How to manage a waitlist in OpenTable

This guide explains how to manage a waitlist in OpenTable, from adding a walk-in party to seating them once their table is ready. You review the current floor status, add the party with their details, monitor the list, message the guest, and seat them.

Prerequisites

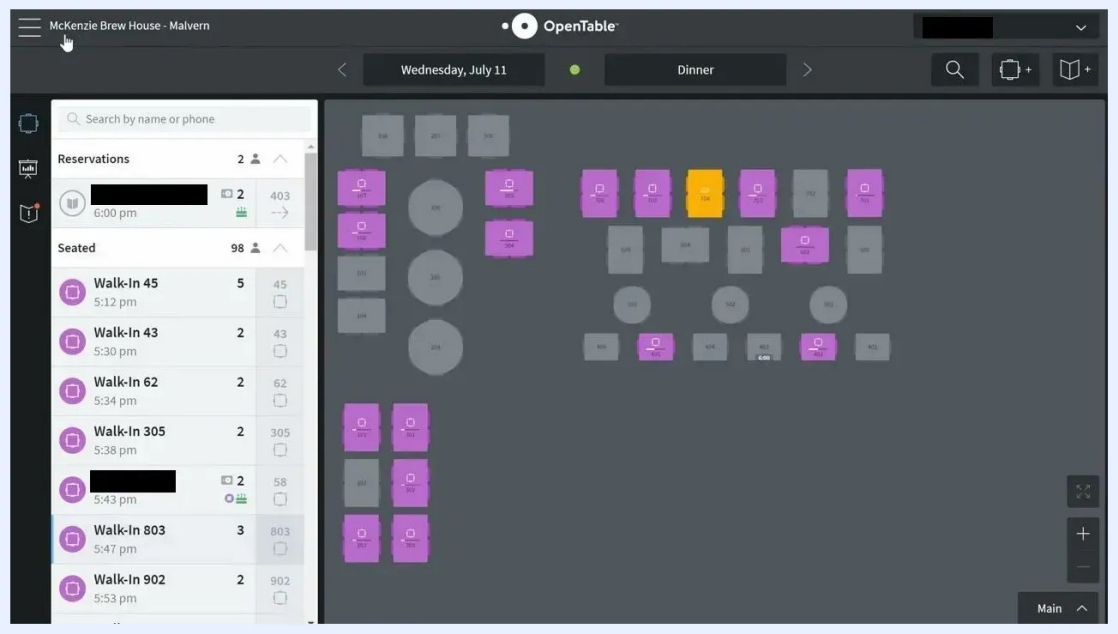
- You are logged into OpenTable for the correct location (for example, McKenzie Brew House - Malvern).
- You can see the correct date and meal period at the top of the screen (for example, Wednesday, July 11, Dinner).

Step 1: Review the current reservation and seating status

Before you add a party, check the state of the restaurant.

- Review the left panel for existing reservations and seated guests.
- Look at the floor plan. Occupied tables appear purple, available tables appear gray, and tables in transition are highlighted.

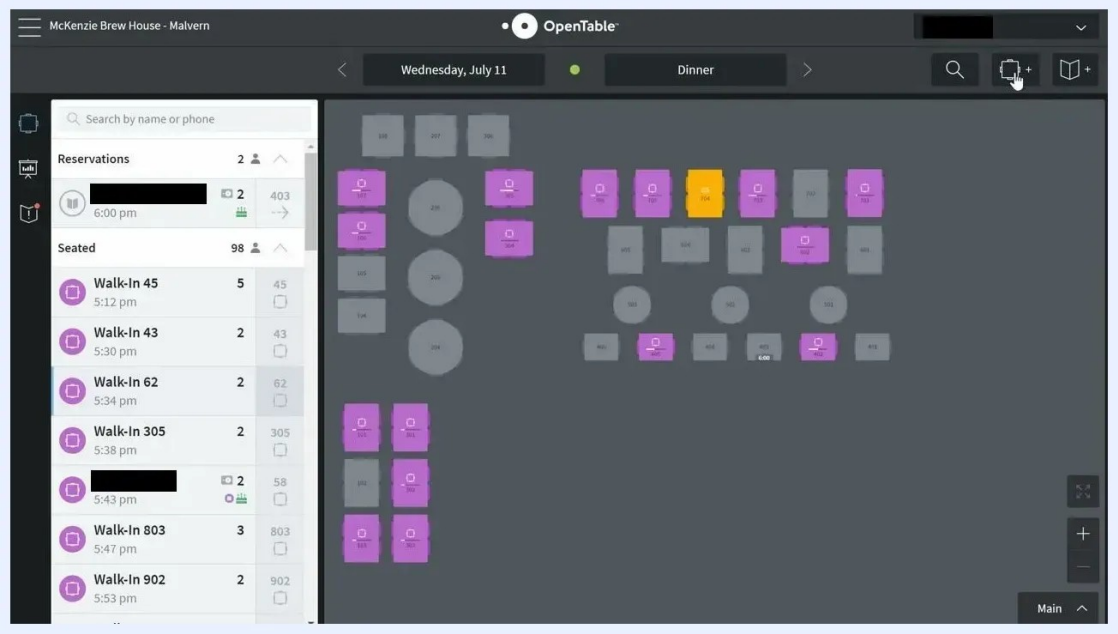
In this example, only one reservation, for "Jennie Brungardt" at 6:00 pm, is listed, and several walk-in parties are already seated.



OpenTable dashboard showing reservations, seated guests, and the table map for McKenzie Brew House - Malvern, with the Wednesday, July 11 dinner period selected

Step 2: Start adding a party to the waitlist

Locate the table icon (waitlist/add party) in the upper right corner of the OpenTable interface, then click it to begin adding a new party.



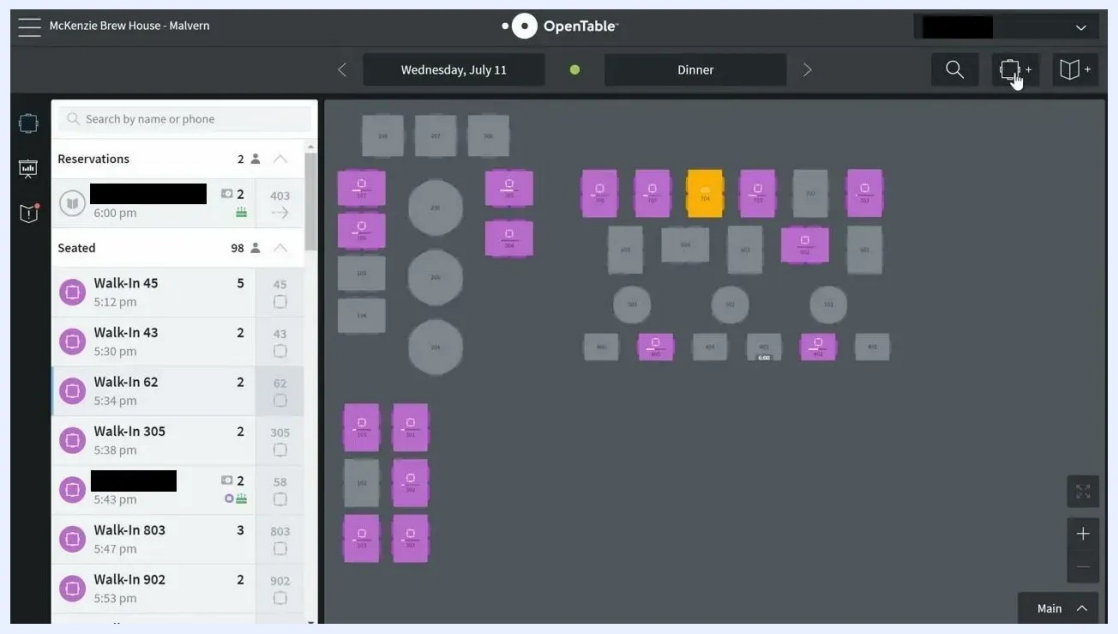
Cursor hovering over the table icon in the upper right corner of the OpenTable interface

Step 3: Enter the party size and wait time

On the **Seat or Waitlist** screen, set the party details.

- Select the number of guests (for example, 5 Guests).

- In the **Add to waitlist** section, choose the estimated wait time (for example, 20 min wait, which seats the party around 7:04 pm).

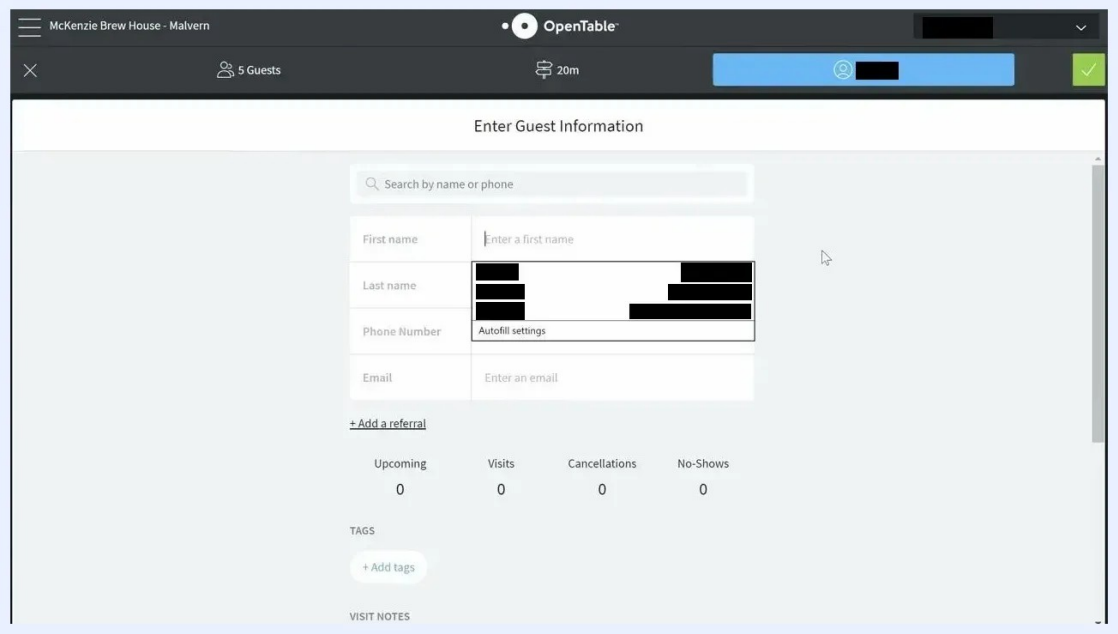


The Seat or Waitlist screen with 5 guests selected and a 20 min wait chosen, showing an estimated seat time of 7:04 pm

Step 4: Collect guest information

Ask the guest for their last name. If the guest has not dined with you before, add them as a new entry in the guestbook.

Enter the guest's first name (for example, Allen), last name (for example, Iverson), and phone number (for example, +1 (610) 506-7957).



The Enter Guest Information screen with first name, last name, phone number, and email fields, filled in with Allen Iverson's details

Step 5: Add the party to the waitlist

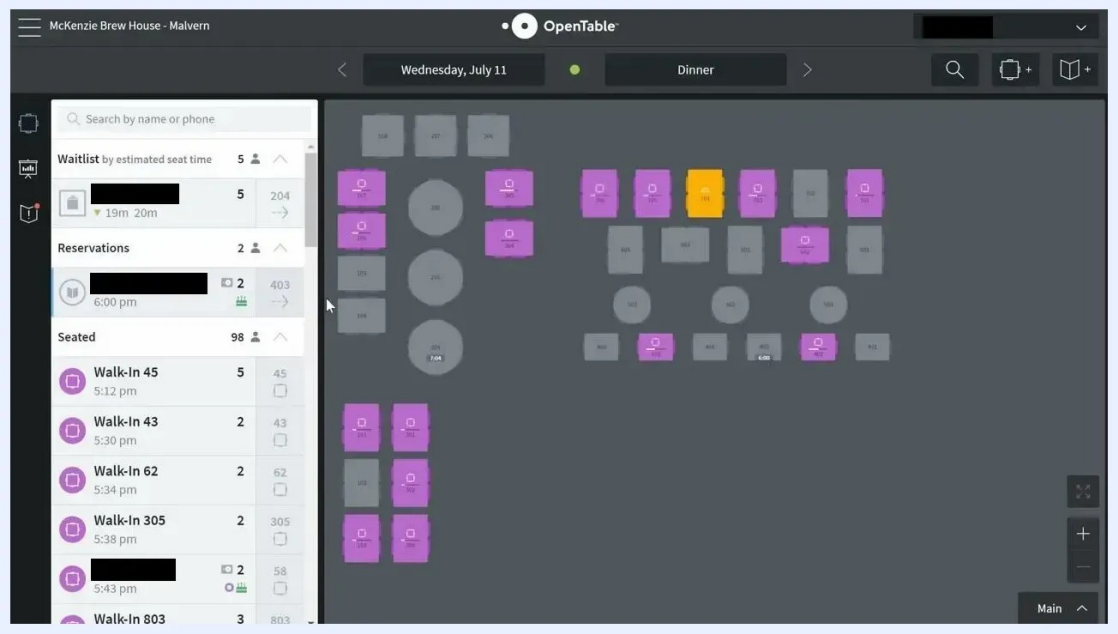
Click the green checkmark in the upper right corner to confirm. The party is added to the waitlist and receives a text notification when their table is ready.

Step 6: Confirm the guest notification

After you add the party, the guest receives a text message confirming they are on the waitlist.

- Tell the guest they can cancel their wait at any time, for example if they find seats at the bar.
- If the guest cancels, OpenTable automatically removes them from the waitlist.

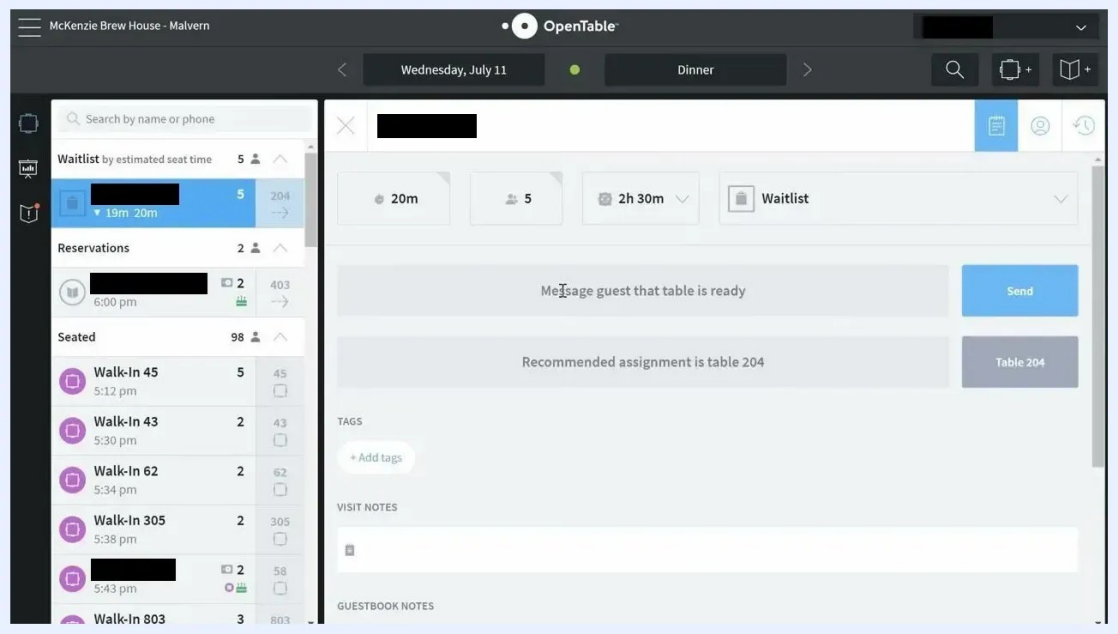
Allen Iverson now appears at the top of the waitlist with 5 guests, an estimated seat time, and a table assignment.



The OpenTable dashboard with Allen Iverson at the top of the waitlist, alongside the floor plan and reservation list

Step 7: Monitor the waitlist

Keep an eye on the waitlist section at the top of the left panel. If a guest cancels by text, their entry disappears from the waitlist automatically.



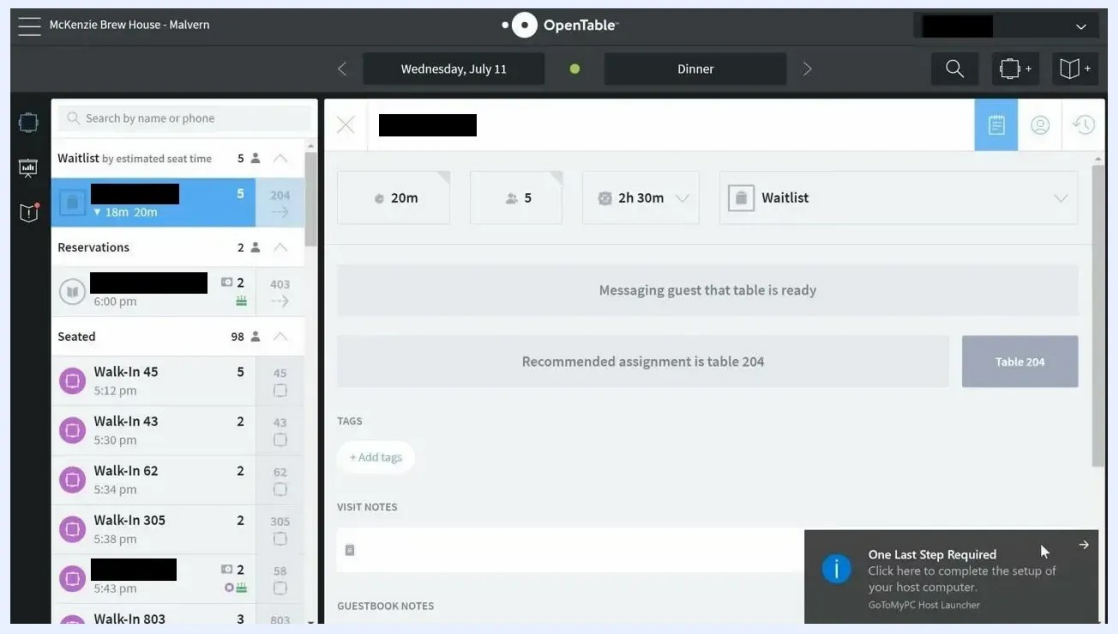
The OpenTable dashboard with Allen Iverson highlighted in the waitlist and the cursor near the table assignment arrow

Step 8: Message the guest that their table is ready

When the estimated wait has passed and a table is available, alert the guest. Because you collected their phone number, you can send the message directly from OpenTable.

1. Click the guest's name in the waitlist (for example, Allen Iverson).
2. Select **Message guest that table is ready**.
3. Click the blue **Send** button.

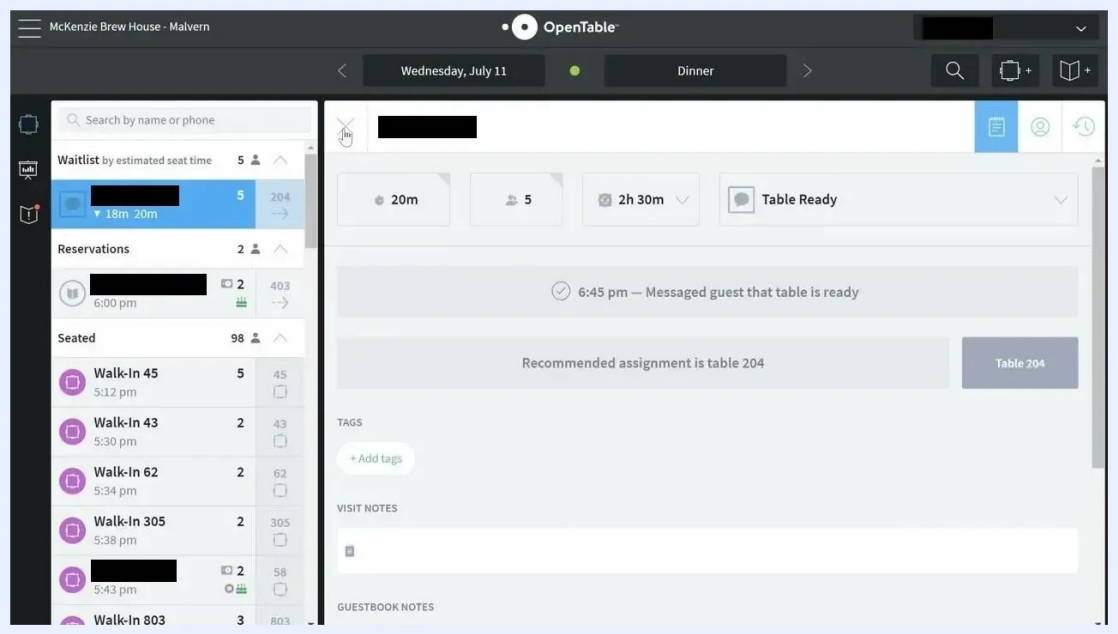
4. Click **Confirm?** when prompted.



The guest details screen for Allen Iverson with the Message guest that table is ready option, a blue Send button, and Table 204 recommended

Step 9: Verify the table-ready notification

The system displays a confirmation, for example "6:45 pm — Messaged guest that table is ready." The guest receives a text asking them to approach the host stand for seating.



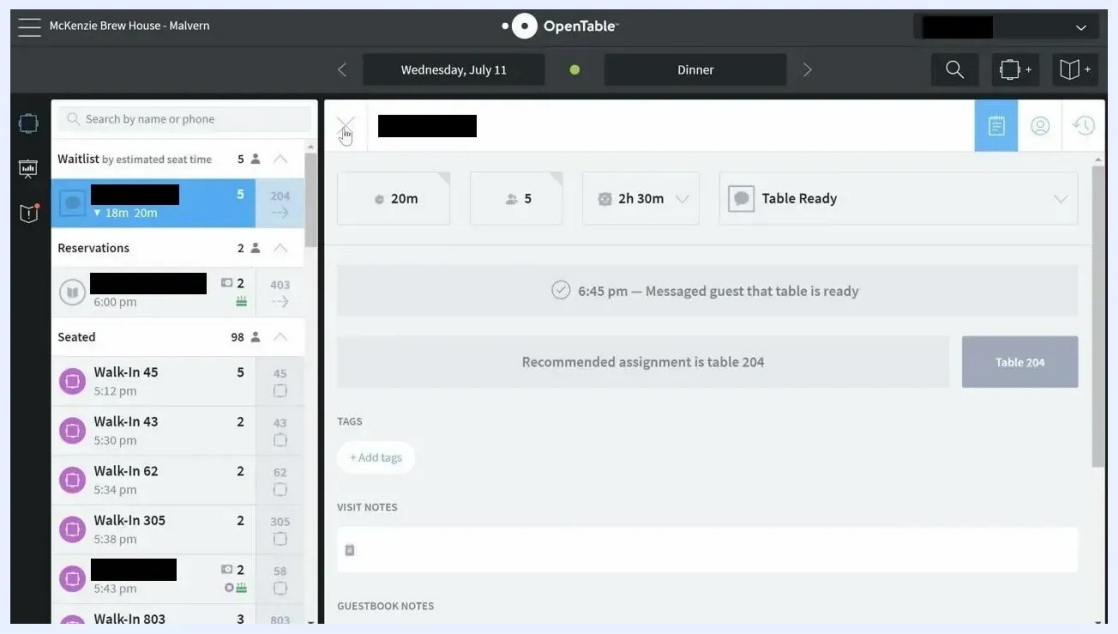
The guest details screen showing the "Messaged guest that table is ready" confirmation and Table 204 as the recommended assignment

Step 10: Seat the guest

Seat the guest as you would with a normal reservation.

- Select the assigned table (for example, Table 204) on the floor plan.
- Click **Seat** or **Seat Now** to complete the process.

Once seated, the guest no longer appears in the waitlist and moves to the seated list.



The floor plan with Table 204 selected to seat Allen Iverson's party, with the seated list and reservations visible

Summary

Now you know how to manage a waitlist in OpenTable: you add a party with their size, wait time, and contact details, monitor the list and cancellations, message guests when their table is ready, and seat them from the waitlist. This gives staff and guests a smooth, professional experience.