

The opulence of the town's roots is embodied in Flagler College, which once housed the industrialist's elegant Ponce de Leon Hotel, opened in 1888. Tours are conducted daily. [www.flagler.edu](http://www.flagler.edu)





# St. Augustine:

## A FOODIE FROLIC IN AMERICA'S OLDEST CITY

By Shelley Skiles Sawyer

FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY HAIGWOOD STUDIOS;

LOCATION PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY ST. AUGUSTINE, PONTE VEDRA & THE BEACHES VCB

**N**ESTLED ON THE MATANZAS BAY on Florida's western coast, St. Augustine deftly delivers nearly five centuries of charm wrapped up in a sultry, soul-filled package adorned with ancient brick-lined streets and Spanish moss. It's a transporting experience, like a trip to Spain without the sticker shock of trans-Atlantic plane fares and weak dollar woes. Generations of Timucua Indians, Spanish, British and French explorers, pirates, Florida "Crackers" and many others made their indelible mark on the town. It was ultimately transformed by legendary industrialist Henry Flagler during his quest to complete a railroad line all the way down to Key West. Inspired by the beauty of the area, he was single-handedly responsible for much of the opulent Spanish, Italian and Moorish-inspired architecture that marks the landscape today and echoes the beauty of what was once a playground for the rich.

All this history translates into delicious results for galloping gourmands, since the culinary personality of St. Augustine is as varied as its past. From sunup to sundown, snacking, supping and sipping opportunities abound. A stay in one of the town's more than 40 bed and breakfasts guarantees a hearty beginning to a day of sightseeing. A stone's throw from the bay and Castillo de San Marcos, The Inn on Charlotte delights guests with dishes such as spinach and bacon soufflé served over sautéed Yukon gold potatoes, and oatmeal pancakes with fresh peach sauce. At the St. Francis Inn, the oldest in St. Augustine, Culinary Director and Chef Gary Douylliez created "1791 Granola" to celebrate the inn's heritage. At the Bayfront Westcott and Bayfront Marin House, both owned by the Graubard family, Hungarian fare offers an unexpected treat.

Tourists and locals alike take in ocean breezes and sunshine along with a lunch (or dinner) of seafood-centric fare at Kingfish Grill located at the Camanche Cove Marina on the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. If you find yourself wandering the Spanish section of the Historic Preservation District, check out the organic Mayan cuisine from Casa Maya. Steps away, the hand-crafted gourmet confections created at Claude's Chocolate provide the perfect afternoon pick-me-up in seductive flavors like Valencia orange, fresh coconut, freshly squeezed lemon and passion fruit. Claude, a classically trained chef and pastry chef, also makes a luxurious full-bodied Belgian chocolate cocoa.



St. Augustine has been an art mecca for more than a century. One of the many locations of Cutter & Cutter Fine Art Galleries features one of the largest selections of Dr. Seuss storyboards, prints and paintings, including many works from his "secret" and not-so-innocent personal collection. [www.cutterandcutter.com](http://www.cutterandcutter.com)



St. George Street offers unique shopping opportunities that reflect the town's history. Satisfy your "inner pirate" at Shades and Blades with its extensive collection of swords, switch blades, elaborate helmets, and, oh yeah, shades. 904/824-5286





The word “oldest” is thrown around a lot, with good reason. America’s oldest city also boasts the oldest wooden school house (above), drug store, Catholic church and street in the United States, as well as Florida’s oldest restaurant, the oldest surviving Spanish Colonial dwelling in Florida and Castillo de San Marcos, the oldest masonry fort in the continental United States (below).



Located in Henry Flagler’s former Alcazar Hotel, Lightner Museum exhibits 19th-century artifacts, including Tiffany glass, as well as vestiges of what once was the world’s largest indoor heated pool, giving a glimpse of the abundantly lavish life Flagler’s crowd led. [www.lightnermuseum.org](http://www.lightnermuseum.org)



Enjoy drinks on the veranda of the Tini Martini Bar, or partake in another favorite evening pastime: a hair-raising ghost tour of one of the country’s most haunted cities. [www.ghostsandgravestones.com](http://www.ghostsandgravestones.com)

Around the corner, contemporary Spanish cuisine rules at The Tasting Room, a sophisticated wine-centered tapas spot adorned with tasteful regional art and a Flamenco-red fireplace. Standout dishes include skewers of pork tenderloin with Spanish olives and roasted tomato sofrito, and rosemary-flecked Basque fries served with anchovies and a creamy romesco sauce. Its sister restaurant, OPUS 39, offers seasonal high-end New American fare crafted from locally sourced products by CIA alumnus Michael McMillan. George Chryssaidis carries the torch for Greek fare at his Athena Restaurant, which overlooks the central Plaza de la Constitucion. Across the street in the 4-star Casa Monica hotel, elegant 95 Cordova specializes in Moroccan and Spanish-influenced cuisine. And no trip to the South would be complete without a dash of romance and nostalgia, deliciously embodied in the rambling century-old Victorian home that now houses the family-owned Raintree Restaurant. Steaks, seafood and pasta offer something for everyone, as does the friendly ambiance.

The city’s French roots are gloriously represented by Jean-Stephane Poinard, executive chef of Bistro de Leon, which he owns with wife Valerie, a winemaker from the Domaine de la Fond-Moiroux. He is a fifth-generation chef from Lyon and is one of only 100 members of the exclusive Les Toques Blanches Lyonnaises, which is led by Poinard’s good friend and mentor, the legendary Paul Bocuse, who paid the chef a surprise visit by stopping in for dinner in January. Bistro de Leon’s fare is soulful, straightforward French home cooking. Poinard’s penchant for baking yields delicious results when he pairs each course with its own bread. Homemade bacon bread complements the escargot-stuffed tomatoes with a drizzle of balsamic vinegar reduction, and roasted brie with microgreens is paired with the chef’s walnut bread. If you can’t make it for dinner, you can enjoy a wide array of breakfast breads and a full menu at lunch.

At the end of the day, you’ll certainly be tempted to drink a toast to Flagler for inspiring such a gorgeous town. An endless selection of libations does the trick at the Tini Martini Bar, located in the Casablanca Inn. Inside, rich wood and paintings by Colombian artist Fernando Botero lend an unmistakable Latin flair while outside, seating on the veranda overlooks the action on the bayfront. Explorer Ponce de Leon believed St. Augustine was the source for the Fountain of Youth. Today, the United States’ oldest city offers such a hefty helping of joie de vivre that one can’t help but feel rejuvenated. ■

## WHERE TO EAT

**Athena Restaurant**

14 Cathedral Pl.  
904/823-9076

**Bistro de Leon**

12 Cathedral Pl.  
904/810-2100  
www.bistrodeleon.com

**Casa Maya**

17 Hypolita St.  
904/823-1739

**Claude's Chocolate**

15 Hypolita St.  
904/808-8395  
www.claudeschocolate.com

**95 Cordova**

95 Cordova St.  
904/810-6810  
www.casamonica.com

**Kingfish Grill**

252 Yacht Club Dr.  
904/824-2111  
www.kingfishgrill.com

**Opus 39**

39 Cordova St.  
904/824-0402  
www.opus39.com

**Raintree Restaurant**

102 San Marco Ave.  
904/824-7211  
www.raintreerestaurant.com

**The Tasting Room**

25 Cuna St.  
904/810-2400  
www.tastetapas.com

**Tini Martini Bar**

(at the Casablanca Inn)  
24 Avenida Menendez  
904/829-0928  
www.casablancainn.com

## WHERE TO STAY

To help narrow down your selection of the nearly 40 B&Bs in the area, go to [www.innsofelegance.com](http://www.innsofelegance.com), which includes those establishments mentioned above. If a traditional hotel stay is to your liking, check out historic Casa Monica, which sports an entrance fashioned after Toledo's Puerta del Sol. [www.casamonica.com](http://www.casamonica.com)

**Laughing Shrimp on Oriental Zucchini Carpaccio**

Recipe by Jean-Stephane Poinard, Executive Chef and Co-owner, Bistro de Leon

Yield: 4 servings

**Zucchini Carpaccio**

- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons honey
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoon ground coriander seeds
- juice of 2 limes
- 1 cup finely chopped cilantro leaves
- salt and pepper to taste
- 2 large zucchinis, sliced into thin rounds

**For the Zucchini Carpaccio**

Combine oil, honey, coriander, lime juice, cilantro, salt and pepper. Marinate sliced zucchini in the mixture overnight in refrigerator.

**Laughing Shrimp**

- 2 pounds peeled and deveined raw shrimp
- bouquet garni (bundle of tied herbs including parsley, thyme, and bay leaf)
- salt and pepper to taste

**For the Laughing Shrimp**

Poach shrimp in vigorously simmering water with bouquet garni and salt and pepper until done, approximately 2 minutes. Remove from liquid and chill in refrigerator.

**Assembly**

Drain zucchini and arrange on 4 dinner plates. Drizzle each plate with 3 teaspoons of marinade. Add a sprinkle of curry powder to the remaining marinade, cut shrimp in half and dunk briefly into the marinade. Arrange shrimp on top of Zucchini Carpaccio. Serve cold.

suggested wine pairing:

White Vinho Verde  
from Portugal or  
Albariño from Spain







*suggested wine pairing:*



Dry Rosé from  
Southern France

## Inn on Charlotte Cheese Pennies

Yield: about 4 dozen

- 1 cup softened unsalted butter
- 4 cups (1 pound) shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon (scant) cayenne pepper
- 2 cups puffed rice cereal

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Mix butter and cheese with electric mixer until well blended. Sift together the flour, salt, and cayenne pepper and add to the blended butter and cheese mix. Mix well to form a soft dough. Add the puffed rice cereal and blend by hand. Form 1/2-inch balls, place on a parchment paper-lined cookie sheet and gently flatten to the shape of a penny. Bake for 15 minutes. Pennies will be light golden brown when done. (Pennies are best when baked shortly before serving, but can be stored in an air-tight container until served. They can also be frozen before baking, then thawed and baked as needed.)

## Tomatoes Stuffed with Escargots

*Recipe by Jean-Stephane Poinard, Executive Chef and Co-owner, Bistro de Leon*

Yield: 4 servings

### Garlic Cream

- 6 cloves garlic, finely diced
- 1 cup heavy cream
- salt and pepper to taste

### For the Garlic Cream

Mix the garlic, cream, salt and pepper in a saucepan.

Reduce slowly over low heat, stirring until thickened.

### Escargots

- 1/2 cup carrot, peeled and julienne cut
- 1/2 cup turnip, peeled and julienne cut
- 3 cloves garlic, finely diced
- 4 dozen snails
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons Grande Absente

### For the Escargots

Slowly sauté the carrot, turnip, garlic and snails in butter over low heat until the vegetables have caramelized. Quickly deglaze the pan with the Grande Absente. Flame the Grande Absente by touching a lit match to the edge of the pan.

### Assembly

- 4 large, vine-ripened tomatoes
- salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Bring 2 quarts water to a boil. Cut a cross into the bud end of each tomato. Plunge the tomatoes into the water for 15 seconds. Remove and plunge directly into ice water. Peel the tomatoes, pulling the skin back from the cut cross. Cut the stem end of the tomato off and carefully scoop out the seeds with a spoon or melon baller. Place tomatoes in rimmed dish, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and bake in oven for several minutes. (The tomatoes should be just warm, not cooked.) Place each tomato on an individual plate and fill each with one quarter of the snail mixture. Place the tops on the tomatoes.

Garnish with 2 or 3 tablespoons Garlic Cream around each tomato.



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*suggested wine pairing:*



Pinot Noir from Burgundy,  
Russian River or New Zealand  
or an oaked Chardonnay

