Shake Shack's Chicago-area reviewers complain about *the wait* and price; owners answer complaints, not praise

> 8 of the 9 Shake Shack locations rate under the best rival nearby. 24% of its reviews read give one or two stars, to Epic Burger's 8%; in those, the wait leads (29%), then rude staff (22%) and price (17%). Its shakes are praised as often as any rival's (7%, to Small Cheval's 6%). The opening is Small Cheval: its low reviews call its burgers dry or salty (23%, to Shake Shack's 9%), though its burgers get more praise (31% to 16%).

Shake Shack
against Five Guys, Epic Burger, Small Cheval

1,433 reviews read
Google Maps
dated 6 May 2026 to 2 Nov 2026

665 of the 902 with words in a theme
sorted by a model, 1 corrected by hand, counted exactly

November 2, 2026
public reviews only; no reviewer names

THE SHORT VERSION

One or two stars in 24% of reviews read, 8% at Epic Burger, led by the wait

15%

of the Shake Shack reviews with words complain about the wait

Five Guys 9%, Epic Burger 3%, Small Cheval 2%

0%

of Shake Shack's four- and five-star reviews have an owner's reply; 97% of its one- to three-star ones do

on four and five stars: Epic Burger 100%, Five Guys 99%, Small Cheval 5%

4

of the 5 locations we could compare drew fewer stars in the last 90 days than the 90 before

the 5 comparable locations together 3.9 to 3.7; Epic Burger 4.26 to 4.77; Small Cheval 3.81 to 4, though 3 of its 5 places fell

3.8

stars on Google for Oak Lawn, the lowest of the 9 locations read; its most-said complaint is price

Oak Lawn's nearest Five Guys: 4.1

01 **The wait sits downtown and at Oak Brook**

Chicago Athletic Association (15 of 59), Oak Brook (12 of 70) and Willis Tower (8 of 33) carry most of it.

02 **Complaints get answers; praise doesn't**

Owners answered 193 of 198 reviews of one to three stars, on a par with Epic Burger's 31 of 32. On four and five stars it is 2 of 406 to Epic Burger's 219 of 219.

03 **Wrigleyville and West Loop slipped furthest**

Wrigleyville went from 4.18 to 3.39 and West Loop from 4.37 to 3.56. Willis Tower rose, from 3.14 to 3.86. Few reviews a location: a direction to check, not a verdict.

Themes count the 902 reviews with words among the 1,433 we read on Google Maps, not of everyone who uses it. A share is of each brand's own reviews read. Themes are a model's sorting; the counts of that sorting are exact.

LOCATION BY LOCATION

8 of the 9 locations rate under the best rival nearby

Each location beside the nearest place of each rival chain. Google's stars are lifetime; new is the last 90 days.

SHAKE SHACK LOCATION	MOST-SAID COMPLAINT	GOOGLE ★, REVIEWS	NEW	NEW ★ (90 DAYS BEFORE)	REPLIES, 1-3★	NEAREST FIVE GUYS	NEAREST EPIC BURGER	NEAREST SMALL CHEVAL
Chicago Athletic Association HIGHEST RATED	long waits for food (15 of 59)	**4.3★** · 4,838	44	3.77★	34/34	**4.2★, 47 new, 0.4 km**	**4.3★, 100+ new, 0.8 km**	**4.5★, 42 new, 1.2 km**
River North	dirty tables and messy dining area (5 of 45)	**4.3★** · 4,545	92	4.14★	20/20	**4.2★, 47 new, 0.8 km**	**4.3★, 50 new, 0.6 km**	**4.1★, 5 new, 0.8 km, 8 read**
West Loop	overpriced for portions and quality (3 of 17)	**4.2★** · 1,117	9	3.56★ (4.37)	7/7	**4.2★, 47 new, 2.2 km**	**4.3★, 100+ new, 2.3 km**	**4.3★, 44 new, 0.8 km**
Oak Lawn LOWEST RATED	overpriced for portions and quality (6 of 34)	**3.8★** · 942	35	3.71★ (4.12)	15/17	**4.1★, 15 new, 3.4 km**	**none within 8 km**	**none within 8 km**
Wrigleyville	rude or dismissive customer service or long waits for food (5 each of 23)	**4.1★** · 651	18	3.39★ (4.18)	9/10	**4.0★, 13 new, 2.7 km**	**4.2★, 28 new, 3.9 km**	**4.7★, 41 new, 0.3 km**
Willis Tower	long waits for food (8 of 33)	**4.1★** · 564	22	3.86★ (3.14)	20/20	**4.2★, 47 new, 1.2 km**	**4.3★, 100+ new, 0.8 km**	**4.5★, 42 new, 0.8 km**
Elston and Logan	overpriced for portions and quality (4 of 20)	**4.0★** · 112	23	3.83★ (4.23)	10/10	**4.0★, 13 new, 3.8 km**	**4.2★, 28 new, 3.3 km**	**4.0★, 29 new, 1.8 km**
Schaumburg	overpriced for portions and quality (15 of 57)	**4.1★** · 1,927	44	3.77★	29/29	**4.2★, 21 new, 0.9 km**	**none within 8 km**	**none within 8 km**
Oak Brook	overpriced for portions and quality (13 of 70)	**4.0★** · 2,183	74	3.15★	49/51	**4.2★, 25 new, 6.0 km**	**none within 8 km**	**none within 8 km**

Google's stars and counts are lifetime. New, new ★ and replies are from the 1,433 newest reviews we read, up to 100 a place: new = last 90 days, + = read stopped short of that; replies = owner replies to 1-3★ reviews. The 902 with words carry the themes.

SIDE BY SIDE

In Shake Shack's low reviews the wait leads at 29%, then rude staff and price

Each cell is the share of that chain's reviews with words, across its places read, that say the theme. Sorted by a model. Green is praise, red a complaint.

SHARE OF EACH BRAND'S REVIEWS READ THAT SAY IT · REVIEWS IN BRACKETS

THEMES SORTED BY A MODEL (GEMINI) · COUNTS EXACT

WHAT REVIEWERS SAY	SHAKE SHACK	FIVE GUYS	EPIC BURGER	SMALL CHEVAL
PRAISE delicious and juicy burgers	16% (56)	21% (27)	27% (53)	31% (69)
PRAISE friendly and helpful staff	16% (57)	19% (24)	41% (79)	20% (44)
PRAISE great crispy fries and generous portions	6% (22)	17% (22)	14% (27)	11% (25)
COMPLAINT overpriced for portions and quality	13% (47)	12% (16)	5% (9)	8% (17)
COMPLAINT long waits for food	15% (52)	9% (11)	3% (5)	2% (5)
PRAISE great atmosphere and outdoor seating	4% (16)	3% (4)	7% (13)	13% (28)
COMPLAINT rude or dismissive customer service	9% (31)	12% (15)	1% (2)	2% (5)
PRAISE delicious milkshakes and frozen drinks	7% (26)	3% (4)	4% (7)	6% (14)
COMPLAINT burgers are dry, bland, or salty	5% (17)	1% (1)	2% (4)	11% (24)

Other themes: wrong orders or missing items (47); served cold or old food (44); dirty tables and messy dining area (35). 665 of the 902 reviews are in a theme; of the 237 that are not, 99 are a few words of four- or five-star praise and 56 give one or two stars. Every review is listed in the HTML version.

A model (Gemini) named one set of themes for every brand and marked which each review says (up to three); we count its sorting. Base per brand: Shake Shack 358 reviews; Five Guys 128 reviews; Epic Burger 193 reviews; Small Cheval 223 reviews.

WHAT SHAKE SHACK'S REVIEWERS COMPLAIN ABOUT

Shake Shack's complaints: 52 reviews on the wait, then price and staff

Shake Shack's wait, price and staff complaints, with each rival's share.

long waits for food

share of reviews, then of low stars: Shake Shack 15%, 29% · Five Guys 9%, 24% · Epic Burger 3%, 26% · Small Cheval 2%, 0%

> “Good food but takes 30+ minutes during lunch peak”
>
> 2★ · Shake Shack Willis Tower · Jul 2026

> “Super slow service and no one was even in there. They were so focused on the DoorDash orders that they weren’t taking care of their customers and making careless mistakes”
>
> 2★ · Shake Shack Oak Lawn · Oct 2026

overpriced for portions and quality

share of reviews, then of low stars: Shake Shack 13%, 17% · Five Guys 12%, 21% · Epic Burger 5%, 32% · Small Cheval 8%, 14%

> “Overpriced for what is served”
>
> 3★ · Shake Shack Oak Lawn · Oct 2026

> “Ordered a bacon cheeseburger burger to get no bacon. Skimpy on the cheese fries too”
>
> 2★ · Shake Shack West Loop · May 2026

rude or dismissive customer service

share of reviews, then of low stars: Shake Shack 9%, 22% · Five Guys 12%, 41% · Epic Burger 1%, 11% · Small Cheval 2%, 4%

> “Super rude employee. Got a text that food is ready but she was super rude about it and unprofessional. Rolling her eyes.”
>
> 1★ · Shake Shack River North · Sep 2026

> “Very rude staff and very dirty.”
>
> 1★ · Shake Shack Wrigleyville · Oct 2026

The themes here hold 76 of Shake Shack's 129 one- and two-star reviews read; 24 are in other themes and 29 in no theme. Quoted as written, whole, without reviewer names; each quote is an example, the share beside the theme the evidence.

WHAT THE RIVALS' REVIEWERS SAY

Where rivals' reviewers complain: Five Guys' staff, Small Cheval's burgers

Five Guys' read is small (128 reviews with words). Small Cheval's burgers are both its top praise and its top complaint (11% say dry or salty).

rude or dismissive customer service

share of reviews, then of low stars: Shake Shack 9%, 22% · Five Guys 12%, 41% · Epic Burger 1%, 11% · Small Cheval 2%, 4%

> “Manager was stern & unfriendly.”
>
> 3★ · Five Guys, 2368 N Clark St Unit 1 · Sep 2026

> “Ordered through their website. Waited for my millshake for about 30 minutes after arriving. Guy just blew me off.”
>
> 1★ · Five Guys, 2368 N Clark St Unit 1 · Sep 2026

burgers are dry, bland, or salty

share of reviews, then of low stars: Shake Shack 5%, 9% · Five Guys 1%, 0% · Epic Burger 2%, 21% · Small Cheval 11%, 23%

> “Gave me a precooked dry burger”
>
> 2★ · Small Cheval- Fulton Market · Aug 2026

> “Terrible burgers! Dry, tough, and tasteless, the 2 pickles and onion that comes on it is McDonalds level sad. Only redeeming factor is the milkshake was good.”
>
> 2★ · Small Cheval, 1119 W Waveland Ave · Sep 2026

Quoted as written, whole, without reviewer names. Each quote is one review: an example of its theme; the shares beside the theme are the evidence.

YOUR BEST AND LOWEST LOCATION

Chicago Athletic Association's reviews complain about the wait; Oak Lawn's about price

Chicago Athletic Association (4.3) and Oak Lawn (3.8), the highest- and lowest-rated locations read, by theme. River North rates within a hair of the first. Small reads: a location's count is an example.

TOP AND LOWEST RATED OF THE LOCATIONS READ, BY THEME SORTED BY A MODEL

SHARE OF REVIEWS WITH WORDS	CHICAGO ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION (59)	OAK LAWN (34)	RIVAL PLACES (544)
friendly and helpful staff	20% (12)	29% (10)	27% (147)
long waits for food	25% (15)	6% (2)	4% (21)
delicious and juicy burgers	12% (7)	9% (3)	27% (149)
great atmosphere and outdoor seating	14% (8)	6% (2)	8% (45)
rude or dismissive customer service	8% (5)	12% (4)	4% (22)
overpriced for portions and quality	3% (2)	18% (6)	8% (42)
delicious milkshakes and frozen drinks	8% (5)	9% (3)	5% (25)

friendly and helpful staff

Shake Shack 16% · Five Guys 19% · Epic Burger 41% · Small Cheval 20%

> “Even having a super busy place, the food was delicious as always, and the manager did a great job communicating with costumers about possible delays, always polite and kind.”
>
> 5★ · Shake Shack Chicago Athletic Association · Jun 2026

> “Very courtesy service,clean and fresh food on orders.”
>
> 5★ · Shake Shack Oak Lawn · Aug 2026

Quoted as written, whole, without reviewer names. Each quote is one review: an example of its theme; the shares beside the theme are the evidence.

THEIR WORDS, AND THREE MOVES

Three things to do: thank fast-service reviews, show the burger near Small Cheval, thank happy reviewers

Phrases reviewers repeat, with how many are Shake Shack's, and three lines to use: in owner replies, in local ads, and in owner replies to praise.

PHRASES 4+ REVIEWS WROTE · REVIEWS, SHAKE SHACK'S OF THEM

- customer service 16 Shake Shack 3
- great burgers 14 Shake Shack 6
- friendly staff 11 Shake Shack 3
- great service 11 Shake Shack 3
- long time 10 Shake Shack 6
- fast service 8 Shake Shack 2

Counted, not chosen by a model: runs of 2 to 4 words that 4 or more of the reviews we read wrote, names left out; 6 of the 40 counted.

OWNER REPLIES ON GOOGLE AT CHICAGO ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION AND WILLIS TOWER · LONG WAITS FOR FOOD

Thank fast-service reviews where the wait comes up

IN REVIEWERS' WORDS

“food came out in pretty fast time”

The wait is 15 of 59 reviews at Chicago Athletic Association and 8 of 33 at Willis Tower.

From reviews: #20 (Shake Shack), #2 (Shake Shack)

LOCAL ADS NEAR SMALL CHEVAL'S LOCATIONS · DELICIOUS AND JUICY BURGERS

Near Small Cheval, show the burger

IN REVIEWERS' WORDS

“Burgers are good quality”

Small Cheval's low reviews call its burgers dry or salty (23%, to Shake Shack's 9%), though its burgers get more praise (31% to 16%) and 17 Shake Shack reviews call its own dry.

From reviews: #205 (Shake Shack), #206 (Shake Shack)

OWNER REPLIES ON GOOGLE TO FOUR- AND FIVE-STAR REVIEWS · DELICIOUS MILKSHAKES AND FROZEN DRINKS

Thank the happy reviewers in their words

IN REVIEWERS' WORDS

“Great truffle hamburger, fries and smores shakes”

Its four- and five-star reviews go unanswered (the short version has the counts); Epic Burger answers all of its own.

From reviews: #156 (Shake Shack), #70 (Shake Shack)

Each line takes a run of 3 or more words from the first review named; the others are on the same subject (#n = its number in the HTML list). Built on reviewers' words, with a few of our own where a reply needs them: match it to Shake Shack's own voice before using it.

HOW WE READ IT

What we read, how it was sorted, and what it cannot tell you

What was asked. “shakeshack.com”: we read it as Shake Shack (hamburger restaurant). No rivals were named, so we picked 3 chains near its locations: Five Guys (fast-casual burger chain with multiple Chicago locations); Epic Burger (local Chicago fast-casual burger chain with several locations); Small Cheval (local fast-casual burger chain across Chicago neighborhoods).

The reviews. Per place, Google's own rating, count and star split from a Google Maps search, and its newest reviews, up to 100 from the last 180 days, in the language each was written. 9 of the 9 Shake Shack locations Google Maps listed for Chicago, IL were read, the ones with the most Google reviews when this report was first run; each rival place is the nearest of that chain to a location, within 8 km. Owner replies to the 1-3★ and the 4-5★ reviews read: Shake Shack 193 of 198 and 2 of 406; Five Guys 54 of 56 and 177 of 179; Epic Burger 31 of 32 and 219 of 219; Small Cheval 61 of 106 and 11 of 237. Reviewer names and owners' replies are not kept, only whether a reply exists.

Dates. Shake Shack on Google Maps 6 May 2026 to 2 Nov 2026; Five Guys on Google Maps 12 May 2026 to 1 Nov 2026; Epic Burger on Google Maps 7 May 2026 to 26 Oct 2026; Small Cheval on Google Maps 7 May 2026 to 2 Nov 2026; read November 2, 2026.

The themes. A model (Gemini) named one set of themes from a sample of the reviews, added themes for reviews it left out, then read each of the 902 reviews and marked the themes it says, up to three; a second pass reread each against its theme and kept only those that say it. 665 of the 902 reviews are in a theme (1 corrected by hand, each with its reason in the HTML list). The counts are exact tallies of that sorting; the sorting is a reading, not a measurement.

The quotes. Every quote is one review, stored as written and shown whole. No reviewer names. Reviews that name an account, carry a link, or name or describe a private person are counted but never quoted (87 left out for naming a person). 1 review with only emoji in the body left out. 1 reviews read twice counted once.

What it cannot tell you. Google reviews come from people who chose to write one; 37% of those we read give stars and no words, so themes rest on the ones with words. Google removes some reviews and can't show visits. A share is of the reviews with words we read, not of customers.

The evidence. The HTML version of this report lists every review we read, by theme, with a link to the place on Google Maps.