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Diversify your diet with beloved classics—a burger, ravioli, salad, pizza or eggs Benedict—prepared in varied ways at Laguna Beach restaurants.

By ASHLEY RYAN

There's no doubt that the culinary scene in Laguna Beach has seen a lot of changes over the last year, and with new eateries come innovative new dishes. But there are plenty of tried-and-true options on local menus as well. From fresh, flavorful salads and mouthwatering burgers to pillows of pasta stuffed with deliciously unique ingredients, the variation in renditions of these popular dishes will inspire you to set out and try them all this spring.

BURGERS



BOB HODSON PHOTOGRAPHY

OC SOURDOUGH BURGER / REUNION KITCHEN & DRINK

Inspired by owner Scott McIntosh's time at Claim Jumper, this variety offers a half-pound patty on Parmesan sourdough bread. Traditional toppings—Swiss cheese, tomato, shredded lettuce, sliced dill pickle, a house-made Thousand Island dressing and optional grilled onions—complement the bread, resulting in a savory burger with a touch of cheesy goodness.

CHILE RELLENO BURGER / THE CLIFF

A brioche bun is buttered and grilled, then topped with a wagyu patty before the magic ingredient—a stuffed chile relleno, fried in tempura batter—is placed on top. "This burger is a great blend of the flavor profiles of California and Mexico," says James Brice, chef at The Cliff. Crispy bacon and sliced red onion complete the burger, which is served with jalapeno aioli and a side of sweet potato fries.

MOZAMBIQUE STEAK BURGER / MOZAMBIQUE

Help combat waste with this option at South African-inspired eatery Mozambique. "We wanted to utilize every part of our high-quality steaks, so we use the end trims of our tenderloin and rib-eye to build an amazing steak burger," says Angel Velazquez, the restaurant's chef. The 8-ounce patty is seasoned to perfection, cooked over an open flame and layered on a brioche bun with cheddar cheese, applewood-smoked bacon, lettuce, tomato, red onion and Monte Carlo sauce.

BLACK BEAN AND PORTOBELLO MUSHROOM BURGER / HARVEST

This vegetarian patty features black beans, mushrooms, corn, quinoa, lentils, shallots, garlic, cheese, breadcrumbs and spices, all consolidated by hand before half of the mixture is pulsed in a food processor. "This helps bind the ingredients, but also keep some texture," says Kyle St. John, executive chef at Harvest. After baking in the oven, the patty is placed on a potato bun with vine-ripened tomatoes, butter lettuce, a grilled portobello mushroom, caramelized onion, melted Swiss cheese and harissa aioli.

GUACAMOLE BURGER / RUBY'S DINER

In a state that values avocado above all else, this just might be the quintessential Californian burger. A generous helping of guacamole sits right on top of the other ingredients—a juicy beef patty, two slices of Swiss cheese, crisp lettuce, fresh tomato and signature RubySauce—to create a classic with a twist that locals and visitors alike will want to tuck into.

COURTESY OF RUBY'S DINER



ANDREW TURILLA



Clockwise from top: the chile relleno burger at The Cliff; the Mozambique steak burger; the black bean and portobello mushroom burger at Harvest; the guacamole burger at Ruby's Diner; opposite page: the OC Sourdough Burger at Reunion Kitchen & Drink



LEFT: MARILENA VERBULO





Opposite page, from left: scampi ravioli at Alessa by Chef Pirozzi; butternut squash ravioli at Nirvana Kitchen & Pantry; this page, clockwise from top: Scarlet Beet "Ravioli" at Selanne Steak Tavern; short rib ravioli at Rumari; Savory Herb Chicken Ravioli at Gina's Pizza

RAVIOLI

SCAMPI RAVIOLI / ALESSA BY CHEF PIROZZI
Limoncello is popular in Naples, Italy, where chef-owner Alessandro Pirozzi was raised—and it just so happens to pair perfectly with seafood. "I wanted to duplicate that refreshing taste of fresh scampi," says Pirozzi of the inspiration behind his unique dish, which incorporates pasta infused with limoncello. The ravioli are filled with shrimp tossed in garlic, shallots, chopped tomatoes, Meyer lemon and Italian white wine, allowing the chef to feel close to his family from the other side of the world.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH RAVIOLI / NIRVANA KITCHEN & PANTRY
Traditionally a fall dish, this ravioli can be found on the menu well into spring,

offering a healthy decadence for all to enjoy. Roasted butternut squash is tucked into egg dough, which is then boiled and coated in house-made beurre blanc. It's finished with sage brown butter, goat cheese crumbles, nutmeg, chopped hazelnuts and micro celery. "It's sweet, tangy and savory all together, with great texture ... [from] the nuts and the creaminess of the ravioli and goat cheese," says chef-owner Lindsay Smith. The best part? The ravioli, beurre blanc and sage butter can all be purchased to go from the Nirvana pantry so you can easily re-create it at home.

SCARLET BEET "RAVIOLI" / SELANNE STEAK TAVERN
Though not made with actual pasta, this signature dish, which has been on the menu since the eatery opened,

is one of the most unique in town: Oven-roasted jumbo red beets are thinly sliced, then stuffed with an artisanal lemon goat cheese mixture and punched closed. The "ravioli" are plated with frisee, watercress, arugula, candied orange, grapefruit segments and sliced Chioggia (or candy stripe) beets, all drizzled in a warm golden beet vinaigrette crafted with roasted golden beets, crushed hazelnuts and hazelnut oil.

SHORT RIB RAVIOLI / RUMARI
Hearty short ribs are the star of this dish, which features the flavorful meat inside pockets of pasta. After boiling, the ravioli are doused in a sauce made of fresh tomatoes, spinach, garlic, oregano, olive oil, salt and pepper

before being sprinkled with Parmesan cheese. "I love ravioli, and the sauce is very light and heartwarming," says chef Braulio Melo of why the short rib ravioli was added to Rumari's menu. "It's delicious and a family favorite."

SAVORY HERB CHICKEN RAVIOLI / GINA'S PIZZA
While classic cheese ravioli is also an option, the savory herb chicken option is delightfully tasty—and gluten free. The chicken breast is combined with spinach, mozzarella, ricotta and herbs inside pillows of fresh pasta dough, then served with your choice of sauce, with options like creamy pesto, roasted garlic Alfredo, arrabbiata, BellaLinda (a creamy marinara) and more. Pair them with the eatery's new porcini mushroom meatballs for a 100% gluten-free meal.

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF ALESSA BY CHEF PIROZZI; LINDSAY SMITH



TOP: COURTESY OF SELANNE STEAK TAVERN; BOTTOM LEFT: LEANNA COSTA-MCMAHAN

SALADS

AHI CITRUS SALAD / BODEGA LAGUNA COCINA & CANTINA

Seafood enthusiasts will fall in love with this salad, in which ahi tuna is pan-seared until lightly blackened then placed atop a bed of arugula, baby kale, iceberg lettuce, fennel, grapefruit, mandarin and blood orange, all coated in a citrus-honey vinaigrette and finished with sprinkles of cranberries, toasted almonds and queso fresco. "I wanted to add a little bit of lightness to our menu," says chef Angel Velazquez. "The citrus complements our coastal flavors and the tuna provides the perfect amount of smokiness to balance it out."

SUMMER SALAD / JAN'S HEALTH BAR

A sweeter option is this colorful Summer Salad, in which fresh berries steal the show: Blueberries, strawberries and raspberries mingle with apple, shaved carrots, avocado, mixed greens, candied walnuts and blue cheese crumbles. The vibrant mixture is doused in a house-made raspberry vinaigrette, which just adds to the fruity flavor.

BBQ RANCH SALAD / SKYLOFT

For those who feel like a salad isn't hearty enough, opt for Skyloft's barbecue variety. Mixed greens, chopped romaine, black beans, roasted corn, tomato, scallion, cilantro and Monterey Jack cheese are tossed together with chipotle barbecue ranch dressing that adds the perfect amount of sweet and tangy—plus crispy tortilla strips on top for added crunch. Add a protein—chicken breast, filet mignon, grilled salmon, andouille sausage or giant prawns—to complete the meal.

EL GRINGO TACO SALAD / SOUTH OF NICK'S

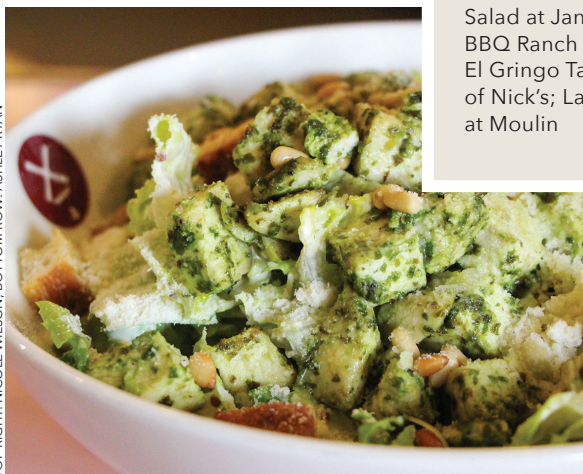
Served in an oversize house-made shell—crisped to perfection before it's filled to the brim with appetizing ingredients—this taco salad comes with your choice of spicy ground beef, chicken tinga, carnitas or ranchera beef. The savory protein is joined with refried beans and Spanish rice as well as chopped greens, scallions, black olives, Jack cheese, sour cream, guacamole and cilantro dressing in the restaurant's made-from-scratch kitchen.

LA SALADE MOULIN / MOULIN

On the menu since day one, this signature dish at Moulin is inspired by the classic Caesar—with a twist. Filled with roasted chicken marinated in pesto, Parmesan cheese, pine nuts and croutons crafted out of the French cafe's artisanal baguettes, then covered in the eatery's house-made dressing, it's the ideal option for a light yet satisfying meal. The same flavors can be found in the Moulin sandwich as well, layered with tomato between two slices of ciabatta bread.



Clockwise from top left: ahi citrus salad at Bodega Laguna Cocina & Cantina; Summer Salad at Jan's Health Bar; BBQ Ranch Salad at Skyloft; El Gringo Taco Salad at South of Nick's; La Salade Moulin at Moulin



TOP RIGHT: NICOLE WILSON; BOTTOM ROW: ASHLEY RYAN

PIZZAS

BLACKBERRY PIZZA / NEAPOLITAN PIZZERIA & BIRRERIA

Traditional tomato sauce is replaced by a special blackberry sauce for a sweeter taste—but the fruit flavor doesn't end there: This pie, from south Laguna pizzeria Neapolitan, also features a unique apricot ricotta. Large chunks of applewood smoked bacon and a pile of fresh arugula that has been tossed in lemon and olive oil are the final touches to this pizza, which is cooked in the restaurant's wood-fired oven.

BIANCO BACON ROSEMARY PIZZA / WINE GALLERY

There's something about a pizza with white sauce that pairs perfectly with a glass of wine. At Wine Gallery, the bianco bacon rosemary pizza features a thin layer of house-made white sauce, four different cheeses, Nueske's bacon, shaved potatoes and red onion. After being cooked at 750 degrees in the restaurant's wood-fired oven, it's finished with fresh parsley and rosemary for an aromatic touch. Now all you have to decide is which wine to select.

ROCKPILE PIZZA / SLICE PIZZA & BEER

It's an age-old debate: Does pineapple belong on pizza? Slice says yes, offering a tasty pie covered in not only pineapple, but prosciutto, arugula, Parmigiano-Reggiano and ovalini mozzarella as well—all on a base of organic tomato sauce. Named for the north Laguna beach just steps from Heisler Park, this quintessential pizza captures the essence of our beach town with its curated toppings and balanced flavor.

PESTO BURRATA PIZZA / ZINC CAFE

It's as if you're eating straight from the garden when you bite into this pizza from Zinc Cafe. Fresh flavors abound thanks to roasted tomato, fresh



spinach and baby artichokes, which are placed atop the crust after it's brushed with olive oil and sprinkled with sea salt. Large chunks of burrata, a layer of pesto (rather than red sauce) and chile flakes complete the dish. "What's nice with the burrata is that it creates a pop of fresh cheese rather than a pizza covered in melted cheese," says owner John Secretan. "The toppings really come through."

LOUISIANA HOT CHICKEN PIZZA / FINNEY'S CRAFTHOUSE

A bit of spice is just the ticket when it comes to selecting the perfect pizza, and spice is something that Finney's has definitely mastered. "Hot chicken is a food style that is currently 'in' and we thought, instead of a Nashville hot chicken, we would make a Louisiana Hot Chicken Pizza instead," says Eric BosRau, the brand's corporate executive chef. The pizza crust is layered with the chicken, shaved garlic, red and green onions, pickled cherry peppers and Finney's own cheese blend, plus a Louisiana hot ranch.



Clockwise from top left: blackberry pizza at Neapolitan Pizzeria & Birreria; bianco bacon rosemary pizza at Wine Gallery; Rockpile Pizza at Slice Pizza & Beer; Zinc Cafe's pesto burrata pizza; Louisiana Hot Chicken Pizza at Finney's Crafthouse



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JD DAWN; COURTESY OF WINE GALLERY; @BIBWINEGALLERY; AMBER FRUITT MONTCOMERY; ASHLEY RYAN

EGGS BENEDICTS

LOX BENEDICT / KITCHEN IN THE CANYON

One of the most in-demand items on the Kitchen in the Canyon menu—and a filling morning option—is the lox Benedict. “We have ... [had] this item for four years,” says owner Shima Roshani, “and people have been coming back to have [it] ... again [and again].” Along with the classic English muffin and poached eggs, this version includes smoked salmon, sauteed spinach and a unique caper hollandaise sauce to complement the fish.

DUBLIN BENEDICT / HENNESSEY’S TAVERN

The Irish influence is strong at Hennessey’s, where diners can try the Dublin Benedict. Already a delicacy in Ireland, this distinct dish has all of the typical Benedict ingredients: a toasted English muffin, poached eggs, hollandaise sauce and a sprinkle of paprika. But it also features corned beef hash, cooked on the griddle to perfection, to lock in that Irish flavor.

KUROBUTA PORK BELLY BENEDICT / SAPPHIRE, CELLAR-CRAFT-COOK

As pork belly continues to gain traction in the culinary world, Sapphire stands at the forefront with this popular dish—often deemed the best Benedict guests have ever had. “Pork belly is perfect for Benedict the way we prepare it,” notes partner and Executive Chef Jared Cook. The slow-cooked pork is roasted for about four hours, then flash fried to create a crisp outside with a tender interior. It is then placed on rosemary focaccia muffins with cage-free poached eggs, country ham, chives and a Champagne-bearnaise sauce.

EGGS BENEDICT CANYON / URTH CAFFÉ

Rather than the traditional English muffin base, this unique iteration layers farm-fresh eggs and house-made

hollandaise sauce on top of two potato latkes made from a family recipe. “The farm is completely old school, with truly free-range, vegetarian-fed, happy chickens that produce the best tasting eggs with a bright, vibrant yolk,” says owner Shallom Berkman. Additionally, diners can opt for thinly sliced Italian ham or smoked salmon lox to round out the dish.

LOBSTER EGGS BENEDICT / LAS BRISAS

Available for breakfast or weekend brunch, this decadent dish is an exquisite selection for any and all lobster lovers. The succulent seafood is poached in butter while a ciabatta English muffin is toasted a la plancha, then guacamole is spread on the bread before it is layered with the lobster tail, poached eggs, hollandaise sauce, chives and paprika. Chef Samantha DeLeon describes the dish as “a luxurious twist to a classic breakfast favorite” that embodies the restaurant’s commitment to fresh California seafood. ■



Clockwise from top left: Lox Benedict at Kitchen in the Canyon; Dublin Benedict at Hennessey’s Tavern; kurobuta pork belly Benedict at Sapphire, Cellar-Craft-Cook; Eggs Benedict Canyon at Urth Caffé; lobster eggs Benedict at Las Brisas

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF KITCHEN IN THE CANYON; ASHLEY RYAN; COURTESY OF SAPPHIRE, CELLAR-CRAFT-COOK; VICTOR BOGHOSIAN; COURTESY OF LAS BRISAS