

FLAGLER FISH COMPANY

# THERE'S SERIOUS SEAFOOD GOING ON HERE!

story and photos by LEIGH CORT



**S**o many lists and headlines when you're a Florida seafood restaurant: Explore the Top 10 Seafood Restaurants in Florida, Get On The Road to Hunt for The Top 25 Hidden

Seafood Gems on the Atlantic or Discover the Top 50 Florida Seafood Restaurants With a View.

Without doubt, Florida dining is synonymous with seafood, and everyone has their own favorite “bucket list” — whether they're crazy about shellfish or the swimming beauties that come from deep-water fishing. Combine an oceanfront historic hamlet like Flagler Beach, Florida, to your getaway and dining at Flagler Fish Company for lunch or dinner will remain in your memory, luring you back time and again. The town and the restaurant are both reminiscent of “time standing still” although it's a bustling village all year long with six miles of scenic beach punctuated with old Florida heritage.

This small city by the beach is proud of its friendly welcoming vibe with only 5,000-plus residents. Before its incorporation in 1925, Ocean City was its name from 1913 to 1923. A quiet fishing village and easy to walk, there are collections of artifacts from the town's rich history of pre-historic, Native American and colonial plantation eras. The tiny history museum tells its story about surfing legends and shipwrecked sailors plus the immortal day when Charles Lindbergh landed on the short airstrip not far from the original 1927 Flagler Beach Pier.



This vintage sign welcomes patrons to the Flagler Fish Company

If you're an adventurous foodie and love eating with the locals yet feeling as though you have discovered a hidden treasure, the unpretentious Flagler Fish Company and its rustic weather-beaten sign will “hook you” to come in and personally taste why it's had a renowned reputation for nearly two decades.

Carolyn and Chris Casper landed in town in 2003, leaving behind their famous Atlanta restaurant to everyone's surprise. The Caspers built quite a reputation for The New Yorker Marketplace and Deli that was acclaimed by the international paparazzi. But these two young New Yorkers packed it all up when it was time to find warmer weather that might have landed them, their doggies and baby Cole in Miami or the Florida Panhandle.

Immediately, Flagler Beach seemed like the sleepy village where their new family could thrive while the Caspers figured out what adventure was next. Opening a plant and flower nursery? What about a surf shop? In a little ole' building that had housed an auto repair shop, a dentist and a scuba diving

business, opening a walk-up sandwich/deli counter wasn't quite their plan either. This wasn't Atlanta. It was a quiet little beach town where they chose to create the Flagler Fish Company.

The dream took two years to imagine and develop, opening in 2005 as a premier fish market and restaurant, paying homage to the destination itself with the freshest fish and seafood, all family recipes, indoor and outdoor flip-flop casual and the most accommodating, helpful staff in town!

Today, don't let the informality fool you. There is serious seafood going on here. You can feast on one of the irresistible signature dishes or select your own piece of fish from the icy display, and it will be cooked to order (steamed, fried, seared, grilled or blackened).

The Caspers are still in love with their decision to raise their family in Flagler Beach, especially with their children Cole, Christian and Caylee (all teens) working alongside the amazing team, many of whom have been original employees for 17 years!

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32 ■

## SEAFOOD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30

Daily, from lunch through dinner, give yourself time to read the menu. It's impossible to focus on just one choice: homemade soup, the raw bar, appetizer, fish/seafood sandwich, lobster roll, taco, entree that also include hand-cut-to-order USDA prime steak and "sides." You might decide to select many items to share so you can "taste" incredible dishes for your first visit. Even the "sides" that are often overlooked in other restaurants, Cole's slaw, savory grit cake, butter-fried noodles, sweet potato waffle fries and homemade thick-cut chips are all notable.



Crabcakes

Three appetizers made with finesse and personality could easily be an entrée if you're keeping the dish all to yourself. LOL! Fried greens tomatoes — lightly battered and fried, topped with chive cream cheese and fresh basil, over roasted tomato puree drizzled with balsamic glaze and parmesan cheese. Sauteed clams or mussels — in a creamy butter broth with garlic, white wine, parsley, shallots and diced tomatoes. Florida Fish Company crabcakes — A mix of jumbo lump and claw crabmeats, delightfully entwined with spices and



Fried green tomatoes

served with homemade trio of sauces!

If you're a chowder chowhound, three choices are worthy of their place on the menu over the years (especially for \$10/large bowl): lobster bisque with brandy and sherry, white fish chowder featuring chunks of fish swimming alongside potatoes, carrots celery, onions and great spices, and red fish chowder ... with just a few different spices.

Raw bar ravenous? Colossal shrimp cocktail, Maine lobster cocktail, oyster or clams on the half shell — all tempting your appetite on display in the fish market presentation on ice.

Are you a fried shrimp or fried fish fiend? These two legends are worth the drive — and people are coming from hours away to enjoy the fried jumbo shrimp basket with cocktail and tartar sauces, and fried fish sandwich: hand-battered fish choice with crispy panko flakes, Cole's slaw, tomato and tartar sauce on fresh baked roll. Since you have a variety of "sides" — hearty appetites must indulge in the cheesy savory grit cake!



Grilled fresh trout with butter-toasted almond sauce

On vacation and trying to watch your diet, too? It's possible at Flagler Fish Company with all of the daily fresh fish that will woo you back just to stay on that "dreaded" diet when you believe you're suffering instead of indulging in the best. Choose sauteed or grilled, steamed or seared fresh fish. Order it perfectly plain or treat yourself to a magical sauce (lemon butter caper, Creole, Hong Kong, roasted tomato puree, drawn butter or horseradish cream).

The joy of gastronomy at the Flagler Fish Company experience doesn't just begin and end with the menu selections and becoming a foodie fan. Carolyn and



Sauteed clams

Chris are as excited and enthusiastic in 2023 as they were years ago with expansion ideas to finally build a private dining party room and serving full bar liquor, too.

What keeps Chris challenged?

"No two days are the same," he said. "My staff and family work side by side to tackle restaurant challenges and keep our guests happy. I like to win!"

Carolyn continues to believe "we're so happy that we chose Flagler Beach. We're blessed to be embraced by our loyal customers, tourists and our dedicated staff. We're proud that we've been recognized over the years by Southern Living, Garden & Gun, USA Today and so many more publications while we share a wonderful life here with our family!"

So, when you're searching for "The 15 Best Seafood Restaurants in Florida," you can find Flagler Fish Company in USA Today 2022 as a "...one-of-a-kind in this cozy beach town. Whether you want tuna, salmon, Chilean sea bass and lobster, they offer more than 20 types of fresh fish and seafood daily ... 'Food to Knock Your Flops Off' the eatery claims."

Some days I wake up with an appetite for really delicious seafood without breaking the dining budget, food that's made with love. Perhaps you'll find me sitting outside in the Florida sunshine with Atlantic Ocean breezes as I give into dessert first. Who can resist the deep-dish key lime pie, Caylee's jumbo peanut butter brownie served with vanilla ice cream sundae-style and tropical homemade rum cake. Or I could be pondering whether I should really share my mahi tacos and chilled lobster roll at FFC.

**Read more from Leigh Cort at [PackYourPortmanteau.com](http://PackYourPortmanteau.com).**