

Briefly, the Tropics



Just steps from bustling Main Street is The Blue Coral. Clockwise from top left: a chocolate dessert sampling; Veggie Tower appetizer; date and bacon appetizer; owner Tony Gullotti.



As summer peaks in Chatham, The Blue Coral offers an island breeze

By Terry Ward Libby / Photography by Tom Croke

For a fleeting time each summer, Tony and Meg Gullotti bring a touch of the Caribbean to busy Chatham, where they operate The Blue Coral from the second weekend in June until Labor Day. The restaurant is an open-air affair just off Main Street, down a little pathway that leads to a shady garden. An electric palm tree and strings of lights illuminate a tropical motif that would make any Parrothead, or "Margaritaville" fan, feel right at home. In fact, Jimmy Buffett tunes can often be heard on weekend nights. The Blue Coral's live entertainment calendar, posted at www.thebluecoral.com, includes blues, jazz and mellow reggae bands.

Umbrella tables sit on a large deck and the bar is covered by a canopy suspended from tree trunks. The cocktail menu is "rum oriented," says Tony, offering lots of tropical infusions, frozen drinks and the house Rumtini. An international wine list and microbrews are also available.

Lunches are casual and family-friendly with salads, wraps, burgers, plump lobster rolls and classic chowder. At dinnertime, The Blue Coral dresses up with crisp linens and candlelight, becoming a romantic setting for an adult crowd.

Because The Blue Coral opens for such a brief season, the Gullottis must seek a new chef every year, says Tony, who has had no shortage of applicants from all over the world. Some customer favorites, such as the hot spinach and crab dip and The Blue Coral's signature three-pound lobsters, stay on the menu, but every chef brings something new to the table. Last year, Japanese Kobe beef made its debut and it will return in 2006. The grilled-to-order filets are so tender, says Tony, "you can cut them with the side of your fork." Creative chicken, pasta and vegetarian entrées are offered, but seafood predominates. The local catch is joined by imported seafood not often found on Cape Cod menus, such as Pacific Dungeness crab.

This year marks The Blue Coral's fifth season. The Gullottis originally bought the space in midwinter, but saw its potential to bring something special to the local dining scene. They wanted to offer updated, city-style cuisine in an entertaining venue that would appeal to a new generation of Cape visitors. The Blue Coral, as Tony says, is a "hidden oasis" that transports diners to more exotic climes, if only for one hot summer night on Cape Cod. ♦

