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In town for the Preakness and trying to find the best food in Baltimore? We can help!

JEFF JACOBSON, Owner

Mama's on the Half Shell, 2901 ODonnell St. Baltimore, MD. 410-276-3160

Missing the mollusk in your life? Well, get your "slurp" on and head over to Baltimore's Mama's on the Half Shell. Located on "The Square" in the hip, bustling, urban neighborhood of Canton, this seafood house will fix you up "Bawlmer" style. The downstairs bar / raw bar feels like it's been there for years, with a long dark wood bar, pressed ceilings and just loud enough music. It gets crowded on weekends, but locals are happy to endure the wait (sometimes over an hour) while sipping on a refreshing Orange Crush (the House Cocktail, made with fresh pressed orange juice) or a minty Mojito. But bivalves are the thing here. Oysters are served on the half-shell, grilled or fried, "on horseback" (wrapped in bacon) or as "shooters". From Malpeques to Blue Points, the hand-written chalkboard announces the varieties of the night. Slurp them out of the half shell for the real experience, HON (as they say in Baltimore). No forks allowed. There are a few tables downstairs in the bar, but a majority in the cozier, Victorian style upstairs. Start off with the Tuna Tartare, Oyster Stew or Peel-and-Eat steamed shrimp. For entrees, try the Crabcake, which is true Maryland style, broiled with little evidence of breading or filler. The pan-seared scallops are a delight, as well. A side of Mac-and-Cheese will top it off (some say it is the world's best). The menu is full of fresh fish and traditional burgers and sandwiches (for the non-seafood eater). Owning a Bar / Restaurant has never truly appealed to me, but if it did, I would recreate "Mama's." Hours: Monday-Thursday: 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday: 11 a.m.-midnight Sunday: 9 a.m.-11 p.m. The raw bar serves until 1 a.m. daily Bar open until 2 a.m. daily.

GEORGANNE HALE, Maryland Jockey Club
Michael's Café Raw Bar and Grill, 2119 York Road, Timonium, MD. 410-252-2022 www.michaelscafe.com.

If anyone has attended the Timonium Sales or Timonium Race Track, more than likely they have dined at Michael's Bar and Grill. It is a stone's throw from the Timonium Sales Pavilion. It has been a family owned and operated restaurant for 24 years. When people arrive in Maryland, what is the first meal they always want? Maryland Crabs!

Michael's is famous for their "World, (not country, city or state) Famous Crab Cakes." My grandfather owned a seafood store years ago in Baltimore. These crabcakes are just as good as the ones he use to make. Big lumps of backfin crab, all crab meat. No stuffing or breading. If seafood isn't for you they also serve steaks, veal, pastas, salads, soups, and burgers. Michael Dellis continues his Mother and Father's tradition for serving good food by having the majority of the menu being homemade. Finally, for those horsemen looking to quench their thirst after a long day at the sales, Michael's offer an excellent "Happy Hour". Any type of drink you want, they can make. (Remember it's directly across the street so you won't have to drive, but you might need a crossing guard to get across York Road.)

DAVID HAYDEN, Dark Hollow Farm
THE BLACK OLIVE, 814 S. Bond St., Baltimore, MD. (410) 276.7141. www.theblackolive.com

The Black Olive sits in quiet elegance in a converted row house on the cobblestone section of Bond Street in old Fells Point. This Greek restaurant is owned by the Spiliadis family, whose heritage and passion for food as art is grounded in a basic aesthetic principle: cook your food with an eye towards simplicity and tradition, and use only the finest ingredients, no matter what it takes to find them. They do not hide their elegant presentations with fancy sauces. Be sure to accept your waiter's invitation to select your dinner from the refrigerated case in the kitchen where you'll find fish and seafood that's moments removed from the sea and perfectly aged beef. Select from gorgeous Dover Sole, Barbouni, Black Sea Bass, St. Peter's Fish, Dorade Royal and Wild Turbo, plus platters of vibrantly fresh beef, veal and kebobs. The wait staff will artfully fillet your whole fish selection table side. The wine cellar is to die for, and they were among "America's 50 Most Amazing Wine Experiences" in Food & Wine Magazine in October, 2004. The Spiliadis family has patiently selected and cellared over 5,000 bottles of the finest wines from around the world with a special eye on the wines that come from the tradition of Greek winemaking. If it's available, reserve the wine cellar for your private dinner party. If you're a foodie or a wine-o, this is a must place to go. Seating is limited so be sure to make your reservations early.

**DAVID DIPIETRO, Maryland Stallion Station
The Oregon Grille, 1201 Shawan Road, Hunt Valley,
MD. 410-771-0505. www.theoregongrille.com**

This very high-end spot, which consistently earns a four-star rating from the Mobil Travel Guide, in the heart of Maryland's horse country is the perfect spot for dinner with great friends during your Preakness visit. The setting is a renovated 19th century stone farmhouse within minutes of the Maryland Hunt Cup Course and scores of beautiful nurseries, including Sagamore Farms. The walkway leading to the restaurant is lined with lawn jockeys adorned in the colors of all 11 Triple Crown winners as well as other noteworthy stables. You have the option of dining inside in the dark paneled rooms of the farmhouse or outside on a wonderful bluestone patio under large umbrellas. Men must wear jackets after 5 p.m. for inside dining.

The cuisine is classic American at its finest, featuring great steaks, lamb and seafood all creatively prepared. While steaks highlight the offerings, most everything is first-rate and the appetizer selections are classic and outstanding. The wine list is ample and consistent with the restaurant's fine dining standards. The wait staff is very professional, but won't unnecessarily interfere with your evening. If you arrive early, the bar is a cozy, equine-themed room perfect for a quick starter or two before attacking the menu.

The Oregon Grille is only 20 minutes from Pimlico, a half hour from downtown Baltimore and slightly longer from the airport. While most GPS and mapping software will send you there via I-83 north and Shawan Road, I highly recommend travelling north on Parks Heights Ave (the road that Pimlico fronts) or Greenspring Avenue, which is parallel to it and approaching from the west on Tufton Avenue, which becomes Shawan Road. That route takes only a few extra minutes, but the last four miles are a beautiful drive through farm country and will take you past Sagamore, the historic Vanderbilt property now owned by Under Armour founder Kevin Plank, and of course, the Maryland Stallion Station, which you are welcome to visit on your way to lunch or dinner at the Grille.