

the raw of the crowd

OYSTERS ARE BACK—HERE ARE THE BEST PLACES IN TOWN TO SLURP THEM UP. BY EMMA TROTTER

AquaKnox

Some of ocean cuisine's best can be found here. We love the sake-ponzu oyster shooters, but the restaurant's pungent Champagne mignonette sauce served with a plate of raw oysters is the real kicker.

The Venetian, 702-414-3772; aquaknox.net

Big Al's Oyster Bar

This friendly spot is famous for its alcoholic oyster shooters ranging from the Lemon Drop with citrus vodka to the Cajun Olé with tequila, cocktail sauce and hot sauce. Menu standouts include crab cakes and any entrée with a Cajun flair.

The Orleans, 702-365-7111; orleanscasino.com

Big Sur Oyster Bar

This airy space inside South Point serves up plump Louisiana Gold Seal oysters and some seriously tasty pan-fried oysters with pico de gallo. The lobster grilled cheese is not to be missed.

South Point, 702-796-7111; southpointcasino.com

Bouchon

Bouchon has hands down one of the most mouthwatering brunches in town—and one of the best Bloody Marys. Rimmed with a signature flavored salt, it's the perfect complement to a plate of raw oysters—or their famous quiche du jour.

The Venetian, 702-414-6200; bouchonbistro.com

Comme Ça

David Myers recommends starting any meal at Comme Ça with a couple dozen oysters, and we agree—they're the perfect starter to brasserie delights such as duck confit and steak frites. The Grand Plateau was created just for the Vegas location and is grand indeed.

The Cosmopolitan, 702-698-7910; commecarestaurant.com

Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak and Stone Crab

Aside from its famous succulent stone crabs, Joe's is also known for its martinis, several kinds of potato sides, homemade pie—and oysters. Order them on the half shell as an appetizer to grilled jumbo lobster tail and Madagascar shrimp. King crab mac and cheese on the side?

Why not?

The Forum Shops at Caesars, 702-792-9222; joes.net/lasvegas

Morels French Steakhouse & Bistro

Besides its prime cuts, artisanal cheese and extensive wine list, the classy French steakhouse also has an impressive raw selection and prides itself on iced seafood offerings like a half or full dozen of the day's oyster selection, lobster, prawns, Dungeness crab and octopus ceviche. Can't commit? The Grand Plateau de Mer offers an impressive variety of raw delights.

The Palazzo, 702-607-6333; palazzo.com

P.J. Clarke's

Famous for its raw bar, P.J. Clarke's features a daily selection of East and West Coast oysters in addition to littleneck and cherrystone clams and jumbo shrimp. Hearty sample platters with a selection of fresh seafood look good on the table and taste even better. Or hit up its six-day-a-week happy hour for \$1 oysters. **The Forum Shops at Caesars, 702-434-7900; pjclarkes.com**

RM Seafood

As one of Vegas' few sustainable seafood restaurants, Rick Moonen's hot spot offers the best of contemporary ocean cuisine. While the upstairs area is geared toward tasting menus, discover a specialty raw bar and sushi bar on the more casual ground floor. The restaurant offers an oyster sampler appetizer so diners can try six different varieties in one sitting.

Mandalay Place, 702-632-9300; rmseafood.com

Village Seafood Buffet

Las Vegas' only all-seafood buffet offers a chance to try favorites at all-you-can-eat prices, so patrons can feel free to indulge—and then go back for more. Newly remodeled, a visit here is a must for seafood lovers, who pile plates high with snow crab legs, steamed lobster, sushi, shrimp, raw oysters and all the traditional seafood feast accompaniments.

Rio, 702-777-7943; riolasvegas.com **V**



AW, SHUCKS

Unselfish shellfish advice from Johnny Church, executive chef at P.J. Clarke's



Why is this a good time for oysters? From October through March, the waters are coldest and the oysters are coming out of hibernation, with firmer meats and sweeter flesh.

Any favorites? My recommendations are the French Kiss from New Brunswick, Barnestable from Cape Cod, and Morro Bay from California.

What libations pair best with oysters? Champagne or, of course, Guinness.

