How to Get the Most Out of Foursquare Places

A Guide on How You Can
Build Engaging App Experiences
Using Location Data

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FOURSQUARE

Introduction

From bakeries in Bangkok to pizzerias in Pittsburgh, Foursquare knows places best. Since our founding in 2009, we've built the most sophisticated platform for understanding where people go. Now, we're arming developers and product leaders like you with this key technology.

With more than 14 billion user-confirmed place visits generated to date by our flagship consumer apps—**Foursquare City Guide** and **Swarm**—as well as through third-party data providers, the quality and coverage of Foursquare's venues database is unmatched. We've continued to compile hundreds of millions of user-generated tips (i.e., short-form reviews of a venue entered by users themselves), photos, tastes (i.e., keywords commonly identified by users that describe a venue's traits) and sentiments (i.e., ratings and reviews) into our rich venue database of more than 105 million places—more than 60 million of them commercial—globally. What's more, by layering that knowledge base on top of Pilgrim, our proprietary core visit detection technology, we've machine-learned a way to accurately detect the precise locations of millions of places around the globe.

To that end, Foursquare is proud to make **Places** available to you—developers and enterprise leaders—to bring an enhanced understanding of the real world to your platform. We want to make sure you get the most out of our Places offering, so keep reading—in this guide, we'll cover:

- An introduction to Places

- Best practices for using our global venue database

- Detailed tips on how to display specific attributes

- Case studies of how some of our partners have successfully implemented our data

Product Overview

To connect with your audience in a thoughtful way—and to ultimately bring value to your business—you must understand the world they inhabit. Over the past decade, 150,000 developers and hundreds of enterprise companies including Uber, Samsung, Hilton, TripAdvisor and Apple have integrated our platform to power meaningful, location-rich experiences for their users. If you're a product manager or developer looking to enhance your existing dataset, or seeking innovative ways to engage multiple touchpoints along the user journey, you've come to the right data partner. With data available across more than 190 countries and 50 territories, Places gives developers the deepest understanding of a venue. In fact, each and every venue in our database includes highly precise firmographic location details—like latitude and longitude coordinates and category tags—with more than **900 categories** to date. This, in addition to our user-generated content, makes it easy to construct a holistic profile of any place and to bring valuable real-time, location-driven content to your audience.

We understand that developers have different use-case applications and integration needs, so Places is accessible in two formats: API and Flat File (Database). For added flexibility, the Flat File is available in both JSON and TSV formats. This is how we've become the market-leading venue database provider that independent developers and industry leaders trust.

Best-Practices

The development and launch of our two consumer products has given us a deep understanding about which user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) practices work best. At the same time, we've been able to anticipate the typical shortcomings that arise when building delightful end-user experiences and maintaining an engaged consumer base.

While Places provides precise firmographic details about a venue, such as name, address and phone number, many of our developer and enterprise partners trust Foursquare because of the quality of our community-sourced content. The most utilized Places features that are commonly integrated into apps to build out dynamic app experiences are venue details (including our

own unique **venue rating system**), photos, and tips, as well as our explore and search features, available exclusively via the API.

Below, we've compiled a series of tips and hacks that lay out the most engagement-inducing ways to present venues within your app and to bring location-aware moments to your audience. We've done most of the heavy lifting to make your Places integration a breeze.

Venue Detection with Snap-to-Place

"Where am I?" Answering this simple question can help developers build rich, location-based experiences— and Snap-to-Place holds the key. By determining a smartphone's specific latitude and longitude, developers can pinpoint mobile user's specific location.

The result is a frictionless user experience that gives consumers the ability to view and share their locations without having to touch their keyboards. Foursquare goes beyond merely placing a latitude and longitude (i.e., pin) coordinate on the map by knowing the real-world place where the user's phone is positioned, including its venue name and category. How is this possible with Places? Snap-to-Place is powered by our **venue/search** endpoint. Used to surface nearby places as well as to return a list of venues, venue/search is one of the Places API's top three endpoints.

In order to execute this specific-use case using venue/search, we recommend that you limit the response to one result. Since venue/search can return up to 50 nearby venues based on a user's latitude and longitude, another possibility is selecting the top result from the response. To try Snap-to-Place for yourself, check out our API Explorer at **developer.foursquare.com**.

To execute this use case, we recommend using the venues/search endpoint.

Venue Search

One crucial factor that impacts engagement is how your listing appears to users when they search. Nearby searches are a clear indicator of a user's intent to go and visit the venue immediately. Therefore, you'll want to highlight things like peak hours, reservations policy, or if the venue is near opening and closing times. If the current user location is a substantial distance from the searched location, you can interpret that as an aspirational search for the future. Since aspirational searchers won't visit the venue immediately, there's no need to display things like "closing soon" or the exact distance between the user and venue.

Keep in mind that the default search ordering setting for user queries is for "best results," but people can also search venues in Places by rating or distance. When displaying your location in search, make sure to only display the first, primary category to users. For example, if your venue is an Italian restaurant with a small bar, make sure that the primary category in the display—"Italian Restaurant," in this case—displays instead of the "Bar" category.

We recommend using the venue/search call within the Places API to power this use case.

Place Recommendations
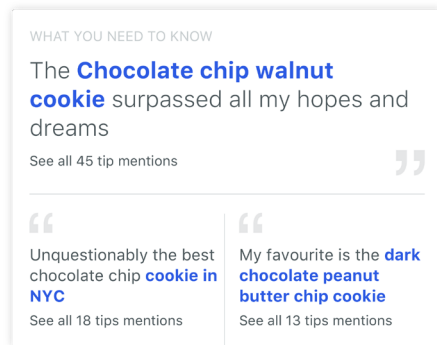
Understanding the difference between venue/search and venue/explore is nuanced, but essential to making the right call to the Places API. While venue/search is used to list nearby venues around a specific latitude and longitude, venue/explore is best utilized to find recommendation around a given latitude and longitude. The venue/explore call answers the question of "What is the best of X around Y?" For example, if a user is in Times Square in New York City and is looking for a cup of coffee, this is an opportunity to utilize the venue/explore endpoint to recommend the best option. If a user just wants to know what type of food-and-drink related venues are in Times Square, it's best to use venue/search. For added functionality, the parameter "section" can be used to limit results to venues with the specified category or property.

The **venue/explore** functionality underpins Foursquare City Guide: It serves as a highly curated recommendation engine that services the right and best types of venues. You can utilize it for various verticals, but it's highly effective for travel, hospitality and retail.

**If you want to see what's recommended, use the venue/explore call.**

Venue Details

Once users find a venue via search and gain interest in learning more about the location, they'll dive in to learn more specifics to help them decide whether or not to visit. Here's how you should organize and display detailed information about your venue in Places:

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The **Chocolate chip walnut cookie** surpassed all my hopes and dreams

See all 45 tip mentions

Unquestionably the best chocolate chip **cookie in NYC**

See all 18 tips mentions

My favourite is the **dark chocolate peanut butter chip cookie**

See all 13 tips mentions

Phrases display a quick summary of popular, unique or common words used to describe a venue.

- **Phrases:** Use phrases to display a quick summary of popular, unique, or uncommon items that past visitors have mentioned at your venue. Avoid trying to create sentences out of phrases, and be sure to use the provided tip snippet.
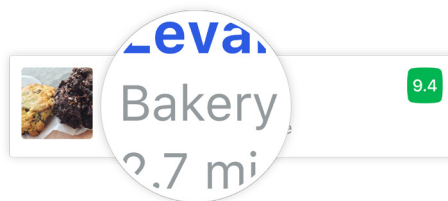

We recommend that you only show the first category (the primary category).

- **Category:** If you're placing pins on a map, make sure to label them. You can do so using pins with a number or category icon. You should then designate a color for each category or rating. Your final view should show only the first, primary category.

You can choose which, and how many photos to display. The most relevant photos are chosen based on our internal ranking algorithm. We highly also recommend responsive dynamic resizing.

- **Photos:** You'll want to conduct internal versus external venue-picture experiments to optimize which images to use. It's also a best practice to avoid ever using a photo in a pin. Photos are available in the details of a venue, and responsive dynamic resizing of photos is highly recommended.
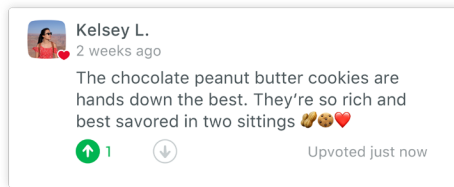
Tips give users insight into the venue experience of other visitors.

Tips: Another essential part of your venue details are tips, which help users gain insight into the experience and advice of other visitors. Think of **tips as pieces of insider knowledge** that would make future visitors' experiences at a venue that much better. How can you get the most of this intel? Here are some best practices about writing and displaying tips on your venue:

Length of Tips: Make tips short, snappy and conversational, with fewer than 200 characters. Do your best to mitigate negative sentiments and offer practical advice to users about each place or venue.

Tip Ordering: Tips can also be ordered by three different hierarchies: Recency, Popularity or Friends. Recency ranks tips in descending order of tip date, with the most recent being first. An internal algorithm creates the popularity ranking, selecting the best-written or most relevant tips for that venue and displaying them accordingly. Friends rankings are for apps with a social aspect, where tips from friends are given more weight by the algorithm than users from the general population. Not all platforms integrate venues data for social use-case apps, so we recommend using popularity as best practice for filtering tips. Popularity will provide users with an accurate summary of a specific dish or venue, and is especially useful if you're only able to display one or two tips.

To recommend venues in real-time, use the venues/details call.

Venue Snapshot View (Venue Detail Cards)

How you present a summary of venue information in Places—in the form of venue detail cards—is critical to giving users a quick snapshot of each location. We recommend that you display your venue name along with a ratings color scheme that has a hex color for the current Foursquare rating that can be used. We also recommend displaying **sentiment scores**—Foursquare derives sentiment scores from a combination of explicit feedback, quick tips, verified check-ins and passive location data generated from our

own and operated apps. The venue name will appear as part of a larger venue card, which summarizes the venue along with other similar locations. The venue name display should look similar to this example below:
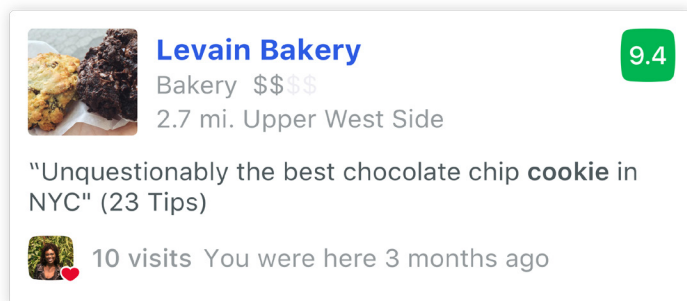
The venue name will appear as part of a larger venue card, which summarizes the venue

Additional Tips to Consider: Picking a Color Scheme

The only time you won't want to include some sort of color scheme in your venue rating is if it's a newer venue without any scores to tabulate yet. If for some reason you choose not to use a rating color scheme, you should still include some indication of the highest scores that were given out of 10—for example, you could simply display "8.9/10." Either way, based on the results of a recent experience the Foursquare product team completed, we recommend numerical ratings contain exactly one decimal place.
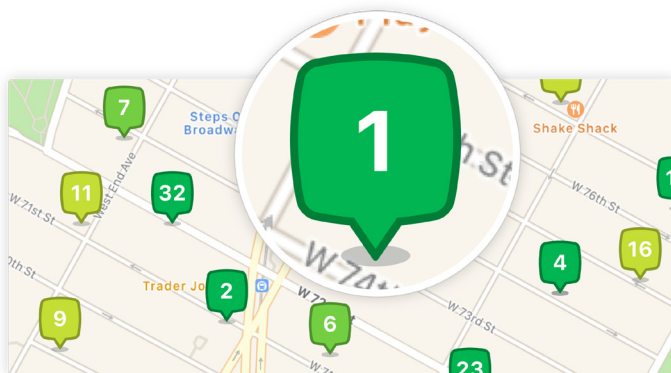

We recommend that you use colors to illustrate a venue's rating (unless it's a newer venue without a score), additionally the numerical rating should always have 1 decimal place.

Displaying Distance

In order to provide the relevant context to your users, we have some recommendations for displaying how far a venue is located in relation to the user. For venues closeby, we recommend showing the distance in the unit the user already has in their system preferences. If the distance to the venue is

less than 10 kilometers (6 miles), we suggest showing the distance in meters, kilometers, feet or miles; when your venue is farther away, your display should then default to the neighborhood, followed by the city and state. In some cases—like when the user is searching from another country—format the listing to show just the city and country.
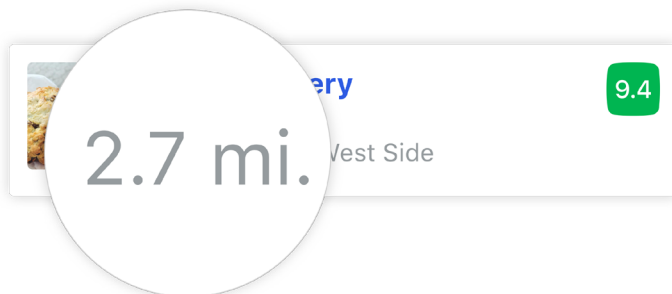
We recommend you display a distance of up to 6 miles/10 kilometers and then default to <neighborhood/city/state> or <city, country>.

Showing Price

The pricing symbol ($)—which denotes the overall expense of your venue on a scale of 1 through 5—is optional. If you do choose to include it in your Places listing, be sure to localize the currency for users viewing your listing from other countries. If your restaurant is in New York, for example, someone viewing the venue from London should see the pricing symbol in British pound symbols (£££).

Integrating Places successfully requires a knowledge of venue cells and cards, along with knowing how to effectively present your place on maps. Following our advice on detailed information—from address and photos to tips—will help engage users and increase the time they spend on your platform.

The pricing symbol ($$$$) is optional. To display the symbol that is localized to the user's currency, we recommend that you use the price.currency value.

Places Case Studies

Top brands across a range of industries use Places to provide more depth, relevance and engagement to their venues. Below are two, from Condé Nast and Hilton, that illustrate the successful implementation and utilization of Places. With these examples, you can better understand each company's use case, the Places features and datasets they used and the results they experienced with our platform.

Condé Nast Traveler

Condé Nast Traveler is a luxury and lifestyle magazine published by Condé Nast. The CNTraveler.com website publishes upscale content related to travel news, destination advice, and travel tips.

Challenge: Condé Nast tapped Foursquare to add more accuracy, freshness and context to their venue detail pages in a simple and efficient manner. For the redesign of the CNTraveler.com website, Condé Nast chose Foursquare to help them enrich the end-user experience, giving readers access to highly localized, in-depth information about travel destinations prior to arrival.

Feature: Condé Nast Traveler relied on Foursquare's database of more than 105 million places as a source for up-to-date information on addresses, hours, and phone numbers of specific venues—in addition to displaying subcategory and amenity data. Now, anyone using the Condé Nast Traveler app can easily identify if a certain destination has features like outdoor seating, Wi-Fi, live music and more as they plan their trip.

Result: Places' proprietary location data provided the Condé Nast Traveler app and Web users with useful information about available features and amenities at various venues they're researching while planning their travels. Moreover, the luxury brand received customized support that delivered the necessary accuracy, freshness and context to the venue detail pages of their branded Web properties.

Hilton Honors Explore

Hilton Explore provides Hilton Honors members with the opportunity to explore the neighborhood surrounding their hotel prior to their reservation date. And to further personalize the experience, local Hilton team employees actually provide the recommendations. The international hotel brand is

currently in the middle of rolling out the Explore feature on iOS in 28 initial markets, covering nearly 1,000 hotels in major destinations like New York, London, and Miami prior to an expanded global rollout.

Challenge: The primary objective of Explore was to provide Hilton guests with an elevated concierge experience, based on the prized local knowledge of Hilton team members. The main obstacle was finding an effective way of aggregating personalized content from local Hilton team members and presenting it to guests in a relevant and meaningful fashion.

Feature: Foursquare's Places now serves as the primary source of real-time venue information for the Hilton Honors app, which includes ratings, features, photos and hours. Thanks to Places, Hilton Honors users can pick the best venues to visit before their trip, and know that they're all pre-approved by the local Hilton team.
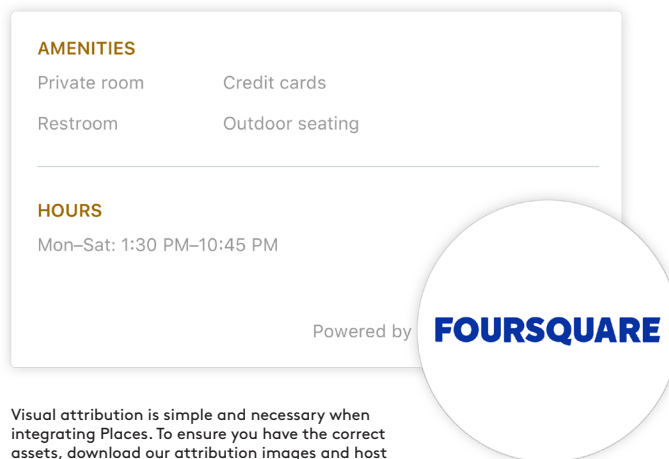
Result: Foursquare's Places made it possible to take all of Hilton's user ID's, lists and tips previously created on Foursquare's consumer site—and place this information directly into Hilton's back-end systems. From there, Hilton can now pre-stage and serve up content directly into the Hilton Honors app. The Explore feature has been active on Android since 2018, and users can expect to see the "Powered by Foursquare" logo throughout the Hilton Honors app.

Accurately Attributing Places in Your App or Website

If you choose to use Places in your app or website, we require that you credit Foursquare. Below are a couple of ways you can correctly attribute Foursquare to ensure you don't violate our **terms of use**.

Visual Attribution
Visual attribution with the Places is simple and straightforward. You can download our attribution images and host them on your content delivery network (CDN). Below is a clear example of how visual attribution typically looks.

AMENITIES

Private room   Credit cards

Restroom   Outdoor seating

HOURS

Mon–Sat: 1:30 PM–10:45 PM

Powered by **FOURSQUARE**

Visual attribution is simple and necessary when integrating Places. To ensure you have the correct assets, download our attribution images and host them on your content delivery network (CDN).

Beyond Basic Data

If you happen to display any non-basic venue data—such as tips or photos—you must provide visual attribution.

If you're displaying a list of venues as a part of search results, we recommend you follow the visual attribution guidelines listed above.

Next Steps

After 10 years, we're happy to share the knowledge we've collected with clients and partners on how to best integrate Foursquare's venue database into their apps or websites. Validated by the success of brands such as Hilton and Condé Nast and more than 150,000 developers around the globe, **Places** is the leading provider of location data. Take advantage of Places for yourself by following our integration tips and see what you can build today!

Test out Places API for yourself by creating a free account at developer.foursquare.com. To learn more about the Flat File, which is available for Enterprise only, please e-mail ask.enterprise@foursquare.com.