



# Secrets of St. Maarten Flavors



## NOLA Bayou Bistro



**Fellow food-lovers, unite! Let's get our taste buds ready for St. Maarten Flavors in November. In anticipation of this culinary month, we took the crucial task upon ourselves to go out and about and sample some of the best flavours of St. Maarten. And while we were at it, we thought: Why not try to uncover some of their secret recipes?**

**Throughout the entire month of November, St. Maarten Flavors will present a fantastic opportunity to indulge in the finest offerings of the island's top restaurants and bars. During this time, patrons can enjoy specially chosen signature dishes or cocktail combinations at significantly discounted prices. Participating venues will provide a variety of options, including sampler or single-dish meals starting at just US \$17.50, and three-course feasts starting at \$49.**

First up on our list is NOLA Bayou Bistro, a newcomer in this year's St. Maarten Flavors celebrations. The chic restaurant opened its doors in February and is quickly becoming

the new hotspot for craft cocktails, exquisite cuisine and an unforgettable ambiance. As soon as we walked into the romantic indoor-outdoor restaurant, we were able to understand the hype – NOLA's breezy and beautiful space adorned with giant fans, dark mahogany wood elements and scenic views of our very own "bayou" (the Simpson Bay Lagoon) looks even better than it appears in photos.

Picture this: It's a Saturday night, so we make our way over to NOLA's impressive bar to try some drinks. NOLA's drink menu currently boasts five signature craft cocktails, but bartender Sergio tells us he is working on expanding this list as we speak (stay tuned). For now, however, we're more than content with the drinks on offer.

Their bestselling French Quarter with Ketel One Vodka, basil, pineapple and citrus is as refreshing and surprising as we had hoped. We also try one of the drinks Sergio is currently working on, which features mint, basil, bergamot, cucumber and elderflower – and let's just say we can't wait for the new cocktail menu.

As we take our seats, a lovely couple from New Orleans comes



up to owner James "Jimbo" Morris to compliment him on the food and service. If that's not a good preview for what is about to come, we don't know what is. Foodies will likely recognise the charismatic restaurateur from the Tex-Mex restaurant Jimbo's, which closed its doors three years ago.

When we ask why he decided to open NOLA, Jimbo explains that he always loved New Orleans and its unique cuisine. What's more, the Louisiana creole kitchen is new to the island, as this isn't being done by any other restaurant; but at the same time it's familiar, as it's something locals will understand and appreciate.

We start off with homemade buttermilk biscuits and corn muffins for the table, instead of bread. They are so buttery and flaky that we would have left happily had all else failed. But thankfully, this is not the case.

We sample an entire array of dishes, starting with fresh oysters accompanied by a red wine vinegar with shallots and a shaved ice champagne vinegar. It all pairs perfectly with the crisp white wine Hostess Jess suggests. Even an oyster newbie can tell how fresh these are: "It's the freshness you crave from sashimi, but often don't get," Jess says.

Next up is the Lobster Etouffee, one of the most popular appetizers on the menu, and we understand why. According to Jimbo, it's "lobster, wild rice, and secrets". Though we cannot attest to those secrets, we agree that the dish has many delicious layers of flavours and textures. Then, the most adventurous thing we've eaten in a while – alligator bites. We have to admit we were a bit hesitant at first, but they taste quite familiar – like dense chicken nuggets, but with a mildly fishy flavour.



Of course, we have to try the two most iconic Louisiana Creole dishes: Gumbo and Jambalaya. The first is a smoky and hearty combination of chicken and sausage with okra and bell peppers. The latter is a perfectly spiced and saucy fried rice with a rich tomato flavour, slow cooked to perfection.

Pro tip: Sop up any leftover sauce with your buttermilk biscuits – if you did not eat them all at once that is.

On to our main dishes: Our hosts recommend the Creole Catfish and the Cornbread Encrusted Salmon – and with good reason.

Neither of us has ever tried catfish before, but we quickly fall in love with the crunchy-on-the-outside-soft-on-the-inside fillet, which is brined to add flavour and improve texture, then dried, double crusted in cornbread and fried to perfection – a must-try!

The salmon is equally delicious. Though encrusted with cornbread, the buttery texture and lemony flavour still shine through. Not to mention the perfect garlic mash with rosemary and thyme, and the smoky charred broccolini – either of which can hold its own as a satisfying dish.

As we are finishing our last bites, Chef Ramon joins us at the table to chat about the food and the restaurant. The talented chef is from St. Maarten, but has cooked in Spain and Florida, where he learned to prepare alligator and other Southern specialties.

Now for the ultimate question at every good dinner: Is there still space for dessert? Well, we recently discovered that according to science, there always is (no kidding – look up sensory-specific satiety and thank us later).



And who are we to go against science?

We opt for the two most famed Southern sweet treats on NOLA's dessert menu: Bananas Foster and Pecan (PEE-can, Puh-KAHN?) Pie. Bananas Foster is a typical New Orleans dessert – cake and fresh bananas infused with rum. Need we say more? The Pecan Pie is sweet, nutty and overall decadent – and sure helps us prove the sensory-specific satiety theory.

**It's not too late to be part of this year's line-up and be featured in the Out n About's "Secrets of St. Maarten Flavors". Participating restaurants should contact the St. Maarten Hospitality and Trade Association (SHTA) for details about the promotional campaign. Interested restaurants can also still sign up to participate in the month-long St. Maarten Flavors campaign via [stmaartenflavors.com](http://stmaartenflavors.com).**



### Corn Muffins

#### Ingredients

120gr flour  
136gr coarse cornmeal  
150gr. brown sugar  
6gr salt thin  
21gr. baking powder  
220gr. butter  
1 egg  
240gr. whole milk

#### Directions

1. Bake for 180° C for 20 minutes.
2. Mix all dry ingredients together.
3. Add all wet ingredients and mix roughly.
4. Pour into greased muffin pan.
5. Bake at 180° C in 35% water for 20 minutes.