

Fresh Takes

EMBRACE THE BOUNTY OF LOCAL PRODUCE WITH SALADS THAT ARE VIBRANT IN COLOR AND DELICIOUS IN FLAVOR.

By ASHLEY RYAN



Chopped Lobster Salad, Montage Laguna Beach

Highlighting the season's freshest produce, salads are perfect for warm summer days—and from crisp greens, juicy tomatoes and crunchy vegetables to tender rib-eye or succulent lobster, the combinations are truly endless.

“Salads are a perfect choice for spring dining—light, bright and nourishing,” says Miguel Ruiz, chef de cuisine at Montage Laguna Beach's Mosaic Bar & Grille. “As the season ushers in an abundance of fresh, local produce, it's the ideal time to enjoy vibrant ingredients at their peak. These crisp, flavorful combinations offer a refreshing contrast to the heavier meals of winter.”

As the weather warms up, light and refreshing meals just feel right, and salads are a healthy way to celebrate the return of color and freshness to our seaside town.

MOSAIC BAR & GRILLE

A decadent option awaits at this poolside eatery at Montage Laguna Beach. Overlook the sparkling ocean or refreshing swimming pool while enjoying the chopped lobster salad, which starts with a base of crisp romaine lettuce tossed with juicy mango, crunchy jicama and a zesty citrus vinaigrette. Lightly seasoned with salt and pepper, the dish is then topped with fresh avocado, colorful grapefruit wedges and succulent lobster. “Mosaic's chopped lobster salad is a standout for its bold contrast of flavors and textures—sweet mango, tangy grapefruit, buttery avocado and delicate lobster come together in perfect harmony,” Ruiz says. “It's a vibrant celebration of spring on a plate.” (949-715-6132; montage.com)

SOUTH OF NICK'S

The enchilada salad at South of Nick's combines one of its most beloved recipes with a salad base from its sister restaurant. “This is the perfect marriage of Nick's and South of Nick's,” explains Haley Cox, chief operating officer for Nick's Restaurants. The crossover begins with a cheese enchilada crafted with



Golden Beets & Goat Cheese Carpaccio, Alessa by Chef Pirozzi; right: Enchilada salad, South of Nick's



Asian Sesame Chopped Salad, Starfish Laguna; right: ribeye Cobb salad, The Deck on Laguna Beach



the eatery's signature red enchilada sauce, red onion, sour cream and micro cilantro. The traditional Mexican dish is made into the perfect southwest salad by incorporating Nick's Caesar salad, consisting of chilled romaine hearts, heirloom tomatoes, fried capers, Parmesan streusel and crunchy brioche croutons. Plated side by side, the combination is both delicious and refreshing. (949-715-3717; nicksrestaurants.com)

THE DECK ON LAGUNA BEACH

Savor the blackened rib-eye Cobb salad, a unique twist on a dish that has historically been made with chicken. “The addition of the blackened rib-eye makes this salad so satisfying and allows it to eat like an entree,” says Executive Chef-Partner Rainer Schwarz. “We blacken our rib-eye steak for a flavor-packed protein. We also make garlic croutons

in-house, along with a beautiful red wine vinaigrette to bring the salad together.” The steak is complemented by applewood smoked bacon, cherry tomatoes, Point Reyes blue cheese and, of course, the aforementioned croutons and vinaigrette for a dish that is fully satisfying. (949-755-8788; deckonlaguna.com)

STARFISH LAGUNA

Indulge in a salad that is packed with zesty flavors, bright colors and seasonal produce at this south Laguna fusion eatery. The ingredients—pulled chicken, roasted red bell peppers, wok-fired corn, iceberg lettuce, mixed greens, red cabbage and cucumber—are chopped fresh daily to ensure crunch and flavor in every bite. Tossed with a white sesame dressing just prior to serving to ensure the perfect texture, the Asian sesame chopped salad is finished with wonton strips. “It's that perfect balance of

flavor and texture—sweet, savory, crunchy and fresh,” says Jennifer Polley, Starfish California's marketing director. “The sesame dressing is a house-made highlight and the combo of Asian-inspired ingredients makes it stand out from your typical salad. Plus, it's super customizable—light enough for a spring lunch, hearty enough to be a full meal. Basically, it's not just a salad, it's a craveable experience.” (949-715-9200; starfishcalifornia.com)

ALESSA BY CHEF PIROZZI

Each ingredient plays a role in the golden beets and goat cheese carpaccio salad at Alessa. Chef-owner Alessandro Pirozzi starts by roasting organic beets, wrapped in foil, until they are tender. The beets are then peeled, thinly sliced and artfully arranged on the plate before they're drizzled with extra virgin olive oil and sprinkled with five artisanal salts from across the globe. Sweet, tangy and savory notes are incorporated through a modern-aged white balsamic vinegar, creamy goat cheese, fresh raspberries, diced shallots, red onions and caramelized walnuts. “Each bite is a harmony of textures and flavors that celebrate simplicity and sophistication,” Pirozzi says, noting that it's one of his favorite dishes to order for spring. (949-497-8222; alessalaguna.com) ■

RESTAURANT LISTINGS

Scan the QR code below to visit our dining resource online.

