



Casual but sumptuous fare and retro-tropical decor makes Crown Jewel a summer must-stop. Photo by Courtney Elizabeth.

EAT & DRINK

SPECIAL OCCASION

When you're in the market for an extraordinary dining experience that gets it all right—from interior design and service to an exemplary wine list, cocktail program, and outstanding food—point yourself toward **Twelve**, the minimalist temple boasting meticulously composed spins on vintage New England dishes. At **Primo**, chef Melissa Kelly continues her winning streak with masterful service and farm-driven plates. For pure romance and celebratory know-how, **White Barn Inn**'s still the one to beat; while this year, **Regards** won us over with its creativity (Eel and lamb tartare with seaweed, sunchokes, and ramps?

Yes, please.) And even without Sommelier Brad Haskel's wine list, **Salt & Steel** had us at *truffled cacao e pepe*.

CASUAL

With the state's deluge of eateries whipping up truly spectacular everyday fixings, this category is stacked with fierce competition. For their refined-but-respectful renditions of classic diner food, **The Harbor Café** and **Palace Diner** both deserve props, while the bright-flavored Vietnamese dishes (congee with king oysters, chili oil, and mustard greens) at **Công Tú Bôt** keep haunting our dreams, as do the

nuanced and complex Thai dishes of **Long Grain**. Meanwhile, the sumptuous green goddess scallops with black rice at **Crown Jewel** keep us steering the boat toward Great Diamond Island all summer long.

DATE NIGHT

Somewhere between fancy-pants dining and come-as-you-are joints, you'll find the brasserie, the bistro, the gastropub, and the tavern. Places like Kennebunkport's **Chez Rosa** and **Central Provisions**, where relaxed elegance pervades in both food and atmosphere. We put **18 Central Oyster Bar & Grill** in the same genre for its pretty yet

unpretentious interior and delicate crudos. **Wayside Tavern**, too, nails that balance between cozy and polished—though we'd also go just for the eggplant terrine alone. And don't be fooled by the simple-sounding staples at **Sammy's Deluxe**; those jalapeño poppers are stuffed with smoked local eel, and the vibe is pure laid-back luxury.

GROUP DINING

A successful group dining experience relies on a few key things: A staff's ability to deftly juggle and synchronize lots of requests—as we've witnessed repeatedly at **Scales** and **Solo Italiano**—and table settings that let guests comfortably eat and talk together. For the latter, we love the extra-long table at **Gather**. And access to a beautiful private room is always a



A mosaic of raw salmon, organic seeds, and herbs at Earth at Hidden Pond restaurant.

plus—as at **Earth**'s enclosed porch and multiple garden cabins that sit up to 12, and at **Little Fern**, with its stately enclosed private room.

SOLO DINING

Certain environments lend themselves more to eating alone than others, and for our money, that

NOTABLE NEWCOMERS

With new entries coming fast and furious over the last year, we've made room to recognize 10 (in no particular order) that already have us going back for more:

1. FRONT & MAIN
2. 555 NORTH
3. ROSELLA KPT
4. MERCHANT & FRYE
5. BREAD & FRIENDS
6. THISTLE & GROUSE
7. WOLFPeach
8. TRUDY BIRD'S ØLBAR
9. BAR FUTO
10. LENORA



The view at Aragosta is as heavenly as the menu, which spotlights local seafood. Photo (and left) by Lauryn Hottinger.

the river make for a million-dollar experience. It's also tough to argue with **Chebeague Island Inn**'s dining room, hovering over sparkling Casco Bay, or with the extraordinary experience of sitting at **Ocean** while taking in the surging waves of the Atlantic.

BAR BITES

Done right, bar snacks are small but mighty. Witness the big-flavored green curried shrimp at **Hey Sailor!** The *cicchetti* menu at **Via Vecchia** is home to the infinitely memorable fried cauliflower with eggplant-golden raisin caponata. **Izakaya Minato**'s broiled Maine oysters with miso custard and ponzu is rivaled only by **Pai Men Miyake**'s Hamayaki—broiled crab and scallop over sushi rice, kewpie mayo, truffle oil, and eel sauce. And then there's **Papi**'s beef empanadas, a flaky, rich ode to the tastes of Old San Juan.

