

Linger at the Table

Dining at the beach is by nature a relaxed affair, and the food should be the same: fresh, unfussy, full of flavor. The restaurants of the Emerald Coast share this philosophy, creating a slate of menus that will put you in the mood for leisure.

Beach Walk Cafe

Chef Tim Creehan brings a wealth of experience to the Beach Walk. Try his signature entree: black pepper-crusted yellowfin tuna, seared rare and served with sauteed spinach. Sweet treats more your style? The Mitzi is a Beach Walk classic: macadamia brittle ice cream with Irish whiskey, Kahlua and Frangelico. 2996 Scenic Highway 98 East, Destin; 850-650-7100; www.beachwalkcafe.com



The Magnolia Grill

COURTESY OF THE MAGNOLIA GRILL

Dewey Destin

"Any fresher," the menu boasts, "and it'd still be moving." When you sit just yards from the water, you can deliver on that promise to serve the freshest seafood. Try shrimp, crab or a selection of fish. Grilled, steamed or fried and served alongside an ice-cold beer, it's a recipe for contentment. 9 Calhoun Avenue, Destin; 850-837-7575; www.destinseafood.com

The Magnolia Grill

A structure that's nearly a century old and plenty of local memorabilia make this restaurant a throwback to old Florida. But modern diners will love the blend of fresh seafood and classic Italian. Try the Scallops St. Jacques, served with fettucine; or the veal marsala with pasta. 157 Brooks Street, Fort Walton Beach; 850-302-0266; www.magnoliagrillfwb.com



Sampling of seafood at Commander's Palace Destin

COURTESY OF COMMANDER'S PALACE DESTIN

BIG EASY ON THE COAST

In the names of New Orleans cuisine, **Commander's Palace** is as famous as it gets; and when the Crescent City giant looked to open another location, Destin was the natural choice.

"The Emerald Coast is such a draw for New Orleanians," says Ti Martin, who runs the original Commander's in the Garden District. "You can drive out of New Orleans, and four hours later, you're at one of the most beautiful beaches in the world."

Commander's opened this summer at HarborWalk, a dine/shop/stroll area on the Destin harbor. It joins three other famous New Orleans restaurants: Irish pub **Pat O'Brien's**, famous old-time diner **Camellia Grill** and **Jester Mardi Gras**, known for its daiquiris-to-go.

This New Orleans invasion is nothing new: Several restaurants featuring Creole and Cajun cuisine already dot the area, such as Royal B and Café New Orleans. "I think Commander's saw an opportunity based on the success of other New Orleans-influence restaurants [here]," says Shane Moody, president of the Destin Area Chamber of Commerce.

For New Orleans restaurateurs, a fun, relaxed atmosphere, like that found on the Emerald Coast, has always been as important as the garnish and spice. "The (Destin) restaurant isn't even a week old and already our cocktail, Sunset on the Rocks, which comes with a pair of sunglasses, is a hit!" says Martin. —**Brianna Pellicane**



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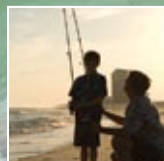


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