

Charleston's dining scene is one of diversity, though seafood like oysters are a more than common ... [+]
(ANDREW CEBULKA)

For all of its beautiful architecture, incredible history and scenic beaches, one of the highlights about Charleston is the food. Most cities in the South have a distinctive gastronomic culture with dishes and flavors that are entirely their own. Think BBQ in Nashville or a po' boy in New Orleans. Charleston is no exception. The city's oceanside locale gives it plenty of access to fresh seafood- couple that with the zesty and spicy flavors that the South is known for, and you're in for a fantastic culinary adventure that's reason enough to make a trip.

Charleston has no shortage of restaurants, but the following is a list of some of my favorite spots in town.

Lewis Barbecue



Lewis Barbecue is two southern cities' tastes colliding, and Charleston natives know how to handle ... [+]
(COURTESY OF LEWIS BARBECUE)

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Coming from Austin, pitmaster John Lewis brings a taste of the Lone Star State to the Upper Peninsula of Charleston. Sporting dishes like Texas Hot Guts (a type of pork sausage) and his award-winning brisket, Lewis' laid-back BBQ joint has a cult following. It's easy to see why: come and eat in the backyard on a beautiful night, and enjoy the easy breezy vibe while digging into delicious ribs, BBQ chicken (only served on Tuesdays) and an array of sides like the green chile corn pudding. The drinks list, especially the tequilas and mezcal, are expansive, and the dirt pie and banana pudding for dessert are worth the splurge. Be sure to take a bottle of the tasty Hatch Green Chili Sauce home with you!

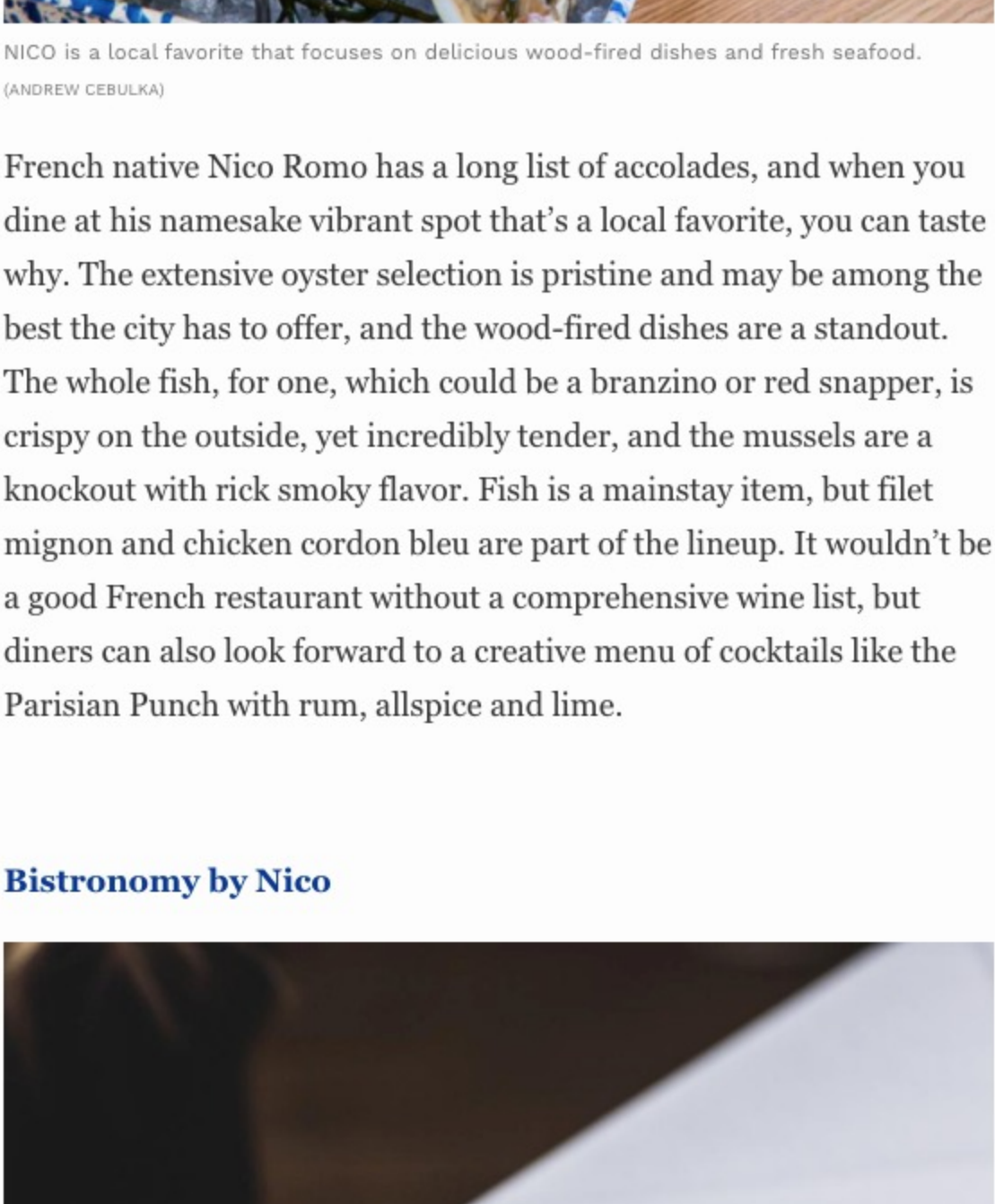
Basic Kitchen



Basic Kitchen is a healthier alternative to the BBQ and oyster joints that Charleston loves so much
(ANDREW FRASZ)

In a completely different vein, Basic Kitchen is a much more wellness-focused joint than a finger-licking BBQ spot. Using sustainably raised meat, local produce and healthy oils, Basic Kitchen is wellness-focused but in a way that feels far from spartan. Enjoy dishes like vegetable-loaded green curry, salmon bowl, a vegan caesar salad and other salads filled with locally grown ingredients and herbs from the courtyard garden. Come to this bright, lovely space housed in a historic building for lunch, dinner and weekend brunch, and try the seasonal cocktails as well.

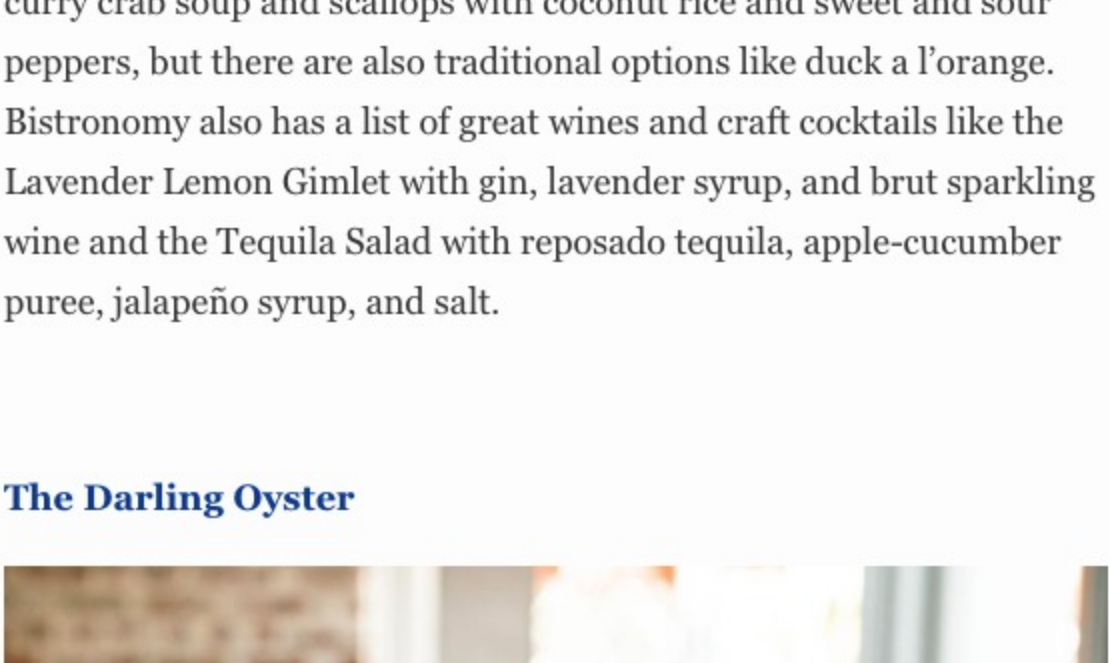
Nico



NICO is a local favorite that focuses on delicious wood-fired dishes and fresh seafood.
(ANDREW CEBULKA)

French native Nico Romo has a long list of accolades, and when you dine at his namesake vibrant spot that's a local favorite, you can taste why. The extensive oyster selection is pristine and may be among the best the city has to offer, and the wood-fired dishes are a standout. The whole fish, for one, which could be a branzino or red snapper, is crispy on the outside, yet incredibly tender, and the mussels are a knockout with rich smoky flavor. Fish is a mainstay item, but filet mignon and chicken cordon bleu are part of the lineup. It wouldn't be a good French restaurant without a comprehensive wine list, but diners can also look forward to a creative menu of cocktails like the Parisian Punch with rum, allspice and lime.

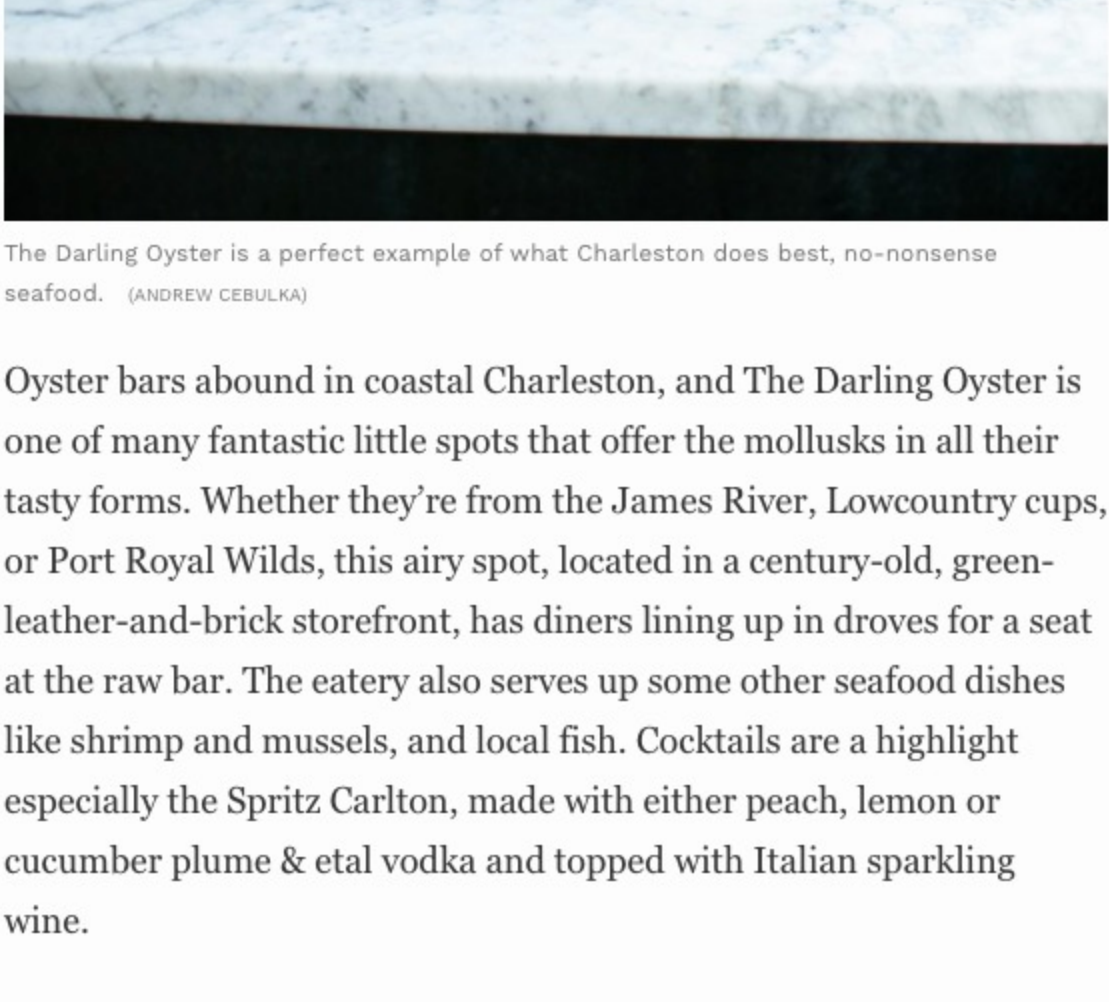
Bistronomy by Nico



Operating out of an old wine bar, Bistronomy is Chef Nico's return to his roots.
(COURTESY OF BISTRONOMY)

Romo hits it right twice: situated in a former wine bar, the new Bistronomy- already a hit with locals and visitors- is a spot for the chef to revisit his roots from when he first debuted in Charleston over a decade ago. The menu features French dishes with a twist such as a curry crab soup and scallops with coconut rice and sweet and sour peppers, but there are also traditional options like duck à l'orange. Bistronomy also has a list of great wines and craft cocktails like the Lavender Lemon Gimlet with gin, lavender syrup, and brut sparkling wine and the Tequila Salad with reposado tequila, apple-cucumber puree, jalapeño syrup, and salt.

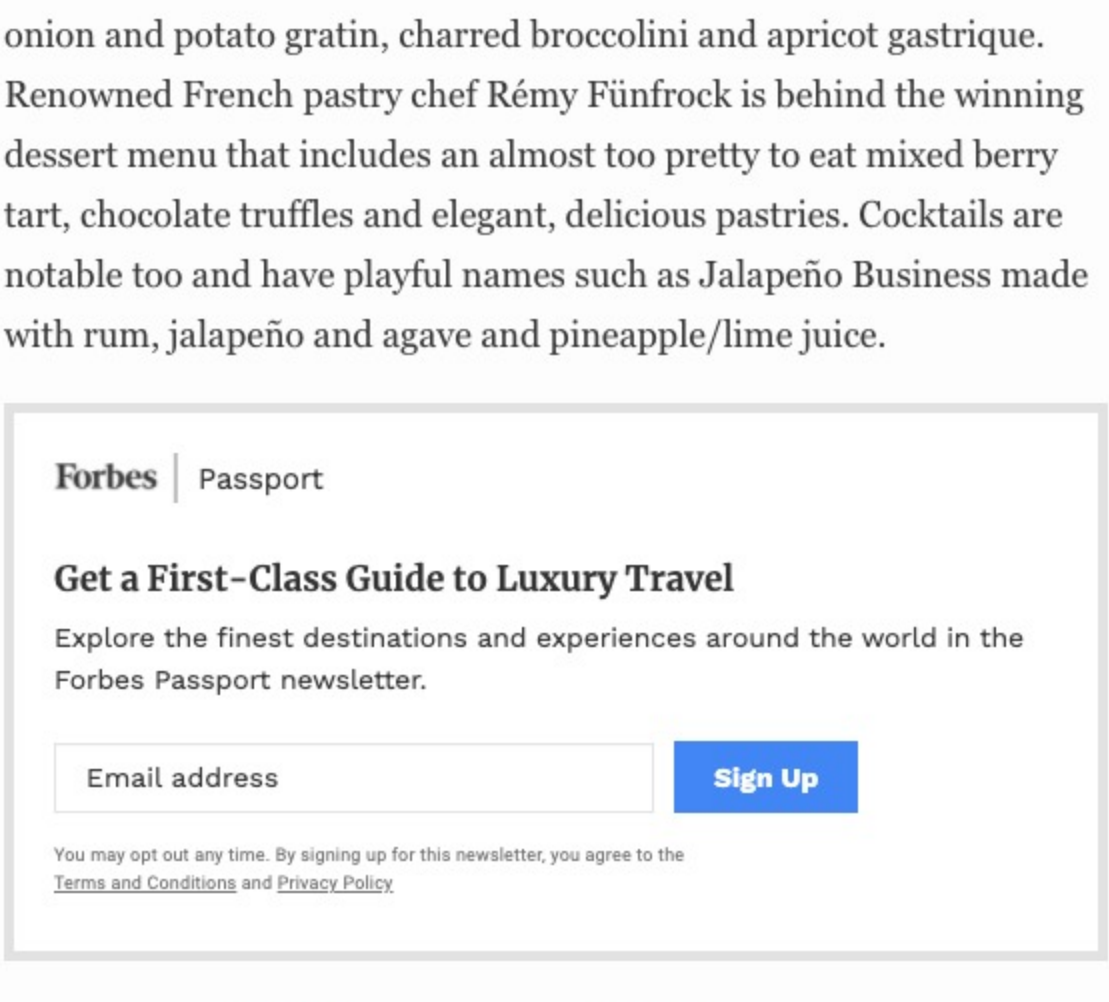
The Darling Oyster



The Darling Oyster is a perfect example of what Charleston does best, no-nonsense seafood.
(ANDREW CEBULKA)

Oyster bars abound in coastal Charleston, and The Darling Oyster is one of many fantastic little spots that offer the mollusks in all their tasty forms. Whether they're from the James River, Lowcountry cups, or Port Royal Wilds, this airy spot, located in a century-old, green-leather-and-brick storefront, has diners lining up in droves for a seat at the raw bar. The eatery also serves up some other seafood dishes like shrimp and mussels, and local fish. Cocktails are a highlight especially the Spritz Carlton, made with either peach, lemon or cucumber plume & etal vodka and topped with Italian sparkling wine.

Gabrielle



Gabrielle offers up classic Charleston flavors in a refined style and setting.
(ANDREW CEBULKA)

Situated in Hotel Bennett- one of the most upscale properties in town-, Gabrielle is a sophisticated but unstuffy restaurant that makes your night out in Charleston that much more memorable. Executive chef Bob Gibson takes regional flavors and favorites and uses them to tell his own story of his time in South Carolina. Diners can look forward to dishes like fish and grits made with crispy red snapper, fava beans and globe carrots and Berkshire pork chops with a spring onion and potato gratin, charred broccolini and apricot gastrique. Renowned French pastry chef Rémy Fünfrock is behind the winning dessert menu that includes an almost too pretty to eat mixed berry tart, chocolate truffles and elegant, delicious pastries. Cocktails are notable too and have playful names such as Jalapeño Business made with rum, jalapeño and agave and pineapple/lime juice.

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