

AN AIR OF ARTISTRY

THESE DESSERTS AT NEWPORT BEACH RESTAURANTS LOOK ALMOST TOO GOOD TO EAT.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

Dessert is often considered the best part of the meal, with sweet treats creating the perfect ending to a lineup of delectable dishes.

From churros and cheesecake to endless flavors of ice cream, confections abound at Newport Beach restaurants. But some are a level above, artfully plated in a way that makes them as delicious for the eyes as they are for the taste buds.

Here, we reveal which desserts you simply can't miss.



The lemon tarts at Moulin resemble a flower.

Moulin

One of the most dangerous things about dining at a French cafe is the sheer array of sweets they have to follow the meal. At Moulin, the classic lemon tart is simple yet stunning. "Like a great sommelier would say, tasting is done by looking first," says Mariette MacDonald, brand manager for Moulin. The lemon curd, made with fresh-squeezed lemon juice and zest mixed with French butter, is cooked slowly on the stove like a jam while the shortbread crust—made with imported French flour—is "sanded" by hand, then molded and baked. The curd is poured in the center and the dessert is cooked in the oven before being finished with meringue, made to resemble a flower. Opt for an individual tart to have it all to yourself or grab a large to share with loved ones. (949-474-0920; moulin.com)



The shell in this dessert at Set Steak & Sushi is made of chocolate.

Set Steak & Sushi

Diners can always count on this luxurious sushi restaurant for its presentation—and nothing on the menu is more stunning than the Dulce de Leche Conch Shell. Inspired by the restaurant's proximity to the ocean, guests will be astounded by the intricate detail that goes into this dessert. The marbled shell, crafted out of both white and dark chocolate, is filled with a buttery dulce mousse, made in-house, as well as white chocolate pearls. Placed on a bed of shortbread and torn matcha cake, then surrounded by a blue-hued curacao creme anglaise, the color palette and textures celebrate the beauty of the Pacific Ocean. "The plating ... is playful and artistically designed to play a slight trick on the mind," says William Pentecost, Set Steak & Sushi's executive chef. "The conch shell is very realistic, sitting on top of shortbread 'sand,' with matcha cake resembling moss or sea sponge. Diners round out their meal ... with a dessert that puts an exclamation point on our story and passion." (949-688-8005; setnewport.com)

FROM LEFT: CHRISTOPHER NOLAN; ROBERT REYES



Pineapple forms the bowl for creme brulee at Tommy Bahama.



Between a Pavlova and a Vacherin at Marche Moderne

Tommy Bahama Restaurant & Bar

Creme brulee is consistently one of the most popular desserts around, but the island twist of the pineapple variety at this Hawaiian-themed eatery makes it one of a kind. "It is unique because we use fresh ingredients—pineapple—as the vessel," says Erik Forrest, West Coast regional chef for Tommy Bahama. "People eat with their eyes and fresh pineapple is such a beautiful ode to Hawaii." The creme brulee itself is made traditionally: Sugar and eggs are warmed with cream and vanilla, then placed in a pan and wrapped in plastic before it is steamed for 90 minutes. Diced, caramelized pineapple chunks are also incorporated, crafted with brown sugar and more vanilla for a bold flavor reminiscent of the islands. Served in a ring of pineapple—with rind intact for effect—diners will feel like they're on vacation with every bite. (949-760-8686; tommybahama.com)

Marché Moderne

Everything at this luxurious restaurant is elevated, but the desserts are especially gorgeous. Crafted by pastry chef and co-owner Amelia Marneau, the Between a Pavlova and a Vacherin is just as it sounds—a mix of the two French desserts. "We start with the meringue shell, which takes the most time to prepare as it needs to be cooked at a very low temperature overnight to dry the meringue," Marneau explains. "Then the mousseline and creams are prepared and assembled in a creative way." Flavor and texture are placed at the forefront, with a fresh touch from both grapefruit mousse and grapefruit gel. Paired with a Tahitian vanilla creme as well as Grand Marnier and pamplemousse (grapefruit) ice cream, each taste marries the others for a creamy, delicious treat that Marneau says has the perfect balance. (714-434-7900; marchemoderne.net)



A three-tiered tower of treats at Bayside Restaurant

Bayside Restaurant

With "Dining as Art" as its motto, this beloved restaurant—which is celebrating a major milestone of 25 years in 2024—is known for shareable dishes that guests can enjoy together. "Since most of our reservations are four-plus guests, this allows them to share and have a taste of three different items," says owner Marc Ghoukassian. Build your own sweet treat tower by curating the selection from options that currently include pumpkin cheesecake, Tahitian vanilla bean creme brulee, flourless chocolate cake, banana bread pudding and ice cream or sorbet trios. "It is a beautiful presentation on three tiers, perfect to wow friends and family at the table," he explains. "... If your entree is the crescendo to your meal, we think the dessert tower is the perfect outro to an incredible evening." (949-721-1222; baysiderestaurant.com) **NBM**