OYSTERS These bivalves have been cultivated for at least 2,000 years, their name deriving from ancient Greek. Many of the world's coastal regions produce oysters of one kind or another, but the ones grown in Louisiana are hailed as being among the juiciest and briniest anywhere. Most are devoured in their natural state, chilled just a bit to make them more refreshing and lightly brushed past the cocktail sauce. The remaining oysters turn up courtesy of the Creoles in preparations and presentations that seem numberless.

POMPANO Mark Twain called the pompano "delicious as the less criminal forms of sin." The locals sometimes call it "sole," placing it squarely in the league of another world-class fish. And most chefs place it far ahead of any sole except Dover. Though pompano range from Massachusetts to Brazil, more are consumed in the United States than anywhere else on the globe. Virtually every famous Creole restaurant has its own special preparation, from the famous Pompano en Papillote to the simple sauteed filet covered with crabmeat.

PRALINE No, not pray-leen, *praw*-leen. New Orleans adores this candy patty made with sugar, water and nuts, with several variations available in candy and gift shops.

REDFISH Touch the black spot near the tail of a redfish and you are touching a legend. According to one story, the redfish was what Christ used to feed the multitude, and the spot was where His thumb touched. Even without the religious significance, this member of the croaker and drum family finds a special place in Creole cuisine. Redfish Courtbouillon is a big, satisfying stew, while Redfish Chambord presents this seafood's sophisticated side--poached, then topped with diced artichokes, mushrooms and a glaze. Cajun Blackened Redfish is now served all over the world.

SHRIMP This is America's favorite seafood, with a distinctive taste and tender, juicy meat. Shrimp present the Creole cook with the greatest room for imagination, letting him play with hundreds of standards before concocting dishes of his own. The Gulf of Mexico and the brackish waters at the mouth of the Mississippi River form one of the country's most important shrimping grounds, with a season from May through December.

SNOWBALL Here's a summertime favorite that's sold in stands on quite a few New Orleans streetcorners. A relative of the Italian ice, it's basically a paper cone mounded with shaved ice then showered with sugary flavored syrup. Stands pride themselves on how many flavors they offer, with some "customized" syrups reaching new heights of unexpectedness in flavor and color. No summer visit to New Orleans is complete without at least one snowball.

This article was written by John DeMers, former food editor of United Press International and author of several books, including Arnaud's Creole Cookbook and Caribbean Cooking. Mr. DeMers is food and wine editor of both New Orleans Magazine and City Business as well as public relations director of the Fairmont Hotel and host of the Astronomical Gastronomical Tour of New Orleans. The material may not be reproduced without permission from the Greater New Orleans Tourist & Convention Commission's Public Relations Department, and full credit must be given to the author.
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