

Taste of the Town / Dining News

EASTER EXTRAVAGANZAS

In the midst of its 20th anniversary offerings, Montage Laguna Beach is hosting two Easter brunch events April 9. Sit outdoors on the lawn overlooking the Pacific Ocean to enjoy a buffet with charcuterie, seafood, carving stations and breakfast classics, then let the children enjoy special activities including an egg hunt and live entertainment. Or, opt for the Champagne brunch at The Loft, a more upscale offering with bottomless mimosas and bloody marys in addition to a three-course meal with a shared appetizer, a la carte entree and dessert. (949-715-6420; montagehotels.com)

Splashes, the signature eatery at Surf & Sand Resort, will offer a special prix fixe menu for the holiday brunch from noon to 3 p.m., with appetizers like a baby spinach salad, Maine lobster quiche and local bass aqua accompanying your choice of seared branzino, Colorado rack of lamb, beef Wellington or the foraged mushroom toast. Don't skip dessert, with options like carrot cake or a festive chocolate pecan egg. The restaurant's regular dinner menu starts at 5 p.m. (888-281-3502; surfandsandresort.com)

Also in town, beachside restaurant Driftwood Kitchen will host its own Easter buffet, with cold stations for fruit, salads, ahi tuna poke and salmon tartare; made-to-order omelets and other hot breakfast items; carving stations for honey baked ham and prime rib; specialty kid's items; a dessert table and more. (949-749-6367; driftwoodkitchen.com)

In nearby Dana Point, another brunch will take place at The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna

Niguel, with a number of specialty stations ranging offering caviar, smoked fish, a raw bar, sushi station and dumpling cart, as well as waffle, French toast and omelet bars, plus traditional breakfast bites and numerous Indian items from Sanjay Rawat, chef de cuisine of a culinary program dedicated to South Asian weddings. Stunning floral arrangements and oversize Easter eggs will be on display while guests can also enjoy family-friendly activities. (949-240-2000; ritzcarlton.com)

Also in Dana Point, the Waldorf Astoria Monarch Beach Resort & Club will present a number of Easter events, including brunch experiences such as a buffet at Aveo Table & Bar and a resort guests/ members only a la carte option at Monarch Bay Beach Club. For lunch or dinner, stop by Bourbon Steak, where Executive Chef Christopher Sanchez will offer a special holiday menu in addition to the restaurant's regular offerings. And guests or members with children can enjoy the day, too, with a special Easter egg hunt on the Grand Lawn, meet-and-greets with the Easter Bunny, crafts, face painting and more. (949-234-3200; waldorfastoria-monarchbeach.com) —Ashley Ryan

SIX SIPS

Though they're known for having one of the most outstanding wine lists in town, Selanne Steak Tavern also boasts a number of signature sips, with six new cocktails in the lineup through April 1. Two bourbon drinks, Forbidden Love and Sunset Boulevard, grace the menu, with the former



New Selanne Steak Tavern cocktails

offering a fruiter option with passion fruit and lemon with frothy egg whites and the latter serving as a spin on the classic boulevardier. Tequila lovers will enjoy Burning Red, which combines blood orange, lemon and agave for a citrusy sip while Wild Thoughts offer a fruity play on a gin and tonic with the inclusion of Chambord, blackberry and grapefruit tonic water. For a vacation-inspired cocktail, drift away with Tiki-style Island Dreamin', which features rum, pineapple and more. When Hearts Collide—a dessert cocktail made with vanilla vodka, creme de cacao, white chocolate liqueur, blackberry and raspberry—rounds out the menu. These winter drinks are part of a mixology program that changes seasonally, so keep an eye out for the upscale restaurant's spring concoctions next. (949-715-9881; selannesteaktavern.com) —A.R.



Top: the jalapeno burger and a beer at the new Finney's Crafthouse & Kitchen; above: the Mad Hatter afternoon tea with an ocean view at The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel

WELL-CRAFTED CUISINE

Finney's Crafthouse & Kitchen is expected to open March 20 in the space formerly occupied by The White House following an extensive restoration of the historic building, originally constructed in 1915. The White House restaurant and bar was established there in 1918 and shuttered just over a century later, in 2019. Finney's is a small regional chain with eight other locations mostly in the Central Coast and San Fernando Valley areas. The eclectic menu features more than 50 made-from-scratch favorites from tacos filled with Baja chicken, kalua pork carnitas or crispy cauliflower to a variety of pizzas and salads, like the Moroccan variety with mixed greens, dried cherries, almonds, feta cheese, quinoa and more. Hot wings come in flavors like Buffalo-yuzu, mango-habanero and Cajun seven-spice while diners also have a wide range of burger and sandwich options, like the prime rib cheesesteak and the black truffle or jalapeno egg burgers. A slew of starters includes bacon deviled eggs, mini lobster rolls, an onion ring tower,

poke nachos and crispy coconut shrimp with sweet chile sauce. To wash it down, Finney's offers an extensive list of handcrafted signature cocktails and 30 local craft beers on tap, including Thousand Steps India pale ale and Lagunatics hazy IPA, both from Laguna Beach Beer Co. The restaurant is open from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily, with a happy hour from 3-5 p.m. weekdays. (949-484-8140; finneyscrafthouse.com) —Sharon Stello

MICHELIN MAGIC

There are now three eateries in town recognized by the Michelin Guide, with Selanne Steak Tavern being added to the list as a "new discovery" in March. The guide makes note of the restaurant's many spaces—from the upstairs loft and modern tavern dining room to the cozy wine library and outdoor veranda and terrace—in addition to its well-marbled steaks, seared mushrooms, buttery mashed potatoes and warm monkey bread dessert. Selanne joins two other previously named Laguna restaurants, Rebel Omakase

and Oliver's Osteria, which were added to Michelin's list in 2022 and 2021, respectively. Rebel Omakase, known for its chef-curated meals, prides itself in its high-quality ingredients and fresh fish flown in from Japan. Some standouts here include cornet, baby yellowtail and seared wagyu, though the menu is always changing. Oliver's Osteria, an Italian spot in Laguna Canyon, enhances its authentic dishes for an experience to remember, with bucatini all'amatriciana pasta and fiori di zucca, or stuffed zucchini blossoms mentioned as notable menu items. (Selanne Steak Tavern: 949-715-9881; selannesteaktavern.com) (Rebel Omakase: 949-664-3186) (Oliver's Osteria: 949-715-0261; oliversosteria.com) —A.R.

TEA TIME

Spring has sprung, so dress up in pastels or floral prints and enjoy some local tea experiences that are perfectly aligned with the season. At Montage Laguna Beach, guests can visit the Lobby Lounge, with views of the sprawling Pacific Ocean, to enjoy tea and snacks on Saturday and Sunday afternoons from noon to 3 p.m. Running through May 7, the menu includes things like smoked salmon roulade, a Maine lobster roll, raisin scones, lemon-gingersnap cookies, pistachio sponge cake and more; there are also vegan offerings like beet tartare, crudites and dried blueberry cookies available, as well as gluten-free options. Over at The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel in Dana Point, a special Mad Hatter afternoon tea continues from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. weekdays except Fridays through April 27. Palais des Thés, a Parisian brand of teas, will be served during the event along with tea sandwiches, sweets and tea-infused cocktails. Set within a whimsical garden installation at the resort's Raya, this is the perfect springtime activity. (Montage Laguna Beach: 949-715-6420; montagehotels.com) (The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel: 949-240-2000; ritzcarlton.com) —A.R. ■

RESTAURANT LISTINGS

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Easter at Montage Laguna Beach

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