



# Coastal South Carolina: A trip to homemade culinary heaven

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By Myrtle Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau

View of Murrells Inlet, South Carolina.

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By Erin Smith

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Georgetown, South Carolina -

At historic Hopsewee Plantation in Georgetown, S.C., afternoon tea is much more than a tea bag dunked into a pot of boiling water. Raejean Beattie serves her delicate scones on doilies with a homemade preserve made from fresh figs picked from the tree in her yard.

“Well gosh, I wouldn't know how to do it any other way,” says Beattie in her reassuring drawl.

Beattie, who lives at the 18th century plantation with her family, prepares the dishes for her tea luncheon from scratch. And I joined three church ladies in enjoying her sugary hummingbird cake, dainty cucumber sandwiches, flaky tomato tarts and quiches.

Dining in Coastal South Carolina goes beyond Southern hospitality; every day can be like eating at your grandmother's house during the holidays.

Myrtle Beach is the epicenter of the Grand Strand, a region that includes more than 60 miles of continuous coastline and beaches from southern North Carolina to Georgetown, S.C. The resort town is most famous for golf and beach fun. But if food were an Olympic sport, the Myrtle Beach area would win a medal, especially for its seafood scene.

Sample the local shrimp and you begin to understand the “Friends don't let friends eat imported shrimp” bumper stickers the local fishermen dole out. Unlike briny shrimp imported from the Gulf of Mexico, South Carolina shrimp is culinary crack - sweet and meaty.

Local fishermen unload their fresh grouper and tuna daily on the picturesque docks about 15 miles south of Myrtle Beach in Murrells Inlet. Local chefs let me in on a little secret: Much of the seafood caught in Murrells Inlet is exported more than 350 miles away to Atlanta, where distributors process and package the fish and ship it back to the massive number of buffets in the beach resort town. (There are about 1,800 full-service restaurants in the Myrtle Beach area and buffets are highly popular.)

Innovative local chefs, including James Clark of Waterscapes restaurant, negotiate directly with local fishermen to ensure the grouper on your plate was swimming in the ocean the previous day.

Clark, who is as conscientious about carbon footprints as taste, mixes local fresh shrimp and fish and simple seasonings with dishes inspired by his grandmother's traditional Southern cooking fare, such as collared greens and “chow chow,” a relish of pickled garden vegetables.

“I don't like it to be over-complicated,” said the modest Clark.

If you prefer your seafood even fresher, Murrells Inlet is only about a 20-minute car ride from Myrtle Beach.

Seafood lovers can stroll on the docks at the Crazy Sisters Marina and stop in to eat at any of more than a half dozen seafood restaurants along the beautiful marsh shoreline.

At Captain Dave's Dockside Restaurant, chef Richard Meyers - a New York City transplant - prepares his popular seared tuna sandwich and thick-cut steaks with little fanfare. Like many of the top chefs in the area, Meyers takes a simplistic approach to cooking, relying on minimal spices to enhance the food's fresh flavors.

[In Myrtle Beach, food lovers indulge in endless possibilities](#) from [Erin Smith](#) on [Vimeo](#).

A pack of frozen crab cakes from The Crab Cake Lady shop nearby tops the souvenir list for the avid foodie. An Mathis Springs carefully guards her secret recipe. The Vietnamese native has been selling her crab cakes out of her house since 1973 but shot to national stardom after her sons convinced her to open a small shop on the highway - recently profiled on the Travel Channel. If you want to bring home Springs' famous crab cakes, it's worth buying an ice cooler.

For a more metropolitan culinary experience, head to The Market Common - a new, pedestrian-friendly shopping district on a former Air Force base in Myrtle Beach - and take a break from shopping to dine at Roy & Sids, which is owned by a local restaurant group. The restaurant is known for its crispy portobello mushroom fries and fried green tomato appetizer.

You could very well find your stomach bulging from all the hefty, deep-fried Southern portions. Walk off the gastronomic bliss with a stroll under the giant oak trees draped in Spanish moss at nearby Brookgreen Gardens, the site of four former rice plantations. The expansive grounds of the National Historic Landmark include a zoo, picturesque fountains and an impressive collection of sculptures.

No trip to the Myrtle Beach area would be complete without eating the local delicacy of shrimp and grits. Each restaurant puts its own individual twist on the traditional dish - adding country ham, bourbon cream sauce or even a fluffy country biscuit at the bottom of the bowl - making it hard to pick a favorite recipe and the perfect dish for a get-to-know-you introduction to the South.

Ask any local about their favorite style and you'll likely be captivated by friendly stories of home-cooked food and the laid-back charm of the people of the region.

Speaking of shrimp, once you sink your teeth into the jumbo pan-seared shrimp at local favorite restaurant Franks in Pawleys Island, you just may slap one of those “Friends don't let friends eat imported shrimp” bumper stickers on your own car.

Chicken bog offers taste of Carolina's past

There's no better way to get a feel for the flavor of coastal South Carolina than by taking a bite of chicken bog.

[Welcome to the South Carolina food festival that celebrates chicken bog!](#) from [Erin Smith](#) on [Vimeo](#). The local dish, also referred to as pirlou, is similar to a gumbo, without the okra.

Every October for the past three decades, Loris - a small town about 25 miles west of Myrtle Beach - has hosted its annual Chicken Bog-off, a festival where local residents compete for the title of best homemade chicken bog. Festival-goers can purchase tasting tickets to sample the contestants' bog and heaping plates of chicken bog are ladled out from large cooking vats on the festival grounds for just \$6.

If you miss the festival, you can always stop by the quaint city of Loris for a bite of bog at one of the local diners. Shorty's Grill (4115 Meeting St., Loris; 843-756-1390) serves up bog on Thursdays; and The Coffee Shop (4148 Main St., Loris; 843-756-3817) offers bog weekly on its Friday menu.

Every family recipe is a little different, but most recipes include the bog basics: rice, chicken and sausage or bacon. The soggy casserole-like concoction is a throwback dish to the days when plantations grew Carolina Gold Rice on farmlands stretching as far as the eye could see.

If you go

EATING THERE: Try the shrimp at [Frank's Outback](#) (Pawleys Island; 843-237-3030). [Waterscapes at Marina Inn](#) in Myrtle Beach (843-913-2845) is a good spot to try shrimp and grits, with a gourmet twist. Order the crab cakes eggs Benedict at local hangout the [Sea Captain's House](#) in Myrtle Beach (843-448-8082), an old turn-of-the-century beach house converted into a restaurant.

In Murrells Inlet, the seared tuna sandwich is the popular lunch order at [Captain Dave's Dockside](#) in Murrells Inlet (843-651-5850) or try a pot of steamed oysters at [Nance's Creek Front Restaurant](#) (843-651-2696). Take home frozen crab cakes from [The Crab Cake Lady](#) (843-651-0708).

For a cheap and filling Southern breakfast of grits, pecan pancakes and gravy-soaked biscuits, eat at [Spring House Family Restaurant](#) in Myrtle Beach (843-626-5941). The local family chain also offers weekday lunch specials that include a comfort-food entree, such as meatloaf, for under \$6.

EXPLORING THERE: [Brookgreen Gardens](#), (Murrells Inlet; 843-235-6000) has a zoo, picturesque fountains and an impressive collection of sculptures. Day passes for adults are \$12.

Afternoon tea at [Hopsewee Plantation](#) in Georgetown (843-546-7891; \$30 per person) is no small affair, and includes an hourlong tour.

STAYING THERE: The [Marina Inn at Grande Dunes](#) in Myrtle Beach (866-437-4113) provides amenities including free bike rental, an indoor and outdoor pool and a fitness room. Special winter rates from \$109 per night.

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