

RESTAURANTS

# 50 Largest Restaurant Chains in America

Are the most popular restaurants in America the most successful?



BY [OLIVIA TARANTINO](#) AUGUST 26, 2020



Courtesy of Chick-fil-A

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Some of the most popular restaurant chains in the country aren't the most successful. While customers may report how much they like (or dislike) a restaurant on surveys, the true way to tell whether a restaurant is popular or not is to look at where those customers put their money—not where they put their mouth.

That's why we consulted *Nation's Restaurant News'* 2020 Top 200 report on the top 50 chains with the highest systemwide total sales to determine the largest popular restaurant chains in America. Every year, *NRN* compiles the data for this report to reveal an "in-depth look at the health of the industry and the performance of its biggest players."

Our list—**ranked from lowest to highest in sales**—is made up of **popular restaurant chains** with many locations nationwide (like Chick-fil-A, Burger King, and McDonald's) as well as regional restaurant chains (like Culver's, Zaxby's, and Wawa).

Read on to see if the results meet your expectations, and then discover what the 100 Most Popular Fast Food Items are at these nationwide chains.

50

## BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse

designs by Jack/Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$1.6 billion**

Despite having just 200 locations, BJ's found a spot on the same list as fast-food giants like McDonald's and Subway, with the California-based restaurant and brewery pulling in \$1.6 billion in sales last year.

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## 49 Dave & Buster's

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$1.33 billion**

Although Dave & Buster's—an arcade that doubles as a restaurant—landed among the top 50 restaurants with the highest total sales, that doesn't mean the restaurant chain is as successful as you may think. After the coronavirus hit, the restaurant had to close all 137 locations and [may have to declare bankruptcy](#)—just like these [6 Beloved Restaurants That Have Filed for Bankruptcy](#).

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## 48 Bojangles

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$1.33 billion**

Bojangles' famous chicken and biscuits are a staple in the southeast.

**RELATED:** [Your ultimate restaurant and supermarket survival guide is here!](#)

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## 47 Jersey Mike's

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$1.34 billion**

Despite its name, you can find Jersey Mike's locations all across the country.

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## 46 Wingstop

Courtesy of Wingstop

**Total sales: \$1.46 billion**

Wingstop expanded from one small Texas restaurant in 1994 to a chain of 1,436 locations globally.

And if you love the chicken chain, here are [The Best and Worst Menu Items at Wingstop](#).

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## 45 Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$1.47 billion**

This chicken fingers chain earned the top spot on the list of [10 Fastest-Growing Restaurant Chains in America You Need to Try](#).

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## 44 Carl's Jr.

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$1.47 billion**

People love Carl's Jr.'s charbroiled burgers enough to spend \$1.4 billion of their hard-earned cash at the burger chain.

Here are [The Best and Worst Foods on the Carl's Jr. Menu](#).

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## 43 Red Robin

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$1.50 billion**

After a solid year of over a billion dollars in sales, [this beloved burger chain could be shutting its doors for good](#).

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## 42 Five Guys

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$1.66 billion**

Burgers, fries, and shakes are a recipe for success. Here are the [10 Best and Worst Things About Five Guys](#).

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## 41 LongHorn Steakhouse

Jonathan Weiss/Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$1.73 billion**

With steak prices upwards of \$30, it's no wonder Longhorn pulls in \$1.7 billion a year.

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## 40 Golden Corral

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$1.75 billion**

Golden Corral pulled in over a billion in sales last year, but will the buffet chain be able to keep the pace after coronavirus?

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39

Culver's

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$1.80 billion**

You may have never heard of Culver's, but it's the second most popular burger chain in the country.

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Zaxby's

Facebook/ Zaxby's

**Total sales: \$1.94 billion**

People are obsessed with this Southern chain's chicken and dipping sauces.

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37

Hardee's

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$2.03 billion**

Hardee's consciously uncoupled from its sister brand, Carl's Jr. in 2018, and that wasn't a bad decision, based on the burger chain's sales.

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36

Jimmy John's

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$2.11 billion**

Subs are a lunch staple, and Jimmy John's impressive sales prove it.

Here are The Best and Worst Sandwiches at Jimmy John's.

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35

The Cheesecake Factory

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$2.16 billion**

We would have expected to see The Cheesecake Factory rank higher on this list based on the fact that they have more than 10 times the number of menu items as many restaurants on this list.

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34

Red Lobster

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$2.22 billion**

Lobster is expensive, and people love to order it at this seafood chain.

33 **Wawa**

Eric Glenn/Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$2.33 billion**

Wawa might be the most regional chain on this list, having locations in only seven states, but the gas station and convenience store combo is one of the most profitable restaurant chains in the country. And if you've ever ordered a hoagie there, you'd know why.

32 **Whataburger**

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$2.56 billion**

Texans love their Whataburgers so much that the chain's 800 locations sell more than \$2.5 billion in burgers each year.

31 **7-Eleven**

Love Solutions/Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$2.63 billion**

Unsurprisingly, selling food at gas stations where almost everyone has to stop is a great strategy. If you're stopping by the convenience store, here are 17 Foods to Buy at 7-Eleven.

30 **Outback Steakhouse**

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$2.64 billion**

How much of those billions of dollars do you think can be attributed to the Bloomin' Onion?

29 **Papa John's**

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$2.66 billion**

Using "better ingredients" helps Papa John's make better money.

## 28 Denny's

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$2.78 billion**

Despite their pancakes regularly appearing on our [The 20 Worst Restaurant Breakfasts in America](#), customers still flock to Denny's for breakfast.

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## 27 Texas Roadhouse

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$3.02 billion**

Honey cinnamon butter on fluffy rolls plus an [early dining menu](#)? It's no wonder [Texas Roadhouse](#) pulls in billions a year.

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## 26 Cracker Barrel Old Country Store

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$3.07 billion**

Cracker Barrel is no doubt one of the most beloved restaurant chains in the country, and customers love to spend their dough at the Old Country Store. Just be sure to steer clear of [The Absolute Worst Dishes at Cracker Barrel](#).

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## 25 Chili's

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$3.10 billion**

With nightly drink specials, customers love to hang out and eat at their local Chili's.

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## 24 IHOP

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$3.30 billion**

The beloved breakfast chain may have pulled in an impressive \$3.3 billion last year, but many IHOP locations have had to shut down after coronavirus hit, landing the 24-hour restaurant a spot on our list of [7 Popular Restaurant Chains Struggling to Survive](#).

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## 23 Jack in the Box

Shutterstock



**Total sales: \$3.50 billion**

Something tells us Jack in the Box's famous curly fries have something to do with their stellar sales.

22 Buffalo Wild Wings

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$3.67 billion**

We wonder how many wings customers had to eat for Buffalo Wild Wings to make over \$3 billion in a year.

21 Dairy Queen

Kevin Brine/Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$3.75 billion**

Dairy Queen's Blizzards are a fan-favorite, but this iconic menu item is no match for the Frosty and McFlurry.

Here are The Best and Worst Foods at Dairy Queen.

20 Little Caesars

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$3.76 billion**

Little Caesars is the third-largest pizza chain in the country, and also ranks third in total sales.

19 Popeyes

Courtesy of Popeyes

**Total sales: \$3.81 billion**

After the chain's fried chicken sandwich went viral, Popeyes' sales went through the roof.

18 Arby's

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$3.88 billion**

Arby's has the meats, and sales show that customers want the meats.

17 Panda Express

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$3.95 billion**

Panda Express has just over 2,000 locations, which makes it even more impressive that the Chinese chain can hang with the fast-food chains that have tens of thousands of locations.

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**16 Olive Garden****Total sales: \$4.02 billion**

We're sure that this pasta chain does well year-round, but we have to wonder if Olive Garden's Endless Pasta Pass is a big contributor to the chain's billions in total sales.

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**15 Applebee's**

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$4.09 billion**

The neighborhood bar and grill's rib and chicken finger offerings satisfy customers across the country.

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**14 KFC**

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$4.55 billion**

One of the oldest fast-food restaurants, established in 1930, KFC is still as successful as ever.

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**13 Sonic Drive-In**

Jonathan Weiss/Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$4.69 billion**

This total sales number is pre-COVID, and we'd bet on the fact that it'll soar over the next year as drive-in restaurants were in the best position to keep sales thriving when dining rooms had to close.

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**12 Chipotle**

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$5.51 billion**

With recent menu innovations like queso and quesadillas, Chipotle is satisfying customers, and its sales show it.



## 11 Pizza Hut

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**Total sales: \$5.56 billion**

Everyone loves pizza, and Pizza Hut's loaded cheesy bites pizza help to pull in even more customers—and sales—than other pizza chains.

Here are [The Best and Worst Menu Items at Pizza Hut](#).

## 10 Panera Bread

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$5.98 billion**

What was originally the St. Louis Bread Company, Panera rakes in cash thanks to their [healthy menu options](#).

## 9 Domino's

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$7.04 billion**

Domino's regular promotions pay off. Customers end up buying more food when they can get a discounted medium pizza, and that translates to over \$7 billion in annual sales.

## 8 Dunkin'

Lynn Watson/Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$9.93 billion**

Dunkin'—which recently dropped the "Donuts"—from their name, is a breakfast mainstay nationwide. To find out what is worth ordering at the chain, read up on [The Best & Worst Dunkin Donuts Coffee Orders For Weight Loss](#).

## 7 Wendy's

Jonathan Weiss/Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$9.76 billion**

Wendy's fresh—never frozen—beef makes this fast-food chain immensely profitable. The brand's quippy Twitter account doesn't hurt, either.

## 6 Subway

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$10.20 billion**

This sub shop boasts tens of thousands of locations across the nation, making it the most prolific fast-food chain in the country, but Subway only ranks sixth for total sales.

If you're headed to Subway, here are [8 Diet Expert-Approved Subway Orders](#).

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## 5 Burger King

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$10.20 billion**

Burger King just edges out Subway with over 10 billion dollars of annual sales. Do you think their [Impossible Whopper](#) is what pushed BK over the edge?

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## 4 Taco Bell

Rob Wilson/Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$11.29 billion**

With options for everyone from omnivores to [vegetarians](#), [Taco Bell's versatile menu](#) and late-night hours help the taco chain drive billions of dollars of sales.

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## 3 Chick-fil-A

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$12.67 billion**

As one of America's [favorite fast-food chains](#), Chick-Fil-A pulled in more than \$12 billion last year—an impressive feat when you consider that the nationwide chicken chain is [only open six days a week](#).

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## 2 Starbucks

Shutterstock

**Total sales: \$22.28 billion**

The coffee chain may be [shuttering 400 locations over the next year and a half](#), but Starbucks will also be opening hundreds of new stores with a pickup-based model. The company's ability to quickly pivot and adapt to a changing world post-COVID will likely contribute to Starbucks' high total sales moving forward.

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## 1 McDonald's

Shutterstock

Total sales: \$40.41 billion

It's no surprise that one of the oldest, most ubiquitous, and most iconic American restaurants is the largest chain restaurant in the U.S. The Golden Arches has the second-most locations in the states (behind Starbucks), so it makes sense that it should be easiest enough to pull in the most amount of cash.

For more, check out these [108 most popular sodas ranked by how toxic they are](#).

OLIVIA TARANTINO

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