



If You Know Where to Look, Atlantic City Has It All

From old time restaurants with colorful histories to prestigious chain restaurants in the casinos, AC has food for every taste.

By David Savastano

When people think of Atlantic City, they typically think of the Boardwalk, the casinos and Monopoly, the game that was patterned on the city. Yes, these are some of the highlights of Atlantic City, but there is a lot more to AC than that.

The History of Atlantic City

A quick look at the history of Atlantic City helps in understanding its present day. Atlantic City's first heyday came all the way back in the 1870s, when the first boardwalk was constructed. The city was the vacation spot for residents in the Philadelphia metro area as well as throughout New Jersey and the New York metro area; estimates say that more than 500,000 people took the trains annually to Atlantic City back then.

The 1920s saw another huge boom in Atlantic City, largely due to Prohibition. The city's boss at the time, "Nucky" Johnson, saw to it that Prohibition was not enforced in AC, and alcohol poured freely while illegal gambling was also common. It was no surprise then the Atlantic City became known as "The World's Playground."

Over time, the city, like many others, suffered a decline, and New Jersey voters took notice, passing a referendum in 1976 allowing casino gambling in Atlantic City. The first casino, Resorts International, opened in 1978; there are nine casinos today.

Atlantic City Today and Classic Places to Eat

Atlantic City no longer has the monopoly on casino gambling on the East Coast, but its casinos still shine, bringing in major performers and offering top-flight restaurants. At the Harrah's Resort, where the Eastern Coatings Show calls home, there are 10 eateries, headlined by **McCormick & Schmick's** steak house and **Gordon Ramsay Steak**.

Other casinos have classics such as **Old Homestead Steakhouse** (Borgata), **Nobu** (Caesars Atlantic City); **Morton's The Steakhouse** (Caesars Atlantic City); **Il Mulino New York** (Hard Rock Hotel & Casino); **Angeline By Michael Symon** (Borgata); **Capriccio's** (Resorts Casino Hotel); and **Chart House** (Golden Nugget). Outside of the casinos, there are classic such as **Ruth's Chris Steak House** (2020 Atlantic Ave., 609-344-5833).

However, people in the know will tell you that there are really interesting places to eat in AC, if you know where to look.

- Let's begin with the venerable **Knife & Fork** restaurant. Known for its excellent steaks and seafood, the Knife & Fork opened its doors in 1912, proudly proclaiming that "Nucky Ate Here. Shouldn't You?" It opened as a drinking and dining club, among other activities, and flourished during Prohibition. The restaurant closed in 1997, but Dock's Oyster House owner Frank Dougherty bought the restaurant and the building, restoring it to its former glory and making it a superb place to eat. (3600 Atlantic Ave.; 609-344-1133)
- As for **Dock's Oyster House**, it is a classic seafood restaurant whose beginnings date back to 1897. Now in its fourth generation of family ownership, it receives rave reviews online as one of the top restaurants in the city. (2405 Atlantic Ave.; 609-345-0092)
- Since its beginnings in 1935, family-owned **Angelo's Fairmount Tavern** has been led by three generations of the Mancuso family. For 87 years, Angelo's has been serving excellent Italian food that consistently earns excellent ratings. (2300 Fairmount Ave.; 609-344-2439)2300
- Established in 1927, **Tony's Baltimore Grill** prides itself on being "Atlantic City's Oldest Pizza Joint," as well as its hearty selection of Italian comfort foods such as spaghetti and meat balls, lasagna and much more. (2800 Atlantic Ave.; [609-345-5766](tel:609-345-5766))
- Another old-time Italian restaurant is **Chef Vola's**. At one time a speakeasy, this restaurant dates back to 1921. This James Beard Award winner is located in a residential home, and reservations are an absolute must. Reviewers say that the Banana Cream Pie is a particular favorite. (111 South Albion Place; 609-345-2022)
- **Cafe 2825** offers great Italian fare as well as traditional experiences, such as Burrata style fresh mozzarella prepared at your table straight from the curd and pasta prepared in a Pecorino cheese wheel right at your table. Reservations are accepted only by phone one week in advance. (2825 Atlantic Ave.; 609-344-6913)
- Another mainstay when it comes to Atlantic City restaurants, **Girasole** is a family-owned restaurant that has been serving excellent Italian cuisine for the past 25 years, earning many prestigious culinary awards. (Corner of Pacific & Montpelier Ave.; text 609-453-4015 for reservations)
- With two locations in Atlantic City, on Arctic Avenue and in the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, **White House Subs** dates back to 1946, and is a legendary fixture in the city, known of course for its subs. (2301 Arctic Ave, Atlantic City and 1000 Boardwalk)

Classic Places to See in Atlantic City

Aside from the casinos and old-time restaurants, there are some interesting places to check out in Atlantic City. Here are a couple of note:

- **James Salt Water Taffy** is the classic Atlantic City location for salt water taffy and other candies. Founded by Enoch James, he changed the way the taffy was made, introducing taffy-stretching machines and cutting the taffy into small individually wrapped pieces. A New Jerseyan, Anthony Bourdain made a point of visiting James Salt Water Taffy. With two shops, it is a must when walking the boardwalk.
- Founded in 1898, **The Steel Pier** is a classic AC attraction, an amusement park jutting into

the Atlantic Ocean. There are plenty of rides, capped off by The Wheel, a 227-foot high Ferris wheel built in 2017, as well as games and food.

Fun Facts About Atlantic City

Here's a few facts about Atlantic City that may surprise your friends!

- The Miss America Pageant dates back to 1921, and eliminated the swimsuit portion of the contest back in 2018.
- Salt water taffy was invented by David Bradley in 1883 after his taffy store was flooded by salt water.
- The Atlantic City Boardwalk was first built in 1870 as a way for hotel owners to keep sand out of their lobbies. At first, it was taken down at the end of each summer. If you are not from a coast, walk the boardwalk, listen to the waves and smell the salt air.
- The game we know as Monopoly was adapted from a game called "The Landlord's Game," which was founded in 1903 as a game against monopolies. Monopoly as we know it was introduced to the public in 1935. Some of the properties no longer exist; St. Charles Place was built over built the Showboat Casino and Illinois Avenue is now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.