



Boiled crawfish at Hawk's are highly sought-after for their freshness and purity of flavor.

## seafood hotspots

The Best in Acadiana

BY JYL BENSON | PHOTOS ROMERO & ROMERO

**YOU WILL NEED A MAP** to find Hawk's, and even then you should still plan on getting lost. There's one on the restaurant's website, and the employees are accustomed to lost souls calling again and again as they try to find their way. Growing up near Rayne, Anthony Arceneaux frequently

had dinner harvested from his family's crawfish pond. "Dad was always a clean freak about crawfish: He would wash and wash them, again and again," he recalls. In 1978, after securing a peaceful legal emancipation from his parents (anything to escape washing those crawfish) when

he was 15, Anthony obtained a \$60,000 loan from the Farmers Home Administration, bought some boats and traps and leased 480 acres around Rayne. He lied his way out of afternoon classes in high school and began calling himself a crawfish farmer, ultimately working his way up to 12,000

acres. His father, Hawk, followed him into the business in 1982. By 1983, they were so loaded down with crustaceans they opened Hawk's Crawfish in a shed-like structure on their middle-of-nowhere property so they could move more of the swarm. The senior Arceneaux, obsessive

as ever about the purity of the crawfish, found a purging technique developed by Texas A & M University. In the beginning, Hawk's started with select, live, hand-graded crawfish, then placed them in the well for up to 24 hours. It was a labor-intensive, expensive process, resulting in an average

9-percent loss due to crawfish death and the sheer volume of dirt the bugs gave up in the process. Indulging the elder Arceneaux's idiosyncrasies paid off for the family: Hawk's was an instant success due to the clean, fresh flavor and purity of the product. People started driving hundreds of miles to the 1,000-square-foot shack in the middle of nowhere to experience the **connoisseur's boiled crawfish**. The meat is pearly white and the fat is golden yellow. There's none of that black, gritty goo to deal with.

Today, the restaurant, which has expanded four times in its 30-year history, has its own extensive purging facility and it is only open from early February until the beginning of May, more or less. "When we can get the most highly select crawfish that are at least medium-large," Hawk's moves an average of 7,000 pounds of boiled crawfish a day. Every batch is boiled and seasoned to order. Forty miles and a world away in the tiny, picturesque waterfront community of Lake Arthur, **Regatta** sounds a siren's call to the diners who pour in for steaks and seafood. As polished and bustling as Hawk's is simple and straightforward, Regatta rises up amid a shore-side thicket of cypress trees and stumps, with panoramic views of the town's eponymous body of water.

▶ **Cajun Claws.** 2272 Rees St., Breaux Bridge. (337) 332-2439. [cajunclaws-breauxbridge.com](http://cajunclaws-breauxbridge.com).

▶ **Hawk's.** 415 Hawk's Road, Rayne. (337) 788-3266. [hawkscrawfish.com](http://hawkscrawfish.com).

▶ **Regatta.** 508 Hawkeye Ave., Lake Arthur. (337) 774-1504. [regattarestaurantla.com](http://regattarestaurantla.com).

### BONUS BITE

Don't feel like sitting is a restaurant but still want top notch crawfish? Partake of Breaux Bridge's finest via **Cajun Claws**, a drive-through operation, and enjoy them less than a mile away under a tree in Parc Hardy.

Opened in 2012, it has been an economic driver for the region. By the time he was 42, owner **Greg Trahan** had amassed a hefty enough fortune to retire and travel the world. His exploration led him back to his hometown, Lake Arthur, a community with a population of fewer than 3,000. What he found was a stagnating community, its people largely complacent and indifferent to the lack of growth, industry and opportunity, despite the area's inherent natural beauty and charm.

"I remembered the big sailboat regattas that I grew up with," Trahan says. "They just didn't do it anymore."

Trahan committed to invest \$2 million of his own money into creating a hub for pulling traffic into Lake Arthur. The result was Regatta. He outfitted the adjacent harbor with 25 slots for boats and yachts as well as accommodations for sea planes. Today, as many as 3,000 people travel from throughout the region to dine each week, and most weekends find the harbor full and the decks jammed.

In addition to the excellent boiled seafood and game be sure to check out the Kubuki shrimp – gigantic shrimp wrapped in won tons skins and fried to golden then covered with a sweet and spicy sauce. It's a fun dish to share. ◀