

## IN PURSUIT OF A LOBSTER ROLL

Most of my first 30 years were spent in New England. I remember my parents buying whole live lobsters for about 59 cents a pound during the summer, bringing them home and boiling them up. A favorite sandwich was the Lobster Roll, a top-loading hot dog bun packed with lobster salad.

To this day, the New England in me makes me crave lobster, especially a Lobster Roll. For several years, my special treat has been the Lobster Rolls at chef Bradley Ogden's YANKEE PIER restaurants. Just recently, I've discovered another place for this special sandwich: OLD PORT LOBSTER SHACK.

I must point out, that, at about \$18 for a Lobster Roll with chips and cole slaw, our California versions are pretty pricey. I do warn that, if you love lobster, once you try a Lobster Roll, you will get hooked.. Both local restaurants mix chunks of freshly-boiled lobster with a light, flavorful dressing, and pack it high into the bun...no such thing as stringy bits of previously-frozen lobster meat. The Roll is served in a basket with house-made potato chips and a side salad.

### OLD PORT LOBSTER SHACK

851 Veterans Blvd., Redwood City; 650-366-2400; [www.oplobster.com](http://www.oplobster.com)  
Lunch Weekdays, Dinner Tues. – Sat., Sunday lunch from Noon until 4 p.m.

You can take the boy out of Maine but you can't take Maine out of the boy. That's what I discovered when my friend Dixie treated me to lunch at the OLD PORT LOBSTER SHACK in Redwood City. Owner, Russell Deutsch came to California from Portland, Maine, where his business was exporting Maine lobsters. Until he married a Northern California girl, he had lived his entire life in New England. From life as a New Englander, as well as from his lobster business, Deutsch knows the importance of fresh lobster. Opening OLD PORT earlier this year, Deutsch has brought a bit of authentic down Maine food and culture to the Bay Area.

As we were driving the 50 miles from Walnut Creek to Redwood City, I told native-Californian Dixie about the lobster-in-the-rough places that Jim and I used to stop at when we would drive from Boston to visit my sister in Portland, Maine. These roadside "shacks" were weather-beaten buildings, often overlooking the beach, where you ordered your lobster at the counter, took a seat at a picnic table, usually outside, and were soon brought a boiled lobster on a paper plate...just lots of good, fresh lobster with no frills except maybe some coleslaw or fries and some drawn butter for dipping. We would crack our lobster, dig out the meat, and eat most of our meal with our fingers. What a wonderful memory.

While OLD PORT LOBSTER SHACK is in a small strip mall on busy Veterans Boulevard, rather than overlooking the beach, it has much the same ambiance of the Maine lobster shacks that I was remembering...just a bit nicer. The format is the same: order at the counter, take a seat at a wooden picnic table, and wait for your lobster or fried clams, scallops, or other East Coast seafood.

We got there at about 11:45 a.m., just before the lunchtime rush. Since Dixie and I came for Lobster Rolls, our only decision was between the Maine Lobster Roll, in which the chunks of lobster are mixed with mayonnaise, lemon juice, chives, salt and pepper, or the Naked Lobster Roll in which the lobster meat is ungarnished and simply piled into the roll and served with side dishes of mayonnaise and drawn butter. All Lobster Rolls are served in a top-loading hot dog bun that is buttered on the outside and toasted. The Rolls are accompanied by housemade Potato Chips, Bread & Butter Pickle Chips, and your choice of Cole Slaw or Pesto Pasta Salad. OLD PORT has their hot dog buns baked specially for them; you can buy them here by the dozen to take home.

Dixie and I both went for the “traditional” Maine Lobster Roll (\$17.75) and were delighted with the sweet lobster meat mixed in its tasty, but not overwhelming, dressing. It was served in a wire basket with the Potato and Pickle chips. A cup of Cole Slaw sat in a side holder attached to the basket. This was a wonderful and filling lunch.

When I spotted Deutsch’s 2004 Maine license plate as part of the decor, I went over to chat with him about New England and its seafood. This led to my asking about his Clam “Chowdah. ” After singing its praises, he served Dixie and me small cups of a perfectly-seasoned New England style chowder which was packed with clams, potatoes, carrots, and celery. It was so good, we took an order home for Jim who is a self-proclaimed New England Clam Chowder aficionado. Jim gave it two thumbs up.

My only regret about OLD PORT is that it is not closer to my home and office. I need to return soon to sample the Fried Clam Roll (\$16.75), the Beer Battered Fish and Chips (several choices on the fish), and to have another Lobster Roll. I did suggest to Mr. Deutsch that he consider a Contra Costa location.

### **YANKEE PIER**

378 Santana Row, San Jose; 408/244-1244

286 Magnolia Ave., Larkspur; 415/924-7676

San Francisco International Airport, United Domestic Terminal 3, beyond Security

Lunch and Dinner Daily; Airport location opens at 5:30 a.m., serving typical breakfast dishes as well as Clam Chowder, Oysters, and Crab Omelettes

Since Chef Bradley Ogden opened his first YANKEE PIER seafood restaurant in Larkspur in October 2000, I’ve headed out here whenever I’ve had a craving for New England seafood. YANKEE PIER now has two other locations, one in San Jose in Santana Row and another at San Francisco International Airport in the United Airlines domestic terminal. Ogden’s inspiration for YANKEE PIER came from the clam shacks that he discovered when he studied cooking in New England.

Usually I order the Lobster Roll, since this has been the only restaurant in the Bay Area where I could find it on the menu. One day, when I arrived for an early lunch, they had not yet boiled the lobsters and I so, instead of a Lobster Roll, I tried the Fried Ipswich Clams, an excellent choice that has become another of my YANKEE PIER favorites . At the Santana Row YANKEE PIER, I recently expanded my horizons further with the Clam Po' Boy sandwich, a wonderful presentation of Fried Clams. Jim usually orders the Clam Chowder to start and follows that with the Fish & Chips.

The YANKEE PIER menu goes beyond just New England seafood, offering several different fresh fish, many from local California and Northwest waters, each day. The YANKEE PIER menu also includes several specialties from Chef Ogden’s LARK CREEK restaurants, including the Yankee Salad with its Fuji apples, walnuts, and blue cheese, and such desserts as the Butterscotch Pudding

### **OLD PORT OR YANKEE PIER?**

How does OLD PORT compare to YANKEE PIER? While there are some differences in the ambiance and menus at the two, I have to say, I am happy to enjoy the New England seafood at either restaurant. I must emphasize that YANKEE PIER has been in business for over five years and that it started small, as has OLD PORT, which has just five months of experience. Quality-wise, both are outstanding.

On the tables at both restaurants are baskets filled with packets of Old Fashioned Oyster Crackers from the Westminster Cracker Company in Vermont (established 1828). These oyster crackers are the “real” New England thing to put in your Chowder, or to just munch on, as I like to do.

The lobster meat that I tasted at OLD PORT might have been a bit sweeter than what I recall at YANKEE PIER, but there was no discernible difference. OLD PORT’s buns are the more authentic and tastier. The homemade potato chips at both are yummy. The serving of Cole Slaw at YANKEE PIER is a bit larger; both are tasty. I like that OLD PORT offers the choice between Cole Slaw and Pesto Pasta Salad for the side salad. At YANKEE PIER, you are served Sour Dough Bread with all meals and, at the end of your meal, your check is accompanied by a piece of Salt Water Taffy, from Marini’s on the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. OLD PORT has a more casual ambiance than YANKEE PIER, making it more like the places I remember from Maine. YANKEE PIER has table service; at OLD PORT you order and pay at the counter and the food is delivered to your table. YANKEE PIER accepts reservations for any size party; OLD PORT only accepts reservations for large parties. Parking is no problem at OLD PORT...it is in a small strip mall with plenty of parking. YANKEE PIER in Larkspur offers valet parking in addition to free or metered parking nearby; at Santana Row, there is plenty of free parking.

Poodle Louie has reminded me that YANKEE PIER welcomes dogs at its outdoor tables; he has dined several times at the Larkspur restaurant, enjoying the water bowl at the entrance to the patio and the dog biscuit that they serve him at the table. The Larkspur restaurant also has a sandbox on the patio for kids, making this dining area quite the lively family-friendly place. At Santana Row, there is a lot of outdoor seating where dogs and kids are welcomed.

I will choose YANKEE PIER for a more elegant night out, particularly if I am dining with friends with whom I want to linger over a leisurely meal. Both restaurants serve wine and beer. The selection is more limited at OLD PORT.

Both restaurants will prepare their meals for takeout; OLD PORT, with its location near a Kaiser Hospital and many office buildings, does a booming takeout business at lunch time. Prices are comparable at both restaurants.