

## **St. Augustine lauded as No. 1 foodie town by Southern Living**



By Colleen Jones  
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There's nothing old about the Ancient City's innovative approach to culinary preparation.

For the first time, St. Augustine has climbed the ranks to the No. 1 spot as the best "foodie" town south of the Mason-Dixon line, according to Southern Living magazine.

"St. Augustine, Florida, worked its way from the bottom to be our overall champion with their ever-burgeoning food scene anchored by restaurants like Preserved, which shows off the wealth of local ingredients in a modern way in the country's oldest city," the magazine proclaims in its The South's Best Food Town 2019 issue.

Other local go-to eateries mentioned in the article were The Ice Plant, The Hyppo and The Floridian. And those are just a few examples of how the gastro landscape in St. Augustine has grown up, catering to more sophisticated palates while staying true to its southern comfort origins.

Brian Whittington, executive chef/founder of Preserved, said the growing numbers of newcomers moving to the county over the last decade or so has definitely played a part.

"It's brought more people, more money and more money to invest," Whittington said. "That has allowed us [restaurateurs] to push forward with new concepts and make sure the workforce and the talent is there to be able to put out more refined food and know there's support for it."

Ice Plant co-founder Ryan Dettra said he could see the beginnings of the movement when the 1920s-themed restaurant/craft cocktail venue opened five years ago in a renovated warehouse on the outskirts of historic Lincolnvile.

“In 2014, we felt we were one of the few [restaurants] that did scratch cooking, and it’s come a long way since then,” Dettra said.

Dettra said he is flattered by all the national publicity the restaurant has received.

Ice Plant’s executive chef Laird Boles described his cuisine as making the the most of locally sourced ingredients, including seafood, and the incorporation of historically popular dishes (rabbit, anyone?) and preparations with a modern twist.

The news of St. Augustine’s culinary evolution is no surprise to Erin Thursby, who’s been watching the scene unfold from her post in Jacksonville over the past several years.

Thursby, executive director of the GastroJax organization, said the influx of tourists has helped St. Augustine’s reputation for dining.

“And this kind of tourist wants something different than Orlando,” Thursby said. “They want to experience what local is, so for St. Augustine that’s been something chefs can take pride in.”

St. Augustine is in good company in Southern Living’s recognition of it as an epicurean destination. Among the other cities making the top 10 include Breaux Bridge, Louisiana; Brunswick, Georgia; and Oxford, Mississippi.

The South’s Best Food Towns 2019

1. St. Augustine
2. Oxford, Mississippi
3. Mount Pleasant, South Carolina
4. Charlottesville, Virginia
5. Kinston, North Carolina
6. Fredericksburg, Texas
7. Breaux Bridge, Louisiana
8. Winter Park
9. Brunswick, Georgia
10. Davidson, North Carolina

Southern Living