



# Sampling South Carolina's



The fact that different regions have culinary styles all their own is a big part of what RealFoodTraveler.com is all about. We celebrate the uniqueness, the ingredients, cooking methods, and names that say “this is OUR food.” The Lowcountry region is just such an area. Colorado-based writer Sandy Bornstein provides us with her “northerner’s sampling of South Carolina’s Lowcountry Cuisine, in this comprehensive guide of where to take it all in.



*Mt. Pleasant's Tavern and Table jumbo lump crab on a challah roll with sweet potato fries.*

***“One of the very nicest things about life is the way we must regularly stop whatever it is we are doing and devote our attention to eating.”  
— Luciano Pavarotti***

Whenever I’m traveling, I designate ample time to indulge in regional foods so my meals and snacks take on a cultural meaning. My understanding of a destination becomes intertwined with my food choices since chefs oftentimes select local products and embrace regional cooking styles. During my first trip to South Carolina, I relied on [Explore Charleston](#), [Discover South Carolina](#), and [Visit Beaufort](#) to select my dining itinerary.

The Lowcountry is an 80-mile strip of land running along the Atlantic seaboard through the states of South Carolina and Georgia. With an abundance of fresh aquatic life, chefs tend to incorporate local fish and seafood into their entrees that follow French

and English cooking traditions with an influx of African and Caribbean ingredients. Locally-sourced ingredients such as rice, grits, and seasonal fruits and vegetables from the coastal plains are usually included. For dietary reasons, I avoided pork products, another prime regional ingredient.

As a northerner who rarely visits the South, I couldn't wait to sample Lowcountry cuisine and share my experiences with other foodies. My journey revolved around restaurants in Charleston, Mount Pleasant, Hilton Head, and Beaufort.

The majority of my time was spent near Charleston. Many of the restaurants were conveniently located within walking distance of our hotel or by major attractions. Since parking was oftentimes a challenge in Charleston, we walked whenever possible. During our brief stay at the [Sonesta Resort Hilton Head](#), we divided our time between that resort and the [Sea Pines Resort](#). Had our visit been a bit longer or not been subject to inclement weather, we would have explored additional places. A brief detour to Beaufort included a quick lunch before heading back to Charleston.

## **Darling Oyster Bar**

### **513 King Street, Charleston**

Whenever I'm visiting a coastal region, I prefer dining on fresh seafood. Within a few hours after arriving at the [Hyatt House Hotel in Charleston](#), we only had to walk a few blocks to The Darling Oyster Bar.

Executive Chef Joe DiMaio, the former chef at the Old Village Post House and the Stars Rooftop & Grill Room, opened The Darling Oyster Bar in a restored, 115-year-old corner storefront on lively King Street in early 2016.

With many choices available on the regular and special menu, I needed additional time to make my selections. As I mulled over the choices, I sipped on a refreshing mug of iced Fish House Punch, a mixture of Bacardi Gold Rum, Cognac, Crème de Peche, and lemon. According to the menu, the unique recipe is based on a 1732 beverage.

For starters, we selected two house specialties— Snapper Ceviche mixed with coconut, lime, orange bits, and cilantro, served with a few corn tortillas and a king crab parfait including avocado, grapefruit, herb pistou, and a few, small slices of sourdough

crostini.

Seared diver scallops with fingerling potatoes, tomatoes, corn, and arugula topped with tomato-dill vinaigrette was my top choice for dinner. My husband Ira ordered the Lobster and King Crab roll, which was served on a split top bun with a side of hand cut fries.

Since we had skipped lunch, we definitely shared dessert. An unusual rendition of a s'more was our unanimous decision. The chocolate mousse creation was set upon a graham cracker crust topped with bruleed marshmallow fluff.



*The Darling Oyster Bar's S'More dessert.*

**Virginia's on King**



## **412 King Street, Charleston**

We arrived for breakfast shortly after Virginia's on King opened and sat at a wooden table in a narrow dining room with brick sidewalls. On the back of the menu, I read how the owners were inspired to start a restaurant. "Food and family are the thread that bind the traditions of the South." They intentionally created menus utilizing "family recipes, fresh ingredients, and Southern cooking traditions." Two prominent symbols—Lowcountry Local First and Certified SC Grown, were on the bottom of the menu.

Egg entrees dominated the menu along with fried chicken, ham, and grits. Omelets with sides of either potatoes or grits satisfied both of us.

## **Poogan's Porch**

### **72 Queen Street, Charleston**

While touring near the Antique District, we stopped for lunch at Poogan's Porch. This family owned restaurant, in a converted home, has been serving regional cuisine since 1976. We could either order breakfast or lunch entrees. The line waiting to be seated attests to its popularity.

I took a few bites of the steaming hot biscuits on our table. I soon learned that biscuits would be a staple at most restaurants. My lunchtime appetite was satisfied with a lump crab cake with cream corn, watercress, and a brown butter Vinaigrette. With no time to spare, we skipped desert and headed to our next attraction.



*Lump crab cake with corn from Poogan's Porch.*

## **Vincent Chiccos**

**39G John Street, Charleston**

On a rainy evening, we eventually located a stone walkway illuminated with strings of white lights and freestanding lampposts off of King Street near the Charleston Music Hall. The European-styled alley matched the atmosphere inside the restaurant, artistically transformed from a former warehouse. Oversized windows and wooden beams complimented the white tablecloths and black and white photos on the walls. Sometimes, I like to take a step away from regional cuisine for a meal or two. This deviation from Lowcountry cuisine was a wonderful opportunity to taste one of Charleston's popular Italian restaurants. Chef Michael Greene's menu includes a combination of traditional Italian entrees and American Italian favorites.

If we returned in the future, we would not hesitate to again order the vertical roots salad, the blue crab tomato bisque with heirloom tomatoes, and the Faroe Island

salmon with glazed strawberries, goat cheese, sweet potato puree, and sorghum-roasted summer squash. We saved room for one of Executive Pastry Chef Richard Farr's creations, a decadent flourless chocolate torte with dark and white chocolate ganache, chantilly cream, and raspberry confit.



*Faroe Island Salmon at Vincent Chiccos.*

## **Millers All Day**

**120 King Street, Charleston**

I could easily eat breakfast all day long. If you share my view about breakfast, Millers All Day should be on the top of your list. Greg Johnsman of Geechie Boy Mill created a southern styled menu with produce from Johnsman's farm.





*Millers All Day Vegetable Frittata.*

After I ordered a vegetable frittata with a side of grits, I had my first opportunity to taste grits. I have to admit that grits have never been on my radar. Heather, the manager, provided a quick lesson about the different types of grits and offered a sampling of Speckled Grits and Guinea Flint Grits. Unfortunately, we didn't have time to return for the twice a week grits milling demonstration using the 175-plus year-old machine sitting in a small room near the front door.





*Millers All Day sampling of different kinds of grits.*

## **Tavern & Table**

### **100 Church Street, Mount Pleasant**

In Mount Pleasant, along the Shem Creek, we enjoyed a casual lunch at Tavern & Table. The menu concentrated on small plates and snacks, platters, brick oven entrees, salads, house-ground meats, and sandwiches.

We both chose a jumbo lump crab sandwich on a challah roll. My side was a simple salad while Ira savored sweet potato fries. After completing our meal, we had the opportunity to meet the new Executive Chef Ray England. He graciously added a delicious budino to our calorie laden order of a skillet baked chocolate chip cookie with vanilla bean ice cream and an amazing espresso martini made with sea island spice rum, Galliano ristretto, and freshly brewed espresso. It's a good thing we weren't counting calories.



*A Budino in Mt. Pleasant.*

## **Old Village Post House Inn**

### **101 Pitt Street, Mount Pleasant**

After a full day of touring, we sat back and relaxed in this warm and inviting neighborhood tavern that also offers six rooms for overnight guests in a 19<sup>th</sup> century structure. My first course was a pickled shrimp plate with Kalamata olives, house pickles, and sweet peppers. Lowcountry cuisine oftentimes includes pickled ingredients. I didn't want to go home without trying one of these regional favorites. Two could have easily shared my generous portion.

It was a toss up to choose between the Halibut with Carolina Gold Rice and lobster pirlou topped with tomatoes and the jumbo lump crab cake with creamed corn,

shoestring potatoes, and a green tomato chow chow. Both options are winning entrees.



*Pickled Shrimp from Old Village Post Inn.*

## **Ocean Lounge at Sea Pines Beach Club at The Sea Pines Resort** **88 North Sea Pines Drive, Hilton Head Island**

Rain pelted the window of our car as we drove through The Sea Pines Resort gate. By the time we reached our destination, the downpour had taken a brief hiatus. The storm had not deterred the other patrons who had filled every table except for ours. While it would have been an added perk to be seated on the oceanfront terrace, the weather didn't cooperate.

My kale salad with sweet potatoes, goat cheese, pecan pralines, dried cranberries and grilled scallops exceeded my expectations in both taste and appearance. Ira's seafood skewers were equally enjoyed. Ira and I shared a flourless chocolate cake with raspberry sauce and whipped cream.





*Flourless chocolate cake at Sea Pines Resort.*

## **Heyward's at Sonesta Resort Hilton Head Island** **130 Shipyard Drive, Hilton Head Island**

The lingering tropical storm caused us to reevaluate our plans. We chose to stay close to the Sonesta Resort Hilton Head Island since the weather conditions were uncertain. Resort restaurants run the gamut from mediocre to superb. Choosing not to venture out did not disappoint us. For breakfast, we chose to eat simple and didn't overindulge in the bountiful buffet. Instead, I had a healthy and filling smoked salmon plate filled with greens while Ira had oatmeal with fruit.

In the evening, we returned for the seared flounder with capers, lump crab and grilled asparagus and the blackened Florida red snapper with sweet potato puree, garlic spinach, and fried okra. I somehow made it until this meal without eating anything deep fried. That's a significant accomplishment in a region where many dishes are battered and plunged into hot oil as a matter of course.



*Blackened Florida Red Snapper at Sonesta Heyward's.*

## **Breakwater Restaurant & Bar**

### **203 Carteret Street, Beaufort**

At the Breakwater Restaurant & Bar, traditional Lowcountry cuisine is invigorated with the talents of Chef Gary Lang and Chef Elizabeth Shaw. Seeing the advantage of using locally-grown, fresh ingredients, this team has created a regional menu dependent on seasonal items. We ended our Lowcountry extravaganza sharing a bowl of gazpacho soup topped with a generous portion of feta cream and each ordering the crab cake entree. Our plates had twin crab cakes with summer succotash, tarragon carrot salad, and a creole mustard sauce.



*Breakwater Restaurants twin crab cakes.*

Surprisingly, our clothes still fit when we boarded the airplane. Then again, we averaged walking about 10-miles a day exploring many of the historical sites in the region. Not only did I return with a better understanding of Southern history and culture, but had also sampled an incredible cuisine filled with healthy, local ingredients with abundance of seafood.

**Hungry for more? Find out what some of the regional foods are in [North Carolina](#), South Carolina's neighbor. Also, make the most out of your culinary trip to South Carolina with these tips from our sister site, [InsideOutsideTravel.com](#).**



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