

# SEASIDE ESCAPE

By CLAUDIA ALARCON



If you didn't get a chance to enjoy a beach getaway this summer, there's always next year.

But if you're still craving fresh-off-the-boat seafood, you are in luck. We've done some research for you, and have found four local establishments that will transport you to that special seaside retreat. From Latin flare to classic Gulf vibes, you're bound to find what you're looking for. You can almost feel the ocean breeze...



## MONGERS MARKET + KITCHEN

512.215.8972 | [Mongersaustin.com](http://Mongersaustin.com)

Photography by Matt Lankes

In Austin's trendy East side, Chef Shawn Stark — formerly of Paggi House and Kenichi — joined seafood purveyor Roberto San Miguel to create Mongers Market + Kitchen. San Miguel, a Texas Gulf offshore seafood specialist, had been selling fresh ocean catch to local restaurants for a few years. “We teamed up after a couple years of buyer/seller relationship at both Paggi



House and Kenichi,” says Chef Stark. “Roberto had always been talking about opening a seafood market, and we decided that a small grill would be a great idea to accompany it,” he adds.

The refurbished space definitely has a Gulf Coast feel to it, designed by Chef Stark's wife Julie, who also runs the front of house. The ocean blue space is lined with whitewashed boards, and a Gulf of Mexico mural graces an entire dining room wall. To create a laid back beach cottage vibe, the room is decorated with tasteful nautical elements, including cleverly-built seashell and driftwood hanging curtains and simple tables and chairs. Guests can also pull up a stool at the raw bar, or grab a picnic table on the patio deck.

Both the menu and market are centered on fresh Gulf offerings like shrimp, grouper, amberjack, snapper and oysters, which San Miguel brings from Freeport, Texas himself, and are available for purchase to take home and fire up the grill. “I wanted the menu to be simple, approachable seafood, focusing on the Gulf but also sourcing from the Northeast, my neck of the woods,” says Stark. “So far, one of the most popular items is the smoked fish dip, which is actually from my time spent throughout Florida and The Bahamas.” Other popular items include the fish BLT, the BBQ Gulf shrimp, fish and grits, Gulf yellowfin tuna ceviche and littleneck clam chowder, enjoyed alongside a small but thoughtful selection of local beer and boutique wines.

## SHUCK SHACK

210.236.7422 | [Shuckshack.com](http://Shuckshack.com)  
Photography courtesy of Shuck Shack



A similar concept has just hit San Antonio, and I mean hit. Jason Dady's newest venture, Shuck Shack, brings a beach getaway to the heart of the city, in the up-and-coming Government Hill. The family-friendly eatery has been packed daily since it opened in early July, and with good reason. The food is every bit as good as you'd expect from Dady, served in a laid-back, no-frills environment that is perfect for sharing good times with friends and family. “We're not trying to reinvent seafood,” says the chef. “The concept is simple fare, super fresh seafood and just a kick-back vibe for hanging out.” Aside from freshly shucked oysters — served raw or baked in three different styles — the menu boasts an East Coast feel with New England style clam chowder, fish 'n chips and decadent whole Maine lobster rolls that are worth the splurge. For the kids, they offer hot dogs and burgers made with beef from 44 Farms in Cameron, Texas.

The cozy, rustic shack is itself a labor of love, practically hand-built by Dady and his brother Jake. “It was an old shuttered thrift shop, and prior to that a house with a small residential kitchen, single restroom, broken walls, etc. It was a mess,” says Dady. The brothers worked tirelessly over several months to secure the structure and install the weathered wood interiors, build a commercial kitchen, and add a bar with a large window facing the patio with its playground centerpiece. Sitting at the bar, sipping on a glass of chilled rosé and washing down a dozen cold water oysters, you would swear there's a pier just outside that window. “I loosely had the concept and a menu written,” says Dady. “But the venue was perfect and dictated finalizing our ideas.”

## MARISCOS EL BUCANERO

210.408.9297 | [Elbucanerosa.com](http://Elbucanerosa.com)

But one can't talk about seafood in San Antonio without including El Bucanero, the city's foremost proponent of Mexico-style seafood. The Cervantes family started serving traditional recipes from their home state of Sinaloa — the shrimp capital of Mexico — in a tiny shack on W.W. White Road. Today, loyal customers pack the two large locations in north San Antonio on a daily basis, thanks to their ample menu that includes unique takes on ceviche, seafood platters brimming with oysters and plump shrimp and a fiery shrimp aguachile that rivals that of any restaurant in Mazatlán. In the dining room the ambiance is festive and bright, with murals of sea creatures lining the walls and tables filled with families in lively conversation. We are most impressed with the Michelada Bucanera, a frosty goblet of the beer of your choice, seasoned with lime juice and spices, and rimmed with fresh poached shrimp and cucumber slices — a cocktail and appetizer in one. Take a sip, close your eyes and pretend to stick your toes in the sand.

## ALCOMAR MARISCOS Y MAS

512.401.3161 | [Alcomaratx.com](http://Alcomaratx.com)  
Photography by Scott Roberson



And since we've touched on Latin influences, there's an Austin newcomer worth discovering — Alcomar, the latest endeavor from El Chile group, helmed by Carlos Rivero and renowned chefs Jeff Martinez and Alma Alcocer-Thomas. About a year ago, Rivero traveled to Peru to visit his sister, Maribel. The two went on a culinary tour of several South American countries, tasting so much incredible seafood that he left inspired to bring this interesting, delicious and vibrant food back to Austin.

The name Alcomar is a combination of the chefs' last names, as well as a play-on-words: mar is Spanish for sea. And just like the name, Alcomar's menu is a complete collaboration between Martinez and Alcocer-Thomas. “The collaboration on the menu and concept felt like we had never stopped creating dishes — where one started the other finished,” says Alcocer-Thomas. “We have a really good time and hope that our guests can feel it in our food.”



“We always try to use as much local produce as we can find,” adds Martinez, “so our menu will inevitably change from time to time. We also offer weekly specials that incorporate seasonal ingredients which compliment new offerings of coastal cuisine in interesting ways.”

The menu includes Mexican staples with a gourmet twist, such as tostadas topped with grilled octopus al pastor, and scallops Veracruzana served with cauliflower flan. There are ample South American influences, like a Peruvian-style cebiche accompanied by corn nuts and yucca chips, or a Bolivian potato soup enhanced with your choice of crab or oysters. The wine list is carefully selected to match the cuisine, and the cocktails are not to be missed — try the Alcomar margarita, made with Tequila reposado, damiana, grilled pineapple and fresh lime, rimmed with Bolivian pink salt.

These creative offerings are matched by a serene, inviting space. The building was formerly occupied by an old Tex-Mex standby, but had fallen in disrepair. It came back to life with subtle maritime motifs that evoke the ocean side, such as a color palette in tones of blue and macramé window treatments. The horseshoe-shaped bar is covered in colorful Mexican tile, and the tiny patio offers a shady spot to while away the afternoon with a cocktail and a snack. The transformation was a team effort between architect Juan Carlos de Leon, marketing director Bryan Gonzales and Rivero himself. “We wanted our guests to feel like they are taking a break in a little casual seaside place,” says Gonzales. “We have been respectful of this great Austin building, and hope to keep the tradition of it being a special restaurant for a long time.” ❖