

TASTE OF THE TOWN



From left: The renovated patio area at Javier's; ceviche; enchiladas de mariscos, filled with shrimp and Dungeness crab then covered with tomatillo sauce

MODERN MEXICAN

SETTLE INTO THE RECENTLY REMODELED JAVIER'S RESTAURANT IN CRYSTAL COVE TO ENJOY AUTHENTIC FARE WITH CONTEMPORARY FLAIR IN AN UPSCALE COASTAL SETTING.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

Slip into a seat at the Javier's bar just before golden hour and you'll be in for a treat. As the sun sinks lower, the cool tones of Crystal Cove's sparkling blue waters just beyond Pacific Coast Highway are replaced by a sky painted with vivid orange and radiant pink. Metal flower sculptures offer an added glow, flames erupting from their pistils as the air begins to cool.

It's been nearly 30 years since beloved eatery Javier's opened its doors in Laguna Beach, relocating to Crystal Cove Shopping Center in 2008, and it's safe to say the restaurant's popularity has only skyrocketed since then. Newport Beach residents and out-of-town visitors alike flock to this upscale Mexican restaurant, which also has locations in Irvine, La Jolla, Century City, Las Vegas and Los Cabos, Mexico.

If you haven't been, it's worth a visit and, if you have, now is a good time to return as the Newport restaurant just reopened in May following a large-scale renovation that added space for another 50-60 guests, expanded the bar from four to 20 seats and increased the size of the kitchen for better efficiency—an important aspect considering that the restaurant serves thousands of diners each night. Additionally, the wall separating the dining room from the patio was removed, the ceilings

JAVIER'S
7832 E. Coast Highway
949-494-1239; javiers-cantina.com
Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through
Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday
and Saturday

were raised and the colors were brightened, providing a more open floor plan and a better view of the picturesque coastline.

The menu, however, remains the same, offering authentic cuisine from all over Mexico with a touch of originality. Gourmet meats, sustainably caught seafood and fresh, local produce fill the menu, and everything is cooked to order to ensure a memorable meal each time.

Start with a handcrafted margarita, all of which feature the restaurant's own tequilas. Opt for a classic, like the Javier's Cristalino, which combines anejo tequila and fresh lime juice over an ice sphere with a Tajín rim, or try a fruity option, like the Piña (pineapple) or Guayaba (guava) cocktails.

Though crunchy tortilla chips with house-made salsa will swiftly be delivered to your table, pick out an appetizer or two to enjoy. The fresh ceviche is a

popular option, offered in fish, shrimp, ahi tuna or octopus varieties; a tasty trio of your choice is also available. Other flavorful options include shrimp empanadas, crisp salads, taquitos or a side of esquites—creamy street corn.

As you delve further into the menu, cultural favorites abound. In fact, family recipes for dishes such as mole, short ribs, chile relleno and carnitas are so valued that no modifications are allowed. Seafood lovers can enjoy seared seasonal fish, premium wild scallops, fettuccine with a medley of ocean-centric ingredients or dishes like the Carne Y Camarones, which pairs filet mignon with wild Mexican white prawns sautéed in a garlic butter sauce. Other steaks—cut from USDA Prime Angus beef, hand selected and aged to perfection—fill the menu, but diners can also select a 14-ounce tomahawk pork chop for their meal.

These dishes are joined by a number of enchilada plates, ranging from enchiladas poblanas made with chicken and mole to a trio of seafood enchiladas (shrimp, crab and lobster) to the vegetarian Enchiladas de Espinacas, stuffed with leafy spinach and a poblano cream sauce.

Make sure to end the evening on a high note: The dessert menu is filled with sweet treats, from flan, churros and tres leches to a melt-in-your-mouth guava cheesecake. **NBM**