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How much should we tip in the US?

May 16, 2013, 4:02 pm | [Tim Grant](#) | [AAP](#)

Figuring out how much to tip at a restaurant in the US can be a tricky endeavour, fraught with a good share of mathematics and emotions.

You might slip the limo driver an extra \$20 bill to show appreciation for a ride from the airport, or demonstrate utter disdain for bad food and poor service at a restaurant by leaving two single pennies.

And it seems almost any US establishment where coffee or pastries are served has a tip jar on the counter. Tips are the only thing that makes it economically worthwhile to deliver pizzas, and budgeting the tip into the cost of a drink when dealing with a bartender can be the best way to get good service in a crowded cafe.

"People tip to reward behaviour," said April Masini, an etiquette expert based in Florida, who writes an advice column called Ask April.

"If you like the way your hairdresser or delivery boy treated you or the way he or she served you, giving a tip shows your gratitude."

Then, there are fear-based tippers, she said. These people tip because "they're afraid (that) if they don't, the waiter will spit in their soup or that their date will think they're cheap or that the impression they're leaving will be less than they want it to be."

Stellar service or not, tips are more or less expected. Many service workers are paid minimum wage - or less in the restaurant industry - and they rely on tips to feed their families and put themselves through college.

Servers at a sit-down restaurant who wait on diners hand and foot expect to receive a tip ranging from 15 per cent to 20 per cent of the meal's cost. For truly exceptional

service, diners are generally expected to tip more. Unless the service is well below standards, some etiquette experts say it is poor taste to go below 15 per cent.

"You really have to look at how the people you are tipping are making your life more pleasant and less stressful," said Thomas Farley, a New York-based etiquette expert known as Mister Manners.

"When you examine it that way, it's certainly worth a dollar here or there."

Sometimes the service is so appalling, the server does not deserve a tip, he said. But you don't ever want to just walk out of the restaurant without tipping.

Instead, explain yourself to the server and have a talk with the manager. Farley does not recommend ever leaving two pennies on the table to make a statement.

"That is a form of revenge," he said. "It is mean-spirited and obnoxious. It's also a coward's way out."

US federal law allows restaurants to pay servers who receive tips a minimum wage of \$US2.13 (\$A2.16) an hour.

They must average \$US5.12 an hour in tips for every hour they work in order to bring their pay up to the federal minimum wage of \$US7.25.

If a server's pay doesn't average out to minimum wage, the employer is required to make up the difference.

While a tip is optional, a gratuity is not.

A gratuity is sometimes added to the bill when large parties - generally eight or more people - are being served. If the restaurant charges a gratuity in the 20 per cent range, diners should not feel compelled to leave a tip unless the service was above and beyond the call of duty.

Some pizza stores have begun to charge a delivery fee in respond to drivers getting shortchanged on tips. A \$1 tip for pizza delivery was acceptable back in the 1980s, but the cost of living - especially petrol prices - has gone up since then. The minimum tip now should be \$3 or 15 per cent if the order is for \$20 or more, the experts say.

Paul Brazina, dean of the school of business at La Salle University in Philadelphia, said different parts of the world take different attitudes toward tipping.

In the US, he said, tipping is the primary way in which service staff is compensated. In Europe, it is a different story. Servers receive their payment from the restaurants and tips are a modest thank-you for good service.

Tipping in Australian restaurants is not obligatory but many customers leave a few bucks anyway.

As the famous Barry Humphries character Les Patterson once said, if you're silly enough to throw your money away, the staff will usually take it.

But tipping in Japan is almost unheard of, even though its service industry is second to none. In fact staff there will usually decline to accept tips and be embarrassed by the offer.

"It is considered demeaning to leave a big tip in Europe because they are already getting fair compensation," Brazina said.

"They actually look at it as someone who doesn't understand good etiquette. It shows the wait staff you don't consider them professional."

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Adam 12:15pm Monday 20th May 2013 EST | [Report Abuse](#)

Whether you think tipping in the US is right or wrong you might like to try a trip to India. You arrive at the airport and as soon as your luggage is cleared by customs someone pounces on your suitcases, carries them a few feet to the waiting taxis (and I mean a few feet) then put their hand out for payment of service. If you ask someone a question you'd better be waiving a few rupee around so they will give you an answer in English. The appearance of cash will ensure they immediately become bilingual. People impose service on you that you don't want and expect you to pay for it. I understand it's a poor country but it's a real pain in the butt.

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CrazyMama818313 08:59am Monday 20th May 2013 EST | [Report Abuse](#)

Although the minimum wage is so low etc, a large majority of waiters make a good living in US/Canada considering what many other working class jobs get paid in these countries.

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bill 08:56am Monday 20th May 2013 EST | [Report Abuse](#)

you pay up to \$4,000 to go to the USA and cough up another \$500 in tips disgraceful

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Jon 07:39am Monday 20th May 2013 EST | [Report Abuse](#)

my tip is dont go to the usa. better places to go,

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rory 10:12pm Sunday 19th May 2013 EST | [Report Abuse](#)

any of you ever had a cold pizza delivered? even though the first and even second time was great? it seems to take longer and longer to get your order? aussie pizza drivers respond well to regular tippers even though it's usually \$0.05 from aussies a couple of bucks will get you hot and regularly fast pizza delivery. how do I know? I was pizza delivery driver for about 3 years :o)

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The banner features a collage of images: on the left, a stylized orange logo of a villa; in the center, a family of five (a man, a woman, and three children) standing in front of a stone villa; on the right, a stone villa with a swimming pool and a circular logo with the text 'PEOPLE YOU CAN TRUST'.

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