

# Mouth-watering New England standards: 6 of our favorite seafood dishes

Each summer, we SouthCoasters look forward to some very specific dishes. Not only do we seek out these dishes, but we look forward to trying them at a few spots for comparison. We love debating friends, family and online pals about who makes the best of our favorites.

How excited do we get when we find out a new restaurant has opened its doors? That we get to immediately search their menu for our favorites? Any foodies knows that you can virtually judge an entire menu on the quality and execution of something simple like a lobster roll, a bowl of chowder, or stuffed quahog. If a cook or chef can't produce a tasty bowl of chowder then it doesn't bode well for the rest of the menu.

Online groups are full of debates about who makes these standards the best, what makes them the best, and why we should travel and try them out. What is not up for debate among serious foodies is our love affair with these dishes, but what is up for debate is who makes the best.

We're not here to declare who makes the best, that's where your voice comes in. I have my opinion, but I'm one person – you are tens of thousands, so you tell us and say it loud enough that there is little debate!

## 1. Clam Cakes



A proverbial favorite, the clam cake, is actually something that can cause confusion to people who are not from the area or haven't visited. I've met people on my travels around the country who haven't the faintest idea what they are. Sadly, because so many people make poor ones and skimp on actually putting clams in the clam cakes, an out-of-stater may still be confused after taking a bite.

According to some recipes in the area, one clam per clam cake is the limit. It's more of a fried dough ball and really doesn't deserve the right to call itself a clam cake.

However when done right – fried to a perfect, crispy, golden brown, filled with a fluffy hot dough center that has clams in every bite – the clam cake deserves respect! Often, served with malted vinegar and/or ketchup, I have come across some who prefer tartar sauce and even some rather fancy dips like a Japanese Kewpie Mayo, Sriracha, even a Shrimp Cocktail sauce. To each their own I guess. Give me malted vinegar, ketchup, and a pint cardboard box and I'm transported back to my childhood. Who makes the best clam cakes? What are they served with?

## 2. Lobster Roll (Chumley's Photo)



Here's an area that is treading dangerous ground. Mess around with someone's choice of a lobster roll and faces turn red and it's construed as fighting words. The only thing we take more serious than our lobster roll is who we feel makes the best. Often this can't even be agreed upon – is it the toasted bun? The dressing or amount of mayo placed on the meat? How much is claw meat and how much is tail meat? Does it come with sides? The other thing that can be agreed upon is price.

I've been to place where they charge you \$19.95 for a toasted bun and lobster. I've been to places that charge you \$12.95 for the same, more meat, and a side of fries. Either way, go on the internet or ask a dozen friends at a get-together who makes the best lobster rolls and you'll get a dozen different answers and likely a heated debate. Who makes the most delicious lobster rolls heaped with lobster meat at a decent price?

### 3. Clam Chowder



Clam chowder is like a minor religion here in Massachusetts and if you dare mention Manhattan chowder, we can't be friends. I don't need that kind of negativity in my life. Clam chowder when done right is made from scratch, is creamy, uses real broth, is creamy, has chunks of potatoes, onions, chock full of rich clams and some type of pork, e.g. salt pork or bacon. When done wrong it's dumped from a can or made from scratch to taste like said brand that everyone knows that comes from a can. Don't do that. Make it yourself or have one of the fantastic eateries across the SouthCoast make it from scratch. Who makes it the best? You at home or does a local restaurant do it best?



## 4. Fried Seafood



This is a broad category, I agree. However, how to we choose and exclude the rest? It would be like choosing a favorite child. Fish & chips, clam plates, fried scallops, a fisherman's platter loaded to the ceiling with fries, a bed of fish filets, covered with shrimp, scallops, whole belly clams, and sided with cole slaw and tartar sauce.

Who doesn't enjoy the guilty pleasure of a great plate of Fish 'n Chips? When I was young and living near the old Kinyon-Campbell I remember the little Fish N Chips spot that used to wrap everything in newspaper and serve it. I believe it was Mitchell's Fish N Chips.

## 5. Clam Boil (Photo by Scoot “Wingman” Williams)



Particularly, the Portuguese clam boil. Not cherrystones or quahogs. It has to be steamers. There has to be corn on the cob, hot dogs, sausages, linguica, and potatoes. For me this is what I had growing up. I know there are variations, but this is what reminds me of childhood and this is what I'd prepare if I was making my own.

Of course, I've seen substitutes or additions of littlenecks, lobsters, fish in wax paper, even shrimp. I'm not here to dare say what is right or wrong, just what is familiar to me. I'd love to hear what is familiar to you and how different it is to mine.



## 6. Stuffed Quahog



You can find stuffed quahogs (and even stuff scallops in some cases) in just about anywhere that serves food on the SouthCoast. You can order them already made at the supermarkets, most bars offer them, friends are capable of cooking some amazing versions, and of course you can find them at restaurants. Like the clam cake, you may be infuriated to order one to find out it's stuffed "bread."

There are a surprising number of variations – hot sauce or no? Dab of butter? Mix linguica into the stuffing? Throw shucked little necks into the stuffing? Make them all spicy? Herbs and spices or just plain bread?

There's something special about a stuffed quahog, dab of butter, some hot sauce and a plastic fork, don't you agree?