

MAC & CHEESE FEST

@YYC.macandcheesefest

CALGARY MAC & CHEESE FESTIVAL

RESTAURANT START GUIDE



Jan 15-31, 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Brought to life by the creative minds behind YYC Sociables!



January is the slowest months for Calgary restaurants with cold weather, low foot traffic, and customers staying home after the holidays. That's exactly why we started Mac & Cheese Festival! We motivate people to get out of the house, participate in something fun and indulge in some cozy, delicious comfort food at a local spot.

And it **works**.

In our first year, **100% of participating restaurants told us they were satisfied with their experience**, their ROI, and want to join again in 2026. Restaurants sold anywhere from 34 to 1,200 mac & cheese dishes, with a median of 139 sold in just a few weeks.

Festival-goers were just as enthusiastic:

- 1,562 Calgarians voted on their fave mac & cheese
- 47% were first-time visitors to the restaurant
- 73% visited the restaurant specifically for the festival

Mac & Cheese Festival didn't just create buzz! It drove **real business** at exactly the time restaurants need it most.

For 2026, we're building on that **momentum**. With a proven format, strong audience demand, and a city that's already excited for year two, we're ready to bring even more attention — and customers — to your restaurant this January.



Data note: We surveyed restaurants post-festival. Numbers based on 67% response rate from participating restaurants.

2025 STATS

"FELT LIKE WE RECEIVED POSITIVE EXPOSURE TO NEW CUSTOMERS. FEEDBACK AND ANALYTICS WAS GREATLY APPRECIATED."

"WE REALLY ENJOYED IT! IT WAS FUN TO CREATE THE DISH... IT WAS A GOOD IDEA TO JOIN EARLY AND HOPEFULLY IT ENCOURAGES MORE BUSINESSES IN CALGARY NEXT YEAR TO JOIN. WE FELT IT HELPED DRIVE BUSINESS DURING A QUIET TIME IN RESTAURANTS WHICH IS TYPICALLY JANUARY AFTER A BUSY HOLIDAY SEASON."

"WE BROKE SALES RECORD AFTER RECORD AND ARE FEELING SO GRATEFUL FOR THESE TWO WEEKS! THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ORGANIZING THIS EVENT, IT'S DEFINITELY BOOSTED OUR LITTLE BIZZ!"

"I THINK IT WAS A WELL TIMED FESTIVAL TO HAVE IN JANUARY AND BROUGHT AN INCREASE IN BUSINESS WHEN USUALLY IT IS A SLOWER TIME."

THE RESTAURANT STORY



100%
Want it Again



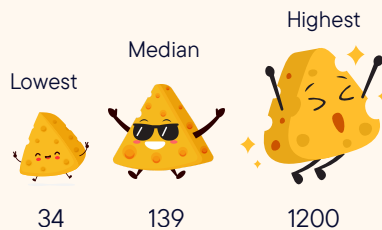
100%
Satisfied



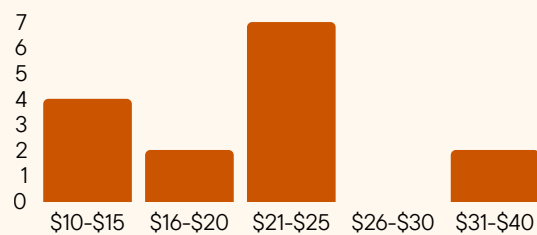
100%
Will Rejoin

100% Agreement on Positive ROI

Dish Sales



Dish Pricing Breakdown



THE CUSTOMER STORY



1562
Voters

47% First Time Visitor

73% Festival Specific Visit

95% Will Return To Restaurant

itsjadekae 42w by author
I already can't wait for next year 🍕👍
Reply

jenniejennieat 43w
The festival we all need 🍕👍
Reply

THE SOCIAL STORY



1,018,745 Views
over 60 days

Festival Posts Attendee Posts

831k views

188k views

WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN



Increased Revenue: Customers coming through your doors during the slowest season of the year means more income when you need it most. We surveyed restaurants who participated in 2025 and **100%** of respondents said they are **satisfied with their return on investment**.



Introduction to New Customer Base: The festival provides a vehicle to new customers who may not have heard of your restaurant or have previously visited. In 2025, 47% of festival attendees told us they were visiting the restaurant for the first time.



Opportunity to Win a Culinary Award: Should you win and be crowned one of Calgary's Top Mac & Cheese dishes, not only do you get bragging rights (to use in your own marketing) but, also your restaurant becomes a destination for eager post-festival Calgarians wanting to experience the winning dish (generating even more revenue).



Positive Exposure: As part of the festival, you'll get eyeballs on your restaurant. A fun, cozy, exciting festival such as this, is exactly the kind of positive experience you want to be associated with. Not only will there be increased visibility to you via social media channels but the festival receives mainstream media attention as well, **last year we were invited for TV segments on both CTV and City News!**



Feel Good for Supporting Local: This festival is completely locally run and operated. Unlike some festivals that are managed from five provinces away, this festival is created by Calgarians for the benefit of Calgarian attendees, and Calgarian restaurants.

OUR NETWORK OF CALGARIANS

We run multiple social media channels that are a **direct conduit to Calgarians**. Here are a few of the ways we will be advertising the festival and it's participating restaurants.



INSTAGRAM

- 80,700 followers @sarah.sociables
- 57,400 followers @yyc.sociables
- 1,000,000+ impressions each month on @yyc.sociables
- 2,400 followers @yyc.macandcheesefest



TIKTOK

- 59,500 followers @sarah.sociables
- 16,000 followers @yyc.sociables



FACEBOOK

- 1,000 followers Sarah Sociables page



WEBSITE

- 30,000-50,000 monthly hits to sarahsociables.com



EMAIL

- 8,200 Calgarian subscribers

OUR TARGET AUDIENCES

Our goal is to bring you new customers by targeting these key audiences for the festival

Local Food Enthusiasts

This is a festival designed for food lovers. With the variety of mac & cheese dishes available, the festival attracts attendees who try mac & cheese dishes at multiple participating restaurants, and are excited to compare and vote for their favourites. Last year we discovered some attendees were so excited they made a visit to EVERY participating restaurant.

Event-Goers

This festival attract individuals who look for exciting local events for entertainment. Or just people looking for something to break the monotony of January—this festival provides the fun factor that people are craving this time of year!

Young Professionals & Millennials

They are active on social media, follow local trends, and want to post about their experiences with what's new and cool in our city. Our festival provides an opportunity to be a part of the action.

Families with Kids

This is a festival that excites the whole family about dining out, even the pickiest of eaters! Last year we were excited to find out we had so many kid attendees. So this year, **we're adding in a whole new award category "Best Mac & Cheese as awarded by Kids!"**

Affluent & Mid-Range Consumers

These festival-goers aren't watching the price—they're here to indulge. Premium dishes like lobster or truffle mac & cheese draw people who prioritize flavor and experience, eager to dive into new, high-quality culinary adventures.

MEET YOUR FESTIVAL ORGANIZERS



Meet Sarah, the founder and social media expert behind the Sociables brand. Considered Calgary's ultimate guide to the city's best happenings. With 80,700 followers and a thriving website, Sarah has spent the past seven years curating and uncovering the best spots for locals and visitors alike. Known for her expert recommendations on the city's best happy hours, hottest events, and hidden restaurant gems, Sarah has built a trusted resource for everything Calgary.



Meet Kelsey, a content creation expert who joined the Sociables team in 2023. With her keen eye for what looks good and what can go viral, she transitioned from editing videos to being front and center. Her expertise in crafting engaging, food-focused voiceover videos and sharing insider recommendations has played a key role in growing the channel to over 57,000 followers. Kelsey's skillful approach to content has made her a driving force in the channel's success.

***Back for year two, we're excited to bring Calgary an
even bigger and better food festival experience!
We're going BIG — and we want you to
be a part of it!***

PRICING



REGISTRATION

EARLY BIRD (UNTIL DEC 14): \$250
REGULAR (DEC 15–JAN 6): \$350
LAST CHANCE (JAN 7–12): \$450

Join Calgary's ultimate comfort food festival! Registration includes:

- ✓ Official entry into the festival
- ✓ Feature on calgarymacandcheesefest.com with your dish photo
- ✓ Promotion to our engaged local audience ([@yyc.sociables](https://www.instagram.com/yyc.sociables) + [@yyc.macandcheesefest](https://www.instagram.com/yyc.macandcheesefest))
- ✓ Drive more customers during the slow month of January
- ✓ Chance to win a Calgary Mac & Cheese Fest award title



REGISTRATION + SOCIAL VIDEO

EARLY BIRD (UNTIL DEC 14): \$775
REGULAR (DEC 15–JAN 6): \$975
LAST CHANCE (JAN 7–12): \$1,175

Take your festival presence to the next level with our video marketing package:

- ✓ Everything in the standard registration, **PLUS:**
- ✓ An influencer-style video filmed at your restaurant by one of our recognizable creators
- ✓ Your video posted across all our social channels (typical reach 10,000+ impressions)
- 👁️ Our top video last year received over 80,000 views! ([See it here](#))

REGISTER

AWARD CATEGORIES



BEST MAC & CHEESE

1ST 2ND 3RD PLACE

Mac & cheese with the highest average rating as voted by festival attendees



BEST VALUE MAC & CHEESE

Mac & cheese with the highest value rating as voted by attendees



CALGARY'S WILDEST MAC & CHEESE

The most wild and creative mac & cheese as voted by attendees



BEST MAC & CHEESE AS VOTED BY KIDS

Mac & cheese with the highest rating as voted by festival attendees under 18 years old



FESTIVAL BEST PRACTICES

1) Make your dish memorable:

Calgarians love a buzz-worthy bite, so give them something fun, photogenic, or uniquely yours. This is a social event, and everyone will be talking and sharing their thoughts with friends, family, and on social media. Make sure your dish is something special that keeps people talking!

2) Make it photogenic!

Entries with visually appealing photos receive extra attention, especially during an event with so many options to choose from. However, ensure the dish sold to the customer fairly represents the description and photo, because no one likes being catfished!

3) Promote enthusiasm for your dish within your restaurant:

- Get your team excited! Brief staff on the dish, key talking points, and the festival so they can confidently recommend it. A genuine, enthusiastic suggestion can drive orders.
- Display the festival logo on your website and in your social media posts.
- Use the provided assets from the digital marketing package in-store and online.
- Add your own in-house marketing (chalkboard signs, table talkers, QR codes) to spotlight the dish and festival.
- Set up an on-site rating station, such as a tablet, laptop, or QR codes at tables, so guests can rate your dish on the spot.

4) Use social media to grow attention to the festival and your dish:

- Tag @yyc.sociables, @sarah.sociables, and @yyc.macandcheesefest, and use #yycmaccheesefest2026 on related posts.
- Add @yyc.macandcheesefest as a collaborator on Instagram. Our team will be happily accepting Instagram collaboration requests featuring your dish entry throughout the festival (at our discretion/within reason). We recommend using this feature to expand your reach.
- Your fans will be tagging and talking about their favourite entries all festival long. Keep an eye on your notifications and IG stories - share positive mentions, and engage with comments to keep the buzz going about your dish.

5) Engage your customers for more positive exposure:

Turn guests into advocates. Ask diners to post pictures of your dish on social media and tag your restaurant and the festival for a chance to be featured and win a prize!

6) Offer it on delivery apps:

If your dish travels well, list it on delivery platforms and promote its availability.

CHEESY INSPIRATION

Feel free to use any of these as inspiration for your dish!

- pulled-pork
- 10 cheese
- homestyle
- unique pasta noodle
- deconstructed
- Mexican
- Italian
- bacon
- jalapeno
- buffalo chicken
- cheeseburger
- classic
- pizza
- gnocchi
- butternut squash
- Cajun
- goat cheese
- smoked brisket
- homestyle chili
- mac & cheese cups
- blue cheese
- sundried tomato
- mackeral
- truffle
- bbq sauce
- prosciutto
- pancetta
- guanciale
- fondue
- beer
- flaming hot Cheetos
- turkey
- southern
- baked
- dessert
- stuffed
- ranch
- broccoli
- seafood
- shrimp
- roasted red pepper
- sausage
- ginger beef
- marshmallow
- velveeta
- deep fried
- lobster
- crab
- spinach
- artichoke
- mushroom
- carbonara
- French onion
- blue cheese
- baked potato
- low fat
- vegan
- gluten-free
- dairy-free
- healthy
- cauliflower
- Sloppy Joe
- waffles
- donuts
- grilled chicken
- smokey chipotle
- Doritos
- and anything else you can think of!

DISH SUBMISSION FORM

Here's what we need from you to get started! After you've registered & paid, it's time to decide on your dish entry. When you're ready, fill out our online [dish submission form](#).

- ✓ **Dish name:** 3-4 words recommended (e.g. Triple Bacon Gouda)
- ✓ **Dish description:** 3-4 sentences recommended
- ✓ **Recommended drink pairing:** (as an upsell)
- ✓ **Dish price:** (before gst)
- ✓ **Allergen information:** Is a gluten-free or dairy-free version available?
- ✓ **Attach high quality photo(s)**
(better quality photos generate more interest)

At your soonest convenience (but no later than January 12, 2026)
submit your dish information online here: **[DISH SUBMISSION FORM](#)**

The faster you submit your dish the more opportunity you're giving us to advertise you! The number one question we get from Calgarians is "who's participating in the festival?!" and we want to be able to list off as many restaurants as we can, as early as we can.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When is the festival?

January 15-31, 2026. Your signature dish must be available to customers each day that you are open for business during that time.

Who can enter?

Restaurants located in Calgary and surrounding areas (Chestermere, Airdrie, Okotoks, etc.). We are not expanding into Banff and Canmore at this time, sorry folks!

Is there a fee to enter?

Yes, the cost will depend on the tier you choose. The money supports the local people working hard to put this festival on. Unlike other festivals that may not have a fee we do not receive grants or government support.

How many restaurants are included in the festival?

Last year, 15 restaurants participated in our inaugural festival. This year we're looking to double (or triple!) that number to offer Calgarians an even BIGGER, more EXCITING festival.

When do I have to have my mac & cheese dish recipe ready?

While it will be need to be ready for customers to order from January 15-31st, you'll have to have your dish nailed down by **January 12th** at the latest so that we can advertise it as part of the festival. The sooner you get us your dish info, the more exposure you'll receive.

Do I make a new mac & cheese dish or do I use one already listed on my menu?

This is up to you! The advantage of a new dish means you can get creative with it and is a limited time offer to drive customers in. However, if you already have a dish you are proud of and confident in, feel free to use that.

Can I enter multiple Mac & Cheese dishes?

No, just to keep things simple, we ask that you only enter one Mac & Cheese dish. If you have multiple locations under the same restaurant name (e.g. Leopold's), we'd ask that all locations provide the same dish. Note, you may allow customers to customize their dish though (gluten-free, or meat-free version, etc.)

Does it have to be a traditional mac & cheese or can I make a spin off?

Spin offs are okay as long as at the heart of it, it's a mac & cheese. If you're not sure, feel free to email!

Do I need to submit anything besides the dish?

Yes! One more thing! We ask that you choose a recommended drink pairing to go with your dish. This is just for fun and for you to use as an easy upsell. Visit our [Drink Pairing Guide](#) for more ideas!

When is the registration entry deadline?

You can register at anytime, but the last day we'll be accepting new registrations is January 12, 2026.

What do I need to submit?

Name of dish
Dish description
Allergen info (gluten free, dairy free)
Price
Optional drink pairing (upsell for customers)
Photo(s) of dish

Where do festival attendees vote?

Via a link on our website calgarymacandcheesefest.com. They can also use a QR code provided to you.

What are the award categories?

All awards are determined by festival voters.

- Best Mac & Cheese (1st, 2nd, 3rd places)
- Wildest Mac & Cheese (single award) (previously "most creative")
- Best Value Mac & Cheese (single award)
- Best Mac & Cheese as voted by Kids (single award)

What do the competition winners get?

Pride in winning! Plus it's recommended you leave your festival dish on your menu to allow for an increase in customers in February to try your winning dish!

I have more questions!

You can reach us at info@calgarymacandcheesefest.com

IMPORTANT DATES & LINKS

Early Bird Registration: Until December 14

Regular Registration: December 15 - January 6

Registration Last Chance: January 7 - January 12

Final date for dish submission: January 12

Mac & Cheese Festival: January 15 - 31, 2026

Winners announced: February 5, 2026



Registration Form

[To register click here](#)



Dish Submission Form

[To submit your dish click here](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

**For inquiries, the best way to reach us is
via email**



Email Us

info@calgarymacandcheesefest.com



Website

calgarymacandcheesefest.com



Instagram

[@YYC.macandcheesefest](#)

[@YYC.Sociables](#)

[@Sarah.Sociables](#)