



## 8 Great Places to Dine in New Orleans



by Kelly Foss

New Orleans is famous for its food and restaurants, and rightly so. Local restaurants have mastered the art of making the common taste royal. It's magical what they can do in a kitchen with some simple ingredients and their secret recipes. Even the lowly Shrimp Po Boys prepared anywhere else just don't taste as good.

Recently I had the opportunity of visiting New Orleans and dining at eight very special eateries. Each was very interested in showing us, the out of town journalists, what they were capable of, and we dutifully obliged them. We were willing victims of this wretched indulgence.

The problem with visiting a city like New Orleans is that there are so many great places to eat and so little time. And, each has a lengthy menu that would require many visits to fully explore. So, where do you start? To begin with, pick a downtown hotel to make getting around easier. Try the new **Harrah's** in the city center. The hotel is gorgeous, the service is great and the location couldn't be better.

**Here are the eight restaurants.** If you're not sure where to eat in New Orleans, these are really good places to go to and I'm confident that you'll enjoy them as much as we did.

**Houmas House Plantation** – This plantation home can trace its origin to the 1700's when the land was sold to French settlers by the Houmas Indians. The plantation was originally established for growing sugar cane. Only 10 of the original 120 plus plantation homes along this part of the Mississippi River still stand and of them all, Houmas House is the best preserved and most original.

The site is located about 45 minutes north of New Orleans off of Interstate 10 going towards Baton Rouge.

In addition to the fascinating history of the place, it also offers fine cuisine and gourmet dining in the Latil's Landing Restaurant. This restaurant is housed in one of the original structures on the plantation built about 230 years ago.

If the historic setting weren't reward enough, the food will surely finish the job. The Bisque of Curried Pumpkin, Crawfish and Corn were very satisfying, as was the Roast Beet and Crab Salad. The Tuna Grace and the Filet Mignon of Beef will also delight.

And, how can you not have a sweet desert while dining at a former sugar plantation? Try the Chocolate, Chocolate, Chocolate desert or the Apple Gallette, or both.

**Riche** – This fine restaurant is inside Harrah's Hotel at street level facing Fulton Street in the heart of the city. The hotel is actually across the street from their casino, which is nice if you want luxury accommodations without the ever-present din of the gaming.

Riche serves signature French cuisine in a warm, intimate setting illuminated by a lively, open grill area and oyster bar.

The menu features flavors of garlic, mushroom, and aged cheeses which enhance luxurious cuts of meat and fish, braised, baked and poached to an authentic French taste.

I liked the Cajun Fried Oysters, the N'Awliins Shrimp and Andouille Gumbo and their unique Macaroni & Cheese. This is gourmet mac & cheese like you've never eaten before. The Shrimp Pernod on angel hair pasta was lauded by one of our writers.

Riche also has live music, jazz of course, which adds a decidedly New Orleans touch to the experience.

**Brennan's** – This is one of the top restaurants in the country. What sets Brennan's apart is their constant high level of service and the quality of food. Executive Chef Randolph has been at Brennan's since 1965 where he went right out of high school. We met him and he comes across as a very accomplished, yet down to earth chef who has mastered his craft by spending countless hours in the kitchen. This is the kind of man that you want to learn cooking from! The atmosphere in this restaurant is thick with history. As you enter the place you can feel it in the air.

Located on Royal Street in the French Quarter, Brennan's has safeguarded its heritage without becoming irrelevant. Several famous dishes including Banana's Foster and Eggs Hussarde were born at Brennan's.

Brennan's is known for its elegant breakfasts and brunches. In addition to the above mentioned dishes, Maude's Seafood Okra Gumbo is wonderful. If you're a turtle soup lover, their New Orleans Turtle Soup is especially good. Even simple strawberries and cream are memorable at Brennan's.

**Galatoire's** – Dining at Galatoire's is as much about socializing as it is about actually eating. Both, however, are accomplished with great skill and artistry. This is a place to see and be seen in. Located right on Bourbon Street in the French Quarter, Galatoire's has been serving food from this same location for over a century. Unlike most modern restaurants, Galatoire's cuisine is not the creation of a singular superstar chef but rather of a family that has carefully safeguarded a tradition of impeccable cuisine, service and ambiance. Consistently providing this exquisite experience is itself an art form that Galatoire's steadfastly maintains. Galatoire's traditions have been preserved with little change through the decades.

Its "no reservations" policy along with its intense popularity explain the famous waiting lines. It is said that local businessmen will pay people to stand in line for them and wait for hours for a table. If you can't wait that long, you can make a reservation for their upstairs dining room. You might miss out on some of the people watching, but the menu is the same.

You might try the Green Salad with Garlic...this dish has lots of garlic. The Sauteéd Poisson with Crabmeat Yvonne was wonderful and the Lamb Chops Béarnaise is expertly done.



**Grand Isle Seafood Restaurant** – This restaurant is located right on the Fulton Street Mall in the city center across from the Convention Center. Designed to give the feel of a Coastal Louisiana Fish Camp, this restaurant celebrates the joy of local seafood. Whether spiced and boiled, fried, sautéed or grilled, the seafood comes from the waters off of Grand Isle, Louisiana to your table without touching the freezer.

The dining is casual and the atmosphere is open and sunny with large windows and light colored wood.

If you're a seafood lover like I am, you may opt for the Seafood Platter which spares you the agony of having to decide what to get or, more importantly, what to avoid missing. To no one's surprise, it was all very good. I don't think there is a bad speck of seafood in this restaurant.

The real surprise was two of the deserts. The Popcorn Rice Pudding was an interesting variation on the original and the Lemon Ice Box Pie was just superb.

**Besh Steakhouse** – This is a steakhouse with a twist. The restaurant is a combination of Chef Besh's own ideas about traditional steakhouse menu items combined with a New Orleans influence. This spacious restaurant is an interesting combination of modern and traditional. There exists at once a comfortable dining environment and traditional service juxtaposed against a stainless, brushed metal kitchen and oversized Blue Dog artwork on the walls.

The menu also contains some pleasant surprises. Items like Plum Lacquered Pork Belly Spring Rolls and Tuna Tartare aren't items you see on every menu. I saw an optimistic diner trying to handle their 38 oz. (not a typo) Cowboy Steak. It looked delicious and she was certainly enjoying it, but it's just too much for one person to handle.

I was impressed by the Sweet Corn & Crab Bisque Soup and the Snake River Farms Kobe Beef Short Ribs. It's unusual to discover well prepared Kobe Beef this far from...Kobe.

**Tujague's** – This is the second oldest restaurant in New Orleans and it celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2006. At the end of the Civil War, a French immigrant family named Tujague...pronounced "tujack"... began by serving breakfast and lunch to the dock workers, market laborers and seamen who crowded that part of the riverfront. The restaurant's style is as refreshingly unpretentious as ever. And the food is as delectable as it was in the days of the first Tujague's.

It's located in the heart of the French Quarter, just east of Jackson Square on Decatur across from the market. It is unmistakably a New Orleans classic neighborhood restaurant. The building is ancient and the interior has intentionally been kept simple and original looking. In a place like this, tradition and links to the past are much more valuable than modernism and change.

Tujague's Complete Dinner menu is a Creole influenced, six course menu. It consists of an Appetizer of Shrimp Remoulade, Soup du Jour, House Specialty Beef Brisket with Creole Sauce, a choice of 4 Entrees du Jour, Dessert and Beverage.

**Bambu** – This multinational Asian restaurant is actually located near the Canal Street entrance inside Harrah's Casino. The Casino is across the street from Harrah's hotel. It is the perfect location for hungry gamers who need the occasional break and are looking for great food and a quiet place that is conveniently located. Even if you're not already at the casino, a trip to Bambu's is worth it.

It has an upscale yet casual feel, with décor inspired by the city of Shanghai. Symbols of good luck, including fish sculptures, bamboo and water, are featured prominently, along with a unique collection of backlit Asian ceramics.

Bambu serves Chinese, Japanese, Thai and Vietnamese classics, as well as Chef Toy's own Asian-fusion creations.

We sampled a wide variety of dishes and they were all very good. Of them all, the Crab & Cream Cheese Spring Rolls, Vietnamese Diced Garlic Rib Eye Steak and the Shrimp Tempura & Vegetables were especially memorable. A truly unique item was the Tiger Roll. This super-sushi roll contained salmon, tuna, eel, masago, scallions and eel sauce.