



VISIT  
*Myrtle Beach*  
SOUTH CAROLINA

## Coastal Culinary Delights

### [Endless Array of Lowcountry Dishes](#)

Travelers around the world journey near and far to discover new flavors and the types of tastes that make lasting vacation memories. Visitors to the Myrtle Beach area will not be disappointed with the various styles of strikingly delicious dishes that make up the area. From fresh local seafood to rice and grits, sweet potatoes to peaches, Myrtle Beach is a foodie's paradise.

At the northern end of the Grand Strand, North Carolina-style Calabash reigns supreme, with its traditional lightly breaded, fried seafood meals. Calabash buffets – the most famous being the Original Benjamin's Calabash Seafood – line Highway 17 and offer guests hundreds of delicious options to choose from, including deviled crab, flounder and black bass. With wallet-friendly prices, Calabash has remained a steadfast cooking style since the Myrtle Beach area became a vacation resort in the mid-Twentieth century.

Venture further south and travelers will find themselves in the heart of the Lowcountry, where chefs utilize local ingredients such as Carolina rice, stone-ground grits, shrimp, blue crab, grouper and country ham, in traditional recipes handed down from the Gullah community of the southeastern coastal states. Today, young professional chefs in the Myrtle Beach area are taking this culinary genre to a new level with innovative interpretations of those traditional dishes. Dubbed "Carolina Coastal" chefs, they are using locally sourced ingredients, sustainable meat, fish and seafood, as well as regionally grown produce to enhance the taste and quality of cuisine. One of the most interesting spots to experience this style of cooking is in the community of Murrells Inlet – the seafood capital of South Carolina – where a slew of restaurants sit along the picturesque Murrells Inlet Marshwalk, offering a range of flavors for every taste and wallet.

### [Murrells Inlet Marshwalk](#)

When people think of great seafood along the Grand Strand, the Murrells Inlet Marshwalk often comes to mind. Visitors can enjoy a stroll along the area's magnificent waterway before settling in for a meal in what has been dubbed the "Seafood Capital of South Carolina." There are eight renowned eateries sure to give your taste buds a serious wakeup call: The Claw House, Drunken Jack's, Creek Ratz, Dead Dog Saloon and Wicked Tuna. Enjoy everything these dining wonders have to offer, from burgers and fries to fresh seafood, wood-fired pizzas and delicious steaks.

### [The International Culinary Institute of Myrtle Beach at Horry Georgetown Technical College](#)

The International Culinary Institute of Myrtle Beach at Horry Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) plays host to a beautiful space at the college's Grand Strand Campus at the Market Common. The Institute includes an

outdoor barbeque cooking and demonstration center, bakery and patisserie laboratories, a nutrition lab, production and training kitchens, a greenhouse, wine cellar, beverage bar, chef's bar and chef's table, as well as an amphitheater with staging area for guest chefs to teach, offer cooking classes to the general public with broadcast capabilities for local television stations. The facility, which opened in 2016, brought significant growth to International Culinary Institute, growing from approximately 170 students to more than 400, in addition to offering culinary classes for the general public and visitors. Ranging from barbeque skills to chocolate making, beer pairing to children's workshops, there is a class that will fit any level of skill, interest and palate.

## COASTAL CAROLINA CHEFS



### **Chef Casey Blake, Chef, [Drunken Jack's \(Murrells Inlet\)](#)**

When Ervin Casey Blake II was 13, he wanted a restaurant job so much he lied about his age. Today, he has achieved executive chef status next door to his original place of employment. The son of Ervin Sr. and Phyllis Blake was raised in Pawleys Island, the youngest of three children. He remembers both of his parents cooking a lot – soul food like fried chicken, collard greens and macaroni and cheese. His first turn at the stove was at age 10, making scrambled eggs. Just three years later the young man got a job bussing tables and washing dishes at Capt. Dave's Dockside Restaurant, and a year after that he was promoted to breading fried foods. By age 15, he was on the line, grilling and sautéing. The future chef graduated from Georgetown High School in 1992 and attended classes in the culinary arts program at Horry-Georgetown Technical College in '93. Early that spring, he moved next-door from Dave's Dockside to Drunken Jack's as a line cook. Just three years later he was executive chef, a job he still enjoys. Chef Blake has received local recognition from winning 1st place in several community competitions such as Trio Dinner, Taste of the Inlet, and ACF's Souper Supper. Someday he'd like to have his own restaurant.



### **Chef Corey Johnson - Executive Chef, [21 Main](#)**

Chef Corey Johnson started his education at Francis Tuttle in Oklahoma City. After graduation he began his career as a Pastry chef with Bon Appetite, also in Oklahoma City. It was important for Chef Johnson to learn all aspects of the restaurant industry to better his growing career. He took positions as a Sous Chef, Bar Manager and Kitchen Manager at various restaurants including Bellini's and Sky Bar. Chef Johnson is a family man with a beautiful wife and two kids, and is very close with his extended family. This being said he followed his in-laws, who are in the oil industry, to Kentucky where he became the executive chef to one of Kentucky's elite golf courses. Luckily, Chef Johnson also followed his family to South Carolina where he worked for such restaurants as Umi Pacific, Devine Dining Brightwater and City Bar, gaining an amazing amount of management experience. His love for cooking brought him to 21 Main at North Beach; he wanted to get back to "the kitchen" and came on staff as a Line Cook in 2011 quickly working his way up to Sous Chef. Chef Johnson is now the Executive Chef at 21 Main at North Beach and has several award winning dishes on his menu including; the Lobster Bisque, St. Louis Style Pork Rib Appetizer, Lobster infused macaroni and cheese, and Prime NY Strip.

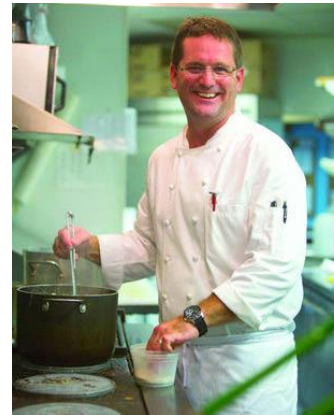


**Joseph Bonaparte, Executive Director, [The International Culinary Institute of Myrtle Beach, Horry Georgetown Technical College](#)**

Originally from Hackensack, New Jersey, Chef Bonaparte began cooking as a child alongside his mother. Coming from a large Italian family, he has fond memories of making homemade pasta in his home kitchen. Chef Bonaparte received both a Bachelor's and Master's degree in hospitality from the University of Houston in Texas. With his well-rounded background, many years of experience and constant thirst to learn cutting edge practices in the industry, he is a great asset to the HGTC program. His educational philosophy is hands-on, focused and centered on helping students truly learn the art of cooking. Under Chef Bonaparte's instruction students in the [Culinary Arts programs](#) train in real restaurant settings at [The Fowler Dining Room](#) and [The Beach Bistro](#) located on the College's Conway & Grand Strand Campuses. Students train in areas such as fine dining, buffet, and café service. Menus are created using a variety of cooking techniques focusing on taste, texture, color and creativity. The restaurants are open to the public.

**Chef Andrew Fortner, Executive Chef, [Croissants Bistro and Bakery](#)**

Chef Fortner moved to Myrtle Beach in 1992 from Richmond, Va., to study marine science at Coastal Carolina University. While he was at Coastal, he got a job at a local restaurant to earn money while he was studying. His part-time job turned into a passion for cooking which he pursued by enrolling in the culinary program at Horry Georgetown Technical College. Since completing the program, Chef Fortner has worked at other local restaurants, including a stint at the Sea Captain's House as its executive chef. He has also received numerous awards for his style and attention to detail; he was the first place winner at the 2015 Trio Dinner. Chef Fortner joined the team at Croissants in 2014, where he puts his own touch on the classic Southern and elegant French cuisine the bistro offers.



**Heidi Vukov, Pastry Chef and Owner, [Croissants Bistro and Bakery](#) and [Hook & Barrel](#)**

Chef Vukov moved to Myrtle Beach from Pennsylvania in the early 90s, and opened Croissants Bistro & Bakery in 1995, which quickly gained a loyal following because of its perfect lunchtime atmosphere and divine baked goods. Her love of food began with many hours spent in her grandmother's kitchen in Germany, where European bakeries inspired her love for cooking. Chef Vukov and Croissants are the recipients of numerous awards, including the 2011 South Carolina Restaurateur of the Year. Most recently, Chef Vukov wrote her first cookbook, "Bonjour, Y'all," which features European dishes meshed with good old Southern cooking. She is the first in the Myrtle Beach area to release a cookbook. She opened Hook & Barrel, an establishment focused on sustainable seafood in 2017, and in 2018, Chef Vukov was also named a South Carolina Chef

Ambassador.



**Chef Dylan Foster, Executive Chef, [Wicked Tuna](#)**

A Maryland native, Chef Foster is accustomed to fresh seafood. Prior to joining the team at Wicked Tuna in Murrells Inlet, where he is now the head chef and corporate executive sous chef, Chef Foster attended culinary school and worked at Enzo in Charlotte, NC. Before entering the classroom, Foster was teaching one. He left a career as an elementary school teacher to enter the culinary industry, following a love for cooking that started with cook-offs between him and his dad when he was a child. That passion continued to develop while attending the University of Maryland, where he became the official chef for all of his fraternity's cookouts. Mr. Foster, Chef Foster's father, also works at Wicked Tuna, where he helps manage the restaurant and fresh fish facility in the bottom of the building.



**Chef Shawn Dudley, Executive Chef, [Thoroughbred's Chophouse & Seafood Grille](#)**

Born in the Washington D.C. area, Chef Dudley has called the Myrtle Beach area home for over 20 years. He received his Associate's Degree in culinary arts from Horry Georgetown Technical College, and has been with Thoroughbred's for over 15 years, currently as their executive chef. Chef Dudley has enjoyed cooking as long as he can remember. His style rests in putting a little Southern spin on a variety of foods he prepares. Since joining Thoroughbred's, Chef Dudley and the restaurant have received numerous awards recognizing the delicious cuisine.



**Chef Kevin Luque, Executive Chef, [Cafe Amalfi at Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort](#)**

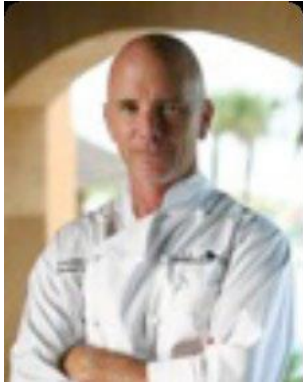
Chef Luque has been cooking since age 16, and counts seafood as his favorite to work with. For all of his dishes, Chef Luque's goal is to create a fusion of flavors with which to dazzle the diner. Countless awards, such as being named the best seafood chef in South Carolina in 2012, prove that his passion comes through in his food. When he is not cooking for customers, he is cooking for those less fortunate. Each December, he is one of many who participate with Feed A Family, a non-profit organization that provides food to hungry families during the holiday season. Combining outside influences with the variety of fresh ingredients available in the Myrtle Beach area, Chef Luque is truly transforming local fare

along the Grand Strand.



**Chef John Leighty, Executive Chef, [Tupelo Honey Cafe](#)**

Originally from Atlanta, Chef Leighty spent some time in Tennessee with his wife, but decided to seek new opportunities back in Myrtle Beach following a stint at the former Tommy Bahama. When Tupelo Honey Café opened in The Market Common in that restaurant's prior location, it was an ideal fit. Chef Leighty's desire to use fresh local ingredients aligned with Tupelo Honey's concept for the restaurant, leading to a match made in heaven. He has spent over 23 years in the industry, beginning with a family restaurant called the Beaver House. Here, he discovered his passion for cooking. Chef Leighty enjoys putting his personal stamp on classic Southern dishes, and tying dishes together through the use of sauces.



**Chef Michael McKinnon, Executive Chef, [Cypress Room](#)**

Chef McKinnon, a native of Myrtle Beach, began working in restaurant kitchens at the age of twelve, helping out in his father's restaurant, the Kings 17. He landed his first Executive Chef position in 1988 with the Sea Island Inn, acquiring a lot of hands-on experience, and eventually earning a degree in Culinary Arts from Horry Georgetown Tech. He went on to win numerous awards at the Taste of the Tidlands before proceeding to work in some of Myrtle Beach's finest restaurants, like The Grande Dunes Ocean Club and the Carriage House Club. He is a very tenacious and energetic chef, whose style is French-inspired New American Cuisine with a devotion to using the best fresh ingredients, and implementing a simplistic, stylish technique with dynamic presentations. His goal at The Cypress Room is to provide memorable dining experiences through passionately created culinary dishes.



**Chef Curry Martin, Executive Chef and Owner, [Aspen Grille](#)**

Born and raised in the South, Chef Martin has always had an appreciation for good food served in a comfortable atmosphere. Chef Martin entered the culinary arts program at Johnson and Wales University in 1994, and interned at The Cloister at Sea Island while in school. Following graduation in 1996, he launched his culinary career at Noble's Restaurants in the Triad area of North Carolina. At Noble's, Martin focused on keeping flavors of foods as natural as possible, using simple, yet the highest quality product available. In 1997, Chef Martin moved west to work at the Domaine Chandon Winery restaurant and Beringer Winery's Hudson House in Napa Valley. He returned to Noble's as Sous Chef in 1998, and assisted in relocating the flagship Restaurant J. Basul Noble in High Point, NC. In 2000, Chef Martin traveled to France where he apprenticed with Restaurant Pierre Orsi in Lyon and Restaurant Michel Rostang in Paris. Upon returning from France, he joined Sonoma Bistro in

Charlotte as Sous Chef, and then entered the wine business as an account manager for Prestige Wines. In June 2009, Chef Martin purchased the Aspen Grille and moved with his family to Myrtle Beach. He has slowly adapted the menu to focus on the highest quality ingredients, prepared with care, and balanced flavors. His passion lies in creating the overall dining experience, where people can enjoy good food and good service in a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere.

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For additional information on the Myrtle Beach Area, visit [www.VisitMyrtleBeach.com](http://www.VisitMyrtleBeach.com).