



DUBUQUE MARINA AND YARDARM: FIREBOAT CHICKEN SANDWICH WITH LOADED FRIES



COCONUT COVE RESORT: FISH TACO WRAP

Dining with The Rec Group

The Yardarm Riverfront Bar & Grill, Coconut Cove Resort, Off Shore Bar & Grill, and Whitetail Bluff Resort

By Bryce Parks

When we planned our cover story, we thought doing an extensive food review on the new Off Shore Bar & Grill would be the compliment, but after our interview, we realized that doing that feature now, focused on that one venue, would be akin to reviewing Disney's Hollywood Studios Theme Park a month BEFORE the *Star Wars* Galaxy's Edge attraction was open. Yes, still cool, but not as cool as it's going to be very soon.

This is because, as mentioned in the cover story on page 18, The Rec Group who owns the resort has opted to make a big investment in kitchen talent, bringing in Chefs Jason Culbertson and Robert Weaver, who each bear a wealth of experience in high-end restaurants in the Tri-States. So expect big changes coming this summer and certainly in the fall as this restaurant is the one in their arsenal of eateries that will not close with the end of the boating and camping season. Off Shore will be a year-round destination restaurant featuring both accessible lunch and dinner favorites catering to the summer crowd when the weather is our friend, but also bringing out a slate of fine dining options that will surely make fans want to make that mid-winter drive from Dubuque to get their favorite dish again and again.

In the meantime, while offering some curveballs for the menus at other venues owned by The Rec Group, which include the Dubuque Marina & Yardarm, Whitetail Bluff Resort, and Coconut Cove Resort, you will find a lot of familiarity and congruency between the properties. For that reason, we're going to talk about them, for now, as a whole. Because if you're looking for the experience of an hour or two summer micro-vacation lunch or dinner, these properties can all offer a version of that to take your savage hunger while calming the stressed-out version of you that had a long week and is ready for a cold beverage and a great view.

Without reinventing the wheel, the restaurant and bar concepts at these properties take on many favorites that people expect to see along the shore of the Mississippi and toss in some curveballs along the way. After all, you never know which bait is going to be hot from day to day. And through the menus, the common theme is quality food served fresh in an inviting and, so important to the owners,

always a clean environment. That last bit can be a challenge for a venue that focuses so much on outdoor amenities, so it's keenly important to always make it a priority.

The menus carry most of the dining categories you're looking for: appetizers, salads, sandwiches, burgers, pizzas, and special entrees. And let us not forget a full run-down of cold beverages including custom signature drinks.

For starters, you'll find favorites like cheese curds, onion rings, shrimp (grilled or fried and served firecracker style or coconut battered, depending on the location), nachos, wings, and quesadillas. But while the Yardarm's nachos are chicken and bacon with white queso and Coconut Cove goes old school with seasoned beef, the nachos at Off Shore are seafood style with grilled shrimp and ahi tuna over wonton chips. We had some. They were yummy! How's that for a skilled food review term?

They all have signature burgers from a Jalapeño Popper Burger or Backwater Burger with homemade bacon marmalade and a bourbon glaze at Off Shore to the Beyond Meat burger at the Yardarm, a popular new option for vegans and, you know, healthy people. Try the Cabana Burger at Coconut Cove which adds pulled pork and BBQ sauce to your beef patty. So many options, but you can also always invent your own burger at any of the locations. Whitetail Bluff has the most traditional Americana version of any of the menus, but you can still find a selection of similar burgers, apps, wraps, pizzas, and more on the menu plus fun stuff like the adult grilled cheese which features swiss and pepper jack cheese and bacon—because it's proven science that bacon makes everything better.

Wraps are big at the resorts, and you'll find cheesesteak, buffalo chicken, chicken caesar, and fish taco-style wraps at some locations while each creates unique offerings like seared mini ahi tuna



OFF SHORE BAR & GRILL: SEAFOOD NACHOS



OFF SHORE BAR & GRILL: REMODELED INTERIOR

wraps at Off Shore or their Outlaw, a seasoned chicken base with roasted corn, black beans, home-made fire-roasted salsa, and cheddar cheese.

You can also find two or three speciality salads from traditional chicken caesar, taco salad, or buffalo chicken to an Italian-style Caprese salad or the Summer Breeze salad at Off Shore, which is Cobb-like with cucumber dill dressing.

Coconut Cove's sandwich game is strong with a great pulled pork, Volcano Chicken, Italian beef, and two club options. But the Yardarm wins the sandwich battle with a Prime Rib Philly, Beer Cheese French Dip, Top Shelf Grilled Cheese, beer-battered cod, BLT, pulled pork, grilled chicken, and Fireboat Chicken, the favorite go-to for co-owner Jamie Becker. I had it with her as well, and it was a great choice. Chicken salad and a cheesesteak join the light spicy mayo-based lobster roll unique to Off Shore.

Pizza is also a common theme because, well, who doesn't love pizza? Coconut offers their unique spins of pizza with the Hawaiian featuring pineapple and Canadian bacon and the BLT pizza with expense itself. The Yardarm's River Philly pizza strays from the usual in a deliciously caramelized oniony kind of way. And Off Shore has taken the pizza oven to the next level, installing a flame-throwing stone hearth monstrosity that can kick out scores of pizzas in no time. The Margarita pizza is a specialty there as well as the seafood pizza on an Alfredo base with shrimp and lobster on top. Once again, you can be the captain and set sail on your pizza adventure any way you want it built if you prefer.

The Yardarm also features tacos three ways: fish, beef, and pulled pork. You might also see photos of daily specials, most off-menu, so it's a great reason to follow them on Facebook (@dubuquemarinayardarm).

They post a tempting photo of what special for lunch just about every day.

Each, of course, has kids menu options being family-focused venues. As for desserts, Whitetail Bluff offers funnel fries and ice cream while Off Shore plays to raspberry cheesecake, S'mores Cake, and key lime pie to tempt you.

Each venue has a list of signature drinks and classics. Off Shore's, named after kinds of racking boats include the Formula (Bombay gin, honey, lemon, muddled raspberries, and lavender bitters), the Cigarette (rum, pineapple, orange, and cherry juices), and the Magnum (Malibu, Blue Curacao, lemonade, topped with a can of Bud Light Seltzer, and served in an Off Shore sand bucket!). The Yardarm's special drink menu won't fit in the paper it's so big. You can guess what goes in the Dreamsicle, sangria, Mai Thai, and their famous Bloody Mary. Well, we'll tell you the Bob Marley features Bacardi Limon, Malibu, Peach Schnapps, and Melon DeKuyper, topped with pineapple juice and a splash of cranberry juice. Yes, please! The Captain's Float is a blend of Captain Morgan, Vanilla McGillicuddy's, Rumchata, and root beer. You can try one every day and it'll take you a couple of weeks to get through them. Oh, and at least five frozen concoctions including margaritas, daiquiris, piña coladas, Miami Vice, and American Dream (strawberry daiquiri topped with piña colada and float of Blue Curacao for a dreamy red, white and blue treat).

You'll have to visit in person or check the menus online to see exactly which restaurant features which items, but you seriously can't go wrong. Especially when it comes with a view... and live music. Double that if you can enjoy it with friends and family. And as always, tell 'em Bryce at 365ink sent ya! Or just point at me across the patio and say, "that guy!" ■

Coconut Cove Resort

1549 BLUFF ROAD HAZEL GREEN, WI
608-748-5480
COCONUTCOVERESORT.COM

Summer Hours: Wed-Mon: 11 AM-8 or 9 PM; Tue: Closed

The Yardarm Riverfront Bar & Grill

1201 SHIRAS AVE EXT, DUBUQUE, IA
563-582-3653
DUBUQUEMARINA.COM

Summer Hours: Tue-Sun: 11 AM-Close (late on weekends); Mon-Tue: Closed

Off Shore Bar & Grill

4115 N RIVERVIEW BELLEVUE, IA
563-872-5000
OFFSHORERESORT.NET

Summer Hours: Thu-Sun: 11 AM-9 PM; Mon-Wed: Closed

Whitetail Bluff Resort

8973 IRISH RIDGE RD. CASSVILLE, WI
608-725-5577
WHITETAILBLUFFCAMP.NET

Summer Hours: Thu-Sun: 11 AM-Close; Mon-Wed: Closed

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DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE RESTAURANT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE US VISIT? SEND US YOUR REQUESTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMMENTS!
EMAIL: DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM