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NARRAGANSETT

In Praise of Aunt Carrie's in Narragansett, Rhode Island

Best known as the birthplace of the clam cake, Aunt Carrie's seafood shack in Narragansett, Rhode Island, offers the quintessential seaside summer experience.

Mike Urban · July 31, 2020 · Read Comments (5)

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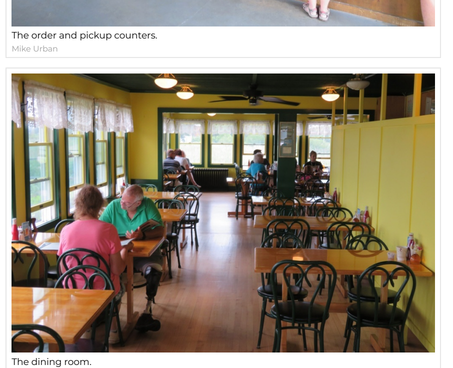
Aunt Carrie's, a beloved seafood shack on the western shore of Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay, has a long history of serving up heaping portions of fresh seafood and, more recently, wonderful baked goods such as breads, pies, and biscuits. But it's probably best known as the birthplace of the clam cake—that deep-fried ball of dough chock-full of minced clams that's become a classic Rhode Island treat.

Aunt Carrie's in Narragansett, Rhode Island, on a sunny summer day.
Mike Urban

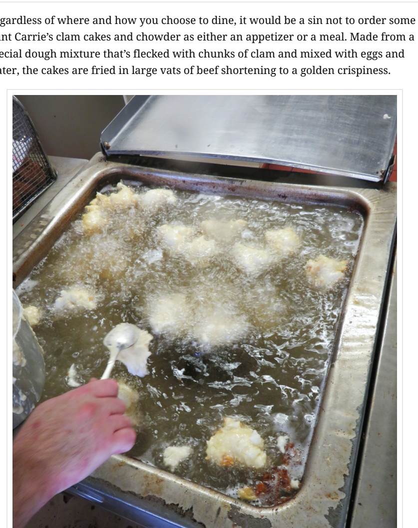
In Praise of Aunt Carrie's

Aunt Carrie's offers two dining choices: a sit-down dining room with waitstaff, and an order-at-the-counter, dine-in-the rough experience. Enter through the screen doors, and you'll find yourself face-to-face with spacious order and pickup windows staffed by friendly kids on summer break from school. A tempting menu hangs from the ceiling just behind the counter, and loaves of fresh-baked bread beckon from racks inside the kitchen. Order here for picnic table dining, or proceed to the door leading to the dining room, which wraps around the side and back of the building.

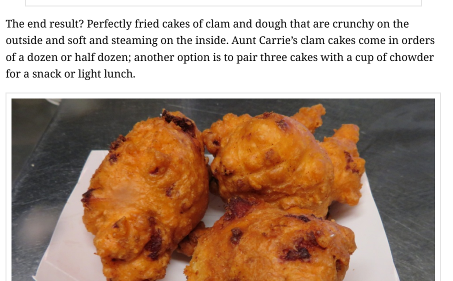
The order and pickup counters.
Mike Urban


The dining room.
Mike Urban

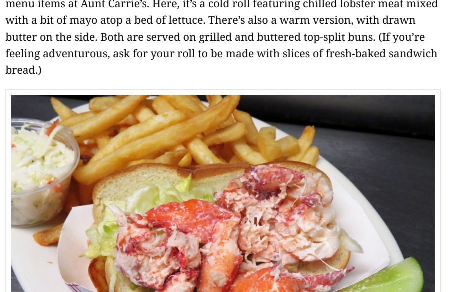
Regardless of where and how you choose to dine, it would be a sin not to order some Aunt Carrie's clam cakes and chowder as either an appetizer or a meal. Made from a special dough mixture that's flecked with chunks of clam and mixed with eggs and water, the cakes are fried in large vats of beef shortening to a golden crispiness.


Dollops of clam cake batter cooking in the voluminous fryer.
Mike Urban

The end result? Perfectly fried cakes of clam and dough that are crunchy on the outside and soft and steaming on the inside. Aunt Carrie's clam cakes come in orders of a dozen or half dozen; another option is to pair three cakes with a cup of chowder for a snack or light lunch.


A trio of the famous Aunt Carrie's clam cakes.
Mike Urban

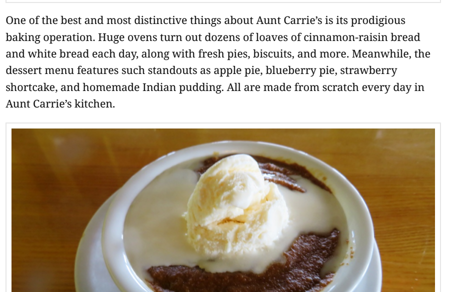
Chowder at Aunt Carrie's comes in three varieties. There's the classic clear-broth Rhode Island style; a tomato-based red chowder; and the traditional milky-white version. All come loaded with fresh clams, perfectly cooked chunks of potato, and seasonings.


From left to right: clear-broth, tomato-based, and traditional clam chowders.
Mike Urban

As with most New England seafood shacks, the lobster roll is one of the most popular menu items at Aunt Carrie's. Here, it's a cold roll featuring chilled lobster meat mixed with a bit of mayo atop a bed of lettuce. There's also a warm version, with drawn butter on the side. Both are served on grilled and buttered top-split buns. (If you're feeling adventurous, ask for your roll to be made with slices of fresh-baked sandwich bread.)

Aunt Carrie's cold lobster roll.
Mike Urban

The Rhode Island shore dinner is also very popular. It's served in the dining room and includes chowder, clam cakes, steamers, fish and chips, a whole lobster, and homemade dessert. There are scaled-down versions of the shore dinner, too, each with plenty of options to make any diner happy.


One version of the Rhode Island shore dinner.
Mike Urban

One of the best and most distinctive things about Aunt Carrie's is its prodigious baking operation. Huge ovens turn out dozens of loaves of cinnamon-raisin bread and white bread each day, along with fresh pies, biscuits, and more. Meanwhile, the dessert menu features such standouts as apple pie, blueberry pie, strawberry shortcake, and homemade Indian pudding. All are made from scratch every day in Aunt Carrie's kitchen.

Indian pudding, a New England classic.
Mike Urban

Right across the street is Aunt Carrie's Ice Cream and Gift Shoppe. Check it out for more than a dozen different homemade ice creams, plus sundaes such as the Little Rhody, the Dirty Fisherman, and the Block Island Sunrise. The gift shop is packed with locally crafted jewelry and souvenirs, many with a Rhode Island theme.

Aunt Carrie's Ice Cream and Gift Shoppe.
Mike Urban

Owner Elsie Cooper is a third-generation family member (Aunt Carrie was her late husband's grandmother). Elsie's two daughters, Laura and Amy, and Amy's husband, Phillip, are also heavily involved in the daily operations.

Elsie Cooper represents the third generation of family ownership at Aunt Carrie's.
Mike Urban

Aunt Carrie's celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2020 with no signs of slowing down. The future looks bright for this New England classic on the shores of Narragansett Bay!

Have you ever visited Aunt Carrie's?

This post was first published in 2019 and has been updated.

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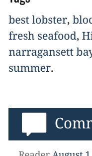

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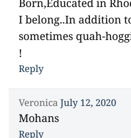
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Comments

Reader August 1, 2020
Born,Educated in Rhode Island, now in Tn. but wishing ,everyday, to be back where I belong..In addition to Aunt Carries, I also remember "Georges of Galilee" and sometimes quah-hogging with rakes along the way @ low tide!RI chowder, the BEST !
Reply

Veronica July 12, 2020
Mohans
Reply

Paul May 31, 2020
Sitting here doing nothing in the middle of the pandemic, it is getting very old, even for us, very senior citizens. I just happen to stumble across this story, my grandparents went to Aunt Carrie's in the 40's and 50's, my parents in the 50's and 60's, and we enjoyed Aunt Carrie's in the 70's onward. We will be rambling through Narragansett this September 2020 of course stopping at Aunt Carrie's to get our fill of lobster, clam cakes, and fried clams. Sure hope you are all safe during this pandemic.
Reply

quahogjk@icloud.com August 10, 2019
Congratulations, Elsie! We hope to see you during the centennial celebration, next year! Looking forward to a great meal and some clam cakes when we visit!
Reply

Reader August 9, 2019
It was a long ride for us but we started last summer's trip to Narragansett with clamcakes and chowdah at Aunt Carrie's. I grew up on the South Coast of Massachusetts eating clam cakes but they're getting hard to find.
Reply

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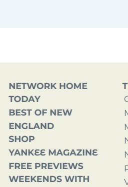

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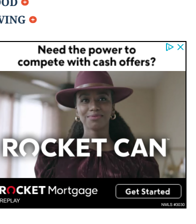

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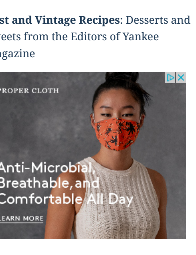

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