



Fishing for the Best

Gulf Coast Is Home to “Royal” Seafood Chefs Who Reign Supreme in the Kitchen

October is National Seafood Month and since MBPR represents several destinations throughout the Gulf Coast, we pride ourselves in knowing a thing or two about great seafood. Though residents in coastal Alabama and Louisiana can enjoy fresh Gulf seafood every day, Seafood Month provides an opportunity to share the bounty with the world. As a bonus, every destination we represent has at least one seafood “royal” serving up some of the best seafood you’ll ever eat.

Seafood “royalty” are individuals who have made significant contributions to their local seafood industry, put their skills and knowledge to test in a culinary competition, and walked away with a literal crown. These chefs are respected leaders within their communities and are full of passion for seafood and its role in their region’s culture. Who are these royals? We’re so glad you asked! We’ve rounded them up in an e-fish-cient list that includes details about some of their favorite catches of the day so we can get your tummies rumbling in advance of National Seafood Month.

Chef Amanda Cusey

The Terrace in [Lake Charles, Louisiana](#)

Favorite Seafood Dish to Make: Fish and Grits

Though she grew up in the southwest United States, Chef Amanda trained and worked extensively in Europe during her culinary journey. She received her Cordon Bleu training in Surrey, England, and worked in restaurants across England and Ireland – perhaps most notably serving as head chef for a Michelin Star chef’s pop-up restaurant in Dublin – before setting down roots in Lake Charles. Her international experience shines through at The Terrace, where Italian influence meets Louisiana flavors. In June 2022, she helped break glass ceilings as she was named the Queen of Louisiana Seafood – only the second ever in the 15-year history of the Louisiana Seafood Cook-Off. Her winning dish? Pan-seared red drum over tomato polenta with a crawfish cream sauce.



Photo Credit: Lake Area Adventures

Chef Jim Smith

[The Hummingbird Way Oyster Bar in Mobile, Alabama](#)

Favorite Seafood Dish to Make: Oysters – in any style!

Though he's famous for his delicious Lane Cake, the state dessert of Alabama, Chef Jim is also known for being a voice for sustainable and local food education. When he served as Executive Chef for the State of Alabama, he focused on sourcing local Alabama ingredients and supporting farmers and fishermen. In 2011, Chef Jim was dubbed King of American Seafood and traveled the country introducing people to the world of sustainable seafood. He has continued his advocacy efforts as he's moved forward in his career ... and that included representing the U.S. Seafood Industry in this year's *National Geographic Traveller Food Festival* in London and appearances in multiple seasons of "Top Chef." Now he's the executive chef at Hummingbird Way, sharing his love for local seafood with every diner who walks through his doors. Prior to 2023, he was the only Alabama chef who had ever taken home the crown of King of American Seafood, which leads us to our next chef ...



Photo Credit: Visit Mobile

Chef Brody Olive

[Voyagers in Orange Beach, Alabama](#)

Favorite Seafood Dish to Make: Tiradito (Peruvian take on sashimi with citrus sauce)

Home to the National Shrimp Festival, Experience the Oyster seafood festival, and other notable seafood events, the twin beach cities of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach, Alabama, are certainly the place to be if you want to find some of the best seafood along the Gulf Coast. With more than 20 years working in the seafood industry, Alabama native Chef Brody has definitely made his culinary mark. He continues to impress diners across the five restaurants and banquet facilities he oversees at the Perdido Beach Resort. He embraces the culinary ways of the Gulf Coast, putting the freshest and best locally sourced ingredients on every plate. Besides the numerous Chef and Restaurateur of the Year awards he has earned throughout his career, Chef Brody is now the newest "royal" in our roundup. In August, he was crowned King of American Seafood in the Great American Seafood Cook-Off, bringing the title back home to Alabama for the first time since 2011, when Chef Jim Smith (above) earned the honor. With saltwater catfish, mole crabs and Gulf shrimp in his winning dish, how could he not wow the judges?



Photo Credit: Perdido Beach Resort

Chef Nathan Richard

Adjunct Professor at [Chef John Folse Culinary Institute](#) in [Thibodaux, Louisiana](#)

Favorite Seafood Dish to Make: Seafood Stuffed Flounder

Besides the crown he received for becoming the Great American Seafood King in 2019, Chef Nathan wears many hats, including professor, private catering business owner and volunteer firefighter ... which means he knows how to (safely) turn up the heat in the kitchen! Though he moved to Europe to cook in France and Italy after Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, Louisiana remained in his heart. Chef Nathan returned to work at restaurants throughout the American South and settled back in Thibodaux, Louisiana, a few years ago, ready to embrace the Cajun lifestyle once more. When you're surrounded by the pantry of fresh ingredients that the bayous of Louisiana provide, it only makes sense to cook what you know. Chef Nathan's winning cook-off dish was a crawfish and goat cheese king cake, complete with Cajun caviar.



Photo Credit: Nathan Richard

Chefs Keith and Nealy Frentz

[LOLA](#) in [Covington, Louisiana](#)

Favorite Seafood Dish to Make: Louisiana Seafood Gumbo and Pan-Fried Speckled Trout with Capers and Lemon

Chefs Keith and Nealy, a husband-and-wife team, were forced out of New Orleans in 2005, when Hurricane Katrina hit, and came to settle in the nearby Northshore. Though they'd both held prestigious restaurant chef positions, they had always dreamed of owning their own restaurant. Thus, LOLA was born. Housed in a historic train depot with the restaurant kitchen tucked away in a caboose, this unique dining establishment keeps it local with fresh ingredients sourced from local farmers and seafood suppliers. In 2012, the pair was proclaimed King and Queen of Louisiana Seafood. A year later, Chef Nealy placed second in the popular cooking show "Chopped." The couple has continued to represent St. Tammany Parish and Louisiana seafood in both their culinary travel and work at LOLA.



Photo Credit: Visit The Northshore

Chef Tommy Cvitanovich

Owner of [Drago's Seafood Restaurant](#) in [Metairie, Louisiana](#)

Favorite Seafood Dish to Make: Charbroiled Oysters

Chef Tommy has made a name for himself throughout the entire seafood industry. He's credited with inventing the charbroiled oyster, which is proudly served at his restaurant and which made thousands of people happy when Drago's shipped the delicacies all across the country during the pandemic. Chef Tommy spent more than a decade serving on the Louisiana Seafood Promotion Board and now he travels across the country on behalf of restaurants and seafood industries, doing speaking engagements and radio and television appearances. He has accepted numerous awards and recognitions and was one of the judges in the Louisiana Seafood Competition in 2019, when Chef Nathan Richard (above) was crowned King of Louisiana Seafood. Though Chef Tommy doesn't hold any official royal titles, throughout the Gulf Coast he's considered the unofficial king of oysters ... and that makes him plenty royal in our eyes)!

If you've got a hankering for Gulf Coast seafood now, we completely understand. Want to try some in person? Let *minnow* and we'll see what we can do!

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