

Ready for a game of culinary hide-and-seek?

Most everyone knows where to find a great meal in downtown Wilmington or at the beaches. But where's the adventure in that?

There are plenty of places with good food that are somewhat off of the eaten path. Ready or not, here we go.

Two Fat Ladies Over a Simmering Pot

Southern food in big portions with even bigger flavors.

The collard greens alone are worth seeking out this 1601 Dawson St. hideaway, which is situated in the middle of a busy intersection yet remains unexplored by many locals. Cooked perfectly, the collards are sweet with some heat, just enough salt, and balanced out with a bit of sourness.

Gayleane White and Nicole Clay are more than just owners. They do it all – they're the only employees.

"People love our macaroni and cheese," White said. "Some people get so upset if we're out, they won't even eat. They turn around and walk right out the door."

These two ladies make everything on the menu from scratch, and on Sundays they serve slow-cooked, fork-tender oxtails and



Gayleane White prepares a pot of cabbage at Two Fat Ladies Over a Simmering Pot.

turkey wings (baked and fried) as specials.

Winnie's Tavern

Winnie's has been hiding in plain sight for years. Open for nearly half a century, this watering hole south of downtown and just off of the Cape Fear River at 1895 Burnett Blvd. is one of the oldest establishments in Wilmington.

Some say Winnie's makes the best burger in the area – "and they're as big as your head," exclaimed a customer from the end of the bar during a recent visit.

Dee Magritz is the captain of

this nautically themed tavern.

"I do just about everything," Magritz said as she opened a beer and peered over her shoulder at the grill. "The burgers are half-a-pound, seasoned with salt and pepper and cooked slow – that's it. Everyone that's had one always comes back."

In addition to these bodacious burgers, they serve an awesome thick fried bologna sandwich – all cooked on a flat-top grill.

S&L New York Style Deli

Located near New Hanover Regional Medical Center at 2317

S. 17th St., S&L has been serving breakfast and lunch for more than five years. Owners Steve Ercole and Louie Natoli are both transplants from the City.

"We're a true New York-style deli," Natoli said. "Our bread and bagels come from New York and our meats and cheeses are all from Boar's Head. But everything else is homemade."

Natoli and Ercole are brothers-in-law, and Natoli's wife, Tami, takes care of the catering and the cakes.

Those in the know know dishes like The Hobo – a breakfast sandwich piled high with eggs, meat, cheese and homefries on a roll.

"Our specials, like our quiches, soups and Italian dishes, change daily," Natoli said. "Plus, we have the BYO, or build-your-own option. If we got it, you can get it."

From their superb split pea soup to their Tribeca Cheese sandwich, the food is fantastic.

The Holly Ridge Smokehouse

Located at 511 U.S. 17, north of Topsail and south of Jacksonville, this barbecue joint has been serving locals and tourists alike for more than 20 years.

"We get fairly busy in the summer," said manager Sherri Stanley. "People always catch up with