

Feast ^{on} This



A delicious blending of culture and cuisine is available in eateries across the state – from Lake Charles and Monroe to Shreveport and New Orleans. And if you're looking for something to talk about as you eat, do as Louisianians do – at breakfast you talk about where you're going for lunch, at lunch you talk about where you are going for dinner, and at dinner? Naturally, you talk about where you're going for breakfast!

Just like a spicy bowl of jambalaya, Louisiana cuisine is a rich mixture of flavors influenced by the state's French, Spanish, Anglo, Native American and Afro-Caribbean natives. So, bring your appetite! No matter what type of food you're craving, you're sure to get your fill here.

CREOLE

Wealthy French settlers – particularly around New Orleans – introduced soups and stews, on which traditional Creole cuisine is based. The Spanish brought onions, peppers, tomatoes and garlic to the table, while African and Caribbean slaves added the generous use of spices to the cooking style. The Choctaw Indians showed settlers how to use filé, an herb from sassafras leaves, to thicken their stews. Louisiana's proximity to the Gulf of Mexico meant a ready supply of fresh seafood, which was often included in dishes. Delicious Creole cuisine remains a staple of Louisiana's culinary landscape, in and outside of New Orleans.

Dick and Jenny's is an unassuming restaurant in The Big Easy that was once a grocery store. Dick and Jenny Benz use locally grown ingredients in their nouveau Creole menu, which changes every two months. Always on the menu: savory lobster and brie cheesecake with lemon aioli.

African-American owned **Olivier's Creole Restaurant** in



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The French Quarter, with its unique architecture, great food, jazz music and interesting shops is beautiful and definitely worth visiting.

New Orleans has been a Crescent City favorite for five generations. Chef Armand Olivier III serves up the same award-winning dishes as his father and grandfather before him. Specialties include Creole rabbit, pecan-breaded oysters, Great Grandma Jeanne's Shrimp Creole and Mama Cheryl's

Snapshot

New Orleans is also the home of great soul music. A melodic fusion of jazz, blues, rock, and rhythm and blues can be heard on any given night echoing through the streets of the French Quarter.

Crawfish Étouffée. And don't forget to save room for Olivier's famous bread pudding (see recipe).

Sink your sweet tooth into fresh Louisiana pecans at **Esther's Praylines and Sweet Things** in Bossier City. The pâtisserie is known for its rich and creamy pralines, pecan pies, candied pecans and other sweet treats. After dessert, head toward Shreveport to try

your luck in any of the area's five **riverboat casinos** on the Red River.

CAJUN

The poorer Acadian (Cajun) population relied on ingredients they farmed for their hearty dishes: pork, beef, beans, corn, sweet potatoes, okra and rice. Rice was used to stretch meals for large families and became the basis for Cajun dishes such as jambalaya. And while the Creole dined on oyster, lobster and crab, Cajun cooks developed a taste for crawfish from the freshwater swamps and bayous. Today, the crawfish is the unofficial symbol of Cajun cuisine.

Breaux Bridge, the self-proclaimed crawfish capital of the world, pays homage to the native crustacean during the annual **Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival**, held the first weekend in May. Visit bbcrawfest.com for details.

Southern Living readers recently voted Lafayette

as having the best food in the South. So, while you're there, visit **Creole's Lunch House**, which is known for fried catfish, chicken fricasse, beef stew, corn bread, and red beans and rice. However, it's the eatery's Creole's Stuffed Bread – served every year at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival – that has customers clamoring for more.

If you're in Baton Rouge, be sure to add **Boutin's Restaurant** to your agenda. The local favorite is known for its Bayou Rouge – a grilled fish fillet stuffed with crabmeat and served with Cajun rice and corn maque choux. At night, laissez les bons temps rouler with live Cajun and Zydeco music every night.

While you're in Baton Rouge, take a ride on the wild side aboard one of several **swamp tours through the Atchafalaya Basin**, where you'll glide under moss-draped trees and get a view of the swamp's colorful wildlife.

SOUL FOOD

But while Cajun and Creole cuisine tend to dominate the state's culinary landscape, Louisiana's melting pot boils over with flavorful influences from Vietnamese immigrants and former African slaves, who reinvented traditional dishes to suit the tastes of their masters.

Sample this reinvention at **Dooky Chase** in New Orleans with food so good it's been immortalized in song. Ray Charles' "Early in the Morning" was written about the N'awlins soul food haunt. A gathering place for community leaders and activists, Dooky Chase is known for its blending of down-home cooking with traditional Creole cuisine.

Brenda's Dine In & Take Out in New Iberia has a menu that reads like Sunday dinner at Grandma's: smothered cabbage, fried chicken, red beans with sausage and peach cobbler.

You can't even go near Natchitoches without sampling a Natchitoches meat pie. **Merci Beaucoup** serves up a special beef and pork mixture stuffed into a flaky crescent roll.

So, where are we going for dinner?



Olivier's Bread Pudding

1 loaf stale bread, broken into fairly small pieces (not sourdough)	2½ cups milk	1 ounce vanilla extract
¼ pound margarine, melted	¼ can evaporated milk (3 oz.)	¾ cup raisins
	1 egg	1 teaspoon salt
	1 cup sugar	

Place one quart warm water into large mixing bowl. Add the broken pieces of bread to the bowl, allowing it to become completely soaked. Gently squeeze the excess water from the bread, one handful at a time. Set bread on the side. Discard water from mixing bowl. Thoroughly mix all items in bowl, then spread evenly in a deep baking pan. Bake in 350-degree oven for 40 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to cool before cutting into serving-sized portions. Yield: approximately 12 pieces



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Go Online

The key to a great meal in Louisiana is knowing how to read the menu. Visit bit.ly/cajun_food for a quick guide to food speak on the Bayou.



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