

## Feast on finger-lickin'-good fare along the beach

By Jonathan Levitt  
 GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

HAMPTON BEACH, N.H. — Don't come here for a quiet day at the beach. The crown jewel of the 17-mile-long New Hampshire Riviera sounds like Saturday morning cartoons with the volume turned all the way up, looks like a convention for teenage mothers and biker gangs, and smells like the Filet-O-Fish Frialator exploded all over a tanning salon. There are sunburns, pit bulls, temporary tattoos, tan lines, tiny bikinis, lowrider convertibles, chrome choppers, and Hummer limousines. Fireworks fill the sky on Wednesdays and concerts in the Casino Ballroom attract the has-beens and the still-greats, everyone from B.B. King to Travis Tritt to Megadeth.

For a good time, skip the Ski Ball and head straight for the food. It's old-fashioned beach fare, the stuff your grandparents ate at the shore, the kind of fried food with integrity that is so hard to find. Five chow stops from Seabrook to North Hampton make for a junk food tasting menu.

From Boston, get off the highway in Seabrook, just south of Hampton Beach. It's quiet here: fishing boats, modest cottages, a nuclear power plant . . .

Right away you'll see Ceal's Clam Stand — so, stop for a fried clam roll. The clams are small and juicy, breaded in crumbs, and fried crispy and golden brown. Little has changed since Cecelia Littlefield founded the business in 1948. Littlefield passed the business on to her daughter Florence Henderson, who now runs it with her daughter Debbie Henderson and her granddaughter Alison Tirone. "We can take things pretty far but mother always comes in and puts her touch on it," says Henderson. "Like the breading, we know nothing at all about how she does it." Ceal's closes on Labor Day so the girls can go traveling around the world. This year they'll be in Aruba from November until January, and then in Italy, Greece, Germany, Egypt, Africa, and Las Vegas. "Traveling is our thing," says Henderson.

Leave Seabrook and prepare for sensory overload. Hampton Beach traffic is Times Square heavy with just as many crossers and walkers and riders — roll down the windows and look out for the Razor scooter gangs, the spaced-out Goth kids, and the many mothers with baby strollers. Good luck finding a place to park.

In the middle of everything is Boardwalk Fries — with hand-cut batons that are better than McDonald's, even in the suet days. The cooks start with boxes of starchy potatoes, chop them with the cutter on the wall, blanch them in medium-hot oil, and then throw them in the blazing-hot Frialator to crisp. "It would be much easier to do frozen fries, but come on," says manager Mike Suttner. "And believe me, people know

the difference. They come here just for the fries: cheese fries, bacon cheese fries, salt-and-vinegar fries just like the potato chips."

Before you dig into the fries, grab a freshly squeezed cup of lemonade from Suttner and a sausage or corn dog from Steve Hashem at Giuseppe's Italian Sausage. For 14 years, Hashem has stood over the griddle, moving around the peppers and onions and charring the butcher-shop sausages as crisp as cracklings. "It's like memories around here," he says. "I see the same people every year. The kids grow up and get bigger and they say, hey, there's the sausage guy."

Walk across the street with your bounty to the benches along the beach and feast with a view of the neon and your back to the waves.

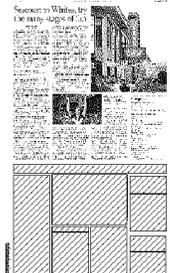
Before you move on from the bright lights and easy cheese, try a slab of fried dough — with cinnamon and sugar, and fried to order — from Blink's Fry Doe. Owner Teresa Everett lives right behind the bright orange stand. Blink's is named for Blinkie, the nickname of Everett's ex-husband Robert Difeo. "They called him Blinkie because he blinked a lot when he got in trouble as a kid," she says. "It's an Italian thing — everybody needs a nickname." When Difeo was little, his mom made the fried dough for him as a breakfast treat. "It's basically sweetened pizza dough, and it comes out of the oil tasting like the best doughnut ever," says Everett. Originally from Mississippi, Everett appreciates the retro charm of Hampton Beach. "There aren't many places like this anymore," she says. "It never changes. It's a slice of Americana."

Belly full, walk off the food on the sand and in the crashing surf and then get back in the car. There's one more stop to make.

Head north on Ocean Boulevard and it's actually beautiful. Like a mini-Pacific Coast Highway, the road winds and dips and dives past mansions and marshes until you get to The Beach Plum on North Hampton State Beach.

The Beach Plum is a little shingled thing with purple shutters, hanging plants, and a pretty cupola — more Martha Stewart than Carmela Soprano. Across from the gravel parking lot is the white-sand beach with views to Spain on a clear day. Manager Debbie Tsoronis recommends the earthworm sundae. It comes in a banana boat. Crumbled Oreo cookies on the bottom are the dirt. Hot fudge is mud. Three scoops of Oreo ice cream are more dirt and mud, and crawling through it all are Day-Glo gummy worms. "It's the kind of thing you come up with during 98-hour workweeks," she says.

Tsoronis lives around the corner from The Beach Plum year-round with her husband, her grandson, a



pet frog, and a pet rabbit. She works from 9:30 in the morning until almost midnight seven days a week for the whole season. Crowds line up all day and into the night for soft-serve and salty air and the fog and the moonrise over the ocean. After closing for the night, Tsoronis sweeps the floors and locks the doors. She always takes a minute to look out at the ocean and catch her breath. "It's so peaceful here when nobody is around," she says. "It's so quiet."

*Jonathan Levitt, a freelance writer in Maine, can be reached at [Jon.levitt@gmail.com](mailto:Jon.levitt@gmail.com).*

## If you go . . .

### **Ceal's Clam Stand**

Route 1A, Ocean Boulevard, Seabrook Beach

603-474-3150

Open late April until Labor Day. Top-shelf fried food, clam roll \$5.95.

### **Boardwalk Fries**

189 Ocean Boulevard, Hampton Beach  
Open early May until at least the end of September.  
Large fresh-cut fries \$4.

### **Giuseppe's Italian Sausage**

193 Ocean Boulevard, Hampton Beach

Open from April until the end of September. Sweet Italian sausages and crowd-pleasing corn dogs. Italian sausage sub with peppers and onions \$6.50.

### **Blink's Fry Doe**

115 and 191 Ocean Boulevard, Hampton Beach

Open March until mid-October. Deep-fried sweet pizza dough with all kinds of toppings. Cinnamon and sugar fried dough \$3.40.

### **The Beach Plum**

17 Ocean Boulevard, North Hampton

603-964-7451

Open April 15-Nov. 15. Ice cream with a view of the ocean, specialty sundae \$5.95.



JONATHAN LEVITT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Gianna, Olivia, and Sophia DiSaronno of Haverhill savor sugary treats from Blink's Fry Doe.**