

## WEEKEND LIFE

## RESTAURANT REVIEW

## Barefoot Charlie's transports patrons to island getaway

By Nancy Vienneau  
FOR THE TENNESSEAN

In these money-tight times, the buzzword is staycation. Unable to afford holiday trips to far-flung places, families are instead opting to stay home and explore the often overlooked natural and cultural treasures of their own locale.

Barefoot Charlie's is all about island attitude at local latitude. The Manis family, Charlie, Nancy and Dave, transformed old dive bar Sputniks into the kind of dining outpost you might find on St. John's or Key West. True, there are no swaying palms, white sands or azure waters, but from your table on the deck behind the restaurant, you see a placid arm of Old Hickory Lake. It's breezy and piped sounds of marimba and steel drums move through the air. Teal plantation shutters cover the windows of the sand-colored stucco building, and inside, clever deco-style wooden tables, chairs and bar stools are placed throughout a dark, cool room.

There's a full-service bar with a roster of signature tropical cocktails, and this neighborhood spot also has wi-fi, strategically placed (as in non-interfering) flat-screen televisions, shuffleboard and, on certain nights of the week, live music.

The attention placed on creating a relaxing and pleasurable ambiance is extended to the food. Poking good-natured fun at "flip-flop free" bistros and "O'Chilli-bees" chains, the Manis' concept is to offer fresh, made-from-scratch dishes that reflect that laid-back attitude, with savvy. To that end, they have brought in Culinary Institute of America-trained chef Dustin Rupoli to execute the Caribbean-inspired menu, from starters to sweet finishes.

## BAREFOOT CHARLIE'S

125 Sanders Ferry Road, Hendersonville.  
615-431-2859; www.barefootcharlies.net

■ **Hours:** 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Mon-Thurs.; 11 a.m.-1 a.m. Fri-Sat.; 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sun.; Happy Hour 4-7 p.m.

■ **Payment:** MC/VISA

■ **Reservations:** accepted

■ **Alcohol:** full-service bar featuring signature tropical cocktails, Land Shark lager

■ **Food:** Island-Style Caribbean, with some American options

■ **Cost:** Appetizers, \$2.99-\$9.99; salads/sandwiches, \$5.99-\$9.99; entrees, \$7.99-\$15.99

■ **Parking:** on-site parking lot

■ **Kid's Menu:** Yes

If it's just a cocktail accompaniment to suit your mood, there's a range of tempting appetizers, perfect for sharing. Diners were enjoying elaborate nacho platters piled with jerk chicken, black beans, queso and salsa, as well as the simple, "soon-to-be-famous" bowls of Cajun fried pickles. A mound of hand-cut steak fries dripping with melted cheese and cilantro-lime sour cream looked like one of those good-bad things, but they also offer heart-healthier sweet potato chips.

## Voodoo practiced

It wouldn't be a laid-back resort bar without wings, and you can get Barefoot

Charlie's Voodoo Wings either mild or hot in the customary buffalo style, or Jamaican Jerk (\$5.99). Go for the true voodoo version. They're roasted in a slather of fiery-sweet jerk sauce, that delicious fusion of scotch bonnet peppers, allspice, scallions and thyme, and they're sticky — be sure to ask for extra napkins.

The chef creates daily dinner specials; on our visit "The Wedge" (\$12.99), a traditional salad with a Caribbean spin, was the feature. A crisp iceberg quarter dressed in blue cheese was supported by two skewers of grilled jumbo shrimp, liberally dry rubbed with jerk spices. It was served encircled by island favorites, cumin-laced black bean-corn salad and a mild, refreshing pineapple salsa. Skinny fried onion bracelets flecked with pepper and allspice further garnished the plate.

The creative desserts at Barefoot Charlie's sound persuasive: Key Lime Crème Brûlée, the Erupting Chocolate-Caramel Pyramid and Pina Colada Bread Pudding (\$4.79). The bread pudding called our name. Served warm, this rich, spongy wonder was studded with bits of pineapple, topped with toasted coconut and finished with a pour of rum-spiked coconut crème anglais. Mercy.

For your staycation mini-outing to the islands, Barefoot Charlie's provides a pleasant respite, especially with waterside dining. Pretend you're at a beach house getaway: eat, drink, relax and watch the weather. Tropical storms, you know, can blow through at a moment's notice. But under the shelter of the patio umbrella you'll feel all right.

Reviews are written from anonymous visits to restaurants. Negative reviews are based on two or more visits. *The Tennessean* pays for all meals.