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Alas, so many options

GREG COX - CORRESPONDENT

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Tired of the same old, same old when it's time to step out for a bite to eat? Too exhausted after a long day at work to narrow all the new area restaurants down to a single one that's just right for your mood but won't break the bank? Not to worry. We've done the work for you. Food critic Greg Cox has recommendations for dining in various situations.

OUT WITH THE FAMILY

Skipper's Fish Fry & Market

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1001 E. Williams St., Apex

303-2400

www.skippersfish.com

Cuisine: Seafood

Prices: platters \$7-14, sandwiches \$4-6, kids' meals \$4 (\$2 on Monday nights)

Mom and Dad can feast on Skipper's New England style fish fry, featuring cracker meal-crusted cod or haddock, shrimp, scallops, oysters and the best fried clams this side of Boston. Platters are available in just about any combination you can imagine, with fries or onion rings, homemade slaw and (a nod to Southern tastes) hushpuppies. On Tuesdays after 5 p.m., the options expand to include steamed seafood, including oysters and clams shucked tableside. Meanwhile, the kids (under 10) choose from an offering that ranges from bite-size "fish nibbles" to corn dogs. Top it off with homemade cobbler or key lime pie, and everybody's happy.

IMPRESSING A DATE

18 Seaboard

18 Seaboard Ave., Raleigh

861-4318

www.18seaboard.com

Cuisine: Contemporary

Prices: entrees \$11-27 (most under \$20)

Jason Smith, chef/proprietor of this popular new contemporary bistro in downtown Raleigh, has worked in some of the most celebrated restaurants on the East Coast, from Magnolia Grill to Gramercy Tavern in New York. His experience shows in a Southern-accented menu of contemporary fare whose offerings are consistently as memorable as they are affordable. Recent options have included fried green tomatoes with crawfish aioli, pan-roasted North Carolina trout, wood fire-roasted chicken, and 24-hour marinated Flat Iron steak. The menu evolves with the seasons, but don't worry. You can't go wrong.

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1201-L Raleigh Road, in Glen Lennox Shopping Center, Chapel Hill

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www.jujuberestaurant.com

Cuisine: Asian

Prices: entrees \$9-20 (most in the \$14-16 range)

If you're dining alone, eat at the kitchen bar, where you can watch owner/chef Charlie Deal turn out his vibrant updates of Asian street food. In addition to house-made dumplings and noodle dishes, winning options include spicy oyster mushroom curry soup, venison with watercress salad, pan-seared crab and shrimp cakes, and a decidedly uptown rendition of the Vietnamese sub, banh mi. Lemon-lime coconut rice pudding is a satisfyingly sweet-tart conclusion to your meal -- unless, that is, you'd prefer to settle in with an expertly made after-dinner cocktail.

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