

BEST BARS

Something about summer makes us thirsty — wonder why that is? It's the perfect time to spotlight the exquisite watering holes throughout Acadiana, everything from beer taprooms and live music venues to ethnic experiences and high-end restaurants where signature cocktails are served. ¶ Here are our picks for the best bars in Acadiana, but we're only scratching the surface. Like its world-famous cuisine, South Louisiana has a lot to offer those who are parched. This list will get you started.

BY CHERÉ COEN PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSEPH VIDRINE





as Rocky Mountain for mountain-based distilleries or Canadian for Canadian whiskeys.

“It’s a fun way for us to play around and it’s something our customers ask for,” Thom said.

Social reuses oak barrels that have been dropped off by distilleries and used once or twice in the restaurant to barrel age bourbons for their Manhattans, Sazaracs and old fashioned. Once the barrels have run their course for cocktails, the kitchen uses them to barrel aged items such as honey, vinegar and hot sauce.

Above all, it’s the wide selection of bourbons that draw in customers. Social is one of the few establishments to carry the select brand of Pappy Van Winkle and the Buffalo Trace Antique Collection. It also serves three select brands in whiskey cocktails.

“We try to showcase them in our cocktails or let them shine alone,” Thom said.

Social Southern has happy hour from 3 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday. Happy hour also means half-priced fried green tomatoes and flatbread and on Wednesdays it’s \$6 old fashioned all day.

RUNNER UP

►► Folks enjoy Cinclare Southern Bistro in Thibodaux for its distinctive and versatile menu that utilizes Louisiana produce and products, but the restaurant also features signature bourbon cocktails such as the traditional old fashioned, one of owner Chef Michael Dalmau’s favorites. Sample his classic cocktails or be adventurous with one of the restaurant’s revolving drinks, such as the Summer Trail made with bourbon, Carpano Antica vermouth, strawberry-infused Aperol, Rabarbaro and muddled strawberry.

BEST BOURBON BARS

SOCIAL SOUTHERN TABLE & BAR

Lining the walls at Social Southern in Lafayette are custom-made cabinets full of select bourbons, part of the more than 150 bottles the restaurant and bar has on hand.

And it keeps growing, said Brian Thom, wine director and assistant manager.

“Every time they build us a cabinet, we fill it up in days,” he said.

It’s why the *Bourbon Review* has chosen Social Southern as one of the nation’s top bourbon bars five years running.

“It’s a cool thing, something we’re really proud of,” Thom said.

In fact, the hip restaurant and bar has so many bourbons, it instituted what it calls the “Social Outcask.” Thom takes five to six bourbons off the shelf, mixes them together inside a 10-liter oak barrel, then waits about five to seven weeks to serve the result.

“The first one was created as a way to move some bottles that had been sitting there forever,” Thom explained. “It’s been fun to provide a product you can’t get anywhere else and to move a product.”

Social Southern is now on its fifth Outcask, serving up its shots for \$14 a piece. In the past, many have had themes such

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socialsouthern.com



OLD FASHIONED

Brian Thom of Social Southern offers this recipe: Mix 2 ounces bourbon or rye with ½ ounce of sugar syrup (one part sugar to one part water) and add four dashes of Angostura bitters and three dashes of orange bitters. Stir and pour the cocktail in a short glass with ice. Slice the outside of an orange and express its juice (exterior peel side), then drop the juice and orange peel into the drink.





NEGRONI

Combine 1 ounce each of Campari, gin and sweet vermouth, stir and pour over ice or serve neat.



PAMPLONA'S TAPAS BAR



The owners of Pamplona's Tapas Bar studied the culinary landscape of downtown Lafayette, examining what was being offered and, most importantly, what wasn't. Even though Louisiana's heritage contains decades of Spanish rule, the Spanish culinary heritage was missing from the

631 Jefferson St., Lafayette. 337-232-0070. pamplonatapas.com.

RUNNER UP

► It doesn't get more Celtic than McFarland's Celtic Pub in Lake Charles, which pours 40 brands of Scotch and 135 different beers and serves a menu of Old World favorites such as the Scotch Egg, corned beef and cabbage and fish and chips. There's live Celtic music and a daily happy hour from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., not to mention nightly drink specials. Try the Scotch Flight — four Scotches for \$20.

town where most restaurants gear their menus with Cajun and Creole traditions.

So, in December 2007, Pamplona's Tapas Bar opened, with Spanish tapas the focal point on a full bar offering Spanish wines, specialty cocktails and both red and white sangria. What makes the bar scene special — besides the photos of Ernest Hemingway, portraits of bull fighters and an actual bull mount — is that Pamplona's mixologists create cocktails in a pre-Prohibition style, explained General Manager Andrew Payne.

"Everything has to be fresh," Payne said. "No mixes. Juices are squeezed daily."

Pamplona's sangria, for instance, incorporates fresh fruit and juices, wine, Triple Sec with pear schnapps in the white sangria and cherry brandy in the red.

"They're a big hit," Payne said. "We sell hundreds of gallons the weekend of Festival International alone."

Customers still ask for traditional cocktails, Payne added, and Pamplona's serve up the classics as well as signature drinks. In the past, Pamplona's has participated in Lafayette's Absolut Best Martini contest, offering their unique twist on the standard cocktail.

"We take the classics as our base and we have a few originals we make and we try to change things up seasonally," he said.

Pamplona's also serves 10 types of absinthe, two of which made are made in the U.S.

"The same year we opened Pamplona's, absinthe became legal again in the United States," Payne said.

Pamplona's has happy hour from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and all day Wednesday with \$4 well drinks, \$3 sangrias and house wine and \$1 off beer. Tapas are 25 percent off from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Friday as well.



BEST BEER
Bayou Teche Brewing

► ARNAUVILLE Fun has always been part of the manifesto at Bayou Teche Brewing in Arnaudville. Their European-style beers have sported names such as The Walking Dead coffee kolsch, Cinco de Bayou and A Giant Hop for Mankind double IPA. Last Mardi Gras, the Acadiana brewmasters mixed boudin, Steen's syrup and coffee into a limited-edition Cajun Breakfast Stout.

"The boudin beer was crazy," said Karlos Knott, president. "It was gone in like 30 minutes."

So, it's no wonder they offer fun every weekend in the brewery's taproom and surrounding grounds known as the "beer garden." There's live music from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Fridays and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays, song trivia on Saturday afternoons and a Cajun jam session on the brewery's porch on Sundays, followed by games such as bean bag toss and bourré. On Thursday evenings, it's "Arnaudville Theatre" with family-friendly science fiction films.

"Every Thursday through Sunday we do some-



LIVE MUSIC VENUE

PANORAMA MUSIC HOUSE

331 Broad St.
Lake Charles
337-602-6343
thepanoramamusic-
house.com

T

he downtown music scene in Lake Charles continues to evolve and the latest kid on the block mixes an innovative menu with live music six nights a week.

The large venue located at 331 Broad Street grows quiet on Mondays and there's a different vibe every night from Tuesdays through Sundays. Tuesdays features jazz bands, Wednesdays is ladies night with a house band and Thursdays the venue hosts acoustic acts. Fridays

and Saturdays bring in local and regional touring acts and Sundays it's open mic with the Good Samaritans.

"We have a wide assortment," D.C. explained. "We're not committed to one genre. We love all kinds of music. We try to get as much music and be as diverse as we can be."

The menu's diverse as well, including flatbread pizzas, hamburgers, salads and appetizers, plus "Grown Up Grilled Cheese." The Goldband Burger — featuring goat cheese, portabellas, mayonnaise and pesto — is a nod to the former Goldband Studios of Lake Charles, where Dolly Parton cut her first single.

Panorama may be new to downtown, but the site has seen a long list of Lake Charles notable businesses. Rikenjaks used to be located here, as well as the Lake Charles American Press newspaper, Sloppy's Downtown and Happy Hippie Pizza.

Daily specials range from drink discounts to bingo, a washer tournament and \$10 mimosa and sangria carafes on "Fuzzy Sundays," topped off by the Panorama Pajama Jam open mic from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. Daily happy hour is 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

RUNNER UP

▶▶ Visitors come for the antique car memorabilia and the pizza and Cajun dishes at Buck and Johnny's of Breaux Bridge, located in the old Domingue's Motors building. But it's the music that packs the place, from Yvette Landry and Richard Comeaux on Thursday nights, Doyle Tauzin's acoustic country on Fridays and the "World Famous Zydeco Breakfast" with a revolving lineup starting at 7 a.m. on Saturdays.

thing [at the brewery]," said Knott. "It's fun and we figured if we're having fun, they're having fun. It's a great [place] to bring your family and enjoy an adult beverage."

Not to mention the taproom pouring signature brews every day of the week — look for a blackberry lemonade sour beer and peach IPA this summer — and Neopolitan pizzas served hot from the brick oven Thursdays through Sundays.

Knott has been fired up about the homemade pizzas, pun intended, now that the brewery has

taken on additional brew staff. He incorporates house-smoked meats and homemade sauces and hopes to create his own mozzarella soon.

"I've always been a foodie," he said. "I've been making pizza at the house for years. Our goal is to be the best in the state."

Because Bayou Teche is a craft brewery, they experiment and serve small batch brews

to weekend customers. That boudin beer may make a return appearance when the weather chills out, Knott said.

The on-site taproom is open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Fridays, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturdays and noon to 5 p.m. Sundays. Scheduled tours of the brewery are offered on Saturdays, but may be arranged.

1106 Bushville Highway. Arnaudville. 337-754-5122. bayoutechebrewing.com.



CLASSIC MARTINI

Pour 1½ ounces gin, 1½ ounces sweet vermouth and a dash of Angostura bitters into an empty cocktail shaker. Fill the shaker with ice and stir with a bar spoon (unless you're 007's James Bond and prefer it shaken). When chilled, strain and serve into a martini glass and garnish with lemon peel.

CHARLEY G'S



3809 Ambassador
Caffery Parkway
Lafayette
337-981-0108
charleygs.com

Charley G's is a Lafayette landmark that's the place to enjoy a great meal any time. The award-winning restaurant and lounge — Executive Chef Holly Goetting has nabbed numerous awards — has been serving up exquisite dishes in the Hub City since 1985.

But the bar at Charley G's remains the hot local watering hole to relax, enjoy a cocktail or glass of fine wine and a delicious appetizer after work. The space adjacent to the restaurant fills up every afternoon and early evening, mostly with locals gathering for good company. On any given afternoon, one may spot politicians, business executives and dignitaries, said Justin Caldwell, general manager.

There's also live piano music by well-regarded pianists — a long-standing tradition — from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays and 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. For years Grammy Award-winner David Egan performed at Charley G's, attracting famous musicians who would come to hear him play.

"I was lucky to have worked here during Egan's tenure," Caldwell said.

Charley G's celebrates its 35th year in 2020 and many anniversary events are planned, including high-end wine and whiskey dinners, Caldwell stated. Starting now, on the last Wednesday of every month, Charley G's will offer tapas tastings in the

bar, where for \$55 participants may enjoy a variety of tapas with three full wine tastings.

In addition to the restaurant's outstanding wine list, one of the best in the state said Caldwell, the bar serves up classic, Prohibition-style and original cocktails. Be sure to try "The Hot Mess" consisting of grapefruit vodka, St. Germain and fresh lemon juice that's topped with sparkling Cava.

Charley's G's happy hour includes special discounts from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Mondays through Fridays but in the fall the restaurant will serve up free appetizers to the after-work crowd on specific Fridays. Check the restaurant's Facebook page for updates.

RUNNER UP

►► Go for the cocktails, stay for the food. That's the thinking behind the after-work crowd making their way down Jefferson Street in downtown Lafayette. At Spoonbill, the new restaurant helmed by Chef Jeremy Connor, there's outside tables, a cozy inside ambiance and a bar serving up classic and signature cocktails, plus a "Tiki Time" selection that arrives in South Pacific-style mugs. In addition to the creative pies, Central Pizza serves both original and traditional cocktails at its 25-foot-long bar. Or pick up a cocktail and enjoy the parklet right outside the front door.