alaskans don't prefer fish for their fast food. The biggest seller in America's biggest state is the sandwich. Subway leads the pack, making up a quarter of Alaska's fast food eateries.

Who says Alabamans aren't adventurous? They turn out to be America's number-one state when it comes to eating ethnic cuisine — roughly half of Alabama's fast-food restaurants fall into the foreign-food category.⁵

--

¹ <https://www.qsrmagazine.com/content/qs50-2017-top-50-chart>

² Sawe, Benjamin Elisha. "The 50 US States Ranked By Population." WorldAtlas, Oct. 21, 2019, worldatlas.com/articles/us-states-by-population.html.

³ <https://www.qsrmagazine.com/content/qs50-2017-top-50-chart>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._states_and_territories_by_coastline

⁵ This would be good place to have a pop-up that says something like: "Apparently, Taco Bell counts as ethnic."

[Explanation page]

“There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics.” — Mark Twain

Good data analysis requires good data. We found a dataset of 10,000 fast food restaurants graciously provided for free by Datafiniti’s Business Database. It contains a wealth of information in each row, including the restaurant’s address and website. At first blush, it felt robust—10,000 rows is a lot of data. Quick sorting showed that California and Texas had the most restaurants, as we expected. Another sort that showed states with the fewest restaurants made it immediately clear that we had a problem.

[image of the sorted data]

By the numbers, Alabama has only six fast-food restaurants in the dataset.

Looking back at fast-food sales information we obtained from QSR Magazine, the publication for quick-service and fast-casual restaurant news, it became immediately apparent that the 10,000-row dataset represented only a fraction of existing restaurants. The top 50 fast-food restaurants from QSR’s table combined to have 159,792 locations in the United States in 2016. Statista Research estimates that, in total, there were 241,379 fast food restaurants in the U.S. in 2016.⁶ Therefore, we were looking at a dataset containing roughly 4 percent of all fast-food restaurant locations. Unfortunately, Datafiniti did not indicate that this dataset is incomplete, and it would have been very easy for us to do analysis and believe that our outcomes represented incontrovertible fact.

Does this mean that the fun facts aren’t factual? Not necessarily. [I’m going to talk more about statistics here]

⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/196619/total-number-of-fast-food-restaurants-in-the-us-since-2002/>