

St. Augustine's Colonial Quarter: Capturing the art of history



Leigh Cort/Special to The Recorder

The Colonial Quarter in St. Augustine offers an inspiring walkway into history.

Leigh Cort Columnist

Layers of history unfolded around me as I entered the Colonial Quarter in historic St. Augustine, a captivating living history journey through centuries of British and Spanish occupation. It opened March 16 and I experienced more sensory moments in three hours than I could have imagined.

It's brilliantly designed and orchestrated on two acres of hallowed



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Table Talk
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property accessible from famous St. George Street and the Avenida Menendez (on the bayfront). Searching for the main entrance at #33 Saint George, I was lured into one of the Colonial Quarter's two

restaurants — The Bull and Crown Publick House with a warm welcome from the staff.

It was mid-morning and the buzz of costumed interpreters was everywhere throughout the various "centuries." Once I began to tour the cleverly designed villages, artisan shops, gardens, replicated buildings from yesteryear and watchtower, history unfolded neatly and charmingly. Well educated historic characters toured with visitors

and explained their stories while the puzzle of St. Augustine's early lineage took on a colorful and expertly crafted tale.

Upon entering the expansive "village," it's suggested that you allow one of the interpreters to present you with a colorful map that depicts the following four towns: 18th Century Spanish Garrison Town, 18th Century British

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14th Colony, 16th Century Spanish First City and 17th Century Spanish Fortified Town.

Each of the centuries and occupations contributed to the evolution of St. Augustine. Here at the Colonial Quarter, they make it easy to understand — even if you're not a history maven. In fact, the easy-to-navigate coquina pathways (for pedestrians and wheelchair access) are fabulously fun with signage

everywhere. Bilingual is the password and every word that is read throughout the village is vetted by scholars from the University of Florida. The printed interpretations are in English and Spanish — easy, quick reads that tell the story to visitors of all ages. Once you walk under the representative flags that have flown over St. Augustine since the mid 1600s, you begin to feel the magnitude of one of the “New World’s” greatest stories ever told.

Whether you choose to take part in

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Oysters on crostini at the Bull & Crown Publick House

Jay Greene
Provided by
Leigh Cort

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Jay Greene/Provided by Leigh Cort

The ultimate Bloody Mary at La Taberna del Caballo

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a musket drill, climb to the top of a 17th century watchtower replica, dig in the sand for an archeological “treasure” or join the Colonial Crew Revue for an evening of historical entertainment, you will definitely want to dine either in La Taberna del Caballo (authentic Spanish restaurant for outdoor or indoor dining) or Bull & Crown Publick House (replicated 18th-century British pub and eatery).

Both casual menus have been developed to enliven your palate with dishes that enhance your experience. All cooking is done in ovens and

panini presses — no fryers! Ambience is enchanting in both eateries so donning a server’s outfit crossed my mind numerous times. They’re very professional and obviously having a great time serving guests.

Bloody Mary fans, begin lunch or dinner at La Taberna (no electricity here — all candlelight) with bartender Alessandro’s outrageous presentation garnished with hand-stuffed cheese olive, pickled okra, fresh tomato, celery and thick-cut crispy bacon. Warning: You might not have an appetite for the meal afterward because the rich concoction is topped off with a coarse salted rim!

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The Colonial Quarter offers a watchtower for that private little Dinner for Four!

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The Spiced Clams/Almejas Sazonadas (\$9.95) are piled into a small basket seasoned with chopped onions, celery, garlic, white wine and turmeric.

Watching your diet is easy with this dish — it leaves room for a yummy panini. Choose the Cuban/Emparedado Cubano (\$9.95). Ham, roasted marinated pork, Swiss cheese, tomatoes, shredded lettuce, mayo and mustard are pressed in a crispy buttered Cuban bread. All dishes are served in dispos-

able tableware, making your outdoor meal a SUPER casual affair. Even in the evening with candlelight, the tempo doesn't change. You can relax for an hour or catch a quick meal and explore the Village. Flatbreads, salads,

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Armadero (two gunsmiths)

Colonial Quarter

**33 St. George St., St. Augustine
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www.ColonialQuarter.com

- The Colonial Quarter was launched by businessman Pat Croce, owner of the St. Augustine Pirate & Treasure Museum. He partnered with the University of Florida so that his multi-million dollar renovation could revitalize the Quarter with historical accuracy. With the city's upcoming celebration of its 450th anniversary, it is now celebrating the 500th anniversary of the landing of Juan Ponce de Leon in Florida. His philosophy is "History is fun and corny is cool."

- The Taberna de Caballo is actually two structures built atop the historic foundation of the DeHita House and the Gonzalez House in 1979. Both homes once belonged to cavalymen and their families. In 1764, they became the property of the British!

- Daily scheduled events include: Orientation Walks, Militia Drills, Blacksmith Demos and Meet the Shipwright. Most events take place from 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Wear your wristband; spend the entire day in-and-out of the Colonial Quarter.

- On any day, visitors might be surprised to bump into famous characters from the past: Pedro Menendez, Jesse Fish, Spanish Cavalryman DeHita, Gov. Tony (18th Century Florida governor), Henry Flagler, Sir Francis Drake, William Bartram and colonist John Kent.

- After 5 p.m. daily, there is parking at the Fort, directly across from The Colonial Village. The St. Augustine Parking Garage is only a short walk from the City Gates and entrance to the Village

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soup, appetizers and desserts round out the menu and are smartly priced. My choice? Flan/Flan de Caramelo (\$4.95). Order in Spanish or English — the menu offers both.

The recycle/green philosophy carries through to Bull & Crown Publick House. Creamy Beer Cheese Soup (\$3.95-\$5.95) with onions, celery and of course beer is thickly rich. PIES are their specialty but not sweet dessert pies. Dive into a Cottage Pie filled with beef tips, vegetables and topped with a crown of mashed potatoes, Colby and Jack cheese, then oven roasted (\$12.95).

A crowd-pleasing hefty portion of Bull & Crown Kettle Chips are layered with bleu cheese, baked in the oven and topped with balsamic glaze (\$7.95). Oyster lovers don't have to wrestle with shells — they're plump and served resting on crostini, baked in the oven with either Spinach Rockefeller or Datil barbecue sauce with bacon and cheese (\$10.95).

Not to forget the children in tow, the Colonial Quarter has figured out that sometimes children's dining attention span is short. Forget concern. Parents walk through the village with cocktails,

beer and wine without issue. It's a two-acre private property!

If you've dined at either restaurant and purchased an admission ticket to the museum (adults, \$12.99; children 5-12, \$6.00; children 4 and under, free), your food and beverage are discounted 10 percent and vice versa. There are many packages that include the popular Pirate Museum available at www.ColonialQuarter.com

Coming soon in the Quarter's lantern-lit amphitheater under the trees is the Colonial Crew Revue, a lively and fun-loving historic variety show for the whole family. Singing, dancing comedy and magic will be featured along with El Comico Troubadour, Rosa del Jardin, Senora del Amour and cast. It's a good time and feel-good evening where you can jump in to clap, sing and enjoy the fun. Complimentary beer, wine and sangria will be served to folks over 21 with light snacks for all.

For a VERY special occasion, reserve the Watchtower just for your table of two or four. Custom-prepared menus are offered high above the twinkly lighted Old City.

I'll be watching you from my table in the Taberna one Saturday night, dancing the night away with Luis Mario's Latin Salsa rhythms — sipping a chilled glass of perfectly delicious red sangria! Ole!



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