



Bluecoast Bethany's back deck

Delaware's Culinary Coast™

A mid-Atlantic culinary hub, perfect for savory escapes

BY TINA COLEMAN

SOUTHERN DELAWARE has developed into a mecca for foodies and drinks enthusiasts. In fact, Sussex County is widely recognized as the Culinary Coast™ thanks to its incredible concentration of top notch, James Beard-nominated and award-winning chefs and dining establishments, its abundance of popular wineries, breweries, and distilleries, and the wide variety of local producers who ensure that all of them are working with the freshest possible ingredients.

While it appears to visiting beachgoers that Sussex County's number one industry is sunshine and surf, in reality agriculture is the county's biggest economic driver and a force behind the emergence of the area as a popular

culinary destination. Most visitors to Southern Delaware have traveled farther than the food they are served during a stay.

And thanks to local agriculture, we enjoy a thriving, nationally recognized farmers market culture with active participation from our restaurants and many local specialty producers. At least one farmers market takes place nearly every day of the week in season. Sussex County is also home to a thriving aquaculture community, which ensures local restaurants serve up delicious oysters grown in Southern Delaware's own back bays.

Sussex County has many farms that welcome visitors and sell their own home-grown products. Visitors can check out wineries, visit a lavender farm,



Left: Local brews from Crooked Hammock Brewery in Lewes. Below: A seafood tower from Chesapeake and Maine in Rehoboth Beach

and enjoy ice cream on the dairy farm where it is produced. They can pick their own peaches, blueberries, strawberries, and more when visiting local farms and nurseries.

Additionally, Southern Delaware Tourism's (SDT) Local on the Menu initiative pairs local farmers and producers with area restaurants that display the logo on their menus to let guests know their ingredients are the freshest, tastiest ingredients available. SDT is also developing a self-guided road trip itinerary designed to encourage visitors to experience feasts of hyperlocal Southern Delaware foodie favorites in our seaside and riverside villages and rural small towns.

The county is home to two wineries, multiple breweries and distilleries, and a meadery. Milton is home base for nationally known Dogfish Head Craft Brewery. Wine tastings, winery, brewery, and distillery tours, and cooking classes offered by award-winning chefs from several popular dining establishments are must-dos for locals and visitors alike, as are walking food tours.

It's thanks to the creativity, vision, hard work, and collaborative spirit of local restaurateurs, chefs, brewers, winemakers, distillers, and producers here that the Culinary Coast™ thrives as a wildly popular Mid-Atlantic culinary hub all year round.

Last year, Southern Delaware's tourism industry was hit hard when COVID-19 emerged. Tourism employs nearly 20,000 people in Sussex County alone – 16.5% of all jobs in the county – many of those jobs in food service. Those in the industry rallied to take care of their own. Local residents and regular visitors contributed by purchasing gift certificates, ordering curbside and takeout meals, and donating to funds set up to help displaced workers.

As things began slowly reopening, restaurateurs did everything they could within the restrictions to safely provide the dining experiences and level of service their patrons have come to expect. They offered creative solutions including outdoor dining, curbside pickup, delivery, virtual tastings, virtual dinners, virtual chef demos and videos, and more.



Equally important, Southern Delaware's tourism businesses as a whole – accommodations, outfitters, restaurants, retail shops, arts and entertainment venues, attractions and amusements, historical sites, tour operators, and other local businesses – and the communities they occupy, recognized early on the importance of making Southern Delaware a safe place for visitors to stay and enjoy with confidence. They quickly implemented all necessary safety measures and then collaborated with each other and Southern Delaware Tourism to communicate the steps they had taken to potential visitors.

No question, 2020 was a tough year, but all the elements that make the Southern Delaware culinary scene so incredibly special are thriving, travel is picking up again, and 2021 along the Culinary Coast™ is shaping up to be delicious. For more information about Southern Delaware's Culinary Coast™ visit www.visitsoutherndelaware.com. ■



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