

RESTAURANTS

first South African restaurant has moved up in the world. Its flimsy, original building and packrat decor have made way for a far grander scheme. The food was delicious then and is delicious now, with hearty specialties such as boerewors sausages, bobotie—ground beef curry topped with savory custard—and grilled whole kingklip fish. Expect perky service and lots of large parties. \$\$

ANTICA POSTA ★★ 519 East Paces Ferry Road, 404-262-7112, anticaposta.com. No one has come up with a better or more authentic Tuscan restaurant than has Marco Betti, whose family owns a small albergo and ristorante outside of Florence. Don't waste your paycheck on ruinous and sometimes mediocre entrees, but go for the beans, chicken livers, and rustic pastas characteristic of the humble countryside. You will enjoy the owners' smiles and the coziness of a dining room decorated in the style of a rural relais. \$\$

ARIA ★★ 490 East Paces Ferry Road, 404-233-7673, aria-atl.com. Chef/owner Gerry Klaskala has never cared that much about fashion, and this upscale bistro showcases his taste for slow-cooked food and organic produce. He and his pastry chef are on the same page, and their effort landed this American restaurant on the gourmet map. The one-of-a-kind lighting and flashy details work well with the fussy old building. The lounge is a sexy, well-kept secret, and wine connoisseurs will want to tour the cellar and perhaps book an intimate dinner. \$\$

ATLANTA FISH MARKET ★★ 265 Pharr Road, 404-262-3165, buckheadrestaurants.com. Buckhead has long been acquainted with the big fish sculpture, leaping upward to advertise this massive seafood restaurant, and the crowds pouring into what now feels like a classic have acquired a more family-oriented image. In terms of sheer seafood variety, no one else comes close. The quality is convincing, and there isn't a better spot to explore the outer limits of marine life, from oysters to stone crabs and halibut. \$\$

AU PIED DE COCHON ★ 3315 Peachtree Road, ground floor of the InterContinental Hotel, 404-946-9070, aupieddecochonatlanta.com. This interesting concept—based on a Parisian brasserie that's been active since 1946—is far more than just another fanciful hotel dining room with a fusion menu. The execution isn't always great, but from the signature pig's foot to the foie gras (duck and goose), the raw seafood trays to the tasty steaks, there is plenty to eat among the rosy cherubs and delirious details of this room, which stays open around the clock. \$\$

BLUEPOINTE ★★ 3455 Peachtree Road, 404-237-9070, buckheadrestaurants.com. Architecturally forward and no slouch in the culinary field, either, this extravagant fusion restaurant is part of the Buckhead Life empire. The kitchen has gotten progressively more seafood-oriented

CHEAP EATS

New Orleans Done Right

[Just Loaf'n, 313 Boulevard, 404-525-4001, justloafn.net]

Try to pinpoint exactly what makes people love New Orleans, and three things usually come to mind: great food, lively music, and friendly people. Expect all three at Just Loaf'n, a cozy Edgewood-area sandwich shop.

From the moment you drive up to the tiny purple, green, and gold building (Mardi Gras colors, of course), you'll feel like you've traveled back to pre-Katrina New Orleans. Upbeat music pipes through the speakers, colorful masks festooned with feathers line the walls, and, within seconds, the staff greets you with a warm smile. Even the rows of Zapp's potato chips convey that the owners took great care in ensuring that patrons enjoy an authentic N'awlins dining experience (unlike the many restaurants that tout entrees like scarlet red gumbo as credible cuisine). The constant stream of natives flocking to this sister establishment of the original Stockbridge location seems to agree.

The restaurant's name alone pays homage to its hometown inspiration—*loaf* is New Orleans slang for po' boy sandwiches. Here, they headline the menu with fillings like crispy fried shrimp, oysters, and even turkey, served still sizzling between flaky slices of French bread. Patton's brand hot sausage (brought in from New Orleans) and soft-shell crab versions are also signature specialties. If you can't make up your mind, go for a half-and-half po' boy made with your top two choices. And for a couple of bucks extra, enjoy side dishes of savory red beans and rice or jambalaya overflowing with smoked sausage and chicken.

Other temptations include spicy seafood gumbo steeped in a heavy brown roux, pralines packed with pecans, sweet "sno balls" (a cross between an icee and a snow cone), and homemade bread pudding drenched in whiskey sauce.

Unlike many incarnations of New Orleans restaurants, Just Loaf'n doesn't neglect the breakfast crowd, serving up shrimp 'n' cheese grits and breakfast po' boys (made with sausage or fried fish, eggs, and cheese) with side items such as "gator tatorz," a Cajun hash brown. The drive-thru is open daily (until 2 a.m. on Friday and Saturday) and delivery is available for just \$2 with a \$20 minimum order. —CHANDRA R. THOMAS

