

DINING GUIDE OR WHAT WE RECOMMEND:

DOWNTOWN:

-39 Rue de Jean

French
Entrées \$15-\$20
Downtown. 39 John St. 722-8881
Lunch, Dinner, and Sunday Brunch

We have trouble classifying Rue de Jean, as it can be so many things, depending on the occasion. That happens when you wrap an exceptional restaurant around one of the most splendid bars in town. "Rue," as some call it, helped lead the upper King Street revitalization, but it retains all of the glamour that made it a star in the first place. Whether you go for the outstanding mussels or just to watch the beautiful people while sipping champagne at the bar, Rue de Jean is a one-stop shop for an entire evening of revelry.

-Basil

Asian/Indian
Entrées \$10-\$15
Downtown. 460 King St. 724-3490
Lunch and Dinner

On any given night, people line the sidewalk on upper King, jostling for a seat in this very reasonably priced Asian hotspot. It is the favorite lunch counter of food critic Jeff Allen's 83-year-old conservative grandmother, who likes her ham boiled and her oatmeal plain but her spicy "Beef Basil" over rice. Get there early and steal a spot at the bar overlooking all the hot wok action in the glass-encased kitchen. For \$15, there's no better show in town.

-Blossom Café

Seafood
Entrées \$15-\$20
Downtown. 171 East Bay St. 722-9200
Lunch, Dinner, and Sunday Brunch

Locals and tourists alike return often to sample Blossom's classic "nouveau Southern" cuisine. For lunch or dinner, the expansive menu boasts delightful seafood entrées and hand-prepared pizzas with the freshest of ingredients and a Lowcountry style. A favorite for business lunches or a dinner out with friends, Blossom remains a steady choice.

-Charleston Grill

American/Eclectic -- Upscale
Entrées \$20 and up
Downtown. 224 King St. 577-4522
Dinner

This is the place that started it all -- proving that urban redevelopment is not as evil as some would have you believe. What is now the Charleston Place Hotel complex anchored the revitalization of the entire peninsula above Broad Street, which is to say that almost every fine dining establishment in town owes its very existence to the pioneering that took place in this location. This elegant showpiece of a restaurant effortlessly choreographs an exemplary experience, weaving Southern influences within the framework of classically inspired cuisine and impeccable service (they are one of the few establishments in town that can correctly decant a wine).

-Coast

Seafood
Entrées \$10-\$15
Downtown. 39-D John St. 722-8838
Dinner and Sunday Brunch

This is perhaps the hippest place to eat seafood on the peninsula. A wood-fired grill churns out nightly fresh fish specials as inventive cocktails careen through the bustling young professionals gathered around the bar. Live music often warms the bar and drifts into the exotically appointed dining space. With a sharp focus on seafood, the menu dances among genres, serving excellent versions of ceviche, fish tacos, fried crawfish, and Lowcountry classics. Even the obligatory shrimp and grits has some flair. A nice wine list can complement any of the chef's fare, but the mixed drinks, like the "Dark & Stormy" and "Watermelon Cooler," are worth a visit in themselves.

-Cordavi

American/Eclectic -- Upscale
Entrées \$20 and up
Downtown. 14 N. Market St. 577-0090
Dinner

Who would think that an unassuming little bistro at the end of the Market would house some of the most innovative and delicious food in the entire city? Chefs David Szlam and Cory Elliot push the culinary envelope, earning rave reviews (Esquire named them one of the best new places in the country) and local applause. The diverse menu offers the best tasting options in town, with diners able to select from multiple course pairings -- the greater the number of courses selected, the smaller the plates -- resulting in a never-ending rotation of amuse-bouches and quirky offerings from the kitchen. Complimentary valet parking and one of the coolest bar scenes in town (featuring an outstanding weekly jazz group) make Cordavi a must-stop for locals and tourists alike. Their extreme skill in the kitchen, coupled with a mission to innovate and astound the audience through unexpected juxtapositions of taste, temperature, and texture, create what many consider one of the most cutting-edge dining experiences Charleston has ever seen.

-FIG

American/Eclectic -- Casual
Entrées \$15-\$20
Downtown. 232 Meeting St. 805-5900
Dinner

If you have to take an unfamiliar visitor to one place and want to be sure that they leave duly impressed, FIG (which stands for Food Is Good) is your best bet. Mike Lata's dogged determination to exact flavor from the best local ingredients results in an inspiring seasonal array of delicious, well-executed cuisine. Flavors as fertile and pure as the local soil from which they spring are treated with the deftest touch in Lata's hands. It is clear that a lifetime of respect for the food itself also taught Chef Lata a few things about how to handle it over the flame. His passion for seasonality and freshness, and his support for local sustainable farm production make each meal at FIG a foray into the streams, fields, and forests of the Lowcountry.

-Fulton Five

Italian
Entrées \$15-\$20
5 Fulton Street 853-5555
Dinner

Fulton Five is a stalwart member of the old Charleston restaurant society. It's been tucked away in its romantic little alley for years, serving excellent soup, risotto, ravioli, and other northern Italian-influenced dishes to star-crossed lovers, impressed tourists, and groups of gluttonous foodies. The Brasciole appetizer is delicious, as is any incarnation of the day's risotto. The tiny bar feels European and is as sexy as the rest of the restaurant -- a perfect spot to impress a date.

-Gaulart and Maliclet/Fast and French

French
Entrées \$5-\$10
Downtown. 98 Broad St. 577-9797
Lunch and Dinner (closed Sun.)

Quirky, entertaining, shoulder-to-shoulder, and delicious -- the place with the funny name heads up the Broad Street lunch scene, packing in customers like sardines at the communal tables with just enough room for an Orangina and a crusty baguette between. While the food is not always so authentically French, they serve a good meal at a fair price. If you go for lunch, be prepared to wait -- locals may not be able to pronounce the name, but they line the walls during the midday rush. They have good reason to do so.

-Grill 225

American/Eclectic -- Upscale
Entrées \$20 and up
Downtown. 225 E. Bay St. 266-4222
Lunch, Dinner, and Sunday Brunch

Serving some of the finest steaks in town smack in the middle of the Market Street Pavilion Hotel lobby, Grill 225 promises one of the fanciest dinners and consistently delivers just that. From the curbside valet parking (which costs a whopping \$10) and the white-jacketed formal dinner service to the three-foot high menus, feasting here will make even the most demure of diners feel like an instant sophisticate. The dark wood interior and starched white tablecloths ooze with the grandeur of a bygone era. Despite the pomp, the minimalist menu focuses on the prime meats themselves, with sauce served on the side and sides served in separate dishes altogether. It is simply some of the finest food in Charleston, and some of the priciest, but worth every penny.

-Hank's Seafood Restaurant

Seafood

Entrées \$15-\$20

Downtown. 10 Hayne St. 723-FISH

Dinner

Home of Charleston's most impressive communal table, Hank's is a place to see and be seen. Once the headstrong new guy on the block — self-proclaiming "world-famous" status from day one — the venerable old warehouse raw bar and seafood palace has weathered nicely over the years to become one of Charleston's trustiest fish houses. We go for the "Grand Seafood Castle," a stupendous assortment of iced shellfish from around the globe and one of the best seared tuna dishes around.

-High Cotton

American/Eclectic -- Upscale

Entrées \$20 and up

Downtown. 199 E. Bay St. 724-3815

Dinner, Saturday Lunch, and Sunday Brunch

High Cotton headlines the Maverick group's offerings downtown as a Southern fried steak and seafood house with a classy edge. Tourists and locals alike flock to the place and make for a difficult reservation, so get your requests in early or you will be hanging at their splendid bar for an eternity. If you get inside, you will not be disappointed. Aside from the crowded environs, High Cotton serves up delicious food in an elegant yet surprisingly comfortable atmosphere.

-Hominy Grill

Southern/Lowcountry

Entrées \$10-\$15

Downtown. 207 Rutledge Ave. 937-0930

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, and Weekend Brunch

The greatest thing about Hominy Grill is that, as New York Times writer Richard B. Woodward puts it, "the neighborhood has been up-and-coming for years and still hasn't come up." Hominy does one thing: they serve authentic Southern food and they are the best in South Carolina at doing so. Every morsel comes so perfectly prepared, at such a reasonable price, that one wonders why you would ever go elsewhere for grits ... or shad roe ... or chicken n' a biscuit. If you want to eat true comfort food, then this is the only game in town worth your time.

-Il Cortile del Re

Italian

Entrées \$15-\$20

Downtown. 193-A King St. 853-1888

Dinner

Il Cortile was pumping out real, homespun Italian cuisine before real, homespun Italian cuisine was cool. They call themselves an enoteca (wine bar), but the food has been the star from day one.

-Joseph's Restaurant

More Than A Sandwich

Entrées \$5-\$10

Downtown. 129 Meeting St. 958-8500

Breakfast, Lunch, and Sunday Brunch

Joseph's little storefront location next to the Gibbes Museum of Art on Meeting Street serves a delicious assortment of breakfast and lunch specialties, as well as brunch all day on Sundays. From delicious homemade pancakes to creative salads, they dish out big portions of freshly prepared food in the well-appointed dining room and in the splendid outdoor garden during good weather. You will have no trouble finding the place -- just look for the line outside the door.

-La Fourchette

French

Entrées \$15-\$20

Downtown. 432 King St. 722-6261

Dinner

Serving the most authentic French fare in town, this tiny upper King Street dining room commands a loyal clientele who return time and again for the lobster bisque, the signature cassoulet, and a great wine list featuring distinctive French regional selections. Always packed and lively, the tight seating and loud conversation exemplify the Parisian ideal. You just might think you have arrived on the left bank of the Seine.

-McCrary's

American/Eclectic -- Upscale
Entrées \$20 and up
Downtown. 2 Unity Alley. 577-0025
Dinner

If Mike Lata at FIG is the slow food maverick of Charleston, then Sean Brock is the rebellious rock star of its cuisine. Speculative rumor about town has it that Brock rarely even fires a sauté pan during service (actually, he uses them all the time) at McCrary's, a location so ancient and venerable that it once served dinner to George Washington. Juxtapose its historical legacy against the cutting edge "molecular gastronomy" that Brock practices and you have yourself one hell of a concept.

-Magnolias

Southern/Lowcountry
Entrées \$15-\$20
Downtown. 185 E. Bay St. 577-7771
Lunch, Dinner, and Sunday Brunch

A leading light from the old days, Magnolias has gone the way of the tourist throng, but locals who brave the crowds or sneak in during the dead of winter can be rewarded with quality interpretations of Southern cuisine. It seems that all those tourist dollars have not totally relegated the kitchen to churning out mediocre fare in high volume. We particularly like the fresh, handmade potato chips that come blanketed in an aged blue cheese. Take note, guys: on a cool autumn day with a glass of decent wine, these beauties make the downtown shopping trip bearable.

-Mercato

Italian
Entrées \$20 and up
Downtown. 102 N. Market St. 722-6393
Dinner and Late Night

If you want to experience what must be considered the most beautiful dining space in the city of Charleston, Mercato is your next stop. The latest jewel in the burgeoning Hank Holliday empire, the previous space underwent an extraordinary renovation at great expense and tapped the considerable talents of Chef Jacques Larson, who excelled at Cintra before moving out for the glitz and glamour of the big lights and then returning. The bar is second to none, and the gnocco, a hot semolina porridge topped with molten cheese, is perhaps the best late night tummy-filler in town. Rumor has it that Larson's time spent in the company of Mario Batali has also yielded a developing interest in charcuterie and, while not yet on the menu at Mercato, we can still hope for some tasty house-cured meats in the future.

-Oak Steakhouse

Steakhouse
Entrées \$20 and up
Downtown. 17 Broad St. 722-4220
Dinner

Brett McKee commands one of the most dedicated followings in the city. His patrons, it seems, come not only for the exemplary food (the espresso-rubbed prime steaks are absolutely divine), but also to support a man who raises mountains of cash for aid organizations and community causes. Attend any charitable event in town and you are likely to sample some of the Oak Steakhouse's great grub. From his signature lobster-laced mac 'n' cheese to a meltingly tender veal osso buco, Oak delivers the goods in style.

-Peninsula Grill

American/Eclectic -- Upscale
Entrées \$20 and up
Downtown. 112 N. Market St. 723-0700
Dinner

They may not have been the first high-style "grill" to open in the market area, but they are certainly one of the best. Chef Robert Carter headlines this delicious Southern belle with creative dishes that sing from the plate. Lowcountry influences intertwine with contemporary preparations in a symphony of flavors that lead flawlessly from arrival to dessert.

-Slightly North of Broad

Southern/Lowcountry

Entrées \$15-\$20
Downtown. 192 East Bay St. 723-3424
Lunch (Mon.-Fri. only) and Dinner

S.N.O.B., as it is affectionately known, still produces a steady, reliable stream of classic food from its open kitchen. While the new guys on the block in the East Bay corridor have stolen some of its former glory, S.N.O.B. can still be counted on for a dependable quality lunch or dinner in a charming atmosphere. Chef Frank Lee is a downtown institution and his interpretive Southern fare explores interesting textures and combinations of flavor while remaining true to the culinary traditions of the Lowcountry.

-Ted's Butcherblock

Gourmet Groceries/Wine Shops
Entrées \$5-\$10
Downtown. 334 East Bay St. 577-0094
Lunch and Dinner (closed Sun.)

A hybrid of sorts, Ted's stated mission is to provide the best ingredients for those who love to cook and gourmet fare for those who lack the time (or skill). In this they excel, proving that they are far from your standard neighborhood butcher. In one trip to the butcherblock you can pick up a "Kobe"-style (Wagyu) beef ribeye, some 8-year-old farmhouse cheddar, a great bottle of red wine, fresh kielbasa for the grill, aged gouda mac and cheese, and a whole smoked duck, ready to eat. They also have fresh salads made to order and a selection of side dishes and entrées that showcase a different world food region each month. Remember your wallet, because they're not giving anything away, but the duck is one of the best things we've ever tasted.

-Tristan

American/Eclectic -- Upscale
Entrées \$20 and up
Downtown. 55 S. Market St. 534-2155.
Lunch, Dinner, and Sunday Brunch

There are two good reasons to go to Tristan: Chef Ciarán Duffy's lamb ribs with chocolate sauce and the Tomahawk ribeye. They represent two of the most astounding dishes in the entire city, the ribs for their delectably creative composition and falling-off-the-bone texture, and the chop for its outlandish size, sizzling crust, quality flavor, and super-size "frenched" bone. After you have stuffed yourself with several pounds of beef and lamb, you might try some vegetables or such -- we hear they're delicious as well...

Other Downtown Recommendations:

-Jestine's Kitchen: Southern/Lowcountry 251 Meeting Street 722-7224

-Sermet's Corner: Greek/Mediterranean 276 King Street 853-7775

JAMES ISLAND, JOHNS ISLAND, AND WEST ASHLEY:

-Al di La

Italian
Entrées \$10-\$15
West Ashley. 25 Magnolia Road. 571-2321
Dinner

The word "trattoria" means something very specific to Italian food, and Chef John Marshall understands its connotations very well. Al di La, a favorite haunt of numerous "star chefs" around town, serves up delicious handmade fare at more than reasonable prices and never fails to deliver an authentic, soulful experience. The dining room has been packed from day one (reservations are almost always necessary), so Marshall created a new wood-oven wine bar, or "bacaro" (which never accepts reservations), next door to handle the overflow. When that filled up with eager diners, he ripped up the outdoor plants and installed two patio areas beneath the stars. One day he will realize that with food this good, at these prices, in such a beautiful space, he could fill a Super Wal-Mart.

-Bowens Island Restaurant

Seafood
Entrées \$5-\$10

James Island. 1870 Bowens Island Road. 795-2757
Lunch and Dinner

Before a devastating fire in the fall, people had been shucking and sucking creekside for over 60 years. While the "oyster room" and its inherent graffiti may be in a charred heap, the spirit of Bowens is not. Owner Robert Barber has already rebuilt the kitchen and is serving up oysters on the back decks and dock while the dining room gets rebuilt. Read Robert's take on the fire and the legacy of Bowens on the back page of this issue and then get on out there and be a part of the enduring tradition of Bowens Island.

-JB's Smokeshack

Barbecue/Ribs
Entrées \$5-\$10
Johns Island. 3406 Maybank Hwy. 557-0426.
Lunch and Dinner, Closed Mon. & Tues.

Way out on Johns Island, this cute little country shack features both a buffet and a selection of plates for ordering in a cozy little one-room space with plenty of pig paraphernalia adorning the walls. The chopped pork is good, with several sauces featured, but they have won multiple awards in competition for the beef brisket, competently smoked and sliced; it is not featured on the buffet, but worth the extra expense.

MULTIPLE LOCATIONS:

-Andolini's Pizza

Entrées \$5-\$10
Downtown. 82 Wentworth St. 722-7437; West Ashley. 1117 Savannah Hwy. 225-4743; Mt. Pleasant. 414 W. Coleman Blvd. 849-7437; James Island. 967 Folly Road. 576-7437.
Lunch and Dinner

The original remains very much the best; thousands of College of Charleston students cannot be wrong. They pack this scruffy downtown legend nightly, sucking down cold beers with huge slices of pie and fat, steaming calzones. If the college crowd gets you down, you can always head out to one of the other Andolini's locations in Mt. Pleasant, West Ashley, or James Island. The pie is still divine, and with more room to spread out, you can even bring the kids.

-Five Loaves Café

More Than A Sandwich
Entrées \$5-\$10
Downtown. 43 Cannon St. 937-4303; 372 King St. (inside Millennium Music). 805-7977; Mt. Pleasant. 1055 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. 849-1043
Lunch and Dinner (closed Sun.)

This hippy-dippy spot on the corner of Spring and Cannon Streets replaced the venerable old Latasha's Taste of New Orleans a few years back. It took us a while to forgive them, but gentrification is a regrettable fact of life in downtown Charleston. The place has become so successful that they now sport two other locations, one in Millennium Music on King Street and another across the bridge in Mt. Pleasant. We like the original and their daily special, which pairs a host of freshly prepared soups, large salads, and interesting sandwiches -- pick any two for \$7.75. That's a deal we like, and judging from the lines, we are not alone.

-The Mustard Seed

American/Eclectic -- Casual
Entrées \$10-\$15
James Island. 1978 Maybank Hwy. 762-0072; Mt. Pleasant. 1026 Chuck Dawley Blvd. 849-0050; Summerville. 101 N. Main St. 821-7101
Lunch and Dinner (closed Sun.)

Just like real mustard seeds, Sal Parco's health-conscious yet delicious offerings have sprouted throughout the greater metro area, reaching all the way to Summerville. With a menu that can appease both meat eaters and vegetarians without breaking the bank, the casual atmosphere and relaxed service make The Mustard Seed an excellent choice for a quick lunch or a weekday dinner no matter what side of town you happen to inhabit.

-Sticky Fingers

Barbecue/Ribs
Entrées \$5-\$10
Mt. Pleasant. 341 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. 856-7427; Downtown. 235 Meeting St. 853-7427; Summerville. 1200

N. Main St. 871-7427; North Charleston. 7690 Northwoods Blvd. 797-7427.

Lunch and Dinner

Three guys, post-college bums by their own account, decide to create a rib joint in Mt. P, expand into Summerville and the heart of the historic district, and then get some college friends to open franchises in a budding empire that stretches across five states. It sounds like a recipe for disaster in the ultra-competitive world of Charleston cuisine but is exactly how Sticky Fingers got its start. Now a successful franchise chain, with even more corporate expansion on the horizon, these local transplants have gone national to bring their fine ribs and barbecue to the rest of the country -- spreading Memphis-style pork, with Lowcountry flair, across the land.

ISLE PALMS:

-Atlanticville Restaurant

American/Eclectic -- Upscale

Entrées \$20-\$25

Sullivan's Island. 2063 Middle St. 883-9452

Dinner and Sunday Brunch

A nice spot to munch on Sullivan's, Atlanticville takes the seafood traditions of the coast and crosses them into a Lowcountry and Southeast Asian hybrid cuisine. Interesting, exotic flavors inform the classics; seared tuna is served in a carrot-ginger curry and fried calamari dresses up in a spicy gastric concoction. Grits are piled high with new twists on old ideas, making the trip a guaranteed adventure.

-The Boathouse

Seafood

Entrées \$15-\$20

Isle of Palms. 101 Palm Blvd. 886-8000

Dinner and Sunday Brunch

The Boathouse is a popular spot and offers something more than a reliable seafood menu that will make those in search of simple fried shrimp as happy as those who prefer a more sophisticated approach. The IOP location's perk is a killer view on the top floor, with a cozy bar and plenty of seats.

MOUNT PLEASANT

-Boulevard Diner

American/Eclectic -- Casual

Entrées \$5-\$10

Mt. Pleasant. 409 Coleman Blvd. 216-2611

Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner (closed Sun.)

Just out Coleman Boulevard, on the right, sits a great little slice of Americana in East Cooper, a classic Alice's "Kiss My Grits!" type of place with food to die for. Big brawny breakfasts and filling dinners fly out of the kitchen for a song, proving that steak and eggs in Charleston don't have to be overpriced. The next time you're broke and jonesing for that fried eggplant and blue cheese sandwich, this is your place -- but after recently being featured on the Food Network, you're going to have to get there early to beat the rest of the crowd.

-Capriccio's

Italian

Entrées \$10-\$15

Mt. Pleasant. 1034 Chuck Dawley Blvd. 881-5550

Dinner

When we're in the mood for lip-smacking, family-style Italian fare, Capriccio's routinely fits the bill. This place has been serving up delicious Italian food for years and has become a neighborhood favorite, with food that draws a crowd from miles around. People from Meggett to Awendaw line up to experience the best baked spaghettis and lasagnas in town, smothered in cheese just like your nonna made it. We go for the mussels -- big, plump, and juicy with a fistful of fresh thyme on top and a rich butter sauce beneath -- simple perfection.

-Charleston's Bookstore Café

American/Eclectic -- Casual

Entrées \$5-\$10

Mt. Pleasant. 1039 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. 856-7796
Breakfast and Lunch

The food remains tops for a weekend brunch, with huge "Potato Casseroles" smothered in an assortment of delectable accoutrements as well as generous stacks of pancakes, French toast, and a great house-made corned beef hash.

-Coco's Café

French

Entrées \$10-\$15

Mt. Pleasant. 863 Houston Northcutt Blvd. 881-4949

Lunch and Dinner

Coco's may have changed ownership recently, but this little strip mall restaurant continues to pump out signature classic French cuisine perfectly true to its roots. The intimate Mt. Pleasant dining room was sold last year by chef/owners Alain Saley and Francois Rivalain to Stephen Ollard, but the original, authentic French menu remains. Coco's also features a wonderful collection of cellared wine specials showcasing some very fine examples of French wine at fair prices.

-Everyday Gourmet

More than a Sandwich/Pre-made dishes and Meals

Entrées \$5-\$15

1301 Ben Sawyer Blvd 388-2490

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Quick breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and desserts to go

-Gullah Cuisine

Southern/Lowcountry

Entrées \$10-\$15

1717 Hwy 17 N 881-9076

Lunch and Dinner

Authentic Lowcountry through and through at down-to earth prices

-Iacofono Deli

More than a Sandwich

Entrées \$5 to \$10

626 Coleman Blvd 881-3323

Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

New York style deli serving signature sandwiches, pizza, and breakfast

-Jack's Cosmic Dogs

More than a Sandwich

Entrées \$0 to \$5

2805 Hwy 17 884-7677

Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Nine varieties of hot dogs, including the Cosmic Dog and the Galactic Dog, form the core of Jack's Cosmic Dogs at the intersection of Hwy. 41 and 17N. They are big fat Boar's Head hot dogs topped with every kind of relish imaginable, and the extra treats are the frozen custard, shoestring fries, and spiky draft root beer. The Galactic Dog is the best — chili, cheese, slaw, and spicy mustard. If you're really serious, switch to blue cheese slaw for the Blue Galactic. Throw any dietary concern out the window and sign up for the fries and a root beer float as well. You won't soon forget your gluttony in this great retro setting.

-Langdon's Restaurant and Wine Bar

American/Eclectic -- Upscale

Entrées \$10-\$15

Mt. Pleasant. 778 South Shelmore Blvd. 388-9200
Lunch (M-F) and Dinner (closed Sun.)

One could drive right past Langdon's Restaurant and never even know it was there. Tucked away in a nondescript BI-LO shopping center, even the sign is hard to see -- but don't let that dissuade you from trying this exceptional menu. They produce truly memorable food and wine -- particularly the lamb chops napped with a jalapeño-mint gastric and a seared tuna that is the best we've ever had. Combine this with a very well-designed wine selection available in multiple pour sizes, featured food pairings, and expert bar service (Riedel glasses are the bomb) and you have yourself some top-notch stuff that's worth fighting the traffic for.

-Long Point Grill

American/Eclectic -- Casual
Entrées \$10-\$15
Mt. Pleasant. 479 Long Point Road. 884-3101
Lunch and Dinner

Sal Parco's newest project, situated just outside the edge of the industrial port operation at the end of its namesake street, offers a delicious option for both weeknight drop-ins and weekend splurges. They excel at producing delicious stick-to-your-ribs fare with a creative twist at a price that allows the entire family to tag along. All of this comes with great service in a welcoming casual atmosphere without the slightest pretense. Take your mother-in-law and the persnickety old gramps -- hell, take the dog and leave him in the car. The generously oversized portions will leave plenty for the pooch as well

-Momma Brown's

Barbecue/Ribs
Entrées \$5-\$10
Mt. Pleasant. 1471 Ben Sawyer Blvd. 849-8802.
Lunch and Dinner

This mainstay of Mt. Pleasant has such a loyal following that people drive from West Ashley to eat lunch at the packed tables that line the buffet steam bar. Serving authentic Pee Dee/Eastern North Carolina vinegar and pepper on some very good hog, the team at Momma Brown's sticks to tradition and serves up the real thing. It's no wonder, since they are part of the ancestral lineage of Browns that made the Kingstree area famous for slow-cooked pork. If you're looking for old-style country barbecue with a spicy tang, then this is your next stop.

-The Old Village Post House

Southern/Lowcountry
Entrées \$15-\$20
Mt. Pleasant. 101 Pitt St. 388-8935
Lunch, Dinner, and Sunday Brunch

Tucked away among the quaint homes and friendly streets of Mt Pleasant's most livable neighborhood, the Post House anchors the historic commercial strip of the Old Village. Set inside a charming wood frame structure that also houses a top-flight inn, the small dining room showcases some of the best food that the Maverick restaurant group puts out. New chef Tim Armstrong continues to improve an already outstanding establishment, focusing on creative interpretations of local favorites with a contemporary style.

-Red Drum Gastropub

American/Eclectic -- Upscale
Entrées \$15-\$20
Mt. Pleasant. 803 Coleman Blvd. 849-0313
Dinner

Need a great meal after work in Mt. P., a place to take the office out for crowd-pleasing drinks and dinner? This is your place. The Gastropub serves up a delicious blend of Southwestern-inspired cuisine, microbrews, and classic French bistro fare in a gorgeous, laid-back atmosphere. It is a synergy that has wowed a plethora of regulars who now inhabit the bar, swilling killer margaritas and munching on Chef/Owner Ben Berryhill's awesome chicken enchiladas with red mole and some of the best ceviche that we have ever tasted; if you are lucky, you will get to eat it all in the cozy little wine cave. It dresses down like a pub, but serves fine cuisine like a grande dame of the restaurant scene -- hence the moniker Gastropub. We don't really care what they call it -- it's just plain good.

-The Wreck of Richard & Charlene

Seafood
Entrées \$10-\$15
Mt. Pleasant. 106 Haddrell St. 884-0052

Dinner

Welcome to the only place that you should be eating huge platters of fried seafood in the greater Charleston area. It has the crispy crunch, the impossible-to-find location, that authentic shabby milieu, and the tattered shrimp boat just off the creekside rail. You go to "The Wreck" for one thing only — the best deep-fried platters in town (they serve other stuff, but who orders that?). They have been doing seafood since Hurricane Hugo grounded the eponymous trawler on the site and they have been doing it well. The actual shipwreck is long gone, but the remembrance lives on at the end of the world along Shem Creek.

Other Mt Pleasant Recommendations:

-Oriental Garden: Sushi 835 Coleman Blvd 881-3765

-Shem Creek Bar and Grill: Seafood-Waterfront-Oyster Bar 508 Mill Street 884-8102

SUMMERVILLE and DANIEL ISLAND:

-The Dining Room at Woodlands Resort & Inn

American/Eclectic -- Upscale

Entrées \$20 and up

Summerville. 125 Parsons Road. 875-2600

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, and Sunday Brunch

The Dining Room at Woodlands can be summed up in one word: perfection. Everything they do here is well thought out, perfectly executed, and still, after all these years, delivers the same exemplary meal that we have come to expect, no matter what's on the menu, which changes daily. Despite its considerable distance from downtown, Woodlands remains a strong contender in the uppermost echelon of the Lowcountry's restaurant scene.

-Sienna

Italian

Entrées \$15-\$20

Daniel Island. 901 Island Park Dr. 881-8820

Lunch and Dinner (closed Sun.)

Who would've thought the culinary mastermind behind the original diamonds and stars at The Woodlands could go out and open an even better establishment — by returning to his grandma's Italian roots — in suburban Daniel Island, of all places?

SULLIVAN'S ISLAND

-Atlanticville Restaurant

American/Eclectic — Upscale

Entrées \$15-\$20

Sullivan's Island. 2063 Middle St. 883-9452

Dinner and Sunday Brunch

A nice spot to munch on Sullivan's, Atlanticville takes the seafood traditions of the coast and crosses them into a Lowcountry and Southeast Asian hybrid cuisine. Interesting, exotic flavors inform the classics; tuna tartare piles mangos and chilies into the mix, and fried calamari dresses up in a spicy gastric concoction. Grits are piled high with new twists on old ideas, making the trip a guaranteed adventure

-Poe's Tavern

American/Eclectic -- Casual

Entrées \$5-\$10

Sullivan's Island. 2210 Middle St. 883-0083

Lunch and Dinner

No matter the time of day, this is the perfect place to weather that freak thunderstorm that ruins your beach excursion. You can sit inside, out on the patio, or on the porch -- either way the beer is cold and the respectable pub food can quell a grumbling belly. Chips with guacamole and a killer soft-shell crab sandwich top the list of good eats at this island institution.