

TABLE TALK

DINE BEHIND THE WALLS OF HISTORY *at the Colonial Quarter*

story and photos by LEIGH CORT



As you stroll along famed St. George Street in St. Augustine, passing shops, restaurants, museums, pubs, hidden paths and familiar landmarks,

take notice of the largest tract of history, The Colonial Quarter. If you listen carefully, you might hear whispers from centuries past. You have to look behind the walls of history to explore their 2.5-acre self-contained Colonial Experience Living History Tour. Here you will be welcomed into the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries with notable sights, authentic demonstrations and fabulous casual dining.

Walking through times past beneath the colorful flags that have flown over St. Augustine for more than 450 years, you can imagine the thrill that sailors on Ponce de Leon's ship felt as they reached Florida's northeastern coast. The Colonial Experience allows guests to understand the success of the oldest permanent European settlement in North America. The entire property of history and dining is like a living museum that represents our country's mosaic of cultures.

Prominently positioned on St. George Street, three signs welcome you into the Taberna del Caballo, Bull & Crown Publick House and The St. Augustine Seafood Company. Deliciously authentic, what is awaiting you today as you wander into any of the restaurants? They are realistically

designed eateries that feel as if you've stepped back in time to experience the old-world charm of our nation's oldest city.

Two of St. Augustine's cherished landmark homes — No. 37 is the De Mesa-Sanchez House (circa 1740) and the reconstructed Pellicer-DeGurgo House is No. 53 — are marvelously preserved in The Colonial Quarter for dining and relaxing and may well be two of the country's oldest restaurants. In the 18th century, they were occupied by British and Hessian troops during the Revolutionary War. Even if you dine here time and again, you might never sit in the same century in either the restaurants or colonial park setting!

During the day, the tempo on St. George Street is lively with families, lovers, diners and shoppers. Step into the inviting Taberna and treat yourself to an oyster shooter (datil pepper infused vodka, a jumbo sweet fresh oyster and cocktail sauce). Order the puffy conch fritters dipped in JohnJohn sauce. If you have an appetite for



The Bull & Crown Publick House's chicken mushroom pie is this season's star attraction.



This huge sandwich of locally caught fried fish is available at the St. Augustine Seafood House.

a huge sandwich of locally caught fried fish piled high with cilantro cole slaw on a yummy toasted bun, you might want to share it along with the scrumptious fried shrimp basket. Their bar menu is unique; the Sir Francis Drake cocktail is a refreshing all-weather favorite (vodka, peach schnapps, pineapple juice and raspberries).

At night, the Colonial Quarter and its restaurants come alive with candlelight. Perhaps you'll find a comfy table on St. George Street's largest open-air patio at the Bull & Crown Publick House. This is where the buzz of downtown is delightfully unforgettable. Their menu offers a variety of English staples from fish &

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19 ■

COLONIAL QUARTER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

chips and patty melt to kedgereee. The culinary team wows guests with their spin on every dish, especially the truffle parmesan artichoke dip, a perfect shareable that demands your attention!

The menu's authentic house-smoked Scottish salmon finds its showcase on the salmon bruschetta with herbed cream cheese, red onion, capers and dill. This season's star for hearty appetites is the chicken and mushroom pie — with a velvety light tarragon cream sauce and flaky crust.

One can't overlook the newest of the three restaurants, St. Augustine Seafood Company, which is a fast casual dining option. Guests order at the counter and then seat themselves inside or out — at picnic tables in the backyard or under the giant oaks in the Colonial Oak Music Park. Fall and winter weather in St. Augustine couldn't be better for dining outdoors, especially in the Colonial Quarter's



Smoked salmon bruschetta is a big hit at The Bull & Crown Publick House.

very own live music venue under the shady limbs of a 300-year-old oak tree. This multi-faceted attraction and destination is a hidden gem that offers concerts from Thursday through Sunday — and almost always free. It's family and doggie friendly with seating for 250-plus visitors. The Colonial Oak is a surprising, gorgeous and unique setting for music and cultural festivals throughout the year and a popular venue for weddings, too.

The Colonial Quarter's Executive Director Cindy Stavely has been at the helm of her unrivaled destination

for many years. She understands that guests want to have a unique, customized dining "experience" and still have time to explore the historic district day and night. Attentive and timely service, delicious food that's great value for each budget plus genuine hospitality are the principles that keep fans and friends returning to explore and dine.

As you contemplate the history of America's oldest city, it's easy at The Colonial Quarter to imagine the 16th century and St. Augustine's first days as a trading port and the first European waterfront community. Take a moment to climb the watchtower and gaze on the unshakable vista of the bayfront and aerial view of the Castillo de San Marcos.

Restaurants are based on people — so I'll be waiting for you in the Taberna to enjoy a Sir Francis Drake on the rocks.

The Colonial Quarter, at 14 S. Castillo Drive, St. Augustine, is open seven days a week. For further information, go to colonialquarter.com.

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