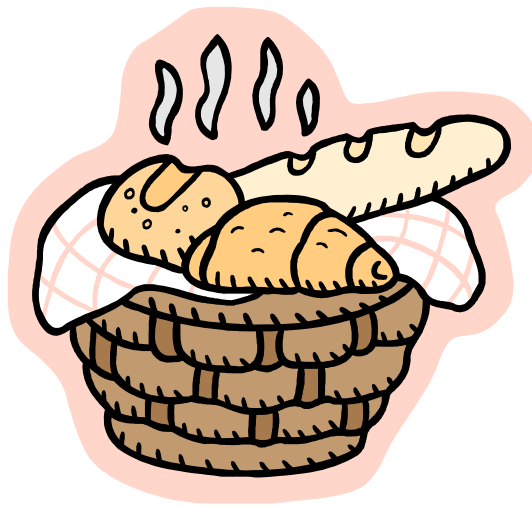


THE "EATING OUT CAN BE FUN" GUIDE TO RESTAURANTS IN ORANGE COUNTY

A Wuffle & Friends

University of California, Irvine
2006 Edition
Western Regional Science Association



Introduction

Orange County is like the proverbial "elephant viewed by the three blind men": perceptions depend on what part of the county you happen to touch. If you drive along Harbor Boulevard south of Disneyland, you might think that Orange County consists entirely of used recreational vehicle dealers, tacky motels, and drive-in taco chains. If you drive through some parts of the county, you would see acre upon seemingly endless acre of tract homes, each development a walled-in enclave--suggesting that the county is a homogeneous "fortress-suburbia." If you go to Newport Beach, on the coast, with its vast yacht marina, you might think of the county as a summer playground of the rich (as it was portrayed in Raymond Chandler mysteries of the 1940s). If you drive along the coast on Pacific Coast Highway to Huntington Beach, you realize you have arrived at the legendary "Surf City," where everyone wore wet suits and all cars came factory-equipped with an overhead rack on which to store your surfboard if not in use.

Because there's so much wealth in the county (especially in the coastal areas), there are lots of trendy but excellent restaurants, serving fresh seafood, pasta and California cuisine, that cater to that wealth. (California cuisine draws its inspiration from nouvelle cuisine and is characterized by stir-fried fresh exotic vegetables and artistic display of food on the plate. Indeed, in some Orange County restaurants the preparation is so elegant that the food is better to look at than to eat.) But restaurant lovers visiting Orange County have an even better reason to rejoice than the ready availability of kiwi fruit tarts. The growing ethnic populations in the county support many authentic ethnic restaurants. Thus, for the venturesome, eating out in Orange County can be a lot of fun. Popular perceptions do not reflect the census figures relating to the growing ethnic diversity in the county, especially the influx of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees and the continuing growth of the county's Hispanic population. Santa Ana, one of the largest cities in the county, is over 50 percent Hispanic; there is an area of Westminster known as "Little Saigon," and dozens of Vietnamese restaurants have opened up in the past decade; while Chinese acupuncturists and herbalists are almost as common as drugstores in the neighborhood shopping centers of some central Orange County cities.

I have identified restaurants first by city and then by type of restaurant. Unless otherwise stated, restaurant prices are inexpensive to moderate. I've focused on restaurants in Newport Beach and Irvine within easy driving range of UC Irvine, in the charming city of Laguna Beach.

Note: Many of the restaurants I recommend are tucked away in rather ugly shopping centers.

One other note: Restaurants that are starred (*) are ones I think worth a special trip, but I haven't listed any restaurant that I wouldn't recommend.

Newport Beach and Irvine

NEWPORT BEACH **Fashion Island** is an enjoyable outdoor shopping center a few blocks from the Hyatt Newporter. It has a Spanish motif, with fountains and archways through the mall. Orange County's only Bloomingdales and Neiman-Marcus stores, and dozens of other shops. There are a set of restaurants here; few are impressive but they are convenient to the Hyatt:
Cheesecake Factory: A chain but with view of ocean 949-720-8333
California Pizza Kitchen: Right next door, with view 949-759-5543.
Daily Grill: American fare, 949-644-2223
El Torito Grill: Mexican chain restaurant. 949-640-2875
French 75 Bistro: Paris in Newport Beach, quiet dining 949-640-2700

The following four are in Fashion Island, but deserve their own listings:
 There is also more information at: www.shopfashionisland.com/

NEWPORT BEACH (Fashion Island) *Italian*
Tutto Mare, 545 Newport Center Drive, Fashion Island Shopping Center, 949-640-6333. Open Mon.-Thurs. 11:30 a.m.-11 p.m., Fri. & Sat. til midnight, Sun 5 p.m.-10 p.m.
 Owned by the same folks who own Prego, Tutto Mare is elegant and fast-paced. Its specialty is seafood, as its name implies but, like Prego, it also offers a variety of meats and of course, pastas.

NEWPORT BEACH (Fashion Island)
Roy's, 453 Newport Center Drive, Fashion Island Shopping Center, 949-640-7697. Sunday - Thursday 5:00-10:00pm, Friday & Saturday 5:00pm to 11:00pm. Prepare for the next WRSA with this trip to Hawaii; Roy's specializes in Asian fusion.

NEWPORT BEACH (Fashion Island)
Blue Coral, 400 Newport Center Drive, Fashion Island Shopping Center, 949- 856-2583. Sun-Thurs: 5-10pm ; Fri-Sat: 5-11pm,
 Relatively new seafood restaurant.

NEWPORT BEACH (Fashion Island)
The Ritz, 880 Newport Center Drive, Fashion Island Shopping Center, 720-1800. Sun-Thurs: 5-10pm; Fri-Sat: 5-11pm,
 Classic cuisine; where the overpaid of Newport Beach come for power lunches; come only if the other person is paying.

NEWPORT BEACH (Balboa)
*Wilma's Patio, 203 Marine Ave 949-675-5542
 The Hyatt is 3-4 blocks from Balboa Island, a little jewel of the Pacific. The island has a boardwalk around the perimeter, and is perfect for a morning jog or leisurely stroll. Wilma's is a family restaurant for the Island; very informal and a place to have breakfast after your stroll.

There are also a number of coffee shops, boutiques, and a few more restaurants on Marine avenue—a fun place to visit.

NEWPORT BEACH
(Newport Harbor)
Restaurant Row, this is a series of restaurants along Pacific Coast Highway just a few minutes drive from the Hyatt. One dines for the ambiance more than the dining, but watching the sun set over Newport Harbor is a wonderful start to the evening. Our favorites:

(Newport Harbor)
Chart House, 2801 W Coast Hwy. 949-548-5889
Quiet, sophisticated and well-prepared Pacific fish.

(Newport Harbor)
Rusty Pelican, 2735 W Coast Hwy. 949-642-3431
More casual seafood restaurant, with beautiful views or the bay.

(Newport Harbor)
Villa Nova, 3131 W. Coast Hwy. 949-642-7880
Long-established Italian restaurant. A Hollywood establishment that 'retired' to the OC, where John Wayne would hang out with his buddies.

NEWPORT BEACH
Japanese
Kitayama, 101 Bayview, (just off McArthur) 949-725-0777
Traditional Japanese cuisine in an authentic setting. A restaurant full of local Japanese community members.

NEWPORT BEACH
Japanese
Benihana's of Tokyo, 4250 Birch, (near Orange County Airport) 949-955-0822.
In Tokyo, Benihana's is known as "Benihana's of New York," but Rocky Aoki, the owner of the restaurant, still deserves credit for inventing the "samurai" chef concept. Even if it has gotten a little old hat to watch the chef slice your shrimp at supersonic speed at your table, the food at Benihana is good. Portions are large, so if you're not that hungry, a twosome might share a steak, or order a second soup and salad à la carte.

NEWPORT BEACH
French
Chanteclair, 18912 MacArthur Blvd. (across from Orange County Airport), 949-752-8001.
This restaurant is a reproduction of a lushly furnished French chateau. Each of the main dining rooms has slightly different décor. (What is it doing across from John Wayne Airport?) The food is OK and sometimes even much better than OK, but ambience is what makes it special. Because it's relatively expensive, I suggest you only go there for lunch.

NEWPORT BEACH
Indian
Mayur, 2931 E. Coast Highway (in the Corona del Mar section of Newport Beach), 949-675-6622
A small and pleasant Indian restaurant.

NEWPORT BEACH
*Pascal's Restaurant, 1000 N. Bristol, 949-263-9400
One of the two or three best restaurants in Orange County. "Continental" *Continental* cuisine that is pricey, but worth it. The owners also run a marvelous deli next door.

- NEWPORT BEACH**
Thai
- *Thai Touch, 2616 San Miguel Dr., 949-640-0123.
A small neighborhood Thai restaurant. Nice proprietors, very pleasant ambience, low prices, very good food, and a convenient location vis-à-vis Hyatt make this a good bet even though there are one or two Thai restaurants elsewhere in the county that are perhaps slightly better (but only slightly)
- NEWPORT BEACH**
Italian
- Mama Gina, 251 E. Coast Highway (near Dover), 949-673-9500.
The waiters may not all be Italian but this is still a very Italian, Tuscan-Florentine, restaurant with an extended selection of appetizers and very good all-you-can-eat Sunday champagne brunch (around \$20 per person) that could easily fill you up for the rest of the week.
- NEWPORT BEACH (Corona del Mar)**
Continental
- *Rothchild's, 2407 E. Coast Highway, Corona del Mar, 949-673-3750.
This is a charming restaurant, with excellent pastas and a large wine selection. Casual elegance. One of the best restaurants in the county.
- IRVINE**
Italian
- Bistango's, 19100 Von Karman, 949-752-5222. (reservations suggested)
Bistango is an elegant Continental restaurant, with good food at not unreasonable prices.
- IRVINE**
Indian
- Clay Oven of India, 15435 Jeffrey Rd., 949-552-2851.
A friendly neighborhood Indian restaurant, with an all-you-can-eat lunch buffet that is, given its quality, a bargain.
- IRVINE**
Mexican
- El Torito, 1910 Main, 714-975-1220; 18512 MacArthur, 949-833-8230
A chain (also see Fashion Island location) but still probably the best Mexican food in the county.
- IRVINE**
Prime Rib
- Gulliver's, 18482 MacArthur, (near Orange County Airport, 949-833-8411. (reservations suggested)
A chain: this remains the place to go for prime rib. The waiters and waitresses are clad in the 20th century's idea of 18th Century garb, which adds to the fun.
- IRVINE**
Italian
- *Il Fornaio, 18051 Von Karman (near Michelson), 949-261-1444
This is probably the best Italian restaurant in Orange County, even though it, too, is part of a chain. The breads are excellent and they have regional Italian specialties, changing each month. Fish dishes are usually especially good.

IRVINE Prego Ristorante, 18420 Von Karman (Michelson at Von Karman), 949-553-1333. (reservations suggested)
Italian Prego is one of the best Italian restaurants in Orange County. Its pastas are superb (and usually al dente). For the jaded palate I recommend as appetizers focaccio (the Italian version of quesadillas), carpaccio (thin sliced raw beef with capers), or duck salad with goat cheese. As for the entrée, I have a simple rule: I always order their pasta special. Their meat or fish entrées are good, but not as good as the pastas. Prego has the nice feature of being open all day long, so you can go there at 3:00, say, and avoid the lunch hordes. The only real drawback of Prego is the noise level.

IRVINE *Sam Woo's Seafood, 15333 Culver Drive, 949-262-0888
Chinese This is a Cantonese style restaurant that gets my vote for the best Chinese restaurant in Orange County. I especially recommend the excellent dim sum, served only at lunchtime, honeyed-walnut shrimp, whole fish with scallions, and soups such as dried scallop soup. They have a large selection of live fish, crab, shrimp, and lobster. Also, they'll bring your fish, alive and wriggling, in a clear plastic bag for your table's inspection. A deli serving BBQ pork, duck, etc next to the restaurant is run by the same people. Maybe 15 minute taxi ride from hotel.

Laguna Beach is my favorite Orange County city, with much the same charm and artsy-craftsy feel as Sausalito. If you can, spend a day there browsing in the shops and walking along the beach. One of the three "must" things to do in Orange County is to see the sunset from the cliffs overlooking the water in Laguna Beach (or from the terrace of the Hotel Laguna or that of Las Brisas).

LAGUNA BEACH *The Beach House, 619 Sleepy Hollow Lane, 949-494-9707 (valet parking down the hill from Coast Highway). Open daily from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. (weekdays); 8 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. (weekends); Sunday brunch, 8 a.m-3:30 p.m.
American Classic This is a beach restaurant par excellence, with a view of the water, a neighborhood favorite of Laguna Beach Residents for years, always jammed by tourists on summer weekends. Come for the ambience; although the food (especially the hamburgers) ain't bad either.

LAGUNA BEACH Claes, 425 S. Coast Highway (in the Hotel Laguna), 949-494-1151.
Continental A high-powered chef drives this California-eclectic menu, which is on the expensive side but generally worth it. I especially recommend Sunday brunch, although it's not cheap.

LAGUNA BEACH *Five Feet, 328 Glenneyre (near Forest), 949-497-4955. Lunch six days a week from 11:30-2:30 (Saturday from noon), dinner 5:30 on.
Chinese The sign says 5'0". That is your first clue that this is not an ordinary Chinese restaurant. Five-Foot offers Chinese food with Japanese elegance in a setting which crosses Soho-style visible pipes and ducts

with Southwest potted cacti and a dash of '30's neon. The chairs are Bauhaus; there are wine glasses on the table; the plates are porcelain from Luxembourg; the tea cups are Byrni from Italy; the waiters are young Caucasian from California.

LAGUNA BEACH Las Brisas, 361 Cliff Drive, 949-497-5434.
Mexican Las Brisas offers Mexican food that is elegant in appearance and OK to good in taste, but the real reason to go there is the view of the ocean. Go there to watch the Laguna Beach sunset. (Be careful to make reservations well in advance. Everyone else has the same idea.)

LAGUNA BEACH Mozambique, 1740 S. Coast Highway 949-715.777
African South African and Mozambique cuisine comes to Laguna Beach. A bit pricey but a restaurant with a different style. Lots of outdoor eating spots on patios and decks.

LAGUNA BEACH Partner's Bistro, 448 S. Coast Highway (across from Hotel Laguna), 949-497-4441.
Continental Casual French. A very pleasant spot for intimate dining. Moderately expensive.

LAGUNA BEACH Splashes, 1555 S. Coast Highway (about 2 miles south of main beach), 949-497-4477.
Mediterranean Mediterranean cuisine at the nicest hotel in Laguna Beach. Almost every table has an ocean view—you are a couple dozen feet from the waves. A romantic, special place.

Huntington Beach is the official ‘surf city’ of California. It’s about a 20 minute drive north of Newport Beach (Laguna is about a 20 minute drive south). A very low key town, with not much happening besides watching the surfers and going to surf shops. Two restaurants are right next to the pier.

HUNTINGTON Dukes, 317 Pacific Coast Hwy. Huntington Beach, CA 92648 (714) 374-6446.
Hawaiian Part of the Hawaiian chain named after the famous Duke Kahhanamoku, the father of modern surfing. A good selection of Pacific fish prepared Hawaiian style. A nice Sunday brunch like you’d find in the islands. Get ready for WRSA 2008 in Hawaii!

HUNTINGTON Chimayo, 315 Pacific Coast Hwy, Huntington Beach, CA 92648 (714) 374-7273
South Pacific Describes itself as colorful, rustic ‘South Seas’ restaurant severing seafood from the Pacific. On the lower level below Dukes, with a view of the sun setting over the Pacific.