

# Differences in Cajun, Creole food more than just what's on your plate

Cajun versus Creole, wondering what the difference is between these two when looking at a restaurant menu? The simplified answer is the Creole dish may contain tomatoes and most Cajun dishes do not. But in exploring Cajun food versus Creole food, we've discovered it is more than just the food on your plate. Louisiana, home to the 74<sup>th</sup> National Square Dance Convention® in 2025, is a land of diverse culture, steeped in history. The diversity also applies to The Bayou State's food and its residents get serious when it comes to the topic of meal choices.



Shrimp Creole

In researching the disparities between Cajun and Creole food, we found it's more than just a topic about whether or not it has tomatoes, it's about the people. We turned to the helpful staff at Shreveport-Bossier Convention & Tourist Bureau and Explore Louisiana and were drawn in the direction of Louisiana native, storyteller and culinary personality Jay D. Ducote. The runner up on Season 11 of Food Network Star, Ducote won an episode of

Beating Bobby Flay and won the Superchef Grudge Match. He also has appeared on Chopped, Cutthroat Kitchen, and Masterchef and has been the recipient of numerous food awards, including the Taste Hall of Fame Awards and listed among the Best Chefs of Louisiana, so he knows how to put a spoon where his mouth is, so to speak when it comes to Cajun versus Creole cuisine. He's also a talented writer and, as a native Louisianian with an extensive knowledge on this subject, we thought you might enjoy this article he wrote for Explore Louisiana (reprinted with permission). Make sure to see his recommendations for the 74<sup>th</sup> NSDC at the end.

## Cajun vs. Creole food: what is the difference?

By Jay D. Ducote

Compared to Louisiana, other states have it easy. Sure, Louisiana is home of the "Big Easy" and the locals are known for our "joie de vivre," but we are also parents to some of the most precious cuisines in the world. While we may, on occasion, have one too many Bloody Marys at Sunday brunch or add some "punch" to our milk, we don't take our responsibility lightly. Like real parenting, this job has no vacations. Even when away from the motherland, Louisianians still find ourselves bragging about and, on occasion, having to defend our pride and joy. Perhaps the most difficult task is explaining Louisiana food in a few short sentences. Of course, a Louisianian would prefer to sit down, put on a pot of coffee or pour a cold beer, and talk about it. However, we've come to learn that most people don't have the time to do that.

So if you're versed in Louisiana history and culture, then all you really need to know is that Creole cuisine uses tomatoes and proper Cajun food does not. You can stop reading now. That's how you tell a Creole gumbo vs. Cajun gumbo or jambalaya. You're welcome (to be fair, some Cajun food, such as a sauce piquant, does include tomatoes as a key ingredient). However, if you'd like to know more, please continue reading so that you can learn why the



terms “Cajun” and “Creole” that have become used so loosely and interchangeably when describing Louisiana food, are not at all the same.

A vastly simplified way to describe the two cuisines is to deem Creole cuisine as “city food” while Cajun cuisine is often referred to as “country food.” Though many of the ingredients in Cajun and Creole dishes are similar, the real difference between the two styles is the people behind these famous cuisines. They say in order to really know someone, meet their family. The same goes for food. In Louisiana, the best place to find authentic Cajun and Creole cooking is in homes across the state, which is what makes the food so special. Many of Louisiana’s most talented chefs learned their trade from their parents or grandparents. Cajun and Creole are two distinct cultures, and while over the years they continue to blend, there is still a vast distinction in Louisiana, and both have their own unique stories.

### What is Cajun food?

Cajun cuisine is famous for being very well seasoned, which is sometimes misunderstood as spicy. Seasoning is one of the most important parts of Cajun cooking, and that comes from much more than a heavy helping of cayenne pepper. Most dishes begin with a medley of vegetables based on the French mirepoix. “The holy trinity of Cajun cuisine” utilizes onion, celery and bell pepper (rather than carrots) to provide a flavor base for many dishes. Garlic is never far away from any stove, either. Paprika, thyme, file (ground sassafras leaves), parsley, green onions and much more are also very common ingredients in Cajun kitchens.

The word “Cajun” originates from the term “les Acadiens,” which was used to describe French colonists who settled in the Acadia region of Canada that consisted of present-day New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. With the British Conquest of Acadia in the 1700s, the Acadians were forcibly removed from their home in what become known as Le Grand Dérangement, or the Great Upheaval. Many Acadians eventually settled in the swampy region of Louisiana that is today known as Acadiana. Actually, four regions of south Louisiana were settled by the Cajuns, each with different resources and influences. Those distinct areas are the levees and bayous (Lafourche and Teche), prairies (Attakapas Indian land), swamplands (Atchafalaya Basin), and coastal marshes (New Orleans area and Houma).

The Acadians were an extremely resourceful people who combined the flatlands, bayous, and wild game of South Louisiana with its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico to create a truly unique local cuisine. While many Acadiana residents today have African, Native American, German, French or Italian roots, among others (which have all influenced Louisiana Cuisine in their own ways), their way of life is strongly influenced by the Cajun culture. Along with its food, this rural area of Louisiana is famous for its Cajun French music and language. With no access to modern-day luxuries like refrigerators, early Cajuns learned to make use of every part of a slaughtered animal. When a pig is butchered the event is called a “boucherie.” Boudin, a type of Cajun sausage that consists of pork meat, rice and seasoning stuffed into a casing, also commonly contains pig liver for a little extra flavor. Tasso and Andouille are two other Cajun pork products that use salts and smoke as preservatives.



Red Beans and Rice with Sausage



## Understanding Creole dishes and heritage

The term “Creole” describes the population of people who were born to settlers in French colonial Louisiana, specifically in New Orleans. In the 18th century, Creoles consisted of the descendants of the French and Spanish upper class that ruled the city. Over the years the term Creole grew to include native-born enslaved people of African descent as well as free people of color.

Like the people, Creole food is a blend of the various cultures of New Orleans including Italian, Spanish, African, German, Caribbean, Native American and Portuguese, to name a few. Creole cuisine is thought of as a little higher brow or aristocratic compared to Cajun. Traditionally, enslaved people in the kitchens of well-to-do members of society prepared the food. Due to the abundance of time and resources, the dishes consisted of an array of spices from various regions and creamy soups and sauces. A remoulade sauce, for example, which consists of nearly a dozen ingredients, would not typically be found in Cajun kitchens. Creole cuisine has a bit more variety, because of the easier access Creoles had to exotic ingredients and the wide mix of cultures that contributed to the cuisine. That’s why you find tomatoes in Creole jambalaya and not in Cajun jambalaya, or why a lot of times you find a Creole roux made with butter and flour while a Cajun roux is made with oil and flour.

The only place to get true Creole and Cajun food is in Louisiana, or at least in someone from Louisiana’s kitchen. However, if traveling down South isn’t in the cards, now you know a few tips that can help you determine if a dish is close to being authentically Cajun or Creole. Luckily, Louisiana is the one place where true Cajun and Creole food will never stray far away from its roots. With each new generation of Louisianans, there is a vested interest in history and culture and a proud new set of parents. There is no one better suited to ensure that Louisiana food adheres to its traditions and reputations. It’s a good thing there are over 4.4 million people fit for the job.

## Recommendations for the 74<sup>th</sup> NSDC

Chef Ducote, who is currently focusing on travel to soak up the various cultures of the world with his taste buds, did take a little time out to answer a couple of questions for the 74<sup>th</sup> NSDC. Although he is based in Baton Rouge, he frequents the Shreveport area and is a fan of several restaurants. He said for anyone wanting to try authentic Louisiana cuisine, “the most quintessential dishes are gumbo, jambalaya, crawfish etouffee, red beans and rice... the list definitely goes on,” but those dishes are classics when it comes to savoring a taste of The Bayou State.

And when it comes to exploring Shreveport’s restaurants for someone visiting the city for the first time, or even those who are frequent visitors, “I’d recommend Herby K’s, Fat Calf Brasserie, Marilyn’s Place, and Ki’ Mexico,” he stated. The restaurants on Chef Ducote’s list include casual dining to an upscale dinner-only option. Two of the restaurants mentioned by Chef Ducote, Herby K’s and Marilyn’s Place, were mentioned in the August edition of *National Squares* under iconic Shreveport foods.

•A convention-city fixture since 1936, the family-run Herby K’s is considered a local gem. The menu includes burgers, nine different po’boy sandwiches, salads, gumbo, etouffee, and several seafood plates. But one of the most popular iconic “taste of Shreveport” dishes is Herby

K's "world famous Shrimp Buster," which is a different take on the shrimp po'boy. There's even a Baby Shrimp Buster for smaller appetites, just don't forget the secret sauce. Herby K's is located at 1833 Pierre Ave. Don't be deterred by its "hole in the wall" exterior, the family has been serving out of the same building over 85 years. Current restaurant hours are: Sunday-Monday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Friday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

•Marilynn's Place is a popular casual dining restaurant focusing on Cajun and Creole foods and we sense a local fondness for po'boys as Marilynn's Place offers 13 different varieties! Red beans and rice, jambalaya, crawfish etouffee and gumbo are always on the menu as well as catfish and shrimp platters. There are different Cajun-inspired specialties offered nightly and a Sunday brunch served from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Locals say the house specialty at Marilynn's Place is the freshly-made beignets with powdered sugar. Beignets and coffee are served all day. Located at 4041 Fern Ave., the restaurant is open Monday-Thursday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Friday-Saturday from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.; and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

•Ki' Mexico is not your typical Tex-Mex restaurant, instead think authentic Mexican soul food with a twist on local flavors. Ki' Mexico offers a variety of hand-crafted tacos, including the Poblano Taco with its roasted and stuffed poblano pepper taking center stage, the Gringa Taco with pork marinated in ancho and guajillo peppers, wrapped in a cheese crust, and the Parrillada Taco topped with a mix of steak, bacon, ham, sausage, poblano, onions, melted cheese and your choice of salsa. There's the Mole Cabrera, a Guatemalan style dish with beef shank rice, grilled zucchini and green beans topped with a sauce made from sesame and pumpkin seeds, spices and dried peppers, and the Pescado Mykonos, featuring cooked redfish marinated in Harissa sauce served atop a homemade roasted pepper hummus and a quinoa Mediterranean salad finished with tomato and raisin chutney. The tacos, tortugas, quesadillas, and homemade salsas are a flavor explosion. If you love avocados, make sure to order the Guacamole Show, which is prepared table side. Located at 3839 Gilbert Drive, the restaurant is open Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; and Sunday, 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Ki' Mexico is closed on Monday.

•Looking for French-inspired Southern cuisine? Chef Ducote recommends trying the upscale neighborhood establishment Fat Calf Brasserie, operated by Chef Anthony Felan and Amanda Felan, who were the recipients of a 2024 Hospitality Award and listed as a 2024 Foodie Fave by Visit Shreveport-Bossier. Chef Anthony Felan was also awarded the Visit Shreveport-Bossier's 2022 Excellence in Hospitality Awards' Chef of the Year, has been named as one of *Louisiana Cookin'* magazine's Chefs to Watch and the Louisiana Food Prize 2022 People's Choice Award winner. The restaurant is in the Highland community of Shreveport at 3030 Creswell Ave. They offer shareable appetizers ranging from French staples such as Classic Beef Tartare, Vol-au-vent d'escargots and Chicken Liver Pate to Butternut Squash Arancini and Charcoal Bread, hearty seasonal entrees that include, among many others, Slow Braised Short Ribs, Crispy Duck Breast and the popular Low Country Shrimp and Grits, in an intimate setting. Fat Calf Brasserie is open Tuesday-Saturday for dinner only, providing an option for an early evening meal starting at 4 p.m. prior to evening dances at the 74<sup>th</sup> NSDC. They close nightly at 9 p.m. Reservations are strongly encouraged.