

Galveston Island, Texas: Where to Eat + Drink

Explore Galveston's Culturally Rich Cuisine

With its history as the second busiest immigration port in the U.S., Galveston is unsurprisingly a culinary melting pot. Although tucked deep in the heart of south Texas, Galveston's diverse food scene is influenced by nearly every part of the world. And, for lovers of fresh Gulf seafood, your taste buds will never get bored because no two restaurants prepare island specialties the same way.

Central American – You can't visit Galveston without indulging at the award-winning Rudy & Paco's Restaurant & Bar. Chef Paco Vargas, a native of Nicaragua, creates a delicious Central American twist on steak and seafood, including his signature plantain encrusted red snapper served with raspberry chipotle sauce and lump crab meat. Rudy & Paco was named one of the Top 100 Best Restaurants in America by OpenTable in 2013. Culinary creations run deep in Vargas' family as his son and daughter, Juan and Denise, opened Vargas Cut & Catch in late 2018. The menu at Vargas Cut & Catch offers a fresh spin on prime steaks and seafood sourced from both Gulf and international waters.

Italian – If you're looking for a souvenir to take home, stop by Maceo Spice & Import Co. for a special blend of spices. The Maceo family – children of Italian immigrants – has been creating its famous spice blends for decades, blending everything inhouse. In addition to wonderful spice blends, Maceo makes a great Muffaletta and carries imported and specialty foods. For Italian cuisine, check out Riondo's Ristorante where as a tourist or islander, you are sure to enjoy the matchless Italian cuisine of Chef Rico. From "farm to fork," Riondo's Ristorante is proud of the local farmers who provide its best and freshest meat, vegetables and seafood. The Riondo's menu features comfortable favorites of a notable influence from Italy. Located in a historical building in the Strand District, you can relax in the restaurant's artful setting, which is a popular destination for Happy Hour. Or for a more casual homestyle dining experience, try Mama Teresa's Flying Pizza for delicious hand-tossed pizza and from-scratch Italian family recipes.

German – The Germans certainly know food and that has been proven true by two award-winning German chefs on the island. For fine dining, locals flock to Shearn's Seafood & Prime Steaks to enjoy the signature dishes of Chef Urs Schmid, including his wonderful Shrimp De Jonghe. For casual eats Stuttgarden Tavern on The Strand features a beer garden with full liquor bar. Culinary favorites include bratwurst along with traditional German dishes, traditional pub fare, and a unique build-your-own-burger menu.

Japanese – For the best Japanese food on the island, Yamato offers a unique family style dining experience where fresh sushi and hibachi are prepared right before your eyes by experienced sushi chefs. Yamato is popular for its artfully crafted sushi and entertaining atmosphere. Like soft shell crab? Reward your taste buds with Yamato's savory spider roll. For another option, try Sky Bar Steak & Sushi located downtown on Postoffice Street.

Contemporary American –A great spot for varied cuisine and one of the newest additions to Galveston's food scene is Hearsay on the Strand, offering specialty craft cocktails and inspired renditions of contemporary American dishes that blend flavors of the past and present. The half old-world revival, half culinary-crusaders eatery creates a dining experience that classifies itself as chic antique harmoniously blending into the Victorian charm of Galveston's Downtown Historic Strand District.

California – For California vibes, try Fika Java & Juicery. This green-friendly market brings health conscious convenience to Galveston with its menu of vegan and vegetarian offerings. A local favorite and originally known for its laid-back feel and live entertainment, Yaga's Café and Bar recently unveiled a health-conscious overhaul to its menu including a robust selection of unique greens and salads. Yaga's Cafe is conveniently located at the corner of 23rd and Strand, steps from Saengerfest Park, museums, art galleries, and the cruise ship terminal. For sustainably caught seafood, check out Yagas' sister restaurant with a view, BLVD. aptly named for its idyllic location on Galveston's Seawall Boulevard.

Louisiana – You can't have Louisiana as your neighbor without letting a little Creole rub off on you. Shrimp N' Stuff, a favorite among locals and tourists alike, is known for the best fried shrimp Po-boys on the island. The seafood dinners, gumbos and salads are bursting with flavor and served in generous portions. For more food with a Creole flair, try Gumbo Bar on Postoffice Street or Benno's on Seawall Boulevard.

Texas Roots – Lovers of traditional Texas barbecue and steak won't be disappointed in Galveston. For barbecue, head to Leon's BBQ where Leon O'Neal's special sauce and slow-cook techniques have earned him the title "Dr. Bar-B-Q." And, you can't have barbecue without ending it with a scrumptious piece of pecan pie from Gaido's Seafood Restaurant. Although widely known for the best seafood on the island, Gaido's best kept secret is its pecan pie, which has been named the "Best Pecan Pie in Texas" several times by Texas Monthly. For high-quality beef, indulge at The Steakhouse at the San Luis Resort. For casual eats, try Café Michael Burger on the West End and wash it down with an in-house brew from Beerfoot Beach Bar. For a souvenir, stop by Lt. Blender's Cocktails in a Bag for a delicious margarita to go!

Island Style – Located in beautiful Pelican Rest Marina, Number 13 Prime Steak & Seafood boasts sweeping waterfront views on Offats Bayou. The restaurant features an upscale atmosphere in its main dining room as well as an outdoor, two-story terrace and adjacent patio – perfect for guests pulling in by boat. The menu features an attractive selection of dry-aged steak and fresh, local seafood. For more food with a view, try The Waterman overlooking Galveston Bay, Galvez Bar & Grill or The Spot along the Seawall or The Porch Café, steps away from East Beach.

Melting Pot + Comfort Food – Gypsy Joynt is an eclectic, Bohemian-style eatery and live music venue that screams attention for its funky ambiance. The cafe offers an array of natural and organic recipes, along with a host of delectable pizzas, burgers, sandwiches, pastas, salads, desserts and specialty coffees.

Sandwich Spots – Though there is great culinary diversity on the island, there is something comforting about the simplicity of a sandwich! The following local hangouts serve up delicious lunchtime classics. Old Moon Deli & Pies is located steps away from The Strand and features a wide variety of specialty sandwiches and decadent pies. Favorite lunch options include the turkey club on wheat with jack cheese and fig jam, as well as the Monte Cristo made with gouda and drizzled with locally-harvested honey. Save room for dessert, because the dark chocolate raspberry pie is a must-try! Or grab a Rueben sandwich, a malt and souvenir treasure hunt at the historic Star Drug Store downtown. This old-fashioned soda fountain and diner was once a real drug store built by renowned architect, Nicholas Clayton in 1886. Also downtown, you won't want to miss the nutritious delights of EatCetera offering a European chic ambiance and a fresh, unique take on sandwiches, paninis, salads and more.

Sweet Treats – Galveston has no shortage of sweet treats. For fresh baked goods, visit Sunflower Bakery & Café in the charming East End Historical District or Patty Cakes Bakery, whose petits fours are oh so yummy! Also check out Hey Mikey’s Ice Cream and ShyKatZ Deli & Bakery as well as the classic favorite LaKing’s Confectionery for old-fashioned taffy, fudge and other treats made daily in the shop.

Thirst-Quenching Libations – The Tremont House Rooftop Bar offers a sophisticated, modern lounge atmosphere located four stories above street level, offering a spectacular view of Galveston's historic downtown and harbor. If the weather isn't ideal or you would like to be serenaded while you sip, head downstairs to the 1888 Toujouse Bar located in the hotel's elegant lobby for a drink, charcuterie and live jazz. If you are a lover of art, have a drink at The Proletariat Gallery and Public House, an art gallery-bar hybrid in Galveston's Cultural Arts District downtown. For unique beverage creations, Daquiri Time Out fits the bill with a rotating drink menu. To wind down, check out the new Island Pour House Wine Bistro or The Wine Next Door both located downtown. For a bit of history with your drink, try Prohibition Red's. The bar was opened in honor of Red O'Marrow, an Irish immigrant seeking her fortune in Galveston, first arriving in 1910, whose spirit is believed to inhabit the building—a historic Galveston landmark dating back to 1844. Steeped in history, Prohibition Red's is offers craft burgers, seafood and beverages along with top shelf entertainment. For some fun BYOB date night options, create your own piece of art at Clay Cup Studios or learn how to prepare a delicious meal at a cooking class offered by The Kitchen Chick.