

Wine & Dine / Brunch

Bountiful Brunch

ELEVATE YOUR MORNING MEALS WITH THESE LOCAL FAVORITES.

By ASHLEY RYAN



The short rib Benedict, served at Reunion Kitchen & Drink

For years, the simple combination of eggs, bacon and toast dominated the breakfast market, with these traditional tastes found on every morning menu across the country. But now, as brunch continues on its endless upward trajectory, chefs are experiencing the freedom to experiment and elevate their options—and Laguna Beach is just the place to find uniquely delicious dishes. From sweet treats to seafood recipes and beyond, you're sure to find something here in town to tempt your taste buds and start your morning right.

REUNION KITCHEN & DRINK

When it comes to brunch dishes, eggs Benedict is one item that is endlessly popular and also easily customizable—from the sauce and toppings to the type of protein

layered over the silky eggs, it's not hard for chefs to make the meal their own. At Reunion Kitchen & Drink, comfort food takes center stage so it's no surprise that the eatery incorporated short ribs into its own version. The short rib Benedict starts with a warm buttermilk biscuit, baked fresh at the restaurant daily. The biscuit is layered with poached eggs, tender short ribs and fresh chipotle hollandaise sauce, then topped with crispy onions and served alongside fresh fruit or hash browns. This unique take on classic eggs Benedict was inspired largely by owner Scott McIntosh's mother, who always orders the short rib entree. To ensure maximum flavor, Reunion Kitchen chefs braise the meat for six hours before incorporating it into one of their most popular brunch items. (949-226-8393; reunionkitchen.net)

SAPPHIRE, CELLAR-CRAFT-COOK

If dessert for breakfast is right up your alley, you'll want to opt for the Meyer Lemon Creme Fraiche Waffles at Sapphire, Cellar-Craft-Cook. "The waffle is perfectly cooked—golden and crisp on the outside and tender and soft on the inside, so it has a great texture," notes Executive Chef and Partner Jared Cook. Crafted with a fluffy buttermilk batter that is made from scratch the night before, the dish features great attention to detail. The creme fraiche is freshly whipped with Meyer lemon zest and real Vermont maple syrup, then placed over the waffles before they are topped with fresh strawberries, blackberries, raspberries and blueberries. "Meyer lemons are sweeter than regular lemons, which makes a subtle difference in how the flavors come together," Cook adds. On the side, the dish is accompanied by warm maple syrup with a little bourbon mixed in. Order as a starter to share with the table or grab a plate all your own—you won't regret it. (949-715-9888; sapphirelagunabeach.com)



Sapphire, Cellar-Craft-Cook's Meyer Lemon Creme Fraiche Waffles with fresh berries on top



Crab omelet at Las Brisas

KITCHEN IN THE CANYON

In coastal California, a breakfast burrito is a pivotal item on any morning menu. Whether you're ordering takeout to eat on the sand as you breathe in the fresh salty air or dining in at this serene eatery, you can't go wrong with Kitchen in the Canyon's steak burrito. The flank steak is seasoned and cooked to juicy perfection, then folded into a large flour tortilla with plenty of Mexican-inspired ingredients. Made with three scrambled eggs to solidify its place on the menu at the brunch restaurant, which is open daily until 3 p.m., the burrito also features black beans, an avocado spread, pico de gallo and semisoft Chihuahua cheese. It can also be ordered in a bowl for a gluten-free option. "It's one of the most popular items on the menu," says owner Shima Roshani. "... It's pretty filling and delicious—a good option for breakfast [and] also for lunch, ... [plus it has a] high nutritional value." (949-715-5388; kitcheninthecanyon.com)

LAS BRISAS

Available every day of the week on both the breakfast and brunch menus, the crab omelet is a must-try for seafood lovers visiting Las Brisas. The omelet joins numerous other ocean-inspired dishes, like the smoked

salmon tostadas and a lobster eggs Benedict, but stands alone as a sweet and savory option perfect for alfresco dining on the California coast. Organic, cage-free eggs are cooked over low heat to create a fluffy texture, then seasonal crab is heated up with Mexican crema and rolled into the eggs with a Jack cheese blend. Topped with Mexican crema, sliced avocado and scallions, the omelet is then served with house-made tortillas and crispy potatoes. "We love elevating a classic breakfast fish with a premium ingredient, like the jumbo lump crab included in this dish and fresh, house-made corn tortillas," says Cristhian Salazar, senior director of culinary at Xperience Restaurant Group, which owns Las Brisas. "... The sweetness from the crab adds a fluffy texture to the savory omelet." (949-497-5434; lasbrisaslagunabeach.com)

HARVEST

One brunch favorite that continues to be popular both at home and when dining out is avocado toast—a dish that features light, fresh ingredients packed full of flavor. At Harvest, the signature restaurant at The Ranch at Laguna Beach, the avocado toast, also called the breakfast toast on the brunch menu, is available daily. It starts with



Harvest's avocado toast



Breakfast burrito at Kitchen in the Canyon

a thick slice of rustic sourdough, which is griddled then topped with whipped Boursin cheese, Hass avocado, onion jam and a fried egg; pickled Fresno chiles, queso fresco and fresh-picked cilantro finish the toast off. "We wanted this breakfast toast to hit all the notes: It's got great crunch with the rustic bread, light and airy whipped Boursin, sweet onions, pickled Fresno for a little heat, saltiness with the queso fresco and freshness with the ... cilantro," says Kyle St. John, executive chef at The Ranch at Laguna Beach. With sweet and savory elements, it can be enjoyed at any time of the day for a filling meal or satisfying snack. (949-715-1376; theranchlb.com) ■