

The Big Story

Go For the Food: SC island offers change of pace

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Poe's Tavern, a restaurant on Sullivan's Island, S.C., is seen in this Sept. 12, 2013 photo. The restaurant is one of about a dozen on Sullivan's Island just outside Charleston, S.C. (AP Photo/Bruce Smith)

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SULLIVANS ISLAND, S.C. (AP) — While nearby Charleston, S.C. is famous for dozens of fine restaurants, for a change of pace try the restaurant district on nearby Sullivan's Island. The downtown of the quiet barrier island offers everything from an Irish pub to Mexican and barbecue. And then there's the seafood.

The district is clustered in a three-block area on this island of expensive beach homes and weathered bungalows.

There's something for every taste. Dunleavy's Pub is a traditional Irish pub where Boston Red Sox fans will feel right at home. Poe's Tavern, a great place for burgers and beer, is named after writer Edgar Allan Poe, who was

once stationed at Fort Moultrie on the island.

There are Home Team BBQ and Taco Mamacita — the names say it all — and SALT, with its signature seafood and raw bar.

Then there is Sullivan's, a seafood restaurant that opened just before Hurricane Hugo hit in 1989. The owners rebuilt and Sullivan's has been a tradition for island visitors and locals alike for a quarter century.

"We're a family restaurant and we don't try to do anything more or anything less. We're serving the best seafood we can," said Sammy Rhodes, 51, who runs Sullivan's with his sister Donna Rhodes Hiott and other family members.

They include his 80-year-old mother Joyce Rhodes, who still greets diners at Sunday brunch and comes by several times a week to help, including dusting off the colorful paintings of island homes that adorn the walls.

Sullivan's uses old family recipes — those for the fish breading and she crab suit are closely guarded secrets. Shrimp and fried grits, stuffed flounder and the seven-layer seafood casserole are among the most popular dishes. The cocktail sauce and salad dressings are fresh, not from a bottle, and the homemade Key lime pie is a signature of Sullivan's.

Donna Rhodes Hiott says patrons see it as their restaurant.

"We took red rice off the menu and put in macaroni and cheese and I heard about it all summer because people come in here for the rice. So it's back on," she laughed.

And just about everyone buys one of Sullivan's T-shirts adorned with the crescent and palmetto tree that is on the South Carolina state flag.

Sammy Rhodes said he's seen people wearing the shirts in other parts of the country and other countries.

"People come here and they've got to have a shirt," he said.

If You Go...

SULLIVANS ISLAND RESTAURANT DISTRICT: Take U.S. 17 north from Charleston crossing the Arthur Ravenel Bridge. Stay right on SC 703 past Shem Creek and its restaurant district (also popular with visitors) and over the Ben Sawyer swing bridge onto the island. Follow the pavement straight to a stop sign. Turn right and you are in Sullivans Island restaurant district. Sullivan's is three blocks down on the left.

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