

**DINING OUT**



**DINING OUT:  
THE EXPERIENCE**

**BEST RESTAURANT  
IN JACKSONVILLE  
Bistro Aix**

If there is such a thing as a culinary version of a harmonic convergence where meat, vegetables, sauces and spices align in perfect harmony, it happens in the mind of Bistro Aix Chef Tom Gray. When Gray opened Bistro Aix in 1999, he brought a California sensibility to San Marco, picking his foodstuffs in season from small artisanal farms. Sometimes that's meant air freighting meats to Jacksonville, but Gray has also formed relationships with local farms like Twinn Bridges. His job is to select and blend the ingredients into a whole, a task he does with aplomb and confidence in dishes like Colorado lamb shank on couscous with a black olive curry and arugula, or risotto with sweet peas, tangerines and shrimp with a balsamic glaze.

**BEST RESTAURANT IN  
ST. AUGUSTINE  
Gypsy Cab Co.**

This beloved locally owned restaurant hasn't changed much in recent years — though its menu changes daily — because it's got things pretty well figured out. The food is creatively prepared and celebratory in style, with a bias toward special occasion dishes like mussels, duck and lamb. The atmosphere is a tropical fade, like South Beach for ordinary folks. And the service is always welcoming and friendly. It's no surprise that weekends still see a line out the door, much as there have been since it opened in 1983.

**BEST RESTAURANT ON  
AMELIA ISLAND  
Salt, The Ritz-Carlton Amelia Island**

You've cracked a lobster, noshed on beluga caviar, harvested white truffles and bathed in saffron. So what's next? For local foodies, Salt, a fine-dining restaurant in The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, is an upscale culinary experience. The eatery features nearly two dozen salts from around the world, like Bolivian rose (harvested in the Andes), aguni (from an obscure Japanese island) and alaea (a traditional Hawaiian table salt). And the chef pairs them with everything from Iberico ham to

foie gras to a chocolate soufflé. If you're still not impressed, take a seat in the kitchen's private dining area while the chef customizes a menu to your liking.

**BEST NEW RESTAURANT  
Salt Life Food Shack**

When beach locals saw that the omnipresent decal outfit Salt Life had decided to open a restaurant in Jax Beach, some cynics might have wondered about a fad reaching saturation point. But the owners of this always-packed establishment have parlayed brand loyalty into a sea of loyal diners. Offering a full bar and a



**Best Bar After Work and Best Trivia: Mellow Mushroom**



**Best Restaurant  
on Amelia Island**  
Salt, The Ritz-Carlton  
Amelia Island

reasonably priced menu with tasty appetizers and killer entrées like the signature Backyard Beer Can Chicken and make-you-pick-a-fight-it's-so-good Caliche's Poke Bowl, it's no wonder that townies and beach bums alike voted Salt Life Food Shack the best new place to chow down.

### **BEST RESTAURANT TO IMPRESS A DATE** **Orsay**

You've been stalking your co-worker for more than a year and she finally agrees to go out with you. Don't screw it up: Take her to Orsay on Park Street in historic Avondale. Named after a village southwest of Paris, the restaurant excels in French cuisine like mussels and frites, duck rilletes and escargot and desserts ranging from homemade sorbets to passion fruit chiboust. Orsay also features an extensive wine list and Sunday brunch. We're pretty sure it'll help you score a second date.

### **BEST RESTAURANT WHEN SOMEONE ELSE IS PAYING** **Ruth's Chris Steak House**

For the fourth year in a row (and five more wins), Folio Weekly readers have chosen this acclaimed gourmet "chop shop" as the place to go when the boss is buying. Which proves one of two things: Either we're really cheap people or Ruth's Chris cooks up a helluva steak. Sizzled up at the now almost-mythical temperature of 1,800 degrees, the life-altering steaks and other signature entrées, like stuffed chicken breast or barbecued shrimp, are enjoyed by diners. They even offer a veggie entrée, and you can wash it all down with a wide selection of wines or cocktails. And what's that, Mr. Moneybags? Now that you mention it, I do think I could eat a dessert or two.

### **BEST MEAL FOR \$10** **TacoLu Baja Mexicana**

Here's a culinary challenge: Where can you go to get well-fed for the price of a sawbuck, get dishes made with quality ingredients and not have to eat while standing in the rain? Jax Beach's TacoLu serves up some righteous Tex-Mex vittles that will fill you up and won't devour your paycheck. The à la carte taco menu includes crowd-pleasers like the Baja fish taco, taco rosa, chingona chicken and critter-friendly hits like the veggie or avocado tacos. And the salads, quesadillas and funky original "stacked" enchiladas will sate your taste while still flying under the \$10 radar.

### **BEST CHEF** **Tom Gray of Bistro Aix**

Tom Gray's first foray into the restaurant business was learning how to make fresh pasta, when he was barely a teen, from Jerry

Moran at Moran's Club Continental restaurant in Orange Park. Gray grew up to graduate from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, to work as executive sous chef at the Wine Spectator Greystone Restaurant, at the Culinary Institute of America in Napa Valley, for famed California chef Wolfgang Puck, as executive chef at Dean & DeLuca in Saint Helena, and at Johnston Vineyards where he studied winemaking. Gray further defined his aesthetic traveling through Spain, Greece, Italy and France. And then he brought it all back home to Jacksonville when he opened Bistro Aix in 1999 with partner Terry Schneider. Gray's menu is rustic Mediterranean with a modern California sensibility. It must be working. In both 2009 and '10, Gray was a finalist for the prestigious James Beard Award as Best Chef: South.

### **BEST WAITER/WAITRESS** **Amber Linskey-Rhodenberry at The Fox**

For the last two years, Amber Linskey-Rhodenberry's been serving classic diner-style fare with a smile. From little old ladies to big, burly construction workers, the patrons at The Fox Restaurant on St. Johns Avenue know Linskey-Rhodenberry by name. According to owner Ian Chase, that's because the 27-year-old and recent UNF grad is "attentive, personable and always has something sweet to say."

## **DINING OUT: THE CULINARY STYLE**

### **BEST CARIBBEAN CUISINE** **Caribbee Key**

This popular Neptune Beach restaurant is open-air dining at its finest, with an upstairs balcony that allows diners to gaze at the beauty of the Atlantic while enjoying a libation of choice and grooving to some local live music. The menu offers island-style entrées; popular dishes include jerk chicken served next to fresh ahi tuna, and even awesome veggie-friendly offerings, like their three-cheese alfredo. The killer food combined with the surfboards and tiki hut bar will lull the most resistant diner into laid-back bliss.

### **BEST ITALIAN CUISINE** **Carrabba's Italian Grill**

With a half-dozen Carrabba's locations in Northeast Florida, Folio Weekly readers have plenty of options to indulge their passion for Italian dining and (let's be honest) acceptable carbo loading. Appetizers like the mussels dish, cozze in bianco, and calamari are notable noshables, but you'll want to leave room for the popular signature pasta dishes as well as

steak, poultry and seafood entrées cooked on a wood-burning grill. Veggie options as well as a gluten-free menu make Carrabba's the people's choice for Italian-style dining.

## **BEST CHINESE CUISINE** **P.F. Chang's China Bistro**

Don't be surprised if you have to wait for a table at this popular eatery at St. Johns Town Center, but that's all the more reason to enjoy a selection of cocktails, beer and wine, and a nice array of traditional and even sparkling sakes. The bistro offers upscale takes on classic take-out dishes like mu shu chicken and pepper steak, but then serves up interesting fare like wok-seared lamb and vip duck, which takes a familiar favorite and adds a sweet soy plum sauce. Throw in some inviting veggie entrées and a fun kid's menu, followed by an order of banana spring rolls, and it all adds up to a night of fine Asian fare.

## **BEST THAI CUISINE** **Thai Room**

For the third year in a row, Folio Weekly readers have voted this Jax Beach restaurant as the place to go for curries red and green and everything in between. Just walking through the door can be a calming experience, since the soothing décor, mindfully placed Buddha statues and comfortable seating can prepare even the most snooty diner for an impressive selection of appetizers and entrées. The spring rolls are always a good place to start, the traditionally prepared red snapper is a hit, and most entrées, like Panang curry or amazing dish can be served with beef, chicken, pork or tofu. A spacious bar, nice beer and wine list and lip-puckering-good Thai sweet tea add to the Thai Room's exotic yet strangely down-home dining experience.

## **BEST MEXICAN CUISINE** **La Nopalera**

Lovingly referred to by locals as "La Nop," this area Mexican eatery and cantina has seven locations in Northeast Florida, and after sampling their sizable, affordable and delicious menu items, it's no wonder Folio Weekly

readers pick this spot as "regla suprema" for neighborhood Mexican dining. Sizzling fajitas are served with steak, chicken or shrimp (or all together as fajitas Texasas) and La Nop's fajitas Delmar is a hearty mix of scallops, shrimp and octopus. The massive, mouthwatering California burrito barely fits on the plate, and the bar churns out margaritas and giant, icy cervezas that might fell a lesser contestant. And don't mind the sporadic birthday celebrations that seem to break out every five minutes. In fact, why not get Grandma to slap on that sombrero and have the whole place serenade her belly-button birthday? Dios mio! Granny, get off the bar!

## **BEST INDIAN CUISINE** **India's Restaurant**

This family-owned Baymeadows favorite serves full-on soul food, like veggie-friendly dishes saag paneer and aloo gobi, appetizer faves like pakoras and samosas, as well as chicken, lamb and seafood dishes cooked in a traditional clay oven. A sweet or mango lassi is the perfect chilled libation on a scorching Northeast Florida day, and the daily buffet is a healthy change of pace from standard workweek food fare. Once again, owners the Singh brothers have wooed Folio Weekly readers with their food, hospitality and welcoming atmosphere.

## **BEST JAPANESE CUISINE** **Daruma Japanese Steakhouse**

In Japanese culture, a Daruma doll is considered a sign of good fortune. In local culinary culture, discerning foodies know that Daruma Japanese Steakhouse symbolizes the last stop for superior Japanese dining. With two locations in Jacksonville, Daruma features teppanyaki chefs renowned for their floor show. All the appetizers one would expect are here, alongside fresh sushi rolls and a nice mix of beer, wine and sake. Those who don't feel like dodging flying shrimp can enjoy the more intimate seating that's available. This kid-friendly stop also prides itself on fast yet attentive service.

## **BEST MIDDLE EASTERN CUISINE** **Casbah Café**

Hookah heads and falafel freaks who comprise



Best Pizza in Jacksonville: Al's Pizza

Folio Weekly's core readership consider this Avondale fave the place to go for Middle Eastern fare. The Casbah offers vibes aplenty with indoor and outdoor dining and a menu that features plentiful vegetarian options, as well as classic lamb, beef, chicken and seafood dishes like kabobs, the signature Casbah pizza and traditional fare like the ramallah dish or maftool, a killer mix of chicken, spices and couscous. Casbah Café has been known to host belly dancers but before the rhythm overtakes you, we urge neophyte "gut shakers" to remain seated, enjoy the show and let the pros do their thing. Look, we all remember our first Arabic coffee, so chill out.

## **BEST VEGETARIAN CUISINE** **BEST ORGANIC CUISINE** **Native Sun Natural Foods Market**

Though not a traditional sit-down restaurant, the café at Native Sun serves at least as many options, whether you order baked salmon and black bean quesadillas from the hot bar, or

Cajun chicken wraps and spelt-berry salad from the deli. Energy drinks, cold beer and wine and chips of every variety are also available, with vegan or gluten-free alternatives in most cases. The bright, airy seating at the Baymeadows location is an especially popular destination for lunchtime meetings, and that gives you a chance to pick up a little something for dinner at the same time — a perk an ordinary restaurant seldom offers.

## **BEST ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT** **Wasabi Buffet**

For the second year in a row, Folio Weekly readers have chosen Wasabi Buffet as the place to go to let their hair down, loosen their belts and dig in for the all-you-can-eat dining experience. Gourmands who want to dance along the razor's (or chopstick's) edge of gluttony can enjoy sushi and fresh sashimi, as well as the comforting sight of endless egg rolls, noodle and rice dishes, and other choices in Asian comfort foods. Go back for plate No. 3, we won't tell. But please tip accordingly and this time, try not to eat while loitering over the hot buffet, OK, Captain Carbohydrate?

## **BEST COFFEEHOUSE** **Starbucks**

We may not know the difference between a venti and a grande, but we know that this citadel of coffee is No. 1 for a reason. WiFi abounds, for one. So do cozy chairs, comfortable acoustics and copies of The New York Times. Add to that the fact that we as a nation are as hooked on upscale presentations of our drug of choice every bit as much as we're addicted to caffeine, and you've got your answer. That and a venti pumpkin-spiced latte will set you back \$4.10.

## **BEST DELI** **Sun Deli**

In these turbulent times of financial doubt, political divisiveness and cultural entropy (i.e., the game "Cornhole"), it's nice to know that as a race and readership, we can agree on one thing: We love sammiches! Devotees of the Earl of Sandwich's namesake head east to Jax Beach's Sun Deli for fresh salads, deli favorites like the Reuben or Radical Side, with both tuna and egg salad, and awesomely good subs Hot Cuzzo, South Beach or even your own personalized meat-and-cheese monstrosity. Bon appetit, brah!

## **BEST FISH CAMP** **Clark's**

If you like your boat dock nearby, your gator tail crispy and your animals heavily taxidermied, Clark's is one spot you don't want to miss.



Best Restaurant in St. Augustine: Gypsy Cab Co.



**Best Neighborhood Bar on Amelia Island:  
The Palace Saloon**

Located at the end of Hood Landing Road in Mandarin, right on the banks of Julington Creek, Clark's has been catering to boaters and the people who love them for more than 30 years. In addition to fish camp faves like fried shrimp, crawfish and u-shuck-'em oysters, Clark's serves up an impressive variety of unusual menu items, ranging from fried kangaroo to charred snake, smoked eel and gator eggs (actually gator sausage wrapped around quail eggs and deep-fried). Add that to the hundreds of stuffed wild animals perched throughout the restaurant, and you have some idea why fish camp fans who like to live on the wild side keep coming back.

### **BEST TAPAS 13 Gypsies**

This Riverside hotspot is run by the Spanish-born-and-raised Chef Howard, who orchestrates a kitchen staffed with experts in the classic tapas style of Mediterranean cooking. Everything at 13 Gypsies is made daily from scratch, from the breads and chorizo sausage to the cheeses and cured meats, using organic ingredients whenever possible. The reasonably priced menu features dishes like the citrus-tinged Quixote style beef, Roman gnocchi and a signature honey-garlic hummus that has made return customers out of many local food fans.

### **BEST SEAFOOD BEST SUSHI Yummy Sushi**

Now two for two, Southside's Yummy Sushi once again has taken top honors from Folio Weekly readers in the crucial sushi categories of inspiration, preparation, presentation and, ultimately, consumption. With fresh colorful offerings like White River, The Incredible and Monkey Roll, Yummy Sushi serves up sashimi and rolls that almost look too good to eat. It's nice to see somebody breathe new life in local sushi scene (What ... Ed Asner Roll again?) and serve it in a cozy atmosphere with visually dazzling appeal.

## **DINING OUT: THE FOOD**

### **BEST BURGER ON AMELIA ISLAND T-Ray's Burger Station**

The hamburgers at T-Ray's Station are seared just right — the outside forms a crust but the inside is still juicy — and it makes a nice handful of a sandwich on a bun, with tomato, lettuce, mustard and mayo. Best of all, this is

the joint where everybody in Nassau County goes to dish — on everything besides food. If you're looking for the latest gossip with a side of crispy fries, T-Ray's is the place to go. It's easy to miss, since the restaurant is inside a defunct Exxon gas station. But on any given day at any hour, there's usually a raucous conversation going on among the crowd that makes Amelia Island what it is: shrimpers and crabbers, Amelia Island Plantation rich folks, eighth-generation Florida crackers and an array of local artists, writers and musicians — all of whom call T-Ray's home.

### **BEST BURGER IN JACKSONVILLE Five Guys**

With seven Five Guys locations in the Northeast Florida area, local burger fans come out the winners when it comes to smackin' down on a crazy-good hamburger. This popular joint offers up hot dogs as well, and fries so large they're just this side of felony intent, but the burgers are what makes Five Guys return champions in our Best Of Jax poll. Add cheese and bacon or go crazy at the condiment counter — any way, you can't go wrong when it comes to Five Guys, the preferred and juiciest gut-bomb on the local feeding scene.

### **BEST BURGER IN ST. AUGUSTINE Cruisers Grill**

Cruisers Grill takes Americana fare seriously. Root beer floats, cheese fries, chicken sandwiches and strawberry shakes abound. But the burger takes center stage, and Cruisers is a repeat winner in the Best Burger category. Opened in 2008, the open-air St. Augustine location sits on touristy St. George Street and operates seven days a week, with live music on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. And at Cruisers, it pays to be a local: Downtown St. Auggie employees get 25 percent off, and Facebook fans are given "magic words" to say for a discount.

### **BEST PIZZA ON AMELIA ISLAND Moon River Pizza**

Located on 14th Street in Fernandina Beach, funky and fun Moon River serves up piping hot pizzas with traditional toppings as well as atypical fare like breaded eggplant, gorgonzola, feta and white cheddar cheeses and fresh garlic that will have your taste buds doing backflips. Everything is handmade every day at Moon River, and the hand-tossed Northern-style pizzas come loaded with a choice of more than 20 toppings. Add to that the freshly prepared calzones, and it's no wonder this pizzeria is popular with both locals and local artists, whose works hang on the restaurant's walls.

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## **BEST PIZZA IN JACKSONVILLE** **Al's Pizza**

Once again, Al's Pizza sweeps this category for Best Pizza in Jax, which is a "No duh" moment for their loyal customers. Hand-tossed, Sicilian or by the slice, Al's features meat, deluxe, veggie and white pizzas to rock the most stubborn food snob. "I don't like pizza!" You do now, sucka! Al's menu also offers standard Italian fare like pastas dishes and calzones, as well as generous appetizers, subs and the "Al's original chicken salad" which just slays the competition. This family-owned place is also a great place to host a party or gathering.

## **BEST PIZZA IN ST. AUGUSTINE** **Pizzally's Pizzeria**

It's a sign of this restaurant's well-placed confidence that it gives out pizza — free — to St. George Street passersby in an effort to lure them inside. And, judging by the bustle there, it works. In addition to the popular pies, Pizzally's grown-up Chianti Room serves a full Italian menu from bruschetta to salads to fettuccine alfredo. For families looking for a place to land after a day of Ancient City attractions, Pizzally's has become synonymous with satisfaction.

## **BEST CHICKEN WINGS** **Dick's Wings**

Wanna see if see if you've found true love? Go on that first date to your local Dick's Wings and ask for a 100-count order of Ragin' Cajun wings (heat level set at Swamp Fever). If your honey matches you bite for bite? I hear wedding bells! Save the bones as a souvenir! What could be called the Caviar of Northeast Florida is served by the mighty and unrivaled Dick's Wings. With a location in nearly every neighborhood in town, Dick's Wings serves up more than 25 flavors of wings with eight different levels in heat alongside some amazing waffle fries, hot dogs, bodacious sandwiches and a wide array of burgers, wraps and salads. The place always packs out on trivia nights, so get there early and snag a pitcher of your favorite brew.

## **BEST SMOOTHIE** **Tropical Smoothie Cafe**

In the 1930s, health food stores on the West Coast started selling puréed fruit drinks based on Brazilian recipes. Some eight decades later, the smoothie is as hot as ever. With nearly a dozen locations, from St. Augustine to Atlantic Beach, and an extensive list of icy concoctions, it's no wonder Tropical Smoothie Café has the lockdown on the frozen liquid fruit market. Signature drinks include the low-fat Blimey Limey (strawberries, pineapple, orange and lime), Caramel Cream (caramel, white

chocolate and a mix of coffee and yogurt) and the supercharged Health Nut consisting of blueberries, mango, banana and almonds.

## **BEST CHOWDER** **Salt Life Food Shack**

The restaurant's motto is "eat, drink and be salty." And while the food never is, the atmosphere is infused with beach flavor. Salt Life, having grown from a simple two-word phrase designed to evoke the passions of those who live on and near the sea, has become a subculture of its own, complete with myriad marketing opportunities. Salt Life apparel is now available in 800 stores nationwide, and Jax Beach's Third Street North location — home of the award-winning chowder — promises to be the first of many. For Folio Weekly readers, Salt Life is a welcome bit of seasoning on the local culinary scene.

## **BEST HOT DOG** **Hot Dog Hut**

For the fourth year in a row, Folio Weekly readers have chosen South Jax Beach's Hot Dog Hut as the wiener (oh, come on! It's still cute) over all other frankfurter rivals. And with more than a dozen versions of the beloved meat link, such as the Onion Sauce Dog and Chicago Dog (with a pickle on top!) as well as sausages, sandwiches, onion rings and fries (try the Bay seasoned), it's no wonder that HDH is still the Top Dog in the eyes and appetites of Folio Weekly readers.

## **BEST SUB SANDWICH** **Angie's Subs**

Judging by their ever-changing marquee, which can lean a little to the right, we'd be hard-pressed to believe that Angie's Subs owner Ed Malin walks around his house wearing a Folio Weekly headband. But regardless of political affiliations, our readers know the sandwich shop is becoming a Beaches dining empire dishing up a helluva sub. The Jack Del Rio is pretty damn good and the Peruvian sauce adds a little kick to any sub. But be prepared to wait; Angie's isn't known for its express service (let's just call it "laid back"), so you might as well watch tourists wonder why in the hell the sign out front reads "A Blundry." (FYI: Before Angie's took over the block, an ABC Laundry once called the same spot home.)

## **BEST DESSERT** **Biscottis**

This Avondale restaurant named for a twice-baked Italian sweet biscuit serves desserts that



**Best Vegetarian Cuisine,  
Best Organic Cuisine:  
Native Sun Natural Foods Market**



Best Burger in St. Augustine:  
Cruisers Grill

are remembered, recalled fondly and then searched for in the large dessert glass case in the front of the restaurant. The sound of the selections is like a siren's song: Warm upside-down pecan rum cake with vanilla ice cream. Warm apple pie with vanilla ice cream. Croissant bread pudding with raisins and cherries. Or maybe you'd just prefer a piece of coconut layer cake just like your grandmother used to make? In your dreams, you don't have to decide.

### **BEST BREAKFAST** **Metro Diner**

Breakfast can mean a bowl of oatmeal after a 9-mile bike ride or a pile of cheesy fried potatoes, scrambled eggs and enough crispy bacon to turn your arteries into Slim Jims. Either way, this San Marco mainstay has got you covered. With indoor and outdoor tables available, and a breakfast menu that includes cinnamon raisin pecan French toast, breakfast burritos and the indulgent crabcake eggs Benedict, Metro Diner breakfasts satisfy on every level. It's no wonder it's an annual favorite of Folio Weekly readers.

### **BEST BAGEL** **Bagel World**

Bagels plus drive-thru equals genius. Bagel World, a Jax Beach establishment on Third Street South, serves customer favorites like the jalapeno cream cheese, egg and cheese sandwich, blueberry muffin and the Italian

bagel. Just get there early and plan on using the drive-thru: Bagel World is only open until 2 p.m. every day and parking is virtually non-existent. Long live carbs!

### **BEST BURRITO** **Burrito Gallery**

Having quickly muscled its way past the upstart stage, Burrito Gallery is now arguably a downtown institution. And while the burritos are fantastic — made with care and creativity, in flavors ranging from ginger teriyaki tofu to yellow curry chicken — they are hardly the only draw. BG features local art on the walls, a full liquor bar, live entertainment and the coolest digs downtown. It's also the centerpiece of downtown's monthly First Wednesday Artwalk, a place to see, be seen and possibly find enlightenment wrapped in a warm flour tortilla.

### **BEST BARBECUE** **Mojo Kitchen**

In a part of the state known for fiercely loyal barbecue fans (never get in the middle of a dry rub vs. wet rub cook-off), it's no small feat that the three area locations of Mojo (Kitchen BBQ Pit, Blues Bar and Smokehouse) once again trumped the challengers. Popular picks from the pit are the ample-sized Mississippi catfish fingers appetizer as well as universal faves like pulled pork, brisket, turkey and chicken and an amazingly good homemade smoked sausage. Mojo Kitchen also serves up some of the best blues in the area, with recent gigs by Michael



Best Barbecue:  
Mojo Kitchen

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Burks and Anders Osborne leaving music fans and barbecue lovers doubly satisfied.

## **BEST STEAK** **Ruth's Chris Steak House**

The famous steaks at Ruth's Chris garnered even more attention this year, when they were part of the celebration for the city's naming rights deal with the Jaguars. But who can fault the city's fat cats for their taste? With two Jacksonville-area locations — one on the Southbank and one in Ponte Vedra Beach — Ruth's Chris is the go-to place for a meal made of cow. Seared at 1,800 degrees to the temperature of your choosing, Ruth's Chris's cuts — whether petite filet or porterhouse for two — are a slice of carnivore heaven.

## **DRINKING OUT**

### **BEST NEIGHBORHOOD BAR IN JAX** **BEST BAR WHEN YOU'RE OUT** **OF WORK** **Pete's Bar**

Admit it — you've met some of your favorite ex-hookups/spouses there. (We certainly have.) And the draft beers are affordable, even if the economy's still tanking and your bank balance is teetering. Pete's was founded in 1933, which makes it about the oldest joint still going strong at the Beaches. Every Thanksgiving, they rope off the street ends and folks come back for the party, sometimes three and four generations of the same family passing the beers around. The décor doesn't change much — memorabilia Pete Jensen brought back from WWII The Big One, as well as seemingly hundreds of Folio Weekly Best of Jax plaques. Our readers love Pete's Bar, voting it the Best in Jax year after year.

### **BEST NEIGHBORHOOD BAR IN** **ST. AUGUSTINE** **Scarlett O'Hara's**

In the daytime, Scarlett's feels like the city's best-kept secret — a mellow place to have a beer and watch the tourists stroll by on Hypolita Street. But at night, it's clear that everyone knows Scarlett's. A favorite of college students and townies alike, this place serves a menu of reliable food (fish n' chips, steamed oysters) at any of three bars — the busy main bar, the outdoor oyster bar or the upstairs ghost bar — haunted, at the very least, by the ghost of benders past. Add to that the almost nightly live music, and it's clear that this is one hotspot that makes its presence known — and remembered for days to come.

### **BEST NEIGHBORHOOD BAR ON** **AMELIA ISLAND** **The Palace Saloon**

Drinking at the oldest saloon in state of Florida gives the simple act of raising a midday mug to mouth as many layers as a compost pile. Elbows rest on the same spots once rubbed by Carnagies, DuPonts, Pulitzers, Morgans and Goodyears. The Palace Saloon opened its doors in 1903 as a gentlemen's club catering to sea captains, wealthy yachters and American moguls. That explains the black mahogany bar, the mosaic tile floor, the embossed-tin ceiling. Behind the hefty bar, a giant beveled-glass mirror is mounted on the wall and surrounded by carved English oak and mahogany, held up by a pair of bare-breasted women carved in wood. Although the Palace Saloon has a friendly neighborhood bar vibe, it's an easiness made cool by the grandeur of the past and the resonance of history that got our readers' attention.

### **BEST BARTENDER** **Ashley Hayek, Crab Cake Factory**

According to her co-workers, Ashley Hayek makes a mean Long Island Iced Tea and a kickass margarita. So it's no wonder the 21-year-old bartender at Crab Cake Factory, a seafood grill on Beach Boulevard in Jax Beach, is considered a top-shelf mixologist. Owner Nicole Yousefzadeh describes her as "young, vibrant ... the kind of girl who lives life to the fullest." It's an attitude that proves infectious, especially at Crab Cake Factory's extensive happy hour — 3 to 8 p.m. every day.

### **BEST BEER SELECTION** **BEST BAR FOOD** **Kickbacks Gastropub**

Kickbacks Gastropub has earned a reputation on King Street as a place that doesn't go in for half-measures. Which is why it serves 600 kinds of bottled beers, 84 beers on tap and a menu that's available 20 hours every day. Chicken wings are a customer favorite — served in flavors ranging from garlic and smoky barbecue to chipotle honey mustard and Thai — and there's always love for a bar that serves corn dogs and Tater Tots. But it's the beer that really wows customers. Owner Steve Flores looks for new craft beers to keep the hops gourmands coming back, and a few of his choices sound like names of some crazy street poets: Terrapin Big Hoppy Monster, Coney Island Sword Swallower, Weyerbacher Slam Dunkel and Smuttynose Pumpkin Ale.

### **BEST MARGARITA** **La Nopalera**

History is confused when it comes to the



# BEST OF JAX 2010



**Best New Restaurant, Best Chowder:**  
Salt Life Food Shack

margarita. There are nearly a dozen commonly repeated tales of who created the sour-and-sweet concoction of tequila, triple sec and lime or lemon juice. Whether you like it frozen, straight up, on the rocks or with salt on the rim, La Nopalera is the place locals go to grab a margarita. With locations all over Northeast Florida, La Nop offers bottomless chips and salsa, happy hour two-for-one ice-cold margaritas and humongous portions of authentic Mexican grub.

## **BEST MARTINI** **Ocean 60**

Writer H.L. Mencken called the martini “the only American invention as perfect as the sonnet.” That was decades ago. Today, the elixir continues to gain popularity — Ocean 60 in Atlantic Beach has an entire room dedicated to the drink. The Martini Room features classic concoctions like the Manhattan as well as modern nips like Hang Ten, Espressotini, Girl Scout Cookie and the Dirty Blue Goose (vodka, olive juice and bleu cheese-stuffed olives), live music Thursday through Saturday and half-price martinis for the ladies on Wednesday nights. We’re pretty sure James Bond would approve.

## **BEST MOJITO** **Christopher Seafood and Company**

The Mojito, an intoxicating mixture of white rum, cane sugar, lime, sparkling water and mint, originated in Cuba. But it’s Christopher Seafood and Company, a family-owned-and-operated restaurant on Atlantic Boulevard, that dominates the local Mojito market. They offer a variety of flavors made from scratch, like watermelon basil, pineapple cilantro and the house signature drink, a blue mojito with Cruzan citrus rum and blue Curacao. General Manager Brandon Carmichael explains, “Every customer who comes in can’t drink just one!”

## **BEST WINE LIST** **The Grotto**

Tucked behind wrought-iron gates on San Marco Square, this tapas-bar-slash-wine-retailer combines urbane sophistication with hundreds of professionally vetted quality wines. Knowledgeable servers help you find the right glass for sipping after work, or pairing with one of their heady appetizers — mushroom empanadas, kalamata olives, sliced manchego cheese served with dried chorizo. The cozy couches and low tables are made for intimate conversations and lingering over good wine. But when you’re ready to leave, you can always pick up a bottle — or a case — to go.

## **BEST PUB** **Lynch’s Irish Pub**

If you’re looking for a spot to let loose, Lynch’s Irish Pub in Jax Beach is the place to go. This laid-back yet hard-partying watering hole is known for its extensive selection of beers on tap, unique décor (the whole joint is plastered in signed dollar bills), loud, live music and Irish pub fare like fried mushrooms, fish-’n’-chips and corned beef and cabbage. At the same time, it’s smoker-friendly, meaning it’s one pub where the ever-dwindling opportunity for public tobacco indulgence still asserts itself, without apology.

## **BEST SPORTS BAR** **Sneakers**

Football, baseball, Ultimate Fighting, boxing, golf, curling ... well, maybe not curling. With two locations (Jax Beach and Baymeadows), Sneakers Sports Grille is the best place to catch a game. The sports bar features dozens of TVs (some a full story tall), servers wearing cheerleading outfits, cold beer, tasty wings in more than a dozen flavors, sports memorabilia and weekly events like bar bingo and trivia night. For as many years as a sports fan can remember stats, this place has been Folio Weekly readers’ favorite.

## **BEST BAR TO NETWORK** **Dos Gatos**

Located directly across from The Florida Theatre, Dos Gatos in downtown Jax is the best place to make a key contact or slip someone your business card. Open until 2 a.m. seven days a week, this networking-friendly bar features custom murals, velvet damask wallpaper and exposed brick walls as backdrops for weekly events like Monday’s Rock N’ Roll Karaoke, Tuesday’s late night happy hour from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. and live DJs. But it’s too swank to feel stuffy, and the cocktails — like the Jalapeño Margarita and the Redneck Fizz (bourbon, bitters and red wine) — are good enough to wash down the aftertaste of any unsavory business alliances.

## **BEST BAR AFTER WORK** **Mellow Mushroom**

While all of these popular pizza restaurants pride themselves on good service and friendly, accessible bartenders (at least one uses the cash register code “enabler”), the Jax Beach location is a social destination in its own right. With a hip soundtrack, a good-looking crowd and a full range of cocktails and edibles, Mellow Mushroom has turned unwinding after work into an art form. □