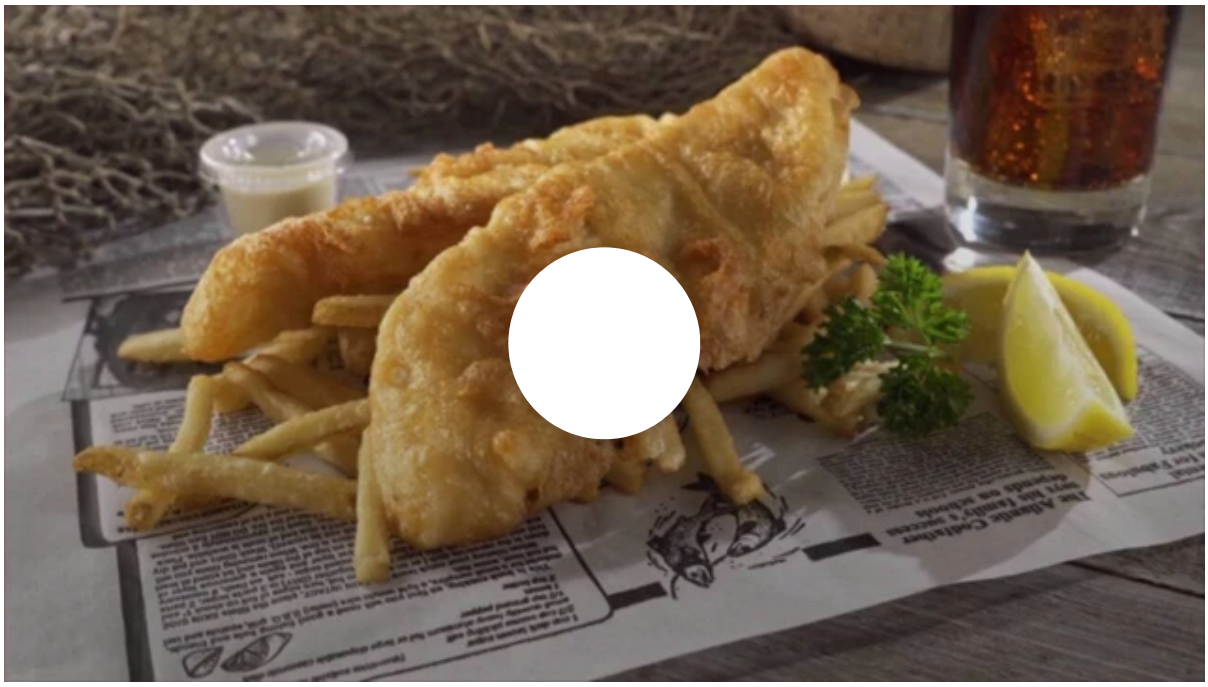
TRAVEL > LOUISIANA

New Orleans Restaurants Band Together to Continue Local Lenten Tradition

The fish fry, a beloved Lent tradition, is usually a community-based event; in a year when many traditions are on hold, New Orleans restaurants are stepping in to fill the gap and raise funds.

By Southern Living Editors | Published on March 19, 2021



For many in New Orleans, spring means Lent and church fish fries: plates of fish, hush puppies, and mac and cheese, picked up on your way home from work. But people are still reluctant to gather amid the pandemic; some churches remain closed; and even if everyone was game, not all communities have the resources to pull it off right now. Thus, Fish Fry Fridays.

usual meal with $1 from each entrée sold benefiting Hospitality Cares, a partnership between the Louisiana Hospitality Foundation and United Way of Southeast Louisiana. Chef Nicole Mills of Peche signed on for a second year, after joining in 2020 when everything first closed. Fish fries, she says, "are simple, but they support the community and let you see your neighbors." In the absence of that option, gathering at a restaurant or picking up some familiar food to go and sharing with family may be the next best thing.

Mills says that the bonus of letting a restaurant do the work is that you get high quality. "We're frying whole fish, which many don't have access to. We know these fishermen who get the really fresh fish from the Gulf," she says. While most church fries feature catfish or something similar, restaurants often go for the wow factor. "We can get snapper, flounder, tilefish," Mills says, adding, "Frying a whole fish at home is a lot."

While a restaurant-made meal might be a splurge, the purveyors do everything they can to respect the fish and make sure nothing is wasted. "We try to use the entire fish," she explains. "We break it all down, even serve the collars. Those make really nice snacks," Mills mentions. They also elevate the typical fish fry to something special. Instead of relying on the usual sides, for example, Pêche serves a kumquat slaw with Meyer lemon aioli, homemade tartar sauce, and potatoes with confit garlic, as well as traditional hush puppies.

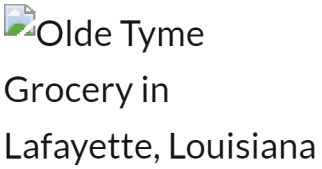
If you are tempted to try your own whole fish fry, Mills has a few suggestions for getting restaurant-level quality. "Some telltale signs are whether the color is vibrant, the eyes are clear, and the gills are dark maroon, not brown," she says. For those accustomed to the aroma of a typical fish counter, she's setting the record straight: "It shouldn't smell like anything but ocean water. If it smells fishy, it's not fresh," she states. And if you can touch the fish, it should feel firm. "If it's been on ice for a while, it's probably gotten soft," she says.

Mills laughs that, while she doesn't often get Fridays off anymore, she happily joined the line at their local parish church or participated in a crawfish boil back in the days when she spent Friday nights with family. "We like to put as much as we can on it," she shares. "Onions, celery, garlic, lots of citrus—oranges, lemons—and lemongrass, which makes it really fragrant. And, obviously, a lot of salt."

The taste of home is always special but putting a new twist on a cherished tradition can help navigate this year's challenges and make them all the sweeter in the future.

Was this page helpful?

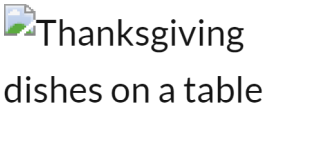
Related Articles



LOUISIANA

Fried Crawfish Po'Boys Are a Lenten Tradition at Louisiana's Olde Tyme Grocery

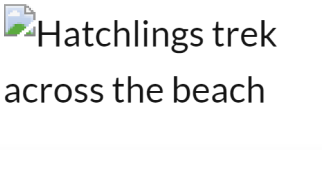
By Betsy Cribb



THANKSGIVING

The Family Thanksgiving Traditions Our Editors Cherish

By Hallie Milstein



ANIMALS AND WILDLIFE

A Passionate Community of Activists, Scientists, and Volunteers Are Devoted To Saving Florida's Sea



BISCUITS AND JAM PODCAST

Parker Millsap's Chicken Fried Steak

By Southern Living Editors



BISCUITS AND JAM PODCAST

Mary Gauthier's Jalapeno Cornbread

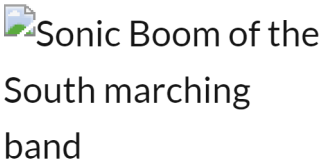
By Sid Evans



HOLIDAYS & OCCASIONS

The Meaning of Watch Night

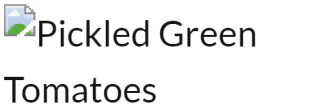
By Safiya Charles



MISSISSIPPI

Experience the Remarkable Spirit of Jackson, Mississippi

By Tara Massouleh McCay



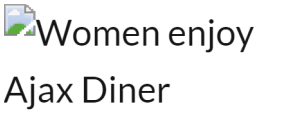
FOOD AND RECIPES

15 Food Trends Southern Chefs are Looking Forward to in 2021

By Kelsey Ogletree



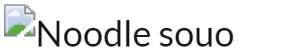
By Southern Living Editors



TRAVEL

Why Lunch at Your Local Meat 'N' Three Is Always Worth the Long Line

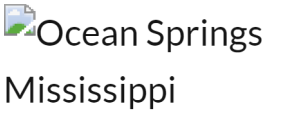
By Rick Bragg



GEORGIA

Your Guide to Atlanta's Buford Highway

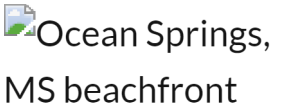
By Mike Jordan



TRAVEL

15 Affordable Small Towns We Love

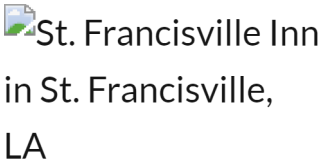
By Perri Ormont Blumberg



MISSISSIPPI

Coastal Mississippi Is Back–And Now's The Time To Visit These Beautiful Towns

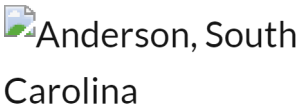
By Valerie Fraser Luesse



LOUISIANA

Spend a Long Weekend in St. Francisville, Louisiana

By Jeanne Lyons Davis



SOUTH CAROLINA

8 Things to Do in the Charming Town of Anderson, South Carolina

By Tara Massouleh McCay



Your Wish List
By Kaitlyn Yarborough

Southern Living

NEWSLETTER



Follow Us

About Us
Subscribe
Editorial Guidelines
Diversity and Inclusion Pledge
Privacy Policy
Content Licensing
Terms of Use
Accolades
Advertise
Careers
Do Not Sell My Personal Information
Contact Us



Southern Living is part of the Dotdash Meredith publishing family.

We've updated our Privacy Policy, which will go in to effect on September 1, 2022. Review our Privacy Policy