

[Coastal Creatures]

SHRIMP TALES

"Jubilee!" the townspeople shouted while catching hundreds if not thousands of shrimp that washed ashore on Mobile Bay sometime in the early 1860s. This moment has since been referred to as Jubilee and continues to be a tradition of shrimp catching for Alabamians and other Gulf Coast residents. Some catch the squirming shrimp in buckets, while others quickly stuff them into their pockets, bringing home enough seafood to feed the neighborhood.

It's true: The most popular seafood in America is shrimp. While the shrimping market continues to regain momentum after the oil spill in 2010, more Alabama consumers are embracing the boat-to-table movement. The seafood industry brings in an impressive \$499 million for the state. "People want to know what they're eating, where it comes from, and what might be in it," says Rosa Zirlott, who runs a family-owned oyster business in Irvington and sits on the board of the Southern Shrimp Alliance in Florida.

—Barbara and Jim Twardowski

3 FISH FESTIVALS

Here's your hookup for shrimp events along the coast. Pass the cocktail sauce, please.

Gulf Shores

THE ANNUAL NATIONAL SHRIMP FESTIVAL, October 8–11

Celebrating its 44th year, this granddaddy of shrimp festivals is staged beside the Gulf of Mexico at the public beach access. The free four-day event draws nearly 250,000 people. Shop inside more than 300 white tents filled with arts and crafts, jewelry, home goods, and fine art. A children's activity village, a sand-sculpture contest, and live music are some highlights. Kick back in your lawn chair and sample fried, grilled, stuffed, boiled, and blackened shrimp.

Galveston, Texas

THE GALVESTON ISLAND WILD TEXAS SHRIMP FESTIVAL, September 25–27

Amateur and restaurant teams compete in a gumbo cook-off. Attendees can buy a Gumbo Stroll ticket to taste samples along the historic Strand. Tap your toes to the live music, catch a few beads at the Lil' Shrimps Parade, and browse new boats and RVs during this free festival.

Jekyll Island, Georgia

SHRIMP AND GRITS: THE WILD GEORGIA SHRIMP FESTIVAL, September 18–20

A shrimp-and-grits cook-off on the grounds of the historic island, chef-led cooking demonstrations, a peeled-shrimp-eating contest, arts and crafts, live entertainment, and craft brew tastings are featured at this festival, which pays homage to one of Georgia's iconic dishes. Admission is free, but some tasting events have a small fee.



FRESH CATCH

They're tasty in ceviche, angel hair pasta, and of course, in a fried coconut batter. The crustaceans are available year-round, and whatever your color preference is, these bite size delicacies are a popular dinner choice. Here are four types of shrimp found in the warm waters of the Gulf Coast.



White

White shrimp can grow to be 8 inches long and prefer very shallow waters. They have a tender texture and a mild, sweet flavor.



Pink

Pink shrimp prefer estuaries with hard sand or crushed shell bottoms. They have a tender texture and a sweet taste. Pink shrimp are easier for frying, grilling, and boiling.



Brown

Brown shrimp live in muddy, nutrient-rich waters and can reach up to 9.5 inches long. They have a firm texture and a strong fish-like flavor.



Red Royal

Red Royal shrimp occupy deep, murky waters and prefer cooler temperatures. They have a lobster-like texture and a very sweet taste.