

There's no consensus on why New Orleans, Louisiana is called the Big Easy, but it might just be because it's so easy to find great food in this city. With 376,971 residents, [the city's population](#) is well over a quarter million people. On top of that, it's one of the top tourist destinations in the American South, so there's always many people looking for a delicious meal.

That's probably why it's become such a culinary hub. People flock to schools like [NOCHI](#) and the [Louisiana Culinary Institute](#) to study cooking. After all, there's no better place to learn the unique New Orleans-style. The city has its own distinct cajun flavors and creole food that people travel all over the world for.

People flock to restaurants like [Dooky Chase](#) for authentic and award-winning Louisiana dishes, like red beans and rice and gumbo. There's amazing seafood at places like [Pêche Seafood Grill](#) and so much Southern cuisine, you might feel overwhelmed with options. However, if that's the case, then don't worry - this list will narrow down the top 10 chefs in the Crescent City, so you can pick a restaurant with confidence.

1. Emeril Lagasse

Location: Emeril's, NOLA, Meril

Profession/Category: Chef and Owner

Experience: 45+ years

How They Got into the Industry: A celebrity Chef and creator of "New New Orleans Style Cuisine", Emeril Lagasse had already mastered pastries and baking in his teens, through his job at a bakery. He attended culinary school at Johnson & Wales in the 70s and later studied French cuisine on-site in France. Since then, he has opened 21 restaurants and become one of the most famed and well-regarded chefs in America.

Interesting Stats/Accomplishments: Chef Emeril rose to prominence with his television appearances, from hosting many shows such as *Emeril Live* to acting as the *Good Morning America* food correspondent. Emeril's, his first restaurant, was named "Restaurant of the Year" by *Esquire* after it opened in 1990. He was *GQ*'s 1998 "Chef of the Year" and named by *People* to be one of the 25 Most Intriguing People of 2004.

Links: [Website](#)

2. Donald Link

Location: Herbsaint, Cochon

Profession/Category: Chef and Owner

Experience: 30+ years

How They Got into the Industry: Chef Donald Link attended culinary school in the early 90s after having already worked in kitchens for years. He worked at numerous top restaurants in San Francisco before returning to Louisiana to open Herbsaint in 2000. Since then he has created a culinary empire that has dominated the food scene in New Orleans.

Interesting Stats/Accomplishments: He won the James Beard award for the Best Chef in the South in 2007 as well as the Best American Cookbook award in 2009, and has also been nominated for two other James Beard awards. He was named Restaurateur of the Year in 2012 by the Louisiana Restaurant Association. His restaurant Cochon was called one of the top 3 restaurants by the *New York Times* and listed in the 20 most important restaurants in America by *Bon Appétit*

Links: [Website](#)

3. John Folse

Location: Restaurant R'evolution

Profession/Category: Chef and Owner

Experience: 45+ years

How They Got into the Industry: Chef John opened his first restaurant, Lafitte's, in 1978, which he still runs. He has been considered one of the best chefs in New Orleans, and has opened numerous restaurants since, in multiple countries. He also hosted a culinary radio show for years. He wrote the famed *Encyclopedia of Cajun & Creole Cooking* and had the John Folse Culinary Institute at Nicholls State University named after him.

Interesting Stats/Accomplishments: He has received countless awards, including being named the 1990 National Chef of the Year by the American Culinary Federation and receiving an honorary Doctorate of Culinary Arts from Johnson & Wales. He hosted a PBS television show and has been featured in worldwide publications like *TIME Magazine*.

Links: [Website](#)

4. Susan Spicer

Location: Bayona, Mondo

Profession/Category: Chef and Owner

Experience: 50+ years

How They Got into the Industry: Chef Susan is a staple of the New Orleans culinary community and began her career in the city in the 70s, though she has also worked in France and California. She opened Bayona in 1990 to high acclaim, and has maintained it ever since. She wrote an award-winning cookbook titled *Crescent City Cooking* in 2007.

Interesting Stats/Accomplishments: She was named the Best Chef in the Southeast region by the James Beard Foundation in 1993, and was then inducted into their “Who’s Who” in 2010. Bayona was granted a place in the Nations Restaurant News Fine Dining Hall of Fame in 1998. Chef Susan has also appeared on *Top Chef* and *NCIS: New Orleans*, and was the inspiration for a character on HBO’s *Treme*.

Links: [Website](#)

5. Nina Compton

Location: Compère Lapin, Bywater American Bistro

Profession/Category: Chef and Owner

Experience: 20+ years

How They Got into the Industry: A native of St. Lucia, Chef Nina’s first kitchen job was in Jamaica. However, she later moved to New York to attend the Culinary Institute of America, which she graduated from in 2001. She worked at top restaurants around the country before opening Compère Lapin in 2015, which was received with great praise.

Interesting Stats/Accomplishments: She was the fan favorite and first runner up of *Top Chef* Season 11. She won the James Beard Best Chef Award for the South in 2018 and was named one of the best new chefs of 2017 by *Food & Wine*. Her restaurants have been raved about in publications like *Eater*, *The New York Times*, and *Playboy*.

Links: [Website](#)

6. Michael Gulotta

Location: Maypop, MoPho

Profession/Category: Chef and Owner

Experience: 15+ years

How They Got into the Industry: A New Orleans native, Chef Michael started his career in NOLA early. He attended the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute and was the Chef de Cuisine for Restaurant August for years before opening his first restaurant, MoPho, which blends classic cajun flavors with Vietnamese cuisine.

Interesting Stats/Accomplishments: He has been semifinalist for the James Beard Best Chef: South award for four years straight. Upon opening, MoPho was named restaurant of the year by *New Orleans Magazine* and was nominated for *Bon Appetit’s* Best New Restaurant award. Chef Michael was named Best New Chef by national publication *Food & Wine* in 2016.

Links: [Website](#)

7. Justin Devillier

Location: La Petite Grocery, Justine
Profession/Category: Chef and Owner
Experience: 15+ years

How They Got into the Industry: Chef Justin did not attend culinary school, and instead became a skilled cook on the job. He learned French cuisine while working at Bacco, Stella and Peristyle, under Chef Anne Kearny-Sands. He rose through the ranks at La Petite Grocery, which he joined in 2004, and bought it in 2010.

Interesting Stats/Accomplishments: Chef Justin was *New Orleans Magazine's* 2014 Chef of the Year and was *Top Chef: New Orleans* finalist. He won the James Beard for Best Chef: South in 2016 after having been nominated for the four previous years.

Links: [Website](#)

8. Martha Wiggins

Location: Café Reconcile
Profession/Category: Executive Chef
Experience: 15+ years

How They Got into the Industry: When she was a teenager, Chef Martha worked in a deli and learned to love cooking. She went to culinary school before moving to New Orleans and gaining recognition through her work at Sylvain. She now works at Café Reconcile, where she not only cooks phenomenal cuisine, but also teaches and mentors at-risk teens and young adults.

Interesting Stats/Accomplishments: She is a two-time James Beard semifinalist, once in 2017 for Rising Star and once in 2018 for Best Chef: South. Her food graced the cover of *Food & Wine* in December 2015 and she made *Gambit's* list of Emerging Chefs in 2015.

Links: [Website](#)

9. Aaron Burgau

Location: Patois
Profession/Category: Chef and Owner
Experience: 15+ years

How They Got into the Industry: Early in his career, Chef Aaron worked with acclaimed chefs like Gerard Maras, and number 4 on this list, Susan Spicer. He opened Patois in 2007 and has continued to be recognized as some of the best that the New Orleans food scene has to offer.

Interesting Stats/Accomplishments: He was the people's choice for Best New Chef for *Food & Wine* in 2011. He has been nominated by the James Beard foundation multiple times. He has also been highlighted in publications like *Louisiana Cookin' Magazine* and *The Times-Picayune*,

Links: [Website](#)

10. Alon Shaya

Location: Saba, Miss River

Profession/Category: Chef and Owner

Experience: 20+ years

How They Got into the Industry: Chef Alon studied at the Culinary Institute of America, interned in Las Vegas, but rose to prominence in New Orleans, after relocating to the city in 2001. He opened Pomegranate Hospitality with his wife in 2017, and though this group manages several restaurants across the country. He has even partnered with the Four Season to open Miss River and Chandelier Bar.

Interesting Stats/Accomplishments: He has won two James Beard awards - in 2015, for Best Southern Chef, and in 2016 for Best New Restaurant. *Southern Living* named him one of the "50 People Who Are Changing the South". He has also written a combination memoir and cookbook titled *Shaya*.

Links: [Website](#)

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SOURCES USED:

Attached links

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