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FACTS

# The Florida Fishing Village That's A Hidden Gem For Seafood Lovers

By **Nick Pisano**

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collection of small communities representing Old Florida: quiet beaches and woodlands, citrus groves, and tiny fishing villages. One of the best of the latter group is tucked away between the city of Bradenton and the popular tourist destination of Anna Maria Island. It's called the Cortez Historic Fishing Village, and it's an excellent stop for seafood lovers living or traveling along Florida's Gulf Coast.

Set on a peninsula between Sarasota Bay, Anna Maria Sound, and Palma Sola Bay, Cortez traces its roots to the 1880s, when a group of settlers from North Carolina established the fishing community to harvest seafood from the rich, nearby waters of the Gulf of Mexico and Tampa Bay. Nearly 150 years later, fishing remains a major industry, as the restored antique boats decorating the town suggest. Both commercial fishermen and recreational anglers enjoy the area's warm weather, relatively small crowds, and diverse outdoor settings. Many families of the original settlers still make their living on the water, while nearly 100 historic buildings preserve the authentic feel of Cortez.

## Many choices for hungry visitors



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seafood delicacies. The dockside Star Fish Company is among the most popular, earning a **4.4 on Yelp with over a thousand reviews**. Reviewers give the shrimp and grouper particularly high marks, noting the place is so popular you should be prepared for a short wait. In addition to primarily serving local seafood (one of the best **ways to make sure you're eating at a quality seafood restaurant**), there's also a market for those who prefer to pick up a few fillets or some shellfish to cook at home.

However, that's just one of many tasty choices in this lesser-known village. Swordfish Grill (**4.4 stars on Google with over 3,500 reviews**) is another bustling waterfront spot, offering live entertainment alongside fresh local seafood. Here, diners praise the views from the patio seating and large portions for affordable prices.

Those heading out on the water can check out the no-reservations-allowed marina/restaurant Tide Tables (**4.5 stars on Yelp with more than 1,000 reviews**), which provides views of the Intracoastal Waterway as you sample fresh-off-the-boat seafood. Along with numerous others, plus many more in the Anna Maria Island and Bradenton areas, seafood lovers may find a new favorite culinary destination.

## Florida fresh seafood means plenty of options

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Seafood restaurants in Cortez and elsewhere in Florida have a notable advantage over many other states. More than 80 different types of seafood are caught and eaten from waters off Florida's coast at various points in the year, including favorites like shrimp, mahi mahi, scallops, grouper, snapper, stone crab, and many more. What's available locally will vary from the Atlantic coast to the Gulf as well as between the diverse waters of the tropical Florida Keys and the more temperate panhandle. This makes it an excellent stop for checking off a few items (like swordfish) from our list of [seafood items you need to try before you die](#).

Though they may not be large or well-known enough to score a spot on Mashed's list of [the best seafood restaurants in Florida](#), which includes eateries such as Ke'e Grill in Boca Raton and The Boathouse in Orlando, there's no doubt that the restaurants of Cortez are worthwhile stops for seafood fans looking to get off the beaten path and experience the Sunshine State as it once was. The most difficult part might be choosing just one of these relaxed, authentic spots.

## RECOMMENDED