

The Chowdah Head Rules: Picking the best made our expert feel a little clammy

When my editor asked me to write an article about the best clam cakes and New England clam chowder in Rhode Island, my first question was, “Will you provide me with a group of security guards to protect me from the violent mobs when the article comes out?”

To put it gently, Rhode Islanders are rabid about their chowder. Each individual feels like whatever the chowder they grew up on is *the best* chowder in the state, hands down, without question. And you’d be an idiot to feel differently.

This became an issue for me.

“I know chowder,” I stupidly thought to myself as I accepted the assignment. “I love going to seafood restaurants. I get chowder wherever it’s available. I am a creamy, clammy connoisseur. This will be nice and easy.” I was so, so, *so* wrong.

After jotting down my thoughts, I decided get other peoples’ opinions from some RI restaurant Facebook groups hoping to hear about some places I never tried. A few hours later, I found myself making an extensive, intimidating spreadsheet to catalog the 700-plus unexpected responses. It shocked me that there were so many places I hadn’t tried — some I hadn’t even heard of — and it hit me like a ton of clams; I was in trouble.

I couldn’t comfortably write the article with only my casual knowledge. These people cared too much about the title for me to treat it so informally. I recorded all of the restaurants suggested and how many times each was suggested. Based on this and my existing local seafood knowledge, I made a list of all the places that *must* be considered, then planned to gain an intimate knowledge of the chowder and clam cakes from every spot on the list — no matter how much fried, creamy food I need to consume.

To be safe, I consulted with my doctor. He dropped me as a patient.

Free from those annoying health warnings, I spent a week driving across the entire state no fewer than four times. I’ve been eating clam cake after clam cake, and slurping chowder after chowder. My seafood tour resulted in this: My personal opinions on the best clam cakes and New England clam chowder in the state. I understand that everybody has different priorities and feelings about what exactly makes these staples perfect. These are the opinions of but one man.

Best Clam Cake: Aunt Carrie’s, Narragansett

Among the dozens of clam cakes I ate during my seafood tour, Aunt Carrie’s grabbed my attention the most. The dough is perfect, the clams are plentiful, the fry is exactly as thick as it should be, with a nice crunch and a complete lack of grease.

Other top clam cakes include: Anthony’s Seafood in Middletown, Blount Clam Shack in Warren, Flo’s Clam Shack in Middletown, and Quito’s in Bristol.

Best New England Clam Chowder: Crossroads Pub, Warren

The offering of this surprising contender has exactly the right blend of clamminess and creaminess. The potatoes are the perfect consistency. It has just the right amount of pepper.

Other top contenders are Anthony's Seafood in Middletown, Quito's in Bristol (if you like it a little bit clammier), and Weekapaug Inn in Westerly (with a little bit of an alternative, smoky taste).

The real takeaway for me was that locally there are a ton of great places serving up their own takes on these Rhode Island favorites. I love that the chowder and clam cakes vary from place to place, and picking a favorite was extremely difficult. I'm not sure I'll accept the burden of choosing "the best" of Rhode Island seafood ever again.

Until I'm forced to judge the best lobster roll.