

TRIPLE A RESTAURANT

2526 Airline, Houston, Texas 77009, (713) 861-3422

Located right next to the Farmers Market and sharing the same parking lot, the Triple A Restaurant specializes in country cooking, with a well-established clientele ranging from bank presidents to eighteen-wheeler drivers. Prices are very reasonable, with lunch specials on our last visit in the \$6-\$7-\$8 range. These generous midday specials include one meat, such as baked beef ribs, country fried chicken, meatloaf, beef stew, enchiladas with beans and rice, chicken and dumplings, seafood gumbo, or country fried steak, along with your choice of three sides, such as hominy with bacon, stewed tomatoes, lima beans, mustard greens, mashed potatoes, pinto beans, and for dessert, different cobblers. A basket of cornbread is served with each lunch in the large, busy dining room, which appeared to Hankamer to seat around 175, including the old fashioned lunch counter and many booths and tables. And sure 'nuff, on every table was the signature condiment for country cooking restaurants: the little narrow bottles filled with small green peppers and vinegar! Lunch special menus change from day to day, but the basic menu includes large hamburgers with fries, fried egg sandwiches, chef's salads, vegetable soup, and fried catfish plates. Triple A is conveniently located just one block inside Loop 610 N on Airline Drive, and is just the place to stop in next time you are in the mood for 'comfort food.'

CAFÉ RABELAIS

6100 2442 Times Boulevard, Houston Texas 77005, (713) 526-6841

This wonderful little restaurant in the Rice Village "feels good" the moment you step inside the door. Cozy and intimate, the seating is compact just like in most restaurants in France. A well-stocked bar, many wine bottles easily accessible to the wait staff, and blackboard menus which change twice per day indicate a brisk volume, a broad range of dining and drinking choices, and fresh food well-prepared. Also suggested is an experienced clientele, one which is not hide-bound to the same old menu items, a clientele which enjoys being surprised – and pleased – with something new to the palate upon each visit. In addition to the ever-changing fish, steaks, and chops which appear on the blackboards, Café Rabelais serves up special celebration menus. Christmas eve specialties included Butternut Squash Bisques, Shaved Fennel & Arugula Salad, Shrimp Mousse with Roasted Tomatoes and Basil, Roasted Goose with Red Lentils and Toasted Chestnuts, and Grilled Salmon Filet with Cranberry Butter Sauce. The Dessert offering was a Buche de Noel (traditional Christmas Log Cake). Non-Holiday selections include Mussels in White Wine Sauce, Entrecote (ribeye) steak topped with fresh sautéed shallots, Steak au Poivre (pepper steak in creamy pepper sauce), and Duck Breast in Red Berry Sauce. Starters include Escargot in Parsley and Garlic Butter Sauce, a rich variety of salads and salad greens, and lamb sausage with Dijon mustard on a bed of tomato and fresh greens. The France-only wine selection is surprisingly grand for a small bistro, and there are some under-\$30 selections in each category, although the diner must be extra diligent to spot them since they are listed randomly with the more expensive bottles.

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Note: By way of qualifications for reviewing restaurants, Hankamer has owned and operated numerous restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, discotheques and banquet halls over the last forty years; he has travelled to over 70 countries and has studied and lived in Europe for over three years; he was co-owner of a home delivery wine of the month club and imported his own wine labels for years.

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