

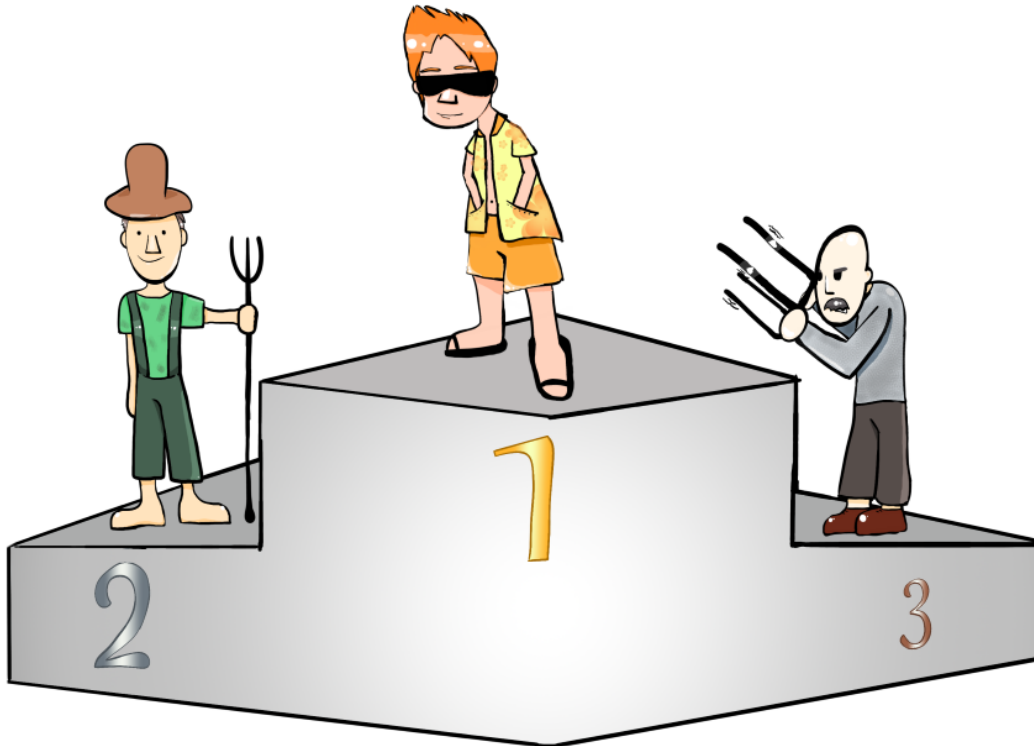


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Flagler County Restaurant Analysis



Hopefully, you'll get this later.

We know. When you hear Palm Coast, the first thing you think of is restaurants, right?

Haha. No, but seriously. When considering places to travel—or live—really, what's more imperative than food? You need it to live, for crying out loud.

Sure, art galleries and shows are nice (we have a few of those, too), but do they take precedence over eating? Or, to be fair, do they take precedence over eating well?

That's a rhetorical question, of course. With that, we have the standard by which we can take pride in where we live, or not take pride. So it's in our interest to closely examine what Palm Coast brings to the table, so-to-speak. But before we can answer this, we have to reflect inwardly for a second:

What makes for a truly **fantastic** food scene?

We decided to don our thinking caps and give the question a whirl. Obviously, the first thing to come to mind is restaurants, right? *Right*.

But then we have to be clear about what does and what does not constitute a restaurant. Using data from VisitFlagler, Flagler County's tourism authority, to conduct our study, we decided to apply the term liberally. That means, for the better part, we included most places that sold virtually any kind of bite or libation. That means we pulled in bars and cafes.

OK, next question. How best to make a determination on quality when quantifying so broad a collective? Hint: It's not Yelp. Not if we're thinking big picture, anyway.

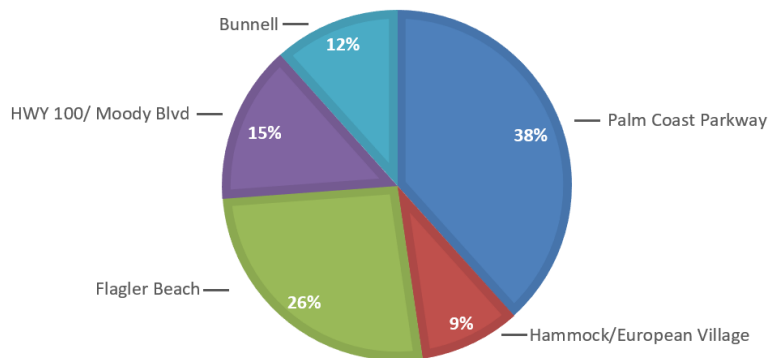
When we conducted our Best Pizza in Palm Coast analysis a few months back, we used polls to settle the matter. This time we decided to use a different metric: *Local versus chain*.

So, at risk of hurting corporate's feelings, we're going to keep it real. We're concerned with the health of the "little guy." And that's how we're going to hypothesize the best food scene in this city vs city mashup. Sure, at the large chains you're guaranteed a more consistent experience and cheaper prices. (That's what they say, anyway.) But we believe it's the small mom and pop joints that help really stake down a community identity.

That's true for a town, county, city, or country, depending on how macro you want to get. So that's what we're doing. **No arguments.**

So the question is, which citizenry among all Flagler County cities, embraces local most.

FLAGLER COUNTY RESTAURANT DIVIDING LINES



Flagler County's 172 restaurants, local and chain, dissected into percentages per section.

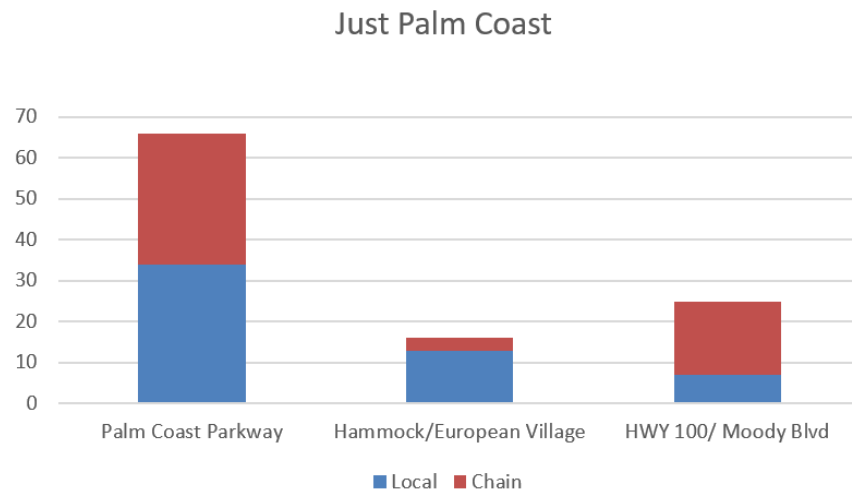
In breaking down the dividing lines that encompass the county's 172 total restaurants, we decided to inspect Palm Coast first. Where was the greatest density of restaurants? We evaluated that portion of data by corridor: Palm Coast Parkway, the Hammock/European Village, Route 100/Moody Boulevard.



Visual ratio of the local versus chain split among each corridor.

Sixty-six of those restaurants fall on Palm Coast Parkway: 38 percent of the county total. Thirty-four of them are locally owned, as compared with 32 chains. Route 100 has the second most with 25, about 14 percent of the 172. Seven of them are locally owned, compared with 18 chains.

And lastly, Hammock Beach/European Village. They have the fewest total restaurants, 16; nine percent. But they fare the best when we consider their local vs chain ratio: 13–3. So, in Palm Coast, and this is “I Love Palm Coast,” the European Village/Hammock corridor wins the medal for the corridor that embraces local most.



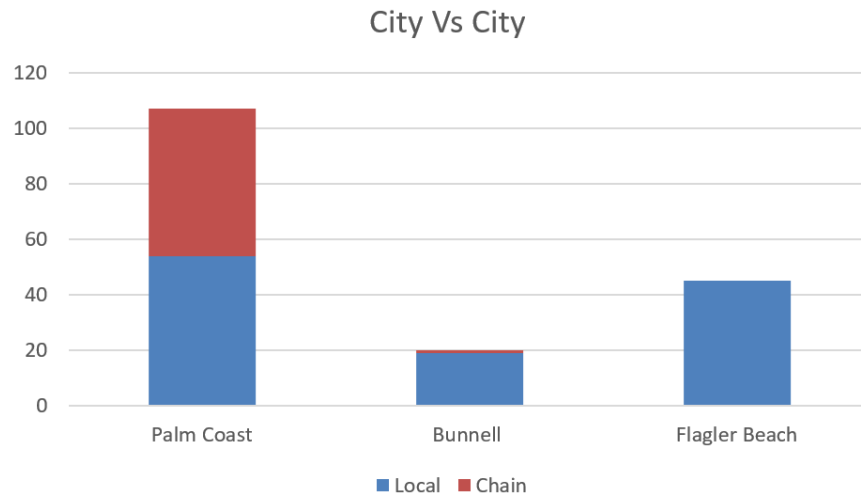
Ratio of local versus chain restaurants among Palm Coast Corridors.

Thomas Garret, the answer guy from the USAToday network, goes into some depth on the topic, examining how Darden, the global company which owns and operates many of our biggest national chains including Olive Garden, one of which we have here in Palm Coast, just off Route 100.

Demographics, population size, proximity to a major highway, trade area, etc., all are factors that enter the picture. Essentially, we're considered more attractive to big business...So we attract the chains and the money...

In Palm Coast, we have three different exits to and from I95. Two of them fall on or close to Palm Coast Parkway. The other one is on Route 100. So that's where the majority of our restaurants falls—and that's where the preponderance of chains falls. Especially on Palm Coast Parkway.

Now when you look at Palm Coast's neighbors, Flagler Beach and Bunnell, a different dynamic emerges. So lets take a look at their numbers. Bunnell: 20 restaurants total (11.6 percent) of the 172. Of those, a whopping 19 of them are local. Just one chain. Flagler Beach: 45 total (26 percent); 45 local!



Local vs chain restaurants as seen in this head-to-head of Flagler County Cities.

Wow...pretty decisive, huh? Now take a look back at this post's opening image. If you understood each city's human representative, this is no reveal!

So how do we account for this? Flagler Beach doesn't have an I95 exit. Bunnell does, but the city is primarily rural. However, there's more to it than that. There's got to be a cultural aspect to this as well.

Are Palm Coast's citizenry, or government, more pro-corporate/pro-commerce? By contrast, are their counterparts simply more "protectionist"—like Cape Cod and many other national cities resisting the big box chains—and worried about losing their flavor through homogenization? Or perhaps they're just thinking of the livelihoods of their local business owners?

Could it be simply that the people of Palm Coast have different expectations, perhaps different values than their beachy and more rural neighbors, that brings them here to begin with? This is a difficult question to answer.

Then there's also this little fact. According to the latest US Census Bureau numbers from 2015, Palm Coast's population has topped 80,000. Bunnell and Flagler Beach have a combined population of less than 8,000 people. That could have something to do with it. Then there's Marineland, straddling both Flagler and St. Johns Counties, which has been holding steady at around 16 people for years now. (I don't think they have any restaurants—chain or local.)

So when it comes to chains vs local restaurants, countywide, Palm Coast registers barely lukewarm. It's not even close. But hey, check out those bike paths....

But in all seriousness, it's all about how you view things. Sure, we'd like more local, family run places, but at the end of the day, in Flagler County at least, Palm Coast brings in *Big Money* businesses. That's something to hang our hat on. We'll just have to find other ways to stake down our Palm Coast identity than local restaurants.

But with that said, if there's any would-be Palm Coast restaurateurs reading, we wouldn't mind if you opened up shop.

