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Where to Eat

The area's specialty is seafood, prepared any way you like.

Bistro by the Sea prepares innovative takes on local ingredients

Bistro by the Sea

If you're looking for a dinner of deep-fried fish, don't try Bistro by the Sea. And if certain seafood isn't available to buy locally, you won't find it on the menu. The Bistro is a supporter of Carteret Catch, an initiative to support area fishermen. Facing an increase in frozen and imported seafood being served in restaurants, Carteret Catch aims to increase the public's awareness of local seafood availability.

"Once you've had fresh seafood, you can really tell the difference between fresh and frozen," says Bistro general manager Libby Eaton, who owns the restaurant with her husband and chef, Tom.

Since 1993, the Eatons have been creating innovative dishes using fresh,



local ingredients. The Bistro has been recognized as one of the first area restaurants to move away from traditional fried seafood dinners. Entrée choices may include grilled peppercorn and sesame seed encrusted salmon and shrimp or baked striped bass and scallops with Chablis dill sauce. The popular she-crab bisque is always on the menu. A North Carolina specialty is triggerfish, which Eaton says is usually available. The kitchen lacks a microwave and deep fryer, and everything is homemade in their kitchen.

Look for Eaton at the June Big Rock tournament, where she'll be passing out samples of fresh seafood to spectators. "You've gotta give something away for free before it catches on," she says.

4031 Arendell St., Morehead City, 252-247-2777, bistro-by-the-sea.com

Kathryn's Bistro & Martini Bar

This family owned restaurant opened four years ago with the concept of casual but upscale dining, a shift away from what visitors could find elsewhere in the area. Serving certified Black Angus

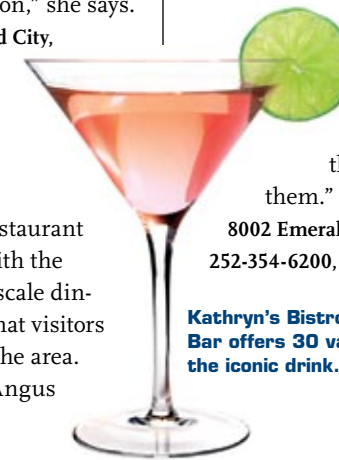
beef and fresh local seafood right off the coast, as well as mixing 30 different types of martinis, the Ayre family has created a unique dining experience at Kathryn's.

"It's fun for people here," says Ryan Ayre, general manager.

Bookend your meal with martinis: the French martini is a best seller for starters, and the chocolate kiss martini ends meals on a sweet note.

"This is a new concept for the area, but it works," says Ayre. "People come here for something different."

The specialty of the house is the lump crab cakes, seared with roasted sweet corn cream and red pepper coulis. A nightly soft-shell crab is another menu highlight.



"We have access to these really big, nice soft-shell crabs," says Ayre. "I go straight to the guy's house to get them."

8002 Emerald Dr., Emerald Isle, 252-354-6200, kathrynsbistro.com

Kathryn's Bistro & Martini Bar offers 30 variations of the iconic drink.

Beaufort Grocery Co.

Serving lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch in Beaufort's historic district, this can't-miss eatery is a local favorite. Enjoy creative sandwiches on homemade bread for lunch, daily seafood specials for dinner, and homemade desserts anytime of day. 117 Queen St., Beaufort, 252-728-3899, beaufortgrocery.com

El's Drive-In

Since 1959, cars have been crowding the parking lot of this classic drive-in for El's shrimpburgers and hamburgers loaded with chili and coleslaw. A

side of fries and an ice-cold Pepsi complete the El's experience.

3706 Arendell St., Morehead City, 252-726-3002, elsdrivein.com

Fred and Claire's Restaurant

New Bern's oldest operating restaurant got a boost when local writer Nicholas Sparks mentioned the place in his books. For a filling lunch, try the homemade soup and quiche. Local seafood dishes are served for dinner, such as crab cakes with mustard sauce or grouper with crabmeat and spinach.

247 Craven St., New Bern, 252-638-5426, fredandclairesrestaurant.com

Front Street Grill at Stillwater

A cozy restaurant on Beaufort's waterfront serving innovative entrees such as Carolina crab cakes with jasmine rice and baked oysters with spinach, bacon, and lemon aioli. Sip a pre-dinner drink at the outdoor bar overlooking the sound.

300 Front St., Beaufort, 252-728-4956, frontstreetgrillatstillwater.com

Portofino

Find an extensive wine list and classic Italian at this cozy spot. Seafood-inspired pasta includes local soft-shell crab with an asiago crust and sea scal-

lops with spinach-mushroom risotto. Bell Cove Village, Coast Guard Road, Emerald Isle, 252-354-8111

Spouter Inn

Unrestricted views of Taylor's Creek provide the backdrop for this laidback spot on Beaufort's waterfront. Spouter sandwiches are served for lunch and seafood pastas are on the dinner menu. Enjoy Sunday brunch on the covered deck and stop by the bakery on your way out the door for the restaurant's signature banana crêpe.

218 Front St., Beaufort, 252-728-5190, spouterinn.net



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