



**STONE CRAB SEASON HAS ARRIVED IN
FLORIDA'S CHARLOTTE HARBOR & THE GULF ISLANDS**

AND THERE'S LOTS OF OTHER GREAT LOCALLY HARVESTED RESTAURANT FARE TOO

CHARLOTTE HARBOR AND THE GULF ISLANDS, Fla. -- Looking to please your palate, and get a true "sense of taste and place" on your next vacation? Then get cracking to Southwest Florida's [Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands](#). Located along the Gulf of Mexico on Florida's southwest coast, this string of quiet, fishing communities surrounds the state's second largest harbor – read lots and lots of fresh fish and crabs. And lately it's been making noise as a must-dine destination for traveling foodies in search of locally caught and expertly prepared seafood.

Though blue crabs are delicious year round, stone crab season is only mid-October through mid-May, so now is the time to enjoy these crustaceans as a delightful appetizer chilled or paired steaming hot with other local fare as a main course.

Stone Crab Fun Facts:

- Stone Crab's claws have an extremely powerful crushing force of 19,000 pounds per square inch
- Male Stone Crabs live to be about 7 years old while females live about 8 years
- Stone crabs are a good, low-fat source of protein, vitamin 6, selenium and magnesium
- Adult Florida Stone Crabs live in burrows that they make in mud or sand on the ocean floor
- Their scientific name is *Menippe Mercenaria*: Menippe (Greek), means force or courage and Mercenaria (Latin), means something of value

Sustainable seafood is big here, as many chefs, restaurateurs and fishermen make their living and livelihood from the bountiful Gulf of Mexico. From the quintessential [Florida cracker crab shack](#) where blue crabs pile high atop newspaper covered picnic tables at Peace River Seafood year round, to contemporary dishes that top retro, stainless steel tables set amidst a wash of riotous color at acclaimed [Trabue](#), the dining options in Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands are as abundant as the fresh catch.

An authentic Florida crab house opened by long-time local crabber Jimmy Beall and his wife Kelly just outside Punta Gorda, [Peace River Seafood](#) is where the fishermen, crabbers, and shrimpers land their catch. Stone Crab season runs mid-October – mid-May and during that

time, the huge crab claws are the number one draw on the locally sourced seafood-centric menu. Year-round, blue crabs arrive by the crate and are prepared and back out on the tables almost as fast as they come in. Spilling out of tin buckets – all you can eat for \$20, 11 a.m. until 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday – the crabs are accompanied only by the requisite wooden mallet, corn-on-the-cob, red potatoes and lemon. Novices take note: friendly expert instruction from the staff will have you crackin’ crab like a local in no time! Highly prized for both taste and for their respective rankings as a “Best Choice” and “Good Alternative” on [Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Seafood Watch Guide](#) are both Blue Crabs and Stone Crabs which make big appearances on menus this time of year.

Chef Keith Meyer is one of the new breed of chefs planting roots in Punta Gorda. At [Trabue Restaurant](#), he translates the classic techniques he learned in New York City into approachable rustic, southern dishes. Dishes range from escargot to a bone-in, brined pork chop, and the menu is always chock full of from-the-Gulf seafood such as mahi-mahi, snapper and shrimp. While he incorporates flavors from across the country in his cuisine, Chef Keith says, “My goal is to highlight locally-sourced ingredients, especially the different flavors that come with each season. Fresh corn, tomatoes and micro-greens are from local farmers, and when Stone Crab season opens in mid-October, we’ll add them to the menu.”

Wherever you dine you’re likely to pair your fresh catch with sides sprouting from the finest produce grown at [one of the best organic farms in the country](#), Worden Farm. No wonder diners exclaim this quiet section of Florida coastline is literally bursting with flavor.

Over in Placida, the waterfront eatery the [Fishery](#) sits on the site of Garry Albritton’s family’s old fishing village, which dates back to the early 1900s. Colorful and casual, the Fishery’s view of Gasparilla Sound is the perfect setting for an extensive seafood feast. Shrimp are served every which way from perfectly fried, to peel-and-eat, or as the star ingredient in Famous Fishery Gumbo. Oysters on the half-shell start a meal followed by a selection of fish and seafood that Garry ensures are caught by sustainable fishing practices. “Stone Crab Claws are seasonal, and the crabs regenerate the harvested claw; Blackened Redfish is a popular local fish protected in the wild, and we serve only farm-raised. Carefully protected by fishing rules and regulations, we use only Red or Black Grouper, in our Grouper Grande, where it is lightly sautéed and topped with hollandaise and shrimp. Our commitment to our waters and their protection began many years ago by our ancestors, and continues to this day,” claims Albritton.

With a fish species list that literally runs from A to Z, [Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands](#) has earned its reputation as one of [the best fishing destinations in Florida](#) and attracts many people who want to catch their own dinner or just enjoy sport fishing in one of the Southeast's most productive environments.

Captain Ralph Allen, who runs fishing charters and sightseeing cruises from [King Fisher Fleet](#) at Fishermen's Village Marina says the practice of catch and release is one that he and his guides encourage and see growing as folks are catching on to the old adage that, "a fish is too valuable to only catch once."

However, there are those who want to reel in and feast on their catch, and so charter captains will assist with weighing and filleting great edible seafood to be prepared at home or by a restaurant chef at one of the local eateries known to provide that service.

From surf to turf, a variety of farmer's markets feature fresh catch and organic produce. [Worden Farm's](#) 85-acres produces over 50 different varieties of certified organic [vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers](#). [Sustainable, ecological techniques](#) are used to conserve and protect soil and water resources, wildlife, and human health. Additionally, late fall through mid-spring, Worden Farm offers culinary workshops and farm tours on select dates. Or check out their fresh vegetables, along with fresh seafood from local fishermen, at the Fishermen's Village Farmer's Market each Wednesday late fall through mid-spring. Year-round farmers markets are popping up across Charlotte County. Locally harvested veggies, meats and crafts can be found Saturday mornings in downtown [Punta Gorda](#) and at the Cultural Center of Charlotte County. Friday mornings, visit [Englewood Farmers' Market](#) for more Florida fresh produce.

For more information on dining in Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands, please visit <http://www.charlotteharbortravel.com> or join them on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/CharlotteHarbor>. For information about area events, activities and attractions, contact the Charlotte Harbor Visitor & Convention Bureau, 18500 Murdock Circle, Suite B104, Port Charlotte, FL 33948; 941-743-1900, call toll free at 1-800-652-6090 for a free Visitor's Guide; or visit www.CharlotteHarborTravel.com.

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