

Stacked and Loaded

BOLD BURGERS ARE SIZZLING ON LAGUNA BEACH MENUS THIS SUMMER.

By ASHLEY RYAN



Oto Sushi - Kraken Burger

Just like watermelon, hot dogs and corn on the cob, burgers are a quintessential summer staple. Defining the taste of the season—whether at backyard barbecues, camping trips, baseball games, or beach days—burgers bring the perfect blend of flavor and fun with every bite.

“Burgers and summer time belong to each other,” says Kyle St. John, executive chef of Harvest restaurant at The Ranch at Laguna Beach. “Backyard grilling is at its peak when the weather is warm and you’re sharing good times with friends and family. Throwing some burgers and hot dogs on the grill was what we grew up with as kids; we have that connection between burgers and summer ingrained in us.”

This classic dish populates menus all over town, ranging from timeless favorites to inventive, one-of-a-kind creations that delight and impress. Grab one to go, hit the beach and soak up the sun, burger in hand.

HARVEST

Using a blend of chuck, brisket and short rib, the new burger at The Ranch at Laguna Beach’s signature restaurant, Harvest, combines flavor and texture for a deliciously savory bite this summer. The meat is dry aged for two weeks and grilled over a fire before it’s assembled on a potato brioche bun. The patty is topped with wild arugula, aged white cheddar, smoked bacon, crispy tobacco onions and chipotle aioli as well as tomatoes from the resort garden for a touch of freshness. “A burger is a vessel for so much more,” says St. John. “Endless combinations create unique flavor profiles that can transform a patty and bun into something beyond just a [simple] burger.” (949-715-1376; theranchlb.com)

GG’S BISTRO

For a unique iteration, visit this cultural cafe. “People love trying new flavors from around the world,” says GG’s Bistro owner Francesca Gundogar. “The Mediterranean



Harvest at The Ranch - Courtesy of The Ranch at Laguna Beach

Burger gives them a familiar format—a burger—with a globally inspired twist. ... [It offers] a creative, delicious alternative to the traditional version.” Ajouka, a spicy North African chile paste, is spread on the bun while the meat is cooked over an open flame to enhance its smoky flavor. Then, it is smothered in onions dipped in zesty sumac, tomatoes and crunks of feta cheese for a one-of-a-kind meal here in town. (949-494-9306; ggscafebistro.com)

OTO SUSHI

While a burger might be the last thing you'd expect to order at a sushi restaurant, the Kraken Burger at Oto Sushi is one of the most thrilling in town. Crafted with an eye-catching squid ink brioche bun with black sesame seeds

and featuring ground American wagyu beef from Snake River Farms in Idaho, it's also just as delicious as it is interesting. After seasoning with salt and pepper and cooking it on a flat-top stove, aged white cheddar is melted atop the patty. “I prefer this method as it creates an excellent Maillard reaction, caramelizing and browning the meat for a unique texture and aroma,” says Connor Mathison, Oto Sushi's corporate chef. Once it has rested, the burger is combined with shredded lettuce, dill pickles, miso mustard and a house-made burger sauce, then topped with a sunny side up egg for a pop of color. (otosushi.co)

REUNION KITCHEN & DRINK

Smash burgers have been all the rage in recent years, and the version at this comfort food

restaurant is no different, serving as a top seller in the summertime. Relax at a patio table with an ice-cold beer and the Double Oklahoma Smash Burger. “The quality [of the ingredients] is unmatched—for everything down to the carefully sourced crunchy pickle,” says Scott McIntosh, owner of Reunion Kitchen & Drink. Premium USDA-grade beef is shaped into two patties while thin, grilled onions are smashed into the meat to give it a caramelized flavor. Topped with thick American cheese, lettuce, pickles, mustard and mayonnaise, this luxe burger is perfect for sharing or enjoying solo after a day at the beach. (949-226-8393; reunionkitchen.net)

OAK LAGUNA BEACH

Another compelling variety of burger is the mushroom burger from this American restaurant. “A sumptuous change from a basic burger, the flavors co-mingle delightfully and are bound together by creamy Swiss cheese,” says Carmen Wildfong, general manager of Oak Laguna Beach. “This burger will not disappoint.” Also incorporating a wagyu beef patty grilled over a flame, this option layers Swiss cheese, caramelized mushrooms and onions, and the restaurant's own secret sauce on the meat, which is then placed on a brioche bun. “It is a perfect blend of flavors,” she adds. “You get the earthiness of the mushrooms mixed with the tanginess of our sauce and richness of the wagyu beef.” What better way to end summer? (949-940-3010; oak-laguna-beach.com) ■

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