



Local News

Cajun power lunch

Leave the crowds behind and head outside Lafayette for tasty lunch menus in smaller Acadiana towns

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Having lunch in Acadiana is a real treat. It seems like every time I dive into a plate lunch special, seafood of the season and someone's homemade bread pudding, I feel sorry for the rest of the nation.

And I have to ask all those people clogging up Johnston at lunchtime heading for the vast array of fast food: Are you crazy?

Being that it was spring break and my kids were home and bored (always a good excuse), I spent a couple of days enjoying a drive, the great weather and some authentic Cajun cooking at Shucks! The Louisiana Seafood House in Abbeville and Paul's Pirogue in Carencro.



Paul's Pirogue in Carencro is a great, quick stop for lunch outside Lafayette. File photo

Shucks! has been an Abbeville institution since 1995, but last August, David Bertrand and Bert J. Istre took over its ownership. The recipes remain, as do the staff members who have been working there 25-plus years, and the chef more than 30. In the back, shuckers still shuck oysters.

The menu features a wide range of great seafood, from oysters on the halfshell to plate dinners and sandwiches. The stuffed oysters, for instance, are oysters surrounded by a delightfully spiced breading that's cooked to a nice crisp and served with salad and fries. The shrimp loaf serves up jumbo breaded and fried shrimp with lettuce and tomatoes on soft loaves of bread. Pan-sautéed crawfish top a salad where the spice from the cooked crawfish accent the whole meal and complement the peppercorn Parmesan dressing I chose.

Those kids I mentioned preferred chicken fingers and onion rings, but even the standard food one might order in Anywhere USA arrived crispy, moist and full of flavor. The onion rings were huge, graced with a hint of spice and only fried slightly so as to not be too greasy. Best children's meal I've ever tasted.

Shucks! advertises some wonderful alcoholic beverages, but I didn't get the chance to try some (Dang, those kids!). I'm eager to return to sample a few, not to mention try the many dinner entrées that looked so appealing.

Paul's, with its pirogues hanging overhead and politician posters lining the bar, makes for a great lunch spot, in addition to being a wonderful place to take visitors. On the day we visited, two strapping men from Texas waltzed through the door saying they'd heard it was the best Cajun food around.

The chicken and andouille gumbo arrives so dark, it's hard to see the meat, and it comes accompanied by a plate full of rice, French bread and creamy potato salad. Paul's also offers a



seafood gumbo, crawfish bisque and corn and crab bisque. But for something unique, try the green gumbo made from greens.

Paul's serves up all kinds of Cajun specialties, from fried catfish, stuffed shrimp and topless oysters to étouffée and boiled crawfish. Specials are available daily and the time we visited, we sampled some tasty fried alligator served with salad and fries as the plate lunch du jour.

Be sure and end the meal with gateaux sirop, a traditional Cajun cake made with cane syrup and topped with vanilla ice cream. It's a special dish you can't find outside of Acadiana.

Shucks! is open for lunch and dinner, but closed on Sundays. Paul's is open for lunch and dinner daily.

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