

FOOD & DRINK

Top deals and meals for Norfolk and Portsmouth restaurant weeks



By **MATTHEW KORFHAGE**

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Monroe Duncan's crab dish flames up after white wine is added at Todd Jurich's Bistro. (Stephen M. Katz | The Virginian-Pilot)
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It's that time of year again — the time when restaurants lure diners back in after the indulgent holidays with promises of low-cost, high-end meals. If you're not stuck nursing an unfortunate New Year's resolution, welcome to your annual January whirlwind of low-cost dates and decadent downtown lunches.

Norfolk Restaurant Week — which also arrives in the summer these days — is a decades-long tradition, running this year from Jan. 19 to 26. And then Portsmouth gets in on the action, from Jan. 26 to Feb. 1. Both offer prix fixe meals at lunch and dinner, ranging anywhere from \$10 to \$35. (Virginia Beach restaurant week kicks off the week after that, but menus have not been posted as of press time.)



But note that not all restaurant deals are

equal. And so here are the spots offering the best price breaks, the just sumptuous meals, or both — in Norfolk and in Portsmouth. Or, if you prefer, do your own investigating at downtownnorfolk.org or portsmouthhospitality.com.

Downtown Norfolk: Jan. 19-26

Competition is steep in the long-running Downtown Norfolk restaurant week — the best deals here are some of the better ones you'll get throughout the year. Here's a tight four, each one an easy entree to try multiple dishes at restaurants whose prices often rise much higher.

\$12 lunch at Todd Jurich's

150 W. Main St., #100, 622-3210,
toddjurichsbistro.com.

Every year, Todd Jurich's ranks among the best deals at Norfolk's restaurant week. But this year, the lunch deal is flat-out ridiculous. After diners were confused last year into believing the \$12 lunch was a three-course meal, Jurich is making good on the misunderstanding. Three courses. \$12. Plenty of options. In our cases, we'll opt for the soup of the day, some chicken and dumplings or meatloaf, and a brioche bread pudding

dessert. The \$25 and \$35 dinnertime deals are also excellent at the Bistro — with the menu's most popular signature items available for a slight upcharge. But that lunch deal is unstoppable.

\$35 all-you-can eat dinner at Texas de Brazil



Meats are rubbed in salt and cooked over an open flame at Texas de Brazil in Norfolk. (Bill Tiernan)

300 Monticello Ave. at MacArthur Center,
622-3113, texasdebrazil.com.

Most weeks a year, a life made of meat will cost you \$45 for as long as you can justify hanging out in a Brazilian Steakhouse. But during restaurant week, it's \$10 cheaper at \$35. Filet mignon, filet mignon wrapped in bacon. Beef ribs, lamb chops, pork ribs. Whatevs. Eat all you can. But whatever you do, don't fill up on salad: That's how they get you.

\$12 lunch at Varia

100 East Main St. at The Main, 763-6280,
varianorfolk.com.

Varia has switched up its restaurant week lunch deal slightly this year — exit veal Bolognese wagon wheels, and enter rigatoni alla vodka with applewood smoked bacon, or a plate of chicken marsala. But either way, with a calamari or caprese appetizer, this becomes one of the finest \$12 lunches you could expect to eat this week.

\$25 dinner at 219 Bistro

219 Granby St., 757-416-6219,
219bistro.com.

Calamari. Steak. Fries. Creme brulee. As always, the price break you receive will depend on the things you order, and the three-course \$25 prix-fixe at 219 contains some combinations whose savings are more minimal — but I dare you to get much better deals than this three-course surf and turf at \$25.

Downtown Portsmouth: Jan. 26-Feb.



The Shrimp Po boy at JoJack's Espresso Bar & Cafe on Churchland Blvd. in Portsmouth. Made with shrimp, sautéed in lemon butter served on a demi roll with house seasonings and lemon rosemary mayonnaise with a side of macaroni and cheese. (ill Tiernan)

This is Portsmouth's first restaurant week in a decade — and some restaurants seem to have had a hard time getting into the spirit. By back-of-envelope math, many of the prix-fixe meals on the Portsmouth menus cost pretty much regular price. For now, the week is best used to find a few no-frills deals at lunch, but Dock of the Bay does have a nice dinner option for the evening-prone.

\$15 two-course shrimp and grits or crab cakes at JoJack's Cafe

5700 Churchland Blvd., 757-483-1483,
jojackscafe.com.

Not everything on the restaurant week at JoJack's is a big bargain — the soup and sandwich specials are fairly comparable to

regular prices. But at lunch during restaurant week, you can also try their supertime crab cake or shrimp and grits, with the addition of a little dessert or cookie, for a steep discount. And who doesn't deserve shrimp and grits for lunch every now and again?

\$10 three-course lunch at Lobscouser

337 High St., 757-397-2728,

lobscouser.com

There is nothing fancy about Lobscouser, a utilitarian fried seafood spot on High Street — but there's also nothing fancy about a \$10 price tag on a three-item meal that includes your choice gumbo or crab puff appetizers, a grilled salmon or fried catfish entree, and dessert.

\$25 dinner at Dock of the Bay

103 Constitution Ave, Portsmouth, 757-337-8604, dockofthebayva.com

Waterside restaurant Dock of the Bay has a nifty dinner deal to entice you out on the water even as the weather takes a turn back to chilly seasonability: a \$25 three-course meal that can include a she-crab-soup appetizer, a fried sampler of flounder and shrimp and mini-crab cakes, and bread pudding or cheesecake for dessert.

\$15 two-course fish and chips lunch at The Gosport Tavern

702 High St., 757-606-2666,
gosporteats.com

The Gosport's lunch is usually a simple affair: a wrap, some soup, some salad. For restaurant week, the gastropub is offering up some of their evening items along with premium sides and salads. The one real deal among the mix is their excellent beer-battered fish and chips — some of the better you'll find locally. The two-course meal is the same price as the regular fish and chips, which means you're getting some fried pickles or a Caesar salad for free.

\$15 lunch at Olde Towne Public House

467 Court St, 757-966-1229,
oldetownepublichouse.com

Two items on a menu of restaurant-week options at this neighborhood pub will run you a mere \$15 total. Options include the burger, the cheesesteak, or the BBQ chicken with two sides. \$15 total. Two things. Out the door.



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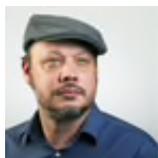
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