

# TASTE OF THE TOWN



From left: the Thai coconut chicken satays with creamy peanut sauce; the lobster macadamia roll (left) and Silk Road potstickers; the Wild Lychee Martini with fresh fruit garnish

## FUSION FLAVOR

FRESH-COOKED FARE INSPIRED BY COUNTRIES ALL ACROSS ASIA POPULATES THE MENU AT THE NEW STARFISH NEWPORT.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

**T**ransport your taste buds across the world to mystical Asia, where signature dishes are vastly different than in the West. The fusion of flavors at Starfish Newport is inspired by countries like Thailand, Japan, Vietnam and China, with a lengthy, coastal-inspired menu that ensures you can try something new every time you visit.

Located one block up from Pacific Coast Highway's Restaurant Row, Starfish opened its doors in the spring following the success of its Laguna location, which launched in 2011. Though smaller, the new eatery captures the same vibrant energy of the flagship restaurant, with textured wooden doors that welcome guests to a room filled with dramatic artwork, textured lanterns and sleek, sea-colored tiles; this location also serves as Starfish's catering hub.

For a light, refreshing cocktail that pairs with any dish, try the Wild Lychee Martini, which combines vodka made of rice wine with lemongrass liqueur and fresh puree. Another Asian-inspired sip, the Thai Me Down, features rice wine rum, chai tea, coquito and cinnamon, while the frozen Newport Frose is unique to the Newport location.

**Starfish Newport**  
191 Riverside Ave.; 949-570-3990  
[starfishcalifornia.com/newportbeach](http://starfishcalifornia.com/newportbeach)

When diving into the cuisine, you'll likely be overwhelmed by the sheer number of options—but you can't go wrong with any of them, so long as you're all right with a little heat. Start out with the wok-fired edamame, tossed in garlic and sesame seeds along with togarashi, a Japanese seasoning blend. While savoring these tasty soybeans in the pod, you can peruse the menu and settle on some shared plates, like the Silk Road potstickers, which are stuffed with shrimp and pork then steamed or pan fried and served with a chile-sesame-soy dipping sauce, or the Thai coconut chicken satays, where chicken breast is marinated in coconut and lemongrass, cooked on skewers then drizzled in a creamy peanut sauce.

Those looking for expert fusion food should try the banh mi sliders, a trio served with either soft-shell crab or beef. Or enjoy the lobster macadamia roll, which fuses pieces of lobster tail with avocado,

cucumber and mango before the sushi is sprinkled with roasted nuts and drizzled in spicy Sriracha aioli.

For a more hearty meal, check out the Rickshaw Ramen Noodle bowl. Chopped prawns and Duroc pork are combined with cucumbers, bean sprouts, green onion and peanuts, tossed in a spicy chile-garlic sauce and placed on a bed of brothless noodles. For a less spicy, vegetarian option, order the pad thai, which contains egg and fresh tamarind atop rice noodles.

The Asian inspiration continues with the entrees, including the wild Thai halibut, which is steamed in a banana leaf alongside coconut rice and a blend of Thai herbs and spices. Served with flour tortillas and a creamy chile-basil sauce, this light dish is perfect for warm nights as summer turns to fall. Other seafood dishes include grilled white miso black cod and kung pao prawns while items like Mongolian beef and slow-cooked baby back wet ribs round out the menu.

Because the eatery draws inspiration from so many different lands, the variation in the food is outstanding. Every bite you take has some spice, fabulous flavor and a bit of the magic and mystery that permeates Asian culture. **NBM**