

## Barbecue in the Bahamas Atlantis continues relationship with Alicart with second restaurant on Paradise Island.

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Virgil's Real BBQ is the latest restaurant to open at Kerzner International's Atlantis resort in the Bahamas, with its debut scheduled for Nov. 1.

But the roots of this culinary deal actually go back more than six years with the opening of Carmine's at Atlantis. Both Virgil's and Carmine's are owned by the New York-based Alicart Restaurant Group. The success of that six-year relationship paved the way for Virgil's to open.

"Atlantis is protective of its brand – a clean, fun environment. And we work hard on our brand," said Jeffrey Bank, CEO of the Alicart Restaurant Group. "Carmine's down in Atlantis has been very successful. At Atlantis, we know the lay of the land and we know the people."

Atlantis's current lineup of 22 restaurants has a spectrum of dining options, from haute cuisine of Jean Georges Vongerichten, Nobu Matsuhisa and Bobby Flay, to the casual poolside dining and Starbucks stands. Virgil's will have its own niche as the only barbecue spot.

The Atlantis outpost of Virgil's will be the first expansion of that brand following 17 years at its original Times Square location. The menu will feature the BBQ styles of Tennessee, Kentucky, Texas, the Carolinas and Missouri. Kerzner is promoting the 650-seat restaurant as the largest BBQ joint in the Caribbean.

One difference, according to Kerzner Vice President of Group Sales Mark Benson, is that Virgil's will offer family-style dining, a serving style that Carmine's is known for.

Both brands share a common DNA.

"You should leave Carmine's and Virgil's with a wow factor," he said. "Everything should be over the top."



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That's why, for example, at Virgil's the kitchen does not split chicken wings into a drumette and wing. They stay together to appear larger. Iced tea and lemonade are served in growlers for the same reason.

The key to running a massive restaurant, according to Bank, is consistency. Virgil's is very recipe-driven to achieve that.

"I want our food to be great," Bank said, "but it has to be consistent."

One of the keys to that consistency is maintaining the same suppliers as its New York restaurant. Alicart will order the same ribs, steak and other staples as its original location, and will even ship dry-aged apple chips to the Bahamas. The idea goes beyond food, he said. Even the maroon hand towels that serve as napkins will be the same.

"If the consistency is the same, the guest will enjoy it," he said. "This is the same style, look and feel that we will have down there."

Not everyone coming to the Atlantis location will be familiar with the brand, though. Because Atlantis draws heavily from the Northeast for its guest base, Bank estimated that about 40 percent will know of Virgil's – a similar figure to Carmine's when it opened. For that opening, Bank spent the first week visiting tables and chatting with guests about their meals and experience with the brand. As the Carmine's empire has grown – there are now branches in Washington, D.C., Atlantic City as well as Atlantis and the two in New York – Alicart has also tried to spread the word about Virgil's. Gift cards to Carmine's as well as other collateral advertise both brands.

Another difference is that Virgil's will serve three meals a day. At Atlantis, Carmine's only serves dinner, and brunch at Virgil's in New York is only available on the weekends.

"We love to do three meals," Bank said. "There has to be demand for it."

Atlantis should be a good breakfast market because there is only one other a la carte breakfast option at the resort. Making that easier will be its on-site bakery where staff can bake biscuits, corn bread and pies.

Jeffrey Beers created the 11,000 square-foot indoor space, which features an 18-ft tall copper beer tap tower. Other rustic design features include wood slate panels, a black steel chandelier, stacked smoking logs, bronze nail heads, hammered copper and Western accents such as whiskey-barrel pedestals and a signature mosaic compass to bolster the "road trip" theme. Caged banquets constructed of Western Barrel lattice allow for private dining and frame views of the resort's Royal Towers while picnic-style tables accommodate groups and families. The 3,000 square-foot outdoor patio features an 18-seat antique-washed brick bar and grill and additional seating overlooking Paradise Lagoon.

Virgil's will also offer children's daily BBQ cooking demonstrations and classes at the kitchen in the Atlantis kid's club. The classes will emphasize learning Southern hospitality and etiquette.