

Dining Our Way Around the Emerald Coast of Florida

by Jan Ross | Food, Food blog | 0 comments



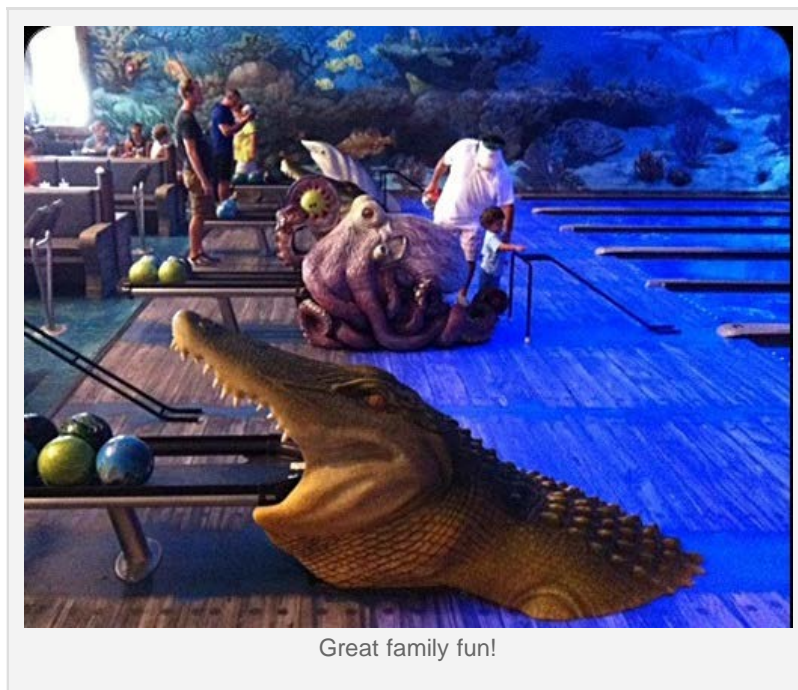
Sunset on the Emerald Coast.

There is a lot to love about the amazingly beautiful [Emerald Coast of Florida](#). Sparkling white sand beaches, the turquoise water of the Gulf of Mexico, fabulous accommodations, and plenty of family friendly activities are just a few. But one of the absolutely best things about this beautiful location is the vast array of fabulously diverse restaurants of all kinds. Casual, fancy, fresh seafood, delicious burgers and pizza, right on the beach with a gorgeous view of the sparkling white sand or tucked away in a quiet shopping area – restaurants in this location are everywhere.

I am very fortunate to have visited this area several times and tried as many different restaurants as humanly possible. The great thing is that there is such a huge selection but the even greater thing is that there are many, many restaurants I have not tried yet.

The very thought is truly exhilarating for a self-avowed foodie. So, if you are heading to this area in the next few months, here is a list of some of the best restaurants you can find, keeping in mind that you might just find one that is even more perfect for you when you visit.

1. **Best Restaurant for Family Fun:** [Uncle Bucks Fishbowl and Grill](#). I'm going to be honest, I only tried the appetizers at this location but that was enough to persuade me that I need to return and order a great deal more food, possibly everything on the menu. The appetizers were not your typical, heat-something-from-the-freezer appetizers but honest to God made from scratch deliciousness. Not only is the food amazing, the locale will quite literally knock your socks off or, at the very least, your shoes because you are going to want to lace up some bowling shoes at this astonishing place. The murals and amazing decorations will make you feel like you have stepped into the middle of an aquarium. Even the bowling balls are caught by eye-catching molded plastic creatures!

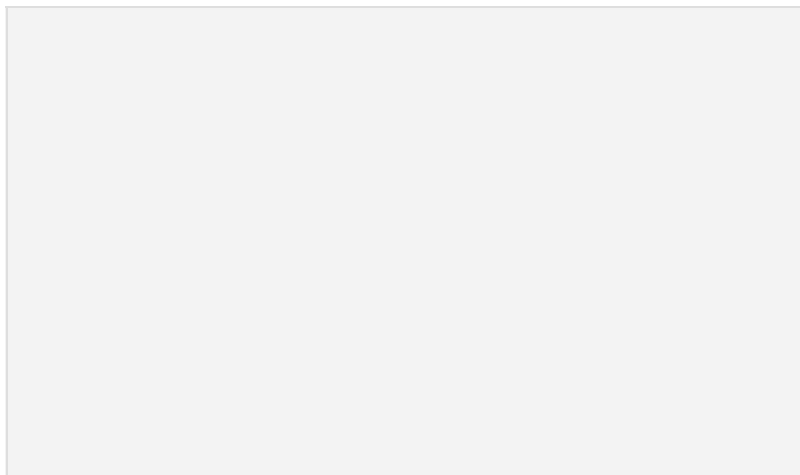


2. **Best Restaurant for a Romantic Evening Out:** [Cuvee Bistro](#). A whole lot of restaurants at the beach are super casual with wooden, beat up floors and an open view to the beach all

of which are super but Cuvee Bistro is not like that. Cuvee Bistro is very classy so this might be the time to get out that little black dress you packed, your high-heeled sandals and some sparkly jewels because this restaurant is quite, quite lovely. They are so nice they will not blink an eye if you show up in cut off blue jean shorts but I wouldn't. Our waiter told us in all seriousness that he often comes in on his day off just to eat the Smoked Tomato and Shrimp soup so of course we had to order that and, he's right, it's amazing. I also strongly suggest that you order the Grouper Vince which is Pecan Crusted with Honey Worcestershire Sauce that was sweet and to die for and came with the Mashed Yukon Gold Potato Cake. For dessert, they impressed us with a darling sampler plate of desserts in which they had cheerfully stuck a sparkler.



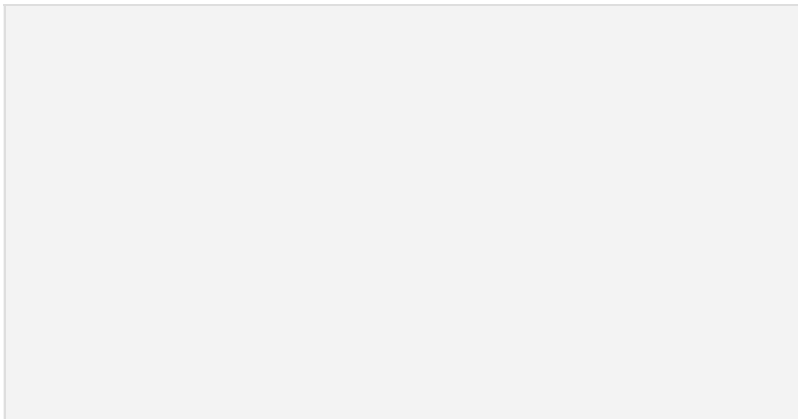
Smoked tomato soup at Cuvee Bistro.





Sparkling desserts at Cuvee Bistro!

3. **Best Restaurant for a Girls Night Out: [The Beach Walk Cafe at the Henderson Park Inn](#).** The [Henderson Park Inn](#) is truly one of my favorite places to stay, not just in Destin, but anywhere. It's the perfect place to stay for that romantic getaway or a girlfriends getaway as this is adults-only and sometimes that's just what you need. One of the reasons I love this place is definitely the lovely Beach Walk Café which has not only an amazing view of some of the nicest beaches in the area but also astonishingly good, gourmet food. I have eaten there a couple of times and the food is equally good, no matter what you order. I'm not sure who Vince is and why grouper all over town is named after him, but they also have a Grouper Vince which is pecan crusted and served over a potato cake. It's different from the one at Cuvee Bistro but equally good.





Grouper Vince at the Henderson Park Inn.

4. **Best Restaurant for a Gourmet Experience:** [Bijoux](#).

Located in the Market Shops of Sandestin, this unassuming but elegant little restaurant is tucked away so you would never know how wonderful the food is until you try it. And you must do so as soon as humanly possible. The last time I was there I had these truly amazing little crab beignet appetizers. I wasn't sure what to expect since the only beignets I had eaten previously were sweet and dusted with confectionary sugar but these were perfect in every way. I'm pretty picky about my shrimp and grits and have ordered them at several different locations but Bistro Bijoux has the best, bar none. This restaurant is also a little more formal so not a place for jeans or beachwear.



Crab Beignets at Bijoux.



Shrimp and Grits at Bijoux.

5. **Best Restaurant for Sushi:** [Jackacuda's](#). First, I have to admit that I did not order the sushi when we ate here. I had mistakenly passed up fish tacos the day before and I was not about to let the opportunity pass me by again, so that's what I had. They were very good but a little spicy so keep that in mind. However, several people in our group ordered the sushi and, based on the moans of ecstasy which ensued, that is what I will get next time. They have these really unusual sushi bowls with several kinds of sushi and rice which looked amazing. Prior to my spicy fish tacos, I absolutely had to order an appetizer of the fried avocado because seriously who has ever heard of fried avocado? Well, Jackacuda's has and it's unique and amazing. They also have an out of this world dessert which consists of three small ice cream sandwiches made out of homemade sugar cookies which had been filled with maple bacon ice cream with chunks of bacon. Yes, it was just

as good as it sounds.



Fried Avocado at Jackacuda's.



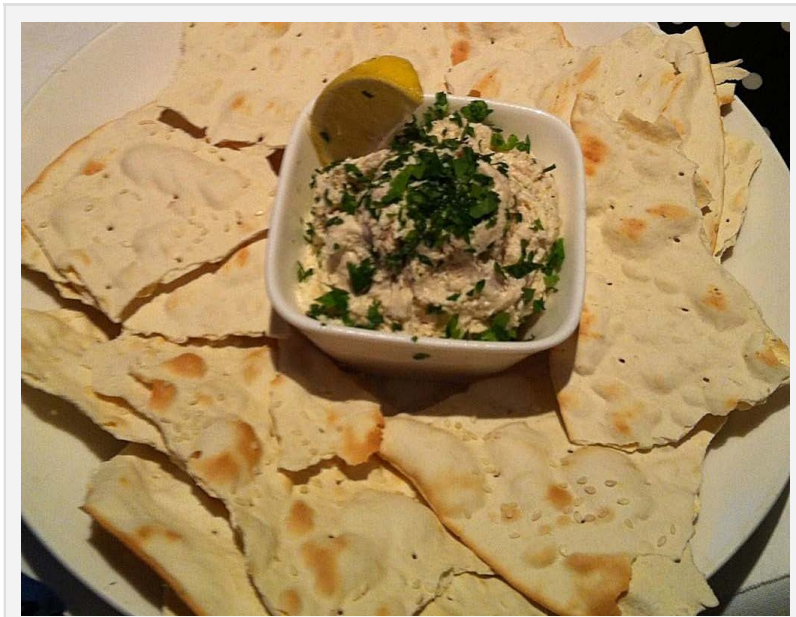
Fish Tacos at Jackacuda's.

6. **Best Restaurant for Fun: [Aj's Seafood and Oyster Bar](#)**. Aj's was truly one of the most fun places I visited on a recent trip to the Emerald Coast. Located right on the bay in Harborwalk Village where there are plenty of kid-friendly activities, the restaurant has a great view of the bay, and includes tons of kitschy decorations like a variety of outboard boat motors scattered around. Before you eat, try the Bushwhacker [Bushwhacker](#) which is described as a creamy, chocolate pina colada but tasted like a milkshake. Then get

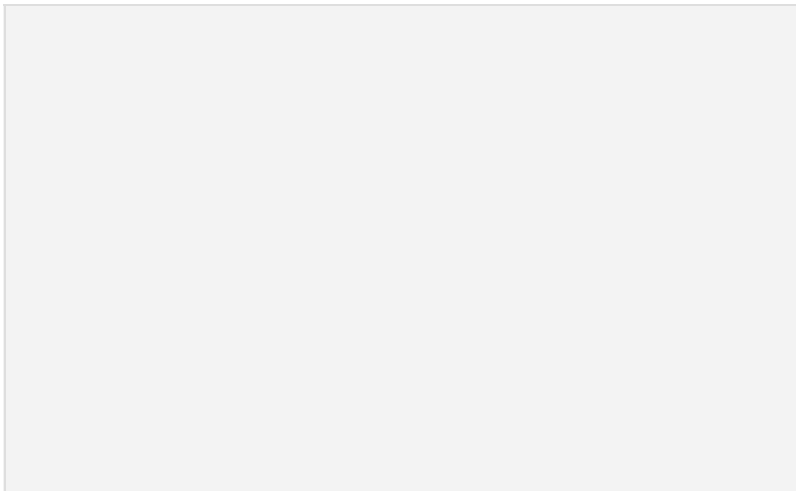
the grilled fish sandwich made with whatever the catch of the day is because it was delicious.

7. Best Restaurant for Seeing the Truman Show Location:
[Bud and Alleys Waterfront Restaurant and Rooftop Bar.](#)

Located in Seaside where the Truman Show was filmed, Bud and Alley's is hidden away but well worth checking out. For more than 25 years this beachfront location founded by two surfing buddies has been serving up delicious seafood as well as tacos and pizza. As a true aficionado of crab cakes, I can testify that theirs are truly awesome. But before you chow down on them, try their famous smoked tuna dip which is justifiably famous because it's delicious.



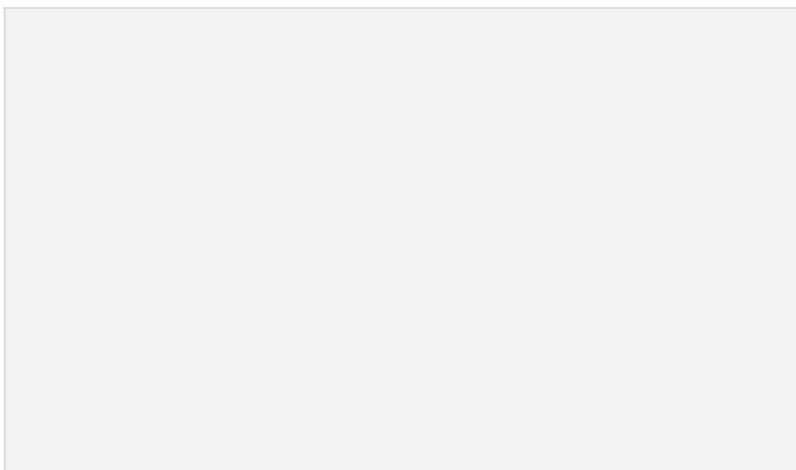
Smoked Tuna Dip at Bud and Alley's.





Crab Cakes at Bud and Alley's.

8. **Best Restaurant for Italian Food:** [Mama Clemenza's](#). This is one of those restaurants that are hidden away in a small shopping center and you might never know it is there and this would be a tragedy since you need to go here immediately. Run by the Clemenza family who take great pride in making everything from scratch, they also have a small demonstration kitchen where the host events and offer very popular cooking classes. Once you taste their food, you will realize why those classes are so popular. We went for breakfast sampled the fresh, Hazelnut Honey Madelines which were still warm. Then try the Cinnamon Apple Crepes which are fabulous in every way.





Madelines with Hazelnut Honey at Mama Clemenza's.



Cinnamon Apple Crepes at Mama Clemenza's.

9. **Best Restaurant for after the Gulfarium:** [Angler's Beachside Grill](#). No family can visit the Emerald Coast without a trip to the [Gulfarium](#) which has been a family favorite since 1955. Located just a few steps from the Gulfarium at the entrance to Okaloosa Island Pier where you can rent fishing equipment and buy bait, the restaurant is casual, open to the Gulf breezes, and has wonderful, tasty seafood. Wanting a light lunch, I ordered the Crab and Shrimp Parmesan Dip which was a great idea because it was not only the perfect amount of food, it was also hot, fresh, and delicious.



Crab and Shrimp Dip at Angler's Beachside Grill.

10. **Best Restaurant for Coffee and Dessert:** [Tommy Bahama Restaurant and Bar](#). We have had some great desserts at the Emerald Coast but my favorite is still one I had at the Hawaii Tommy Bahama Restaurant and Bar for the first time several years ago. Their Pina Colada Cake is a Vanilla Cake made with Myers Dark Rum, Diced Pineapple, White Chocolate Mousse and Toasted Coconut sprinkled on top. Fair warning – it's a huge piece of cake so you either want to share or take the rest home for later because God Forbid you throw any away. I actually took my leftover cake in Hawaii on the plane home with me and ate it with relish mid-flight, much to the annoyance of my fellow passengers who were just jealous, I'm sure. The restaurant on Grand Boulevard has a really nice patio for dining and there are plenty of interesting shops nearby, along with a movie theater and you can sample the best cake in the universe. In addition, you might want to try the scrumptious Parmesan Crusted Sanibel Chicken before your cake!



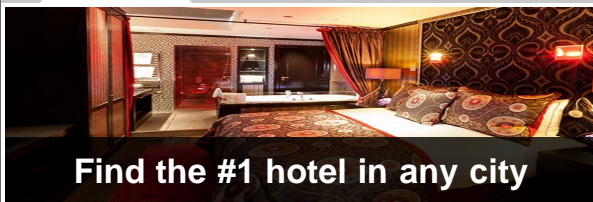
Parmesan Crusted Sanibel Chicken from Tommy Bahama.



Pina Colada Cake from Tommy Bahama.

So, there you go. Some of the best restaurants on the Emerald Coast. Hopefully, I made your mouth water and you are now making notes about where to eat when you visit. Enjoy!

HotelsFlights



Find the #1 hotel in any city