

FOOD & WINE

America's Last Remaining Fishing Villages Are Still Holding the Line

In these nostalgic seafood destinations, the best meals still come with a story, a tide chart, and a dock nearby.



Credit: Courtesy of Bradenton Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

Some of the best meals of my life have happened within an hour of the water, still in a swimsuit. I grew up eating [lobster in Maine](#), cracking claws at long summer tables, and ice fishing with my grandfather, pulling perch through a hole in a frozen Vermont lake and cooking it for breakfast before the world had fully woken up.

The first time I went scalloping was in college, in Steinhatchee, a small fishing town on Florida's Gulf Coast, where every July the grass flats fill with bay scallops and half the town disappears into the water. You wade out with a mesh bag and snorkel mask, face down in the seagrass, scanning for the telltale electric-blue eyes. When you find one, you reach down and grab it. You fill your bag, come back to shore, and crack them open on the dock – raw or quickly sautéed in butter in a cast-iron pan. Briny, sweet, and somehow better because you caught them. I've been chasing that feeling ever since.

I found it again at a raw bar in Apalachicola, where [Gulf oysters](#) rise from the estuary so cold and clean they need nothing more than lemon. I found it in Goodland, cracking stone crab claws at a picnic table while a brown pelican worked the dock pilings. I find it every time I stumble into one of the last places in this country where fishing still shapes daily life.

Those places are getting harder to find. Commercial fishing in the United States has consolidated into industrial operations, and the independent fisherman working a wooden boat out of a village harbor has become a vanishing figure. Along the lesser-traveled roads of coastal America – on a canal in northern Michigan, in a Florida backcountry river town, on an island off the Maine coast – a few fishing villages have held on. These are the ones to visit for that feeling – and where to eat when you get there.



Credit: Courtesy of Crystal Coast Tourism Authority

Part of the rugged Down East region of North Carolina's central coast, Harkers Island remains deeply connected to its maritime roots.

Descendants of the "Bankers" who relocated here from nearby Shackleford Banks in the late 1800s still call the island home, and some continue to speak the distinctive High Tider brogue, a dialect so unique it has attracted the attention of linguists. Across the sound, the Cape Lookout Lighthouse stands watch over waters that continue to sustain the community through fishing, oystering, and scalloping.

What to eat: Down East clam chowder is the signature dish here – a clear, briny broth that lets locally harvested clams shine. Fresh shrimp, wild oysters, and sweet bay scallops, available during their short season (January to March), reflect the bounty of the surrounding sounds and grass flats.

Where to go: [Fish Hook Grill](#) and [Seaside Galley](#) serve the seafood traditions of the island without fuss, from chowder made with the day's catch to classic shrimp burgers. For a deeper understanding of local culture, visit the [Core Sound Waterfowl Museum](#), where hand-carved decoys tell the story of a hunting tradition that evolved into one of the South's most celebrated folk arts.