

Perfecting the Picnic

With some of the most stunning beaches and parks in California, Orange County is the perfect spot to enjoy a meal outdoors with loved ones.

BY ASHLEY RYAN



Orange County has a plethora of places to host your own picnic.

While red and white checkered blankets topped with potato salad and a giant jug of sweet tea are, for the most part, a thing of the past, picnicking is alive and well—especially in a place as beautiful as Orange County.

From the towering bluffs of Dana Point to the sprawling beaches of Laguna, there are plenty of spots near Monarch Beach Resort to stop for the perfect picnic. Whether at the property for a day or a week, sunny afternoons and stunning sunset-filled evenings invite guests to hit the streets (or the parks and beaches) for some exploration—with a picnic basket in hand, filled with only the tastiest meals.

DANA POINT HARBOR

One obvious choice for a daytime picnic is nearby Dana Point Harbor. This hot spot has recently undergone a rejuvenation that includes an array of popular restaurants that often feature live music. But, while the dining scene is prominent, it doubles as a delightful place to sit outside and enjoy the bustling atmosphere. According to Taylor Alpert, guest experience manager at Monarch Beach Resort, it's a great way to get a feel for the Dana Point lifestyle—and to be a part of the local community. Shaded tables near the jetty are the best place to dine, as they offer a view of the boats coming in and

out of the harbor. The waterside walkway is also a great bonus, Alpert says, as visitors can take a stroll there, either before or after enjoying their meal.

MONARCH BEACH

For those that would prefer to stay on property for their picnic excursion, Alpert recommends the resort's private beach. Located just steps away from the resort, underneath the coastal bluffs that Dana Point is known for, this is a beautiful place to soak up the sunshine or watch a colorful sunset. Alpert says attendants are waiting to provide you with everything from chairs to towels once



Dana Point Harbor's Baby Beach

you arrive, as well as all of the food and beverage you might require.

Another perk of picnicking on the resort's beach is that, although no glass is allowed, guests can consume wine or other alcoholic beverages since it's private property. Monarch Bay Club

also rents out fire pits, where guests can have a different type of picnic: order food from the resort to cook over the open flame. They offer everything from s'mores to meat perfect for barbecuing.

SALT CREEK BEACH, DANA POINT

Only half a mile from Monarch Beach Resort, Salt Creek Beach is an obvious choice for picnicking—but Alpert says the beach isn't the main appeal here. Instead, opt to lie out your picnic

spread on the grassy hill in the park atop the cliffs. With plenty of shady spots to escape the afternoon heat, it's a great choice for a lunchtime picnic.

Alpert says it's also a popular place to watch the sunset so evenings can get crowded with locals flocking to the same hill, but that is all part of the fun. "It's just a good experience and gives a good sense of community," Alpert says. "You can still find a place for yourself instead of being right next to someone else." She recommends visiting

anytime in spring, summer or fall, but says winters tend to get chilly here.

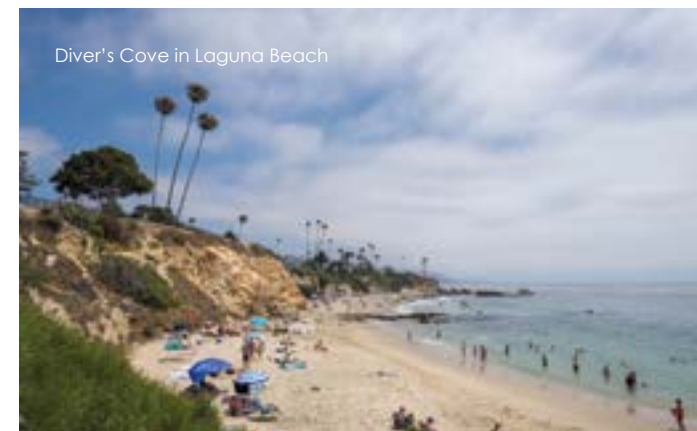


Monarch Bay Club

LAGUNA BEACH

Last but not least, Alpert says Laguna Beach—Fisherman's or Shaw's Cove, in particular—makes for a fantastic picnic destination.

Only a few miles up the coastline from Monarch Beach Resort, Laguna's private coves often face less crowding than other nearby beaches. With beautiful scenery all day long and vibrant sunsets in the evening, there is no bad time to picnic on the sand in one of Laguna's coves. Whether exploring local tide pools or stand-up paddleboarding in the waters just offshore, wildlife abounds. Nearby Heisler Park is also great for strolling before or after your meal, while Alpert says Laguna's array of coastal shops and galleries also make for a full day of adventuring. 🦋

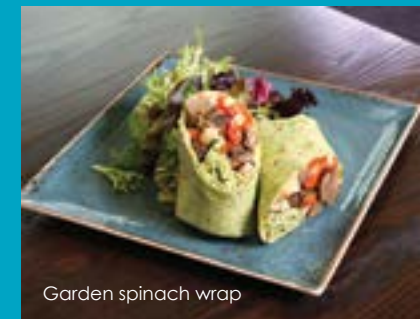


Diver's Cove in Laguna Beach

BOUNTIFUL BASKETS

As you get ready to explore the region, stop by Part & Parcel Market to purchase a picnic basket and fill it with some of these fresh foods to nosh on during your outing.

Garden spinach wrap, \$13: Try the garden spinach wrap, which rolls up roasted mushrooms, garlic and basil hummus, rosemary-grilled artichokes and jalapeño havarti in a spinach tortilla.



Garden spinach wrap

California Club, \$13: This sandwich features citrus-grilled chicken breast, pancetta, avocado, pickled red onion and chipotle aioli.

Lemon verbena grilled red quinoa, \$11: This flavorful dish combines quinoa with butternut squash, avocado, heirloom tomatoes and sun-dried cranberries for a fresh meal that's perfect for a midday jaunt.

Prosciutto pizza, \$15: A blend of roasted garlic, basil pesto, arugula, dried figs and prosciutto are baked atop this pizza, along with a cheesy array of mozzarella and shaved Parmesan, before topping it with aged balsamic. **California Orchard Salad, \$11:** This salad boasts pears and Honeycrisp apples mixed with basil, shredded kale and wild rice topped with pecans, white cheddar and citrus balsamic dressing.