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# Super-summery trips that promise the best meal of the year

## BBQ, seafood, tacos, and more—come hungry.



By Hilary Cadigan • May 1, 2023 • 4 minutes read



Image: THEPALMER/Getty Images

Summer is for long lazy days, ideally spent on or adjacent to an icy-cold body of water, with an icy-cold beverage in reaching distance. It's also a time when the produce is juicy, the seafood is



in season, and ice cream is all but required.

Let me simplify: A summer spent eating well in dreamy places is a luxury we all deserve. But before you book your trip to one of the usual overrun vacation destinations, let's take a moment to consider some of the hidden gems: places that offer all the necessary chill vibes, family-friendly activities, and seriously delicious summer staples—with only a fraction of the sunburned crowds.

Ahead, we pulled together five destinations, whether it's a quintessential seafood feast or a fried bologna sandwich you'll dream about year-round.

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## Gulf Shores, AL



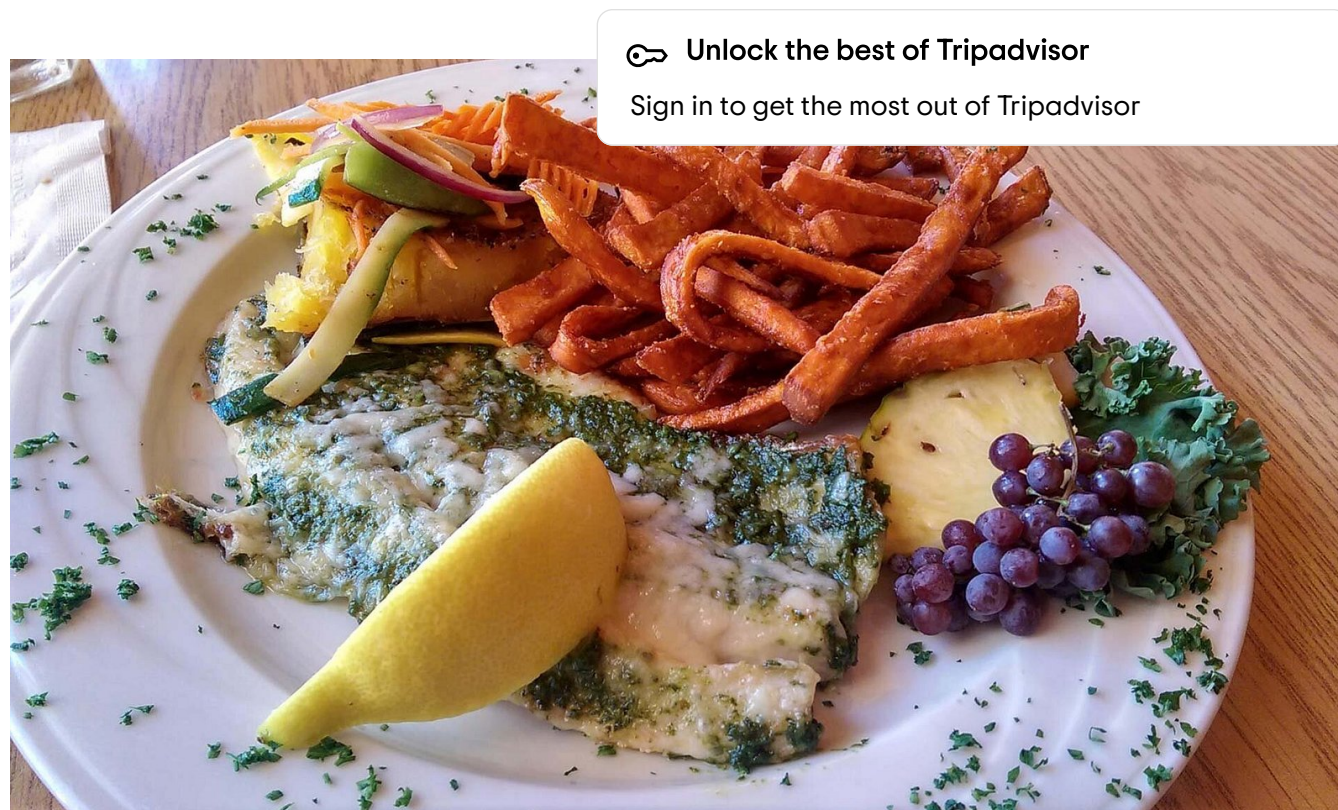
Low country boil at Gulf Shores Seafood in Gulf Shores, AL • Image: hgilbreath/Tripadvisor

Thirty-two miles of pristine white sand beaches. Dozens of hiking and biking trails. A wildlife refuge renowned for its bird watching. A bustling seaside strip packed with restaurants, bars, and live music. Alabama's Gulf Shores is nothing short of a summer lover's paradise. Located just west of the Florida border, it's also one of the most affordable beach towns in the U.S., and thanks to a robust local fishing scene, a prime spot for scarfing seafood by the pound.

Shrimp, oysters, blue crabs, and a wide variety of fish like grouper, snapper, and sea bass are plentiful along the Gulf Coast, and so are the restaurants cooking them up. Try Gulf Shores Seafood for a classic low country boil—shrimp, sausage, corn, and potatoes boiled with Cajun-style seasoning—or S&S Seafood Market for the famous smoked tuna dip. The no-frills Fish

River Grill is the go-to for a killer shrimp po'boy, and if baskets of fried seafood by the seashore is your thing, settle in at Bahama Bob's Beachside Cafe.

## Door County, WI



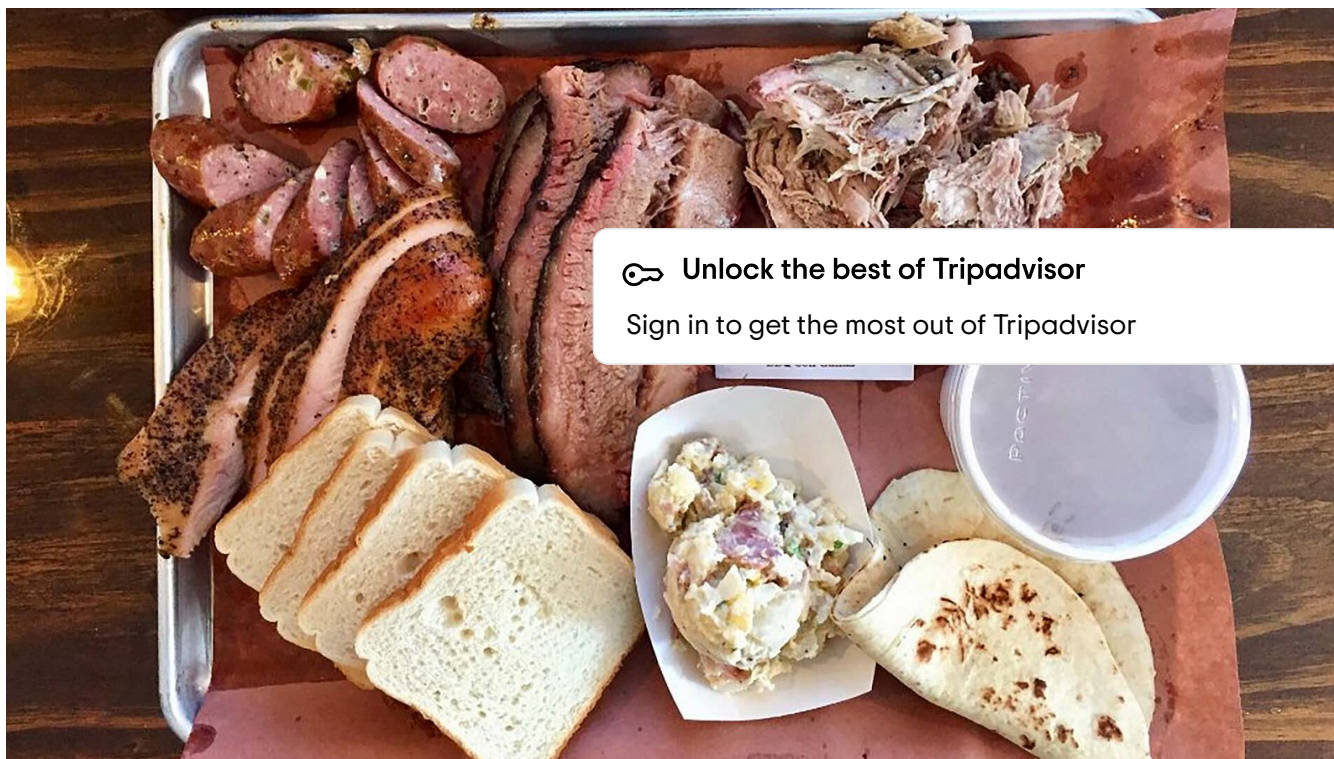
Pesto Whitefish at Shoreline Restaurant in Door County, WI • Image: g1ng3r\_girl/Tripadvisor

Who needs an ocean when you have a Great Lake? This perennially under-the-radar Midwest vacation destination is primed for all four seasons, but summer is when the crystal clear waters of Lake Michigan come alive. Rent a cozy lakeside cabin and partake in an abundant array of water activities like swimming, sailing, fishing, stand-up paddleboarding, and even shipwreck diving at one of several unique sites.

But perhaps the most sacred of all Door County summertime traditions is the Friday Fish Fry, a practice that dates back to Christians foregoing meat in the Middle Ages and remains alive and well (and probably a lot more fun!) today. Restaurants serving up platters of battered and fried locally-caught fish—typically perch, walleye, or whitefish served with coleslaw and potatoes—can be found all over the area. Check out classic institutions like The Mill Supper Club or Waterfront Mary's in Sturgeon Bay; eat with a view at the Shoreline Restaurant in Gills Rock, or pair your fish with a side of ten-pin and live music at Sister Bay Bowl. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

## San Antonio





BBQ at 2M Smokehouse in San Antonio • Image: Jose N/Tripadvisor

Okay sure, heading to one of our country's hottest states in the middle of summer may seem like a recipe for major sweat, but where else can you find peak versions of two of the most quintessential summer delicacies—barbecue and tacos—all in one city? Plus, San Antonio and its surroundings offer plenty of swimming holes to cool you down post-meal.

For tacos, you must first experience a San Antonio classic: the puffy taco, a paragon of flavor and texture identified by its bubbly fried shell. Ray's Drive Inn is the O.G. and its brother restaurant (literally, the founders are brothers who've operated rival restaurants since the 1970s), Henry's Puffy Tacos, is another local fave. Want a more quintessential take on Michoacan-style pork tacos? Try Carnitas Lonja. And when it comes to barbecue, San Antonio is known for its melt-in-your-mouth brisket and Tex Mex flair—most places serve tortillas alongside the meats. For a classic experience, you can't go wrong with 2M Smokehouse, but newcomers like Curry Boys BBQ (which pairs smoked meats with mouthwatering Southeast Asian curries) and Reese Bros BBQ (with killer Mexican-inspired side dishes like poblano mac and cheese) should not be missed.

## South County, RI





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Oysters at Matunuck Oyster Bar in South County, RI • Image: 4alexny/Tripadvisor

Rhode Island feels like a state designed exclusively for summer. And while heavy hitters like Newport tend to get all the shine, head across the bay to laid-back South County and you'll find all the same seaside delights unfolding at a much more leisurely pace. Technically, South County doesn't really exist—it's the name locals have given to the state's southern coastal region, which is officially called Washington County. But the many excellent restaurants, shops, beaches, and people watching you'll find in this cluster of beachside towns will make cartographic hair-splitting feel irrelevant.

Sustainability meets ambiance at South Kingston's Matunuck Oyster Bar, a sprawling patio restaurant perched on Potter's Pond, where you can stuff yourself with oysters served just about every way an oyster can be and sourced from the aquafarm just below your feet. In Charlestown, The Nordic's upscale all-you-can-eat buffet will have you dining like royalty—lobster and prime rib, anyone?—and if you're looking for a quintessential brunch spot, The Cooked Goose in Westerly (and its famous french toast) is ready to serve. If it's a Saturday and you're all beached out, follow up brunch with an afternoon of lazy beer-sipping at Grey Sail Brewery, or head to local favorite Brickley's for some of the best ice cream in New England.

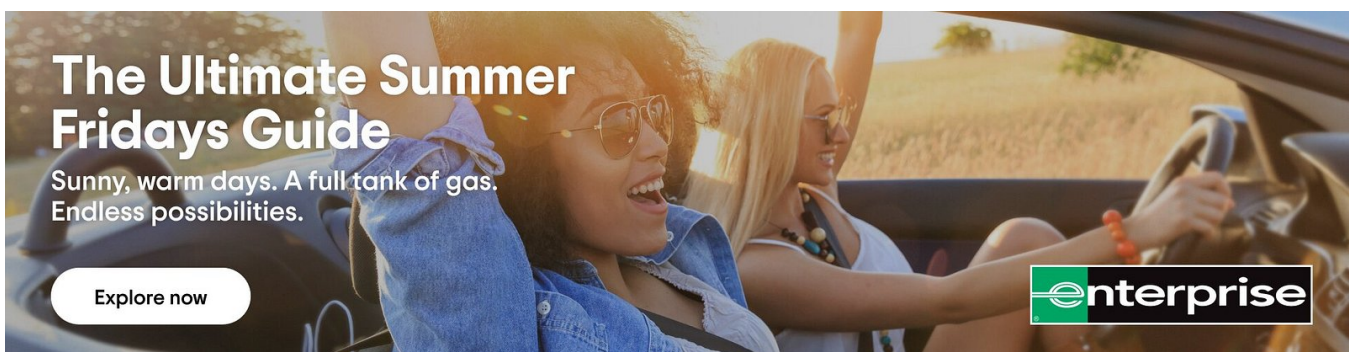
## Hudson, NY





Charcuterie Platter at Talbot & Arding Cheese and Provisions in Hudson, NY • Image: Management/Tripadvisor

For New York City dwellers, the bustling riverside town of Hudson is no secret—but this burgeoning culinary hub deserves global renown. Follow a swim at Lake Taghkanic or a hike in the surrounding Catskills with a stroll around the picture book downtown, where NYC-calibur shopping abounds. Then stuff your face with some of America’s best fried bologna sandwiches at Cafe Mutton or go tropical with [Lil Deb’s](#), where every night’s a party and the ceviche and wine flow free. [The Spotty Dog](#) is the ideal bar-slash-bookstore for whiling away a rainy summer afternoon, and [Kitty’s](#) is the go-to for chicken—roisserie or fried. Want to stock up for a picnic by the river? [Talbot & Arding Cheese and Provisions](#) has you covered.





## Hilary Cadigan

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