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Dining Guide

ORANGE COUNTY'S DEFINITIVE SOURCE FOR RESTAURANT NEWS AND MINIREVIEWS

PRICING

\$\$\$ \$50 and over
 \$\$ Under \$50
 \$ Mostly under \$25

STAR RATINGS

Ratings are determined by food quality, creativity, service, ambience, and value. But one restaurant we review, we recommend.

★★★★ Outstanding on every level ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★ Very good ★ Good

NOV '16



Asian Cajun The Wharf

Sleepy Main Street in Garden Grove gets a wake-up call with a new, mostly seafood spot from the owners of the Wild Crab. Dishes combine traditional Vietnamese flavors with fiery Southern spices in spacious digs with an under-the-sea vibe. Enjoy oysters fresh, grilled, or crispy fried. Or try the Thai larb gai lettuce wraps, with minced ground chicken, gizzards and hearts, pork ears and tongue, and toasted sticky rice sautéed in chile vinaigrette. Design your own barbecue skewers with dozens of items that include octopus or chicken wings grilled with sauces such as bean-curd chili. The cook-at-the-table seafood hot pot offers shrimp, clams, mussels, squid, enoki mushrooms, Chinese cabbage, spinach, tofu, and vermicelli noodles and can be made Cajun spicy or mild. Specialty seafood combinations are feasts, and the crawfish mac 'n' cheese, above, is a standout. Figure on one napkin per bite here. Prices range from about \$8 to \$25, but vary with market price. 12941 Main St., Garden Grove, 714-520-1368, thewharfoc.com

Aliso Viejo

Opah ★★
 26661 Aliso Creek Road, 949-916-9888
 opahrestaurant.com, California, #8
 Tready and sleek, this neighborhood bottle cooler a hip energy that attracts single diners and 'urban scene-busters in search of artfully prepared California cuisine. Choose from a varied, creative menu with signature items such as Truss of Parmesan Sweet Potato Chips, and bread-crust halibut with papaya salsa. Monster martinis keep the mood lively.

Anaheim

Anaheim Packing House ★★
 440 S. Anaheim Blvd., 714-233-0983
 anaheimpackinghouse.com/packing-house
 Live music starts on Anaheim's Weekly Certified Farmers Market at adjacent Farmers Park. Open 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday #8
 Anaheim's double-decker food hall, anchoring downtown's vintage Packing District, is bustling while still evolving. Solid players include Kettle Bar for steam-cooked seafood and local brews and Urban for elevated Mexican cuisine and creative cocktails. Early fans that still thrill are Georgia's for worthy soul food, Adya for smoky Indian street eats, Cafe Coop for yummy dessert crepes, and Blind Rabbit speakeasy for craft cocktails and chic sabbies.

Anaheim White House ★★★
 687 S. Anaheim Blvd., 714-770-1285
 anaheimwhitehouse.com, Sunday brunch
 Makers history/food and seafood #88
 In a vintage mansion that resembles 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., owner Bruno Sesto indulges his flair for high style with fanciful notes on northern Italian cuisine. Many dishes are named for the famous—the Jack & Co is a beautiful tray of bewitchy presented desserts. Chef Eddie Mesa works with hearty meat dishes, such as a 10-ounce lamb rigout, oven-roasted and served atop baked polenta over Gorgonzola sauce.

Bistro Bleu ★★½
 907 S. Main Ave., 714-896-2220, breakfast
 diningroom, Wine and Beer, Closed Sunday
 and Monday French #2
 An unlikely strip mall in West Anaheim is home to this hipster French bistro as run by David Keeler, alum of some of the best French kitchens in OC. His moderately priced classic bistro dishes include coq au vin, croque madame, and steak au poivre. Service



applies fine-dining cred and scratch cooking to a menu of new and old-school fare that sparkles. Don't miss items include premium cottage pie, a killer lamb burger, and anything with house-cured meats. Upscale pricing and dapper surroundings prove this is not your frat brother's Irish pub.

Wineworks for Everyone ★★★

38342 Civic Parkway, 949 257-0385
wineworksforeveryone.com. Wine and beer.
Dinner only. Closed Monday. California. \$\$\$

This near-hidden pocket bistro is a top choice for wine-centric cuisine in South County. A retooled menu by chef David Shofner, who also helms the kitchen at Dublin 4 next door, brims with seasonal California fare that flatters a wine list of West Coast and international bottles. Must-haves include daily flatbread, gourmet sliders, and a killer cheese plate.

Newport Beach

A&O Kitchen + Bar ★½

Balboa Bay Resort, 1081 W. Coast Highway,
949 437-4265, aandokitchen.com. Live
entertainment Friday and Saturday. Gastropub. \$\$\$

A serious reboot of this fabled lounge—formerly Duke's—transforms this waterside venue into a gastropub with a newly youthful vibe. Expect all the usual share plates: battered fries, shishito peppers, bacon-wrapped dates, plus several hearty plates including a worthy Kobe burger with bacon mayo on a cheddar-bacon bun. Bold, nautical decor plays off the “anchors and oceans” theme and brings the bay view to life. The water's-edge patio is invit-

ing for sunset drinks or gathering 'round the fire pit.

A Restaurant ★★★

3334 W. Coast Highway, 949 620-6505,
arestaaronline.com. American. \$\$\$

This very old-school hangout now's wants for business, thanks to longtime executive chef Jon Blackford and his constant retooling of American classics made with hard-to-find premium goods. The stellar burger now is by request only, so go ahead and ask. Dessert fans swoon over the Pflaffenmutter Sundae. The inimitable libelly Register oversees gourmet sandwiches and to-go goodies at A Market next door.

Back Bay Bistro ★★

2232 Back Bay Drive, 949 729-2244,
newportdunes.com/back-bay-bistro. Weekend brunch.
Closed Monday. Euro-Cal. \$\$\$

Though you won't see ocean waves, waterfront seating on the quiet bay abounds at this relaxed venue inside the Newport Dunes Resort. A broad Euro-Cal menu keeps the resort crowd happy, while improved wines and slick details such as a retracting roof and valet parking lure the locals.

Bayside ★★★

900 Bayside Drive, 949 729-2200,
baysiderestaurant.com. Sunday brunch.
American. \$\$\$

Bayside's makeover injects its harbor-side location with fresh energy. Veteran Paul Carrien remains top chef, but look for expanded Prime beef offerings. Long-favored by the coastal set for jazzy brunches, insiders stop in Friday night for a fine jazz session in the bar. Prix fixe menus are a draw.

Bluewater Grill Seafood Restaurant ★★★

430 Lido Park Drive, 949 478-5474, bluewatergrill.com.
See Justin location. No corkage. Seafood. \$\$\$

Classic rich chowder, grilled trout, and fried clams share the daily menu with modern dishes such as zesty riccioppo and mahi-mahi sliders with jalapeno aioli. Executive chef Jason Mazur and a seasoned crew smoothly shifts from icy platters of just-shucked oysters, to ginger-lime prawns over celery root slaw. The menu boasts seasonal specials as well.

Canaletto ★★★

545 Newport Center Drive, 949 640-0900,
iliforniain.com. Italian. \$\$\$

From the cognoscenti of Il Fornaio, this is the perfect SoCal vision of an upscale Italian trattoria. The big draws are the fresh-baked breads, pizzas, pasta, and risotto dishes. Don't miss the bigoli alla Padovana with big strands of pericattelli and the bold flavors of house-made sausage mingled with porcini mushrooms.

The Cannery ★★★

2010 Lafayette Road, 949 266-0060,
cannerynewport.com. Weekend brunch. Seafood. \$\$\$

Newport's nearly century-old legend is more dazzling than ever with executive chef Nick Weber at the helm. Tasty new fare shows Weber navigates the seafood-centric menu with aplomb and creativity. Even his Balboa Sundae 3.0 is a seductive new take on the long-beloved dessert.

Cucina Alessá ★★★

5700 W. Coast Highway, 949 645-2145,
See Huntington Beach location. Italian. \$\$\$

beef and fresh fish) are indeed primo. Crisp service. Worthy wine list. The adjoining lounge is überhip and serves the main room menu.

Sessions ★★★

2823 Newport Blvd., 949-220-9001, [Second location in Huntington Beach at 414 Pacific Coast Highway, 714-974-3839, \[sessionsandwiches.com\]\(#\), Sandwiches & Calling itself a "West Coast deli," this peninsula shop crafts terrific sandwiches that eat like a meal for two. Gourmet creations with kooky names—Greatfella, Baller, and Wake & Bake—are meticulous stacks with top ingredients and exacting ratios, so every 'wich is delightful to the last bite. Soups, sides, and dressings are made from scratch. A surfer vibe extends to hearty breakfasts starring Kéan coffee.](#)

Sol Cocina ★★★

251 E. Coast Highway, 949-675-9800, [solcocina.com](#), Baja Mexican \$\$\$ Fresh, spunky flavors of Mexico's Baja Peninsula lure the coastal crowd to this bayside cantina. Cookbook author and executive chef Deborah Schneider focuses on local seafood and meat dishes, plus street tacos jazzed up with house-made salsas and dreamy guacamoles. A kickin' bar with crackling fireplace serves tasty cocktails, many made from scores of artisan tequilas.

Sushi Roku ★★★

337 Newport Center Drive, 949-706-3622, [innovativedining.com](#), Modern Japanese, \$\$\$ The sixth location of this L.A.-based Cal-Japanese concept makes a huge impression with striking decor and vibrant cuisine. If the dining room's busier than the sushi bar, blame the thoughtfully designed and executed menu, notably dishes such

as fluke kumquat sashimi, blue crab tartars, Prime ribeye Japonais, and the deconstructed s'mores. The creative sushi deserves a night all its own, and the bar and patio offer their own vibes. Look for scores of noodles, salads, and bento boxes at lunch, and sakes.

Taco Rosa ★★★

2832 San Miguel Blvd., 949-700-0980, [tacorosa.com](#), Sunday brunch, See Irvine location, Mexican, \$\$ With agave-sweetened margaritas, a tostitera, and house-made churros, these flagships of the Taco Mesa chain take fresh Mex to the max. Try the Oaxacan enchiladas or portobello quesadillas.

Tommy Bahama Island Grille ★★★

854 Avocado Ave., 949-460-8686, [tommybahama.com](#), See Laguna Beach location, Coastal cuisine, \$\$ Ongoing nips and tucks keep this perennial favorite sharp. The fare remains reliably coastal and fresh. This is a great place to meet for a drink, too, with offerings such as hibiscus Key lime cocktails and trendy scratch concoctions. Save room for the piña colada cake. Beguiling patio seating.

True Food Kitchen ★★

451 Newport Center Drive, 949-644-8400, [truefoodkitchen.com](#), Global, organic, \$\$ Dr. Andrew Weil's anti-inflammatory food pyramid is translated into a globally varied parade of healthful starters, salads, sandwiches, and entrees, with intriguing cocktails for good measure. We like the caramelized onion black fig tart, the chicken chopped salad, and the ginger margarita with honey and flamed orange. Best (and quieter) seats are on the sleek, canopied patio with its lush living wall. *Note: Star rating reflects a former chef.*

Waterline ★★★½

[Bilina Bay Resort, 1881 W. Coast Highway, 949-545-5000, \[waterlinenewportbeach.com\]\(#\), Sunday brunch, Contemporary seafood, \\$\\$\\$ A lavish makeover of this venerable fine-dining room updates this yacht-view space with cushy appointments and a seafood-heavy menu from executive chef Rachel Haggstrom. Look for surf-and-turf specials and seasonal seafood, boosted with modern prep and local ingredients. Signature appetizer is a soy-paper roll of avocado, lobster, and cucumber. Fans of old-school dining are won over by gracious service, and classy live music on the weekends makes this a nice, if spandy, date-night choice.](#)

Wildfish Seafood Grille ★★★½

1270 Blinn Ave., 949-700-0905, [wildfishnewportbeach.com](#), American seafood, \$\$\$ Despite ownership by the Darden Group, best known for megachains Red Lobster and Olive Garden, Wildfish lures a loyal following. The finely calibrated menu of pristine seafood and first-class steaks keeps the glossy room and fireplace patio hopping, especially for nightly happy hour deals when upscale locals crowd the sleek bar. Urbane service. Strong wine list.

Newport Coast

Andrea ★★★★★

[The Resort at Pelican Hill, 20701 Pelican Hill Road S., 949-487-6800, \[pelicanhill.com\]\(#\), Italian, \\$\\$\\$ The deluxe dining room is named for noted Italian architect Andrea Palladio \(1508-1580\), but the elegant Northern Italian dishes are overseen by head chef Jonah Amodi, newly promoted from sous chef. Fare of note includes hand-made ricotta cavatelli](#)