

Photo by Andrew Gelauka

CHARLESTON

## 10 Best Seafood Restaurants in Charleston

WISD PHOTOS

by PAUL OSWELL

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*In this water-adjacent town, lightly fried filets and smoked oysters are practically an art form.*



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South Carolina (and Charleston, in particular) is blessed with a bounty of seafood, swept in from the Atlantic Ocean—and no one, neither resident nor visitor, should deny themselves the wonders of these fresh and salty gifts. But there's seafood, and then there's *seafood*—and even if you're ordering something as simple as clams on the half shell, it's important to look for quality, imagination, and talent (did somebody say, "tuna burger?"). Here, then, are the 10 local joints that are taking Charleston seafood to the next level.

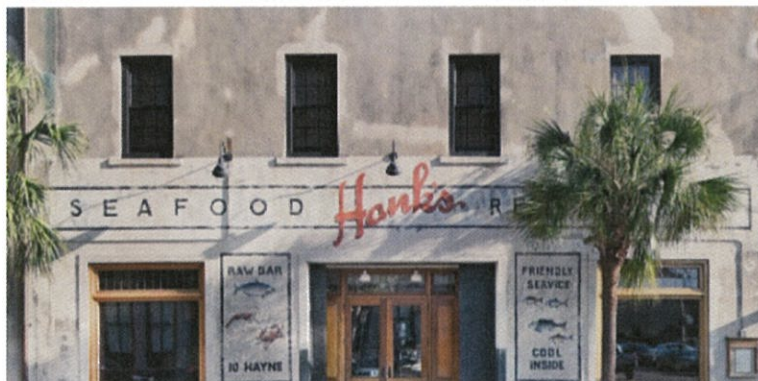




Photo by Christopher Shane

RESTAURANT

### Hank's Seafood Restaurant →

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As soon as you walk into the dining room, you're in no doubt that you're in an upscale traditional fish house. However, the solemnity of the marble pillars and modernist chandeliers is softened by the multitude of aquatic oil paintings that hang on the dark wooden walls, and a panoramic mural around the ceiling's edges give it a more welcoming, family ambience.



Photo by Paul Cheney

RESTAURANT

### Fleet Landing Restaurant & Bar →

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Being the only waterfront dining option in town is a privileged position to be in, the foot traffic outside the restaurant certainly reinforcing that fact and at peak times you'll need to sign up and wait. You feel the difference as you cross Concord Street and the sea air ramps up your appetite. Once inside, the décor is surprisingly daring, with striking white cubed chandeliers and an aquatic-industrial dining room with marine tones. Try for the outdoor deck, which comes with the sometime extra of dolphin watching.



Photo by Andrew Cebulka

**Fig** →

\$5

The homage to high-quality simplicity is sincere and impressive at this newly-renovated downtown spot, whose name is, fittingly, an acronym for "Food is Good." Locally-sourced and seasonal ingredients are revered by chef Mike Lata, and his short, but tightly focused menus feature innovative but accessible seafood dishes: The fish stew, for one, is as hearty and delicious as any you'll find in Provence, while grilled Triggerfish atop a pillowy, aromatic garlic pilaf rice reveals a depth of flavor more often reserved for meat dishes. A seat at one of the tables usually needs some advanced planning, but walk-ins (and their spontaneous hunger pangs) can usually be accommodated at the bar.

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**167 Raw** →

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Restaurants with raw bars trend toward the formal in this buttoned-up town, so the presence of 167 Raw, a more casual, low-key joint with roots in Nantucket, is a breath of fresh ocean air. The lobster roll is a firm favorite among the regulars who continue to subject themselves to the unavoidable lines (though the recent opening of a new patio area has cut them down, somewhat). A toothsome tuna burger and a daily-changing fish sandwich are also worthy options, but it's really the raw bar you came for: there are fresh oysters, clams, and shrimp, aplenty, but if you can't decide, just go whole hog—erm, squid—and get the Big Boy tower.





Photo by Andrew Cebulka

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### Amen Street Fish & Raw Bar →

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There's a melange of styles competing for your attention as you enter, the rustic charm of the exposed bricks and beams framed by Jazz Age cartoons and caricatures festooned across the walls. The most striking feature, though, is the glowing oyster shell chandeliers. Coastal-industrial with a hint of Art Deco, which may sound like too much, but it works.



Photo by Andrew Cebulka

RESTAURANT

### The Ordinary →

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This restaurant's name might be the only underwhelming thing about it. Classic white tiling and rounded windows (not to mention the 22-foot-high ceilings) make for a dynamic backdrop for chef Mike Lata's high-concept oyster hall, where oysters, clams, lobster, and jumbo lump blue crab are whisked right off the raw bar and onto diners' tables, while other dishes, like the signature smoked oysters and yellowfin tuna with house-made potato chips, get just a light touch before they make their way to patrons. If the raw goods don't do it for you, not to worry: warmer choices include New Orleans-style barbecued shrimp and fish head gumbo. Oh, and there's a tempting, regularly-changing line-up of daily specials ready for consideration, too—maybe they should think about changing the name.

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### Roadside Seafood →

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A continuing success story that started out as a food truck venture and turned into a bricks and mortar operation that pays homage to the clam shacks and fish camps of old. The walls of the dining room are deep blue, and bedecked with the obligatory

seafood joint paintings of ocean life. Vinyl table mats and boating paraphernalia add a charmingly kitschy vibe.



Photo by Peter Frank Edwards

RESTAURANT

### Leon's Oyster Shop →

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This former body shop still shows some of its industrial scruff, though exposed wooden beams, concrete floors, and pendant lighting are now softened by the presence of oil paintings and fried chicken, plated daintily on checkered tissue paper. The whole thing stems from a commitment to delivering as unpretentious an experience as possible. To quote some of their mission statement: "We do fried chicken, oysters...and tons of champagne...all in an old garage," and they're truthful to that simple adage. Oysters come raw, chargrilled, or 'casino' style (with bacon and peppers), while straight-up Peel n' Eat Shrimp and fry-ups served with a bundle hush puppies and a dollop of creamy tartar sauce round out the more 'complex' options. No reservations accepted—just show up and take your chances.

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### Nana's Seafood & Soul →

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How unpretentious and family style can one place get? Take a small (there are just three tables), simple dining room with bright yellow overtones, give it a couple of playful touches such as cutlery stencils on the wall and a gumball machine by the counter, and presto – you've got one of the most welcoming, unfussy rooms in town. It's impossible not to feel relaxed here.



Photo by Andrew Cebulka

## Nico Oysters + Seafood →

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All sleek steel and white awnings from the outside, this Mt. Pleasant oyster bar becomes more homely on the inside with its wood panelling, low-beamed ceilings and exposed brick. Its roots French are showing, though, and it retains more than a soupçon of Continental élan, champagne bottles framing the shelves and rustic boards for place settings. There's also refrigerated oysters out on display.

MAP

## Places We Went



RESTAURANT  
**Hank's Seafood Restaurant**

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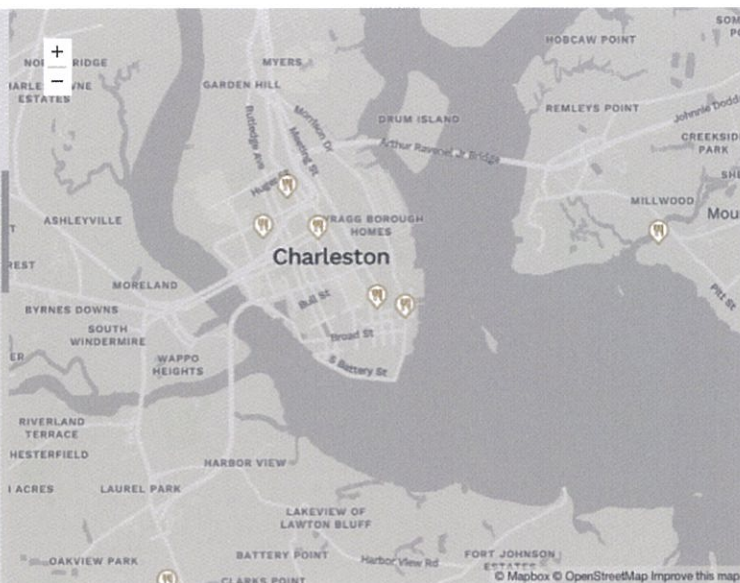
RESTAURANT  
**Fleet Landing Restaurant & Bar**

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RESTAURANT  
**Fig**

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