

IRVINE DISHES NOT TO MISS • RESTAURANTS "WORTH THE WAIT" • TOP VEGAN-FRIENDLY ESTABLISHMENTS

IRVINE

WEEKLY

OCTOBER 23, 2019 • NO. 26



BEST OF IRVINE
Food & Drink

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COVER: Crab Cakes • Photo courtesy of Davio's Northern Italian Steakhouse

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Best of Irvine: Food & Drink

We celebrate Irvine's culinary landscape

With over 280,000 residents, Irvine is one of the most populated cities in California. It's home to prestigious universities, a vaunted public school system, and thousands of businesses offering a wide array of quality jobs. Irvine is also a diverse city, and home to people and families of all backgrounds and ethnicities. And lucky for us, this diversity is reflected in the established yet consistently evolving food scene.

Irvine is now a culinary destination, with its restaurants attracting hungry visitors from across Southern California. In this issue of the Irvine Weekly, we pay homage to the achievements of our local chefs. Welcome to the Best of Irvine: Food and Drink issue.

From bottomless mimosas and Fruity Pebbles French toast, to savory crepes and nitrogen ice cream, we've covered our bases when it comes to the cuisine of Irvine. We reveal our favorite tacos, burgers and brunches, among other categories, along with cocktails, vegan-friendly spots and desserts. Some restaurants appear across multiple genres because their offerings are too expansive to box into just one list.

There's no shortage of international flavors in Irvine: Mexican, Italian, Korean, Mediterranean, Brazilian, French, Latin, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cuban ... the list goes on.

(Irvine is even home to a Hello Kitty-themed speakeasy!) With sought-after cuisine often comes long lines, so we give you insight into which Irvine restaurants are "Worth the Wait." It's often easier to wait for your meal when you know it'll deliver the goods.

Most Irvine restaurants have origins and stories that go beyond the food they serve. To give you a taste of this unique character, we spotlight the history and mission of Andrei's Conscious Cuisine, which operates as a nonprofit to support the Andrei Olenicoff Memorial Foundation. We also shed light on the women's Fantasy Football League of Houston's, that brings a level of competition to the workplace only regulars, to this point, are aware of.

It's no easy task to choose the best of what Irvine has to offer, and we recognize the subjectivity of our efforts. But hey, taste in food is inherently subjective, so if you think we snubbed your favorite eatery, let us know! There's plenty of room in future issues of Irvine Weekly for additional coverage of this city's exciting and ever-changing culinary landscape.

BEST DISHES



IRVINE'S DISHES NOT TO MISS

REGARDLESS OF CUISINE, IRVINE'S EATERIES PROVIDE.

BY MICHAEL COOPER

Irvine is quickly becoming one of the best, most diverse culinary destinations in Southern California. Here are some unique dishes that can only be found within its borders!

CUCINA Enoteca

Italian restaurant CUCINA enoteca, part of the Urban Kitchen Group, opened its doors in 2011. Cesar Sarmiento, chef de cuisine of CUCINA enoteca in Newport Beach and Irvine, describes the eatery as "a modern kitchen, which is focused on creating dishes that bring together the seasonal bounty of Southern California while serving up new interpretations of Italian fare." He continued, "at CUCINA Enoteca, we're inspired by the cultures around us, from Middle Eastern to Asian and Spanish, and we infuse a bit of those flavors into our Italian cuisine." Try the **squid ink linguini**, consisting of muscles, clams,

shrimp, fennel soffritto and arrabbiata. **532 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine**

Davio's Northern Italian Steakhouse

Davio's menu is inspired from Northern Italian cuisine and includes handmade pasta, seafood and, of course, steak. You can't miss the **Kobe meatballs**. These are made with American Kobe beef, veal and pork. It actually takes three days to make these, and you can really tell. They're so tender that they melt in your mouth; whether you're a meatball connoisseur or you just really love meat, you have to try these meatballs. If meatballs aren't your thing, or you prefer seafood, the second dish we recommend is the **crab cake**. It's one of Davio's signature dishes, consisting of lump crab cake that's oven baked and topped off with a whole grain mustard sauce.

18420 Von Karman Ave #100, Irvine.

SAJJ Mediterranean

What makes SAJJ Mediterranean so special? Everything is customizable. Try their **Build Your Own Bowl** (pitas or salads are also choices for your base) that can be filled with chicken or steak shawarma, pomegranate chicken, their signature falafel, or even shawafel (falafel and shawarma). After that, unlimited toppings and sauces, including hummus, cilantro mint chutney, tahini, tzatziki and peri peri are available for further customization. What should you absolutely not skip? Their **chocolate hummus**. Made with just six ingredients – garbanzo beans, tahini, cocoa powder, chocolate hazelnut spread, maple syrup and vanilla extract – it can be ordered with house-made cinnamon sugar-dusted chips or on its own. **6636 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.**

Creamistry

Creamistry, whose flagship store calls Irvine home, is an ice cream shop where everything, even the ice cream, is made to order by their "Creamologists." Banana lovers should order the "**Elvis Presley**," made with fresh banana ice cream, banana slices, Reese's Peanut Butter sauce, real bacon and whipped cream. Not a fan of bananas? Try their **Fruity Pebbles ice cream sandwich**, a custom dessert made with two Fruity Pebble marshmallow treats. **3972 Barranca Parkway, Suite D, Irvine.**

Le Diplomate Café

Le Diplomate Café is an old staple, having been open since 1995. The dish we recommend trying here is the **chicken broccoli mushroom sandwich**. It comes with oven-baked chicken breast, steamed broccoli and mushroom, all in a French baguette roll with a garlic sauce and cheese, grilled panini-style. "The garlic sauce is our signature sauce. We make [it] here, [in house]," says manager Lisa Park. The combination of the food mixed with this special garlic sauce definitely makes this dish one of Irvine's best. **University Center, Suite B161, Irvine.**

Agora Churrascaria

At Brazilian steakhouse Agora Churrascaria, the meat is cooked on an open fire and carved tableside by traditionally dressed gauchos – ranchers from the South of Brazil. Don't miss out on their **picanha**, which is a top sirloin-cap, a prime cut that the restaurant specially orders. While picanha is a traditional Brazilian dish that is served at many Brazilian steakhouses, Agora Churrascaria's stands out because of the quality of the meat. Another dish not to miss is something that a lot of Brazilian restaurants in the U.S. don't serve: **chicken heart**. While it may sound a bit exotic to an American palette, we assure you that the dish is delicious. **1830 Main Street, Irvine.**

Cha Cha's Latin Kitchen

Cha Cha's Latin Kitchen started off as tacos and tequila and has since evolved into a Latin kitchen. Everything is made in-house and from scratch with fresh, seasonal ingredients. Everything is also made to order, and that goes for both the bar as well

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BEST DISHES

as the food. For seafood lovers we insist on the **fresh seafood caldo**, which is fresh fish, shrimp, clams, squid, saffron-tomato broth, herbs and toasted angel hair. One of their other top dishes is pretty common at other Latin restaurants, but not in the way that Cha Cha's Latin Kitchen does it: the **carne asada**. A grilled, marinated skirt steak with roasted potatoes, poblano peppers and fresh chimichurri, this is one menu item not to be missed.

13126 Jamboree Road, Irvine.

Honey & Butter Macarons

At Honey & Butter Macarons everything from their drinks to their cookies and all the ingredients that go in them is made from scratch. This bakery has plenty of macaron options available, from their classic macarons to their dozen daily flavors, to rare flavors and character macarons. With so many to choose from, how does one pick the right flavor? We recommend the **crème brûlée**, one of Honey & Butter's rare flavors. The bakers make the custard in house to produce a delecta-

ble buttercream. Be sure to try one of the character macarons; our favorite is the **corgi**. Shaped like the famous dog, it's almost too cute to eat – key word "almost."

633 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

HiroNori Craft Ramen

While there are many ramen places throughout Orange County, what lands the ramen at HiroNori Craft Ramen on this list is its authenticity. The owners worked for ramen shops in Japan over the course of a decade and then traveled throughout the country eating a lot of ramen. So what two dishes should you be sure not to miss? The first would be their **vegan ramen**, which contains sesame miso broth, broccolini, tofu, corn, bean sprouts, soy meat, baby kale and chili oil. The second is a more traditional ramen, the **tonkotsu ramen**, which contains pork chashu, green onion, spinach, seaweed and bean sprouts.

2222 Michelson Drive #234, Irvine.

Bacchus Bar and Bistro

Bacchus Bar and Bistro in the Quail Hill Shopping Center, first opened in 2005. The first dish we're recommending is the **lamb lollipops**, which come with mashed potatoes and Napa cabernet reduction. The second dish is the **filet mignon**, which comes with mashed potatoes, wild mushrooms, carrots and Napa cabernet reduction. Seared quickly with woody herbs then finished in the oven to give the cut an exact medium rare, this dish is accompanied with fresh seasonal veggies that are sautéed in Chiaromonte olive oil from Apuglia in Italy. The addition of a Napa cabernet reduction brings an overall harmony to the plate that can't be missed.

6735 Quail Hill Parkway, Irvine.

Broken Rice

Broken Rice is the newest addition to TRADE Food Hall. The Vietnamese eatery first started as a popular Orange County and Los Angeles food truck. Serving classic Vietnamese staples, Broken Rice uses the textures and taste elements of its namesake, which are fragments of rice grains, and allows customers the opportunity to build the meal by adding combinations of veggies, proteins and handcrafted sauces such as sriracha BBQ, miso curry, peanut sesame or cilantro lime. The first dish we recommend is the surf 'n' turf bowl, a craveable combination of Cajun shrimp and marinated Angus beef on a bed of Jasmine broken white rice and topped off with our half cilantro lime mixed with half Sriracha BBQ. The second dish is the creamy cilantro lime chicken bowl.

2222 Michelson Drive, Ste. 206, Irvine.

OUTSIDE IRVINE

ARC Food & Libations

ARC is a "wood-burning American steakhouse and craft cocktail bar with on point ambiance and service," says co-owner Marín von Blöm. You must try the **ARC burger**, complete with a 16-ounce patty that is ground sirloin, whipped duck fat and bacon lardon seasoned with garlic and herbs. Complete with a house-made potato cornmeal crusted roll and topped with red oak tossed in roasted garlic vinaigrette, pickled Fresno chilies, shaved red onion, heirloom tomato and a choice of Roquefort bleu cheese or Hook's 10-year aged cheddar, this is truly a dish not to be missed.

321 Hyland Ave., Suite F, Costa Mesa.

Moulin

Moulin, a French restaurant on the border of Irvine and Newport Beach, is O.C.'s portal to Paris. "From the moment you step inside, Moulin transports you to France with the smell of fresh baked bread, the sight of artisan pastries glistening in the patisserie and fresh chickens turning in the rotisserie, accompanied by the sound of people speaking French," says proprietor Laurent Vrignaud. "It is an all-encompassing French experience unlike anywhere else in the county."

The "best dish" is really any of the artisan pastries from their patisserie, as well as the **croque madame**, which Vrignaud describes as "iconic."
1000 Bristol St. N St. 10, Newport Beach.

Bosscat Kitchen and Libations

Bosscat Kitchen and Libations, located right next to John Wayne Airport, first opened in 2014. General manager Chris Daily describes the restaurant as a "southern style whiskey bar with a California twist." Offering over 300 whiskeys, one popular drink that pops on and off the menu is the **Kentucky Orange Blossom**, made with Buffalo Trace whiskey. No doubt the Kentucky Orange Blossom pairs well with our pick: the **12-hour beef short rib**. "We braise [the meat] for 12 hours and the meat is handpicked," says Daily. "We do our own black pepper sauce glaze on scalloped potatoes with fried onion strings. It's one of the four [dishes from] the original 2014 menu and it's still on the menu. It's an amazing dish." We couldn't agree more.
4647 MacArthur Blvd, Newport Beach.

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BEST BRUNCH SPOTS

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IRVINE'S BEST BRUNCH SPOTS

FROM BOTTOMLESS MIMOSAS AND "CRACK COFFEE" TO EGGS BENEDICT.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY ARIELLE ROUDE, RUKSANA HUSSAIN AND TARA FINLEY

The best way to avoid the mid-morning blues in Orange County is to grab a group of your closest friends and head to one of the hottest local brunch spots in Irvine and Newport Beach. Eat and drink your worries away with pancakes, bacon and – let's not forget – the magic of bottomless mimosas. Below are some awesome hotspots to get your brunch fix!

Del Frisco's Grille

A fantastic brunch awaits here at this classic steakhouse location. Among other options, the brunch includes a smoked salmon tower, a green and grains bowl and delicious morning cocktails, including the "Crack Coffee." The steakhouse also has other new seasonal features as well as its regulars, so no matter the size of your party head on in for a hearty meal you won't forget. Brunch is served every Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
772 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

Habana

Spice up your life with the amaz-

ing brunch buffet at Habana. With a fixed price brunch menu, Habana has endless options that vary from classic American breakfast items to the flavors of Cuba. Try their home-made paella or head over to the carving station for fresh whole roasted pig or to the shellfish station that includes jumbo shrimp and crab legs and claws. Wash down this endless buffet with one of their hand-carved Habana coconuts filled with white or dark rum. Escape to Habana for brunch every Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
708 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

The Cut

From food truck fame to the most ad-dicting honey sriracha wings, the crew at The Cut are really on top of their food game. For those with a sweet tooth, try their Tres Leches French Toast. If you are someone who reaches for something savory in the morning, try their chicken and waffles. A bonus to The Cut brunch menu is that they also offer their cult favorite burgers during brunch. Besides a classic cup of coffee, enjoy

your brunch with bottomless mimosas or a traditional bloody mary. The Cut brunch runs every Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
3831 Alton Pkwy, Suite C, Irvine.

Breakfast Republic

One of Irvine's newer brunch restaurants, having opened just this year, Breakfast Republic has quickly become one of our top spots. If brunchy cocktails are your thing, this is the place for you – they have their own Italian prosecco specially made and available by the glass, bottle or as a mimosa. Perfer the harder stuff? With five speciality bloody marys on the menu, you are sure to find your favorite. We recommend the classic with a twist, substituting in habanero vodka for a weekend morning kick in the pants. The food is great as well, offering everything from standard fare with delicious twists to vegan options and seasonal specials. What's caught our eye? Pancake flights and breakfast hot dogs. Try them out any day of the week from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.
4213 Campus Drive Suite P166B, Irvine.

OUTSIDE IRVINE

Bosscat Kitchen and Libations

Bosscat Kitchen and Libations is your perfect stop on the weekends for the ultimate bottomless brunch. With their Instagram-worthy breakfast dishes, TVs showing all things sports and a DJ booth, Bosscat knows how to throw a weekend breakfast party. Must-tries include the Fruity Pebbles French toast and the donut burger. Along with their great bottomless mimosas, a fan favorite drink is their Breakfast in Bed Shot. Wake yourself up by ordering this shot composed of maple bourbon, orange juice and a piece of bacon. Join the party and visit Bosscat for brunch on Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

4647 MacArthur Boulevard, Newport Beach.

Gratitude Kitchen and Bar

If you are vegan or vegetarian, Gratitude Kitchen and Bar is the perfect brunch spot for you. Try their buck-wheat flax pancakes topped with cashew coconut whipped cream and fresh fruit. Gratitude even does their spin on the brunch favorite of chicken and waffles; instead of using real chicken, they use chicken-fried mushrooms to accompany their gluten-free oat waffles. Don't forget to order a pitcher of your favorite brunchy cocktails, such as mimosas, sangria and margaritas to complement your meal. Gratitude Kitchen and Bar is open for brunch Saturday and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
1617 Westcliff Dr, Suite 112, Newport Beach.

Snooze

Snooze Eatery will have you running out the door on the weekend to get in line to try their vast breakfast menu. They have everything from breakfast pot pie and pancake flights to a variety of eggs Benedict flavors. They even take their mimosas, and bloody marys, to new heights with different variations, including the Abri-ca-lav-ra Mimosa (apricot liqueur, lavender, honey and lemon juice). If you are more of a bloody mary fan, grab their Horse and Sidecar. Check them out daily from 6:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
3032 El Camino Real, Tustin.

BEST BURGERS

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TRUFFLE AND BRIE BURGER • COURTESY OF THE CUT HANDCRAFTED BURGERS

IRVINE'S BEST BURGERS

FROM HUMBLE, NO-FRILLS HAMBURGERS TO THE INFAMOUS MAGICAL BURGER.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY SCOTT FEINBLATT AND TARA FINLEY

Most people probably regard burgers as a food item that is satisfying, fast and simple. Hamburgers and cheeseburgers alike are frequently a no-brainer for dining on the run and eating cheaply. As in the case of many fast food menu items, however, there are burgers, and then there are burgers. With this list, Irvine Weekly proudly presents a cross-section of the cherished specialty and gourmet burgers that can be enjoyed without leaving the city.

S'wich Bistro

A great choice for a lunch burger, S'wich's burgers are definitely on the gourmet side. Check this out: Their "loaded" burger features house glazed bacon, bleu cheese, caramelized onions, wild arugula, house dressing (aka "wink wink" house Thousand Island), and it is served on a potato bun. For the non-carnivore, their veggie burger is a "Sono-

ma-style" patty with quinoa, legumes, goat cheese and cranberry with pesto, tomato, spring mix and red onions.

16277 Laguna Canyon Road, Unit B, Irvine.

The Burnt Truck

You guessed it: This is a food truck. Their menu is not that extensive, but about 9,000 people keep track of them on Twitter – most likely because of their Angus beef sliders, which are served in a couple of styles: cheeseburger and Mini Mac. Both options of their little-in-size-but-big-in-taste burgers include American cheese and grilled onions; the former is served with an avocado spread and the latter features homemade Thousand Island, shredded lettuce and pickle. They both go great with an order of the fried mozzarella, which is served with basil aioli and tomato jam. **Location varies.**

The Cut

Their menu is the result of the founders' simple ethos of wanting "to deliver simple burgers without all the gimmicks and overly complicated toppings," and the culinary acumen of world-class chef Andrés Dangond, as stated on their website. We recommend the Savory Cut, which includes bacon relish, swiss cheese, aioli and "3,000 Island." Or, if that's "overly complicated," the Original Cut, with American cheese, pickles and Cut sauce should do you just fine.

3831 Alton Parkway, Irvine.

Burnt Crumbs

While some people swear by Burnt Crumbs' unique menu items such as the spaghetti grilled cheese (you heard me right: spaghetti grilled cheese sandwich), that's not what we're about in this issue. So, let's talk about the Biggie Mac. This mammoth specimen of an Angus burger is comprised of two beef patties,

American cheese, Mac sauce, diced onions, house pickles and lettuce. Although Burnt Crumbs does offer hand-cut fries, we recommend a side of the hand-cut chips, which are served with a sour cream and onion dip.

8549 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.

The Stand

The excellent and friendly service at The Stand is just as renowned as their food, and the variety of burgers on their menu run the gamut from the bare-bones essential of the Stand Burger (grilled onions, lettuce, tomato, pickles and Stand sauce) to the Big Blue (bleu cheese, grilled onions, bacon, roasted tomato, arugula and barbeque sauce). Vegetarians that can stand the sight of other people eating meat will probably find delight in the Veggie Goddess (veggie patty, gruyère cheese, red onion, tomato, avocado, arugula and Green Goddess dressing).

5633 Alton Parkway, Bldg. 200, Irvine.

In-N-Out

Although this chain originated in Baldwin Park, their corporate headquarters is in Irvine, so, you know, we've gotta own that. While we don't believe that a description of their menu is required, we'll give a shout-out to a few of their secret menu items. Naturally, a burger ordered protein style (no bun) will get you through your bout with an Atkins diet; the 3x3 takes the double-double and adds one more patty and slice of cheese; and then there's the most well-known secret menu item, the animal style burger (pickles, grilled onions, extra dressing and mustard cooked onto the patty).

University Center, 4115 Campus Drive, Irvine.

Groundhouse Burger

Easily the most Instagrammable burger around, Groundhouse Burger's famed Magical Burger is truly a sight to behold. We're not sure where to look first, the psychedelic rainbow bun, the splattering of sprinkles, the ooey-goey sauce waterfaling down the sides – it's almost too incredible to eat. Almost. Prefer something a little less intimidating? Their Crispie Burger is an O.C. favorite, true to its name with a crisp texture and delicious taste that is melt-in-your-mouth yummy. Don't miss the Fry Roulette – a smorgasbord of fried sides with every sauce you can imagine.

2222 Michelson Drive, Irvine.

RESTAURANTS WORTH THE WAIT

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IRVINE'S RESTAURANTS "WORTH THE WAIT"

THESE DISHES WILL MAKE SPENDING TIME IN LINE A BREEZE.

BY SAM HINGCO

Irvine is a diverse city and attracts crowds from all over Southern California who come just for food. Because of this, Irvine's food industry is booming and bustling and makes the lines last hours. While long lines are a pain to wait in when you're feeling ravenous, there are many spots in Irvine that are "worth the wait." Here are a few treasures that won't make you regret your time spent idling in line.

HiroNori

HiroNori is a ramen shop located at TRADE Food Hall in Irvine and always has at least an hour wait. While the line may be dreadful to wait in, the creamy milk broth melts in your mouth and is a must. Yelp waitlist is handy to use before arriving and shortens the wait.

TRADE also has a variety of games to play outside while waiting to be called. Although the line at HiroNori is almost always long, the creamy soft noodles give it value and make it worth waiting. **2222 Michelson Drive #234, Irvine.**

Omomo

Omomo in Alton Square is a boba place infamous for their long lines going out the door. The wait tends to run from 60 to 90 minutes long. However, there is a reason why people are willingly wait hours in line. The fresh ingredients and chewy boba are loved by many. The creamomo drinks are a favorite among the crowd and priced well within reason. The chewy boba and refreshing drinks make Omomo worth the wait. **5365 Alton Pkwy, Irvine.**

Tim Ho Wan

Tim Ho Wan in Diamond Jamboree has long lines and, at times, the wait can be up to two hours. This Chinese dim sum places comes with a large variety of options. The pork buns have the perfect amount of crunch and crumble and the crispy noodles have a rich texture. The silky milk sticks are heavenly and a delicious dessert to top off the meal. To avoid the wait, it tends to be less crowded at 3 p.m. **2700 Alton Pkwy, Irvine.**

Kitakata

Kitakata in Heritage Plaza is a fairly new restaurant with Japanese cuisine. The wait time can last up to an hour during dinner. Their tsukemen is an authentic Japanese dipping noodle in

which the noodles are dipped into the broth. The chicken is crispy on the outside, yet tender and warm on the inside. The long lines at Kitakata are definitely worth waiting for.

14370 Culver Drive, Ste C, Irvine.

BCD

BCD is a tofu house located in Diamond Jamboree and is notorious for their long lines. There are multiple options perfect for sharing and this spot is great for a night out with friends or family. BCD is the best spot in Irvine for late night food adventures. The tofu served with the warm and delicate meat is a deal that is worth waiting for.

2700 Alton Pkwy #135, Irvine.

Stacks

The line at Stacks Pancakes in Walnut Village may appear intimidating as people from all over Orange County travel here just for a hearty brunch. However, this line is nothing compared to how heavenly and fulfilling each bite is. The drink options here are numerous and they serve a delicious eggs Benedict. The California eggs Benedict and the iced Mexican chocolate are the ultimate combination that makes the line move like lightning.

14421 Culver Drive, Irvine.

Hui Lau Shan

Hui Lau Shan in Alton Square attracts quite the crowd in China and is accumulating more and more popularity at their Irvine location. Hui Lau Shan Irvine is one of the three locations in the United States and the only location in California, making the lines even longer. This mango dessert restaurant is booming and the sweet silky shaved ice is full of flavor. The fresh mangoes make this spot so valuable and are the reason people voluntarily stand in line.

5365 Alton Pkwy Ste M, Irvine.

Breakfast Republic

Breakfast Republic is new to Irvine and just opened at University Town Center. One of the city's only dedicated brunch spots, it's already attracting a crowd. Since not too many people have discovered it yet, the wait is usually only around 30 minutes. The organic and fresh menu items are rich in flavor, and the warmth and delicacy put into the meal makes Breakfast Republic worth waiting for.

4213 Campus Drive, Suite P166B, Irvine.



COURTESY OF ANASTASIA PIRROTTA

HOUSTON'S FANTASY FOOTBALL

FANTASY FOOTBALL IS A BIG PART OF STAFF CULTURE AT ONE OF IRVINE'S MOST ESTABLISHED EATERIES

BY RYAN LEUTERITZ

The Irvine location of Houston's, a mainstay in local eating, boasts a tightly-knit staff.

Many of the restaurant's bartenders and servers have been there for 10 or more years.

"I've been here 11 and a half years," Rachel, a bartender and server at the restaurant, told Irvine Weekly. Similarly, her sister has also worked there for over a decade. "My sister met her husband here, they have three kids. I met my husband here and we have kids. There's a lot of moms and dads here, it really feels like a family."

Despite the bond between Houston's employees, their love is put to the test every fall at the start of Fantasy Football season. For over a decade, at Houston's Irvine location Fantasy Football has dominated the workplace—and often relationships within the workplace.

"I used to not love Sundays because my man was always going into the day extremely worried, and excited, about Fantasy Football," Rachel recalled.

According to Anastasia Pirrotta, a bartender and server at the restaurant, half of the men's league members have significant others that work at the same

location. Over the years, the Houston's Sunday tradition has been a point of contention.

"Most of the guys in the league have girlfriends that work at Houston's, so I found that every Sunday all the women would complain and complain that all their boyfriends wanted to do was watch football," said Anastasia.

Anastasia is a hardcore NFL fan, and apart from founding the women's fantasy football league, she is also the acting commissioner of the league that the men play in.

"I had an idea to start the women's

league so they could have something to do on Sunday so they wouldn't be mad at their boyfriends for watching the games all day," she explained.

Upon introducing the women's league, many of the participants had little football knowledge and saw the events as a time to drink and commiserate with their friends and co-workers.

"It took some convincing and they were hesitant at first. I even had one girl ask me what a touchdown was," Anastasia laughingly mentioned.

"The baseline for football knowledge was pretty low, but I told them it was an excuse for us to go out and drink and have fun, and if you don't want to pay attention to the games, you don't have to."

That was four years ago. Since then, the women's league has flourished into a strong, 10-team fantasy league boasting expensive prizes and, of course, plenty of smack talk.

"Nowadays, they'll text me with questions about secondaries and defenses. They do their homework. They even show up to the draft with notes on each player," Anastasia continued.

Although Anastasia has never won the league, Rachel, being a former league champion, expounded on the developed intensity of the league.

"I am a champion and I have a silver and bronze title from previous years. My fantasy football trophy case is hands-down the most impressive," Rachel told Irvine Weekly. "The highs are amazing. The lows are depressing. I think there are several of us that appreciate it for the health of our marriages and relationships. We get it now. It's awesome."

Although it sounds like a great time, the Houston's women's Fantasy League is far from merely fun and games. There is a \$50 buy-in for the 10-team women-only league these days, making the competition as fierce as ever.

"We do a lot of passive-aggressive stuff," Rachel admitted. "Last year, I found the most embarrassing pictures of the people I was playing and would make it my profile picture for that week. We'll cut as deep as we possibly can. But we all truly love each other!"

The shared affinity for football has become a big part of the social fabric behind the scenes at the restaurant.

This year, the standings are close, but it's evident that the fantasy leagues within Houston's helps bring the team together, regardless of outcome.

"It's awesome, I'm always so proud of all my ladies!" Anastasia concluded.

RESTAURANT SPOTLIGHT: ANDREI'S

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PASSION AND TRIBUTE

FARM-TO-TABLE ANDREI'S CONSCIOUS CUISINE & COCKTAILS CONTINUES TO HONOR ITS NAMESAKE'S LEGACY AND SERVE DELICIOUS, CLEAN FARE.

BY RYAN LEUTERITZ

"Andrei loved food, he loved making cocktails, he was always the life of the party," explains Natalia Ostensen, owner of Andrei's Conscious Cuisine & Cocktails. Natalia, Andrei's sister, has been the owner of the high-end establishment for a decade. They recently celebrated their 10-year anniversary in July.

Andrei Olenicoff was born and raised in Orange County and was diagnosed with retinal eye disease while in his 20s. This condition led Andrei to the "conscious cuisine" that is served in Andrei's to this day.

"He got really involved in how to slow the progress [of the disease], and he found nutrition was a big part of that," Natalia told Irvine Weekly.

According to his family, Andrei moved to an all-organic and non-GMO diet while he was sick and saw results through clean eating. Unfortunately, Andrei tragically passed away in a car accident in 2005, but he left a legacy of fresh and delicious meals through his family and their conscious cuisine restaurant, founded in his honor.

"He was seeing results from his diet, so when we lost him it just made sense to make our food consciously, and name our self Andrei's Conscious Cuisine. A big part of our mission was to source everything locally and organically as much as possible," Natalia shared with us.

Andrei's "conscious cuisine" not only refers to the fact that all of their food is or-

ganic and locally sourced, but also that every dollar of profit made from Andrei's goes to the Andrei Olenicoff Memorial Foundation.

"We decided that if we were gonna start this restaurant, it wouldn't be to make money," Natalie explained. "And if we did make any money, the profits they would go to the Andrei Foundation. Through the Andrei Foundation, we support a number of organizations."

In the past few months, Andrei's has donated to organizations including Hoag Hospital Foundation, who received a \$50,000 donation from the foundation last month, and Miracles for Kids, who received a \$20,000 donation the month before.

"The best part about it for us is when we come to the restaurant and see Andrei's friends, our family friends, work colleagues and members of the community, all supporting our mission," Natalia said.

Andrei's is a true farm-to-table restaurant, sourcing most of their ingredients from Irvine Farms, just a few stoplights from their location within Irvine's UCI Center. "We get a lot of our produce from Irvine Farms, so were getting a lot of our ingredients from right up the street," Natalia told us.

Andrei's will soon be instituting their fall and winter menu, and also offering catering for events and parties.



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“If not for Keith’s compassion and superior defense strategy, we might have lost all of our hard-earned retirement savings to a very opportunistic claimant. The stress prior to retaining Keith was nearly unbearable.”

- Jim and Carol Hoffman

IRVINE WEEKLY PICKS

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BEST OF
IRVINE
FOOD

COURTESY PANINI KABOB

BEST OF BEST: IRVINE WEEKLY PICKS

THESE RESTAURANTS DESERVE SPECIAL RECOGNITION FOR BEING MASTERS OF THEIR CRAFT.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY RYAN LEUTERITZ, RYAN NAJJAR, BRET KAVANAUGH

Best Shabu Shabu / Hot Pot: Mokkoji

Mokkoji, located in Cypress Village Shopping Center, is Irvine's premier hot pot destination. Mokkoji specializes in Japan's take on it, or shabu shabu, while maintaining a focus on quality ingredients, with all of them being organic and often locally sourced.

When ordering from Mokkoji, you are seated with a boiling hot pot containing one of their delicious broth options – our favorite is their spicy miso. Then you are provided endless protein options, like Scottish salmon, Jidori chicken, zabuton wagyu beef, and more, accompanied with a

bountiful vegetable plate containing items like bok choy, tofu and your choice of glass or udon noodles. Don't be intimidated by the fact that you are cooking your own food, it is easy, fun and the staff are very helpful in providing shabu shabu cooking techniques.

14041 Jeffrey Road, Irvine.

Best Tequila Flights: Puesto

Puesto is well known for their beautiful decor, in addition to their extensive alcohol selection. Their Los Olivos Irvine location, directly across from the Irvine Spectrum, was designed by famed San Diego artist Paul Basile, who credits his

design inspiration to Mesoamerican architecture and modern-day Mexico City.

Puesto could be on this list for half of their menu items, but their tequila and mezcal flights are a fan favorite. Each flight comes with three pours of rare and classy Latin liquor, featuring options like Yuu Baal Anejo, a tequila containing notes of honey and smoke, and their Vago Elote, a mezcal with subtle Mexican corn flavor. These flights pair perfectly with Puesto's expansive gourmet taco selection, and even better with their secret menu (ask your server!).

8577 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.

Best Ramen: HiroNori

HiroNori Ramen's popularity speaks for itself, often clogging their Irvine location's parking lot with hungry ramen fanatics. If you want the best bowl of ramen that Irvine has to offer, make sure to check-in online, because HiroNori is packed almost all the time.

With that being said, their milky tonkotsu ramen is well worth the wait, featuring smooth homemade noodles and slow-cooked pork marrow, boiled for a full 24 hours before being served. HiroNori also prides themselves on their plant based options like their Vegan Ramen, made with grilled tofu and sweet corn. **2222 Michelson Drive #234, Irvine.**

Best Plate of Pasta: North Italia

At **North Italia**, phones eat first, meaning customers shouldn't touch their food without getting an Instagrammable photo of their artfully presented dish, before diving in. North Italia makes their pasta from scratch daily, and in addition to their superior presentation, their pasta dishes are to die for.

One of our favorite dishes is the chicken pesto. This dish is made with fresh gigli pasta, garlic, basil and topped with toasted pine nuts and house made pesto, giving the plate a vibrant green palette. Try enjoying your pasta in North Italia's shaded patio area, perfect for an afternoon brunch or cocktails at sunset.

2957 Michelson Drive, Irvine.

Best Al Pastor Fries: Taquiero Taco Patio

Taquiero Taco Patio Co-Founders Roberto and Sean are two friends who are on a mission to bring the authentic Mexican flavors of Tijuana to Sean's beloved hometown of Irvine, for their first location.

Our favorite dish, their al pastor fries, have captured the hearts of Irvine residents and Instagram users alike. One of Sean's favorites, the al pastor features slow-cooked pork topped with shredded cheddar cheese over a bed of crispy fries, providing an original take on typical loaded fries dishes.

4517 Campus Drive, Irvine.

Best Pancakes: Stacks Pancake House

Stacks Pancake House, founded by chef Nixon Tanuwidjaja, is known for its decadent breakfast sweets, but Stacks' roots add another layer to its allure. Chef Tanuwidjaja worked in four Japanese restaurants in L.A., before he and his wife relocated to Hawaii, where they experienced a Hawaiian and Japanese influence on their favorite meal of the day, breakfast.

Stacks is Irvine's go-to destination for innovative and delicious Hawaiian-inspired brunch items and their most popular – and our favorite – is the banana macadamia nut pancakes. These pancakes receive universally rave reviews from patrons around Orange County, with many of them citing Stacks' famous coconut syrup as one of the dish's standout components.

14421 Culver Drive, Irvine.

Best Avocado Toast: Avocado Cafe

Avocado Cafe is located in a small and quiet retail strip, nestled within luxury condo complex The Plaza, making it an ideal spot to meet a friend, check a few emails, enjoy a coffee in their spacious patio and, of course, eat avocado toast.

Avocado Cafe's avo toast isn't your average, avocado, salt and pepper, avo toast. Avocado Cafe's toast comes with a healthy serving of avocado, freshly sliced tomato, sprouts and even two poached eggs. This avocado toast is more like a meal than a snack, but don't worry, they can remove both eggs for a delicious vegan entree.

6060 Scholarship, Irvine.

Best Kabobs: Panini Kabob Grill

Panini Kabob Grill calls themselves a "scratch kitchen that takes Mediterranean cuisine to the next level" and we couldn't agree more. Panini Kabob Grill has spent decades serving customers with sizzling kabobs and fresh paninis made with only the finest ingredients, like organic eggs, imported oils and cheeses from Europe, grass-fed and hormone-free meats, and fresh baked bread delivered daily.

Panini Kabob Grill specializes in their kabobs, offering steak, salmon and chicken options, with the latter being most popular. Their chicken kabob, containing 44 grams of protein, is skewered with each piece of chicken separated by fresh and organic bell peppers and onions and then grilled to perfect succulence. Panini Kabob Grill is always hopping, but they also excel in delivery and take out orders, with customers and delivery personnel constantly flowing in and out of the restaurant, fresh kabobs in hand.

3041 Michelson Drive, Irvine.

Best Cronut: Jannys Donuts

Jannys Donuts is a go-to sweet spot in Irvine. They specialize in sinful breakfast treats, with offerings ranging from favorites like maple bars and bear claws to doughnuts topped with pretzels and even childhood cereals like Captain Crunch and Cinnamon Toast Crunch.

Our favorite Jannys pastry comes from their selection of croissant donuts, better known as cronuts. The cinnamon apple cronut is a fan favorite, known for its soft texture and sweet apple filling, often compared to that of a homemade apple

pie. It's best described as the lovechild of a croissant, a donut and a bear claw. Imagine the soft flakiness of a croissant, the gooey sweetness of a bear claw, and the indulgent icing of a donut. The best part; you can get this doughnut for free when you check in to Jannys online.

92 Corporate Park, Irvine.

Best Chicken and Waffles: Bruxie

When you think of chicken and waffles, **Bruxie** should be your first thought. Bruxie's fried chicken flies in the face of traditional fried food. All of their chicken is hormone-free and marinated in buttermilk for a full 24 hours before being fried to order. Most of their menu items contain their delicious fried chicken and waffles, but our favorite is The Original.

The Original features their classic seasoned fried chicken breast, fresh cider slaw and Bruxie brand maple syrup. They don't stop at traditional chicken and waffles and slaw either, they aim to satisfy all of your fried chicken cravings, offering chicken and waffle dishes containing jalapenos and chipotle mayo, mac and cheese, and bacon and eggs.

14376 Culver Drive, Irvine.

Best Turkey Sandwich: Sessions West Coast Deli

Sessions West Coast Deli is Irvine's best destination for hearty and healthy sandwiches, because at Sessions, everything has a healthy and homemade twist. From sides like their chips and

guac to sauces and dressings like their habanero-pineapple BBQ sauce, every single ingredient comes from Sessions' scratch kitchen. Even their coffee is made fresh daily from imported Golden State Co. coffee beans.

Our favorite item on the menu is their turkey sandwich, the Meddock Melee. This exceptional sandwich comes on a squaw roll with turkey, jalapeno jack cheese, sprouts and adobo buttermilk dressing. Don't forget: This beautifully crafted sandwich is made entirely in-house, from the squaw roll to the adobo buttermilk dressing.

4736 Barranca Pkwy, Irvine.

Best Latte: Coffee Tomo

Coffee Tomo is a relaxing hangout for pour over coffee and special lattes, all of which are hand dripped. Tomo's hand drip technique, as opposed to machine dripped coffee, is what makes their lattes superior to the drive-thru coffee shops of 2019.

Tomo customers love the outdoor patio and are often seen enjoying red bean lattes and large flavored pretzels, but their most popular latte is their house drink, the Tomo Latte. The Tomo Latte is a cafe latte made with medium roasted arabic beans, with condensed milk as an added sweetener. This simple twist on a traditional cafe latte, brings Tomo stans (I know 'stan' is informal but it just got added to the dictionary this year) to their Culver Plaza location daily to get their Tomo fix.

15333 Culver Drive #450, Irvine.



TURKEY SANDWICH - COURTESY SESSIONS

IRVINE WEEKLY PICKS



**BEST OF
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Best Mojitos: Habana

Irvine's newest Cuban destination is **Habana** at the Irvine Spectrum. Habana always offers a lively atmosphere, whether their fall picnic lunch buffet offering steak, seasonal fruit and Cuban salads, or their weekend Habana nights that pair authentic Latin cocktails with live Cuban music.

Our favorite happening at Habana also includes our favorite item on the menu. Habana's Mojito Mondays feature their house mojitos, made with Bacardi Rum, fresh mint and muddled limes at just \$6. And don't worry about the time constraints of a happy hour, Mojito Mondays lasts from 11 a.m. till closing time at midnight.
708 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

Best Speakeasy: Hello Kitty Grand Cafe

Did you know that Irvine is home to one of the most popular speakeasies in Orange County? The Bow Room is a hidden pink paradise within the **Hello Kitty Grand Cafe** at the Irvine Spectrum. During the day, The Bow

Room hosts tea parties, but at night, it offers an array of exceptional cocktails. This speakeasy is an Instagrammer's dream, even if you're not a Hello Kitty fan. Almost everything in the room is pink, from the walls, to their neon signs, to their cocktails, like the Pink Bow, made with gin, raspberry and aquafaba, an eggwhite foam. Reservations are recommended, but walk-ins are accepted based on availability, as The Bow Room is often booked for weeks at a time.
860 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

Best Korean BBQ: I Can BBQ

Whether you are a KBBQ first-timer or a seasoned gogi-gui veteran, **I Can BBQ** is proud to serve all Irvine residents. Offering an extensive grill-your-own menu paired with small gas grills built into your table, I Can BBQ offers guests an ideal KBBQ experience.

Their pork belly is a fan favorite, but you can't go wrong picking your favorite protein option and cooking it to your satisfaction. I Can BBQ is an easy and fun way to cook and eat your own food and if you are a first

timer, servers are more than happy to serve you helpful cooking tips. We also recommend hitting their dual happy hour, featuring 20 percent off alcohol all week, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., and then again from 9 p.m. to close.
5781 Alton Pkwy, Irvine.

Best Poke Bowl: Pokeworks

Poke, pronounced poh-kay, is a Hawaiian seafood dish usually featuring raw fish and fresh veggies, on top of a bed of rice. Pokeworks in Irvine aims to give you authentic poke dishes using only fresh and sustainable ingredients. They remain ecologically minded when serving their poke bowls, using only fresh and responsibly sourced ingredients.

At Pokeworks, they provide you the option to make your own bowl, or choose one of their classic bowls, like the umami bowl. It boasts freshly caught ahi tuna, green and sweet onions, hijiki seaweed and umami shoyu sauce.

15333 Culver Drive #410, Irvine.

Best Nitrogen Ice Cream: Creamistry

Nitrogen ice cream is the latest advancement in ice cream technology. **Creamistry's** "creamologists" are specially trained to use liquid nitrogen to handcraft their premium ice cream. At creamistry, your ice cream is made to order, making it the freshest ice cream option the world has to offer.

It's hard to pick our favorite Creamistry flavor, as they have over 60 flavor and topping options, including organic and sugar-free selections. One of Creamistry's most popular creations is the Speculoos Overload. This intensely decadent ice cream dish features layers of Speculoos cookie butter ice cream, mini-marshmallows and Biscoff cookies.
3972 Barranca Pkwy Suite D, Irvine.

Best Grilled Cheese: The Melt

The Melt is Irvine's gold standard for beautifully golden grilled cheeses. The Melt stands out from other cheesy sandwich spots, as they carefully select each of their ingredients to ensure that they are completely responsibly sourced, natural and free of any artificial preservatives or colors.

The Mac Daddy, our favorite sandwich, is aptly named, featuring cheesy mac and cheddar goodness, along with smoked bacon and crispy onions. The Melt doesn't stop with caloric masterpieces like the Mac Daddy, they also offer burgers, salads and even grilled chicken sandwiches, all made with The Melt's carefully selected ingredients.
665 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

Best Veggie Burger: Butterleaf

Butterleaf aims to bring vegetarian and vegan cuisine to the mainstream. Butterleaf bills themselves as a vegetable diner, serving vegetarian food to non-vegetarians. Obviously Butterleaf is a vegetarian favorite in Irvine, but chef Andre Gruel offers an innovative and nontraditional vegetarian menu with items like veggie chowder, along with vegetarian classics like their Scratch Made Veggie Burger.

The Scratch Made Veggie Burger is made entirely in house, with a black bean and grain patty. Butterleaf patrons swear by it, and its size, flavor and \$9 dollar price point make it a go-to for a quick vegetarian meal. Vegans need not worry, most dishes are vegan,

BEST OF IRVINE FOOD



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aside from their sauces, and Butterleaf servers known to be very attentive to each customer's dietary restrictions.

2222 Michelson Drive, Irvine.

Best Cheesecake: 85°C

The bakery, whose name comes from the "ideal" temperature for coffee (185°F, for those who are now anxiously wondering whether or not they're making coffee correctly), has been a worldwide phenomenon since it opened in 2004.

The Irvine location is **85°C's** first U.S. store. Between the absurdly large array of pastries, the perfectly chewy boba and the absolutely incredible cheesecake, this bakery is bound to

make Diamond Jamboree a pastry lover's pilgrimage site.

The cream cheesecake is the star of the show. It rests on a firm layer of sponge cake and the "cheese" part of the cheesecake is light and smooth and topped with fresh, seasonal fruit. It is unholy, and we would like to eat it for every meal.

Multiple locations.

Best French Crepes: Mr. French Crepe

Admittedly, what initially led us to **Mr. French Crepe** was their stellar Yelp listing: a full five stars from over 170 reviewing customers. A nondescript kiosk located inside a supermarket,

this eatery that has Yelpers raving has only been open since the beginning of this year.

Offering a variety of savory and sweet selections far beyond similarly sized establishments, the creperie's highlights include the customer-favorite savory crepe, *La Parisienne*. It includes turkey, tomato, onion, parmesan cheese and béchamel sauce.

Like the savory side of the menu, there are a lot of options for sweet delights, each seeming equally appetizing in their own special way. We recommend the "Romeo and Juliette," a beauty of a crepe that comes with freshly sliced bananas, strawberries, nutella, powdered sugar and whipped cream (you can also add blueberries!).

18040 Culver Drive, Irvine.

Best Korean Fried Chicken: BBQ Chicken

BBQ Chicken doesn't serve the standard style of fried chicken Americans know and love, they offer something better: Korean fried chicken. Korean fried chicken is thinly battered and fried twice. As a result, there's a light yet satisfyingly crispy crust, moist meat and a refreshing lack of grease. It can be as spicy or mild, and sauces merely add to the flavor, rather than ruin the texture.

BBQ Chicken claims to serve the best Korean fried chicken in town and, honestly, we agree. They offer flavors

and varieties in perfect moderation: there's original, along with sweet and spicy, soy and garlic, a traditionally Korean variety involving gangjeong sauce, and others with special preparations to make them spicier or crunchier. Our favorite? The soy and garlic wings. The texture of the skin provides the perfect crispy compliment to the tenderness of the chicken inside.

2750 Alton Parkway #111, Irvine.

Best Korean-Mexican Fusion: Urban Seoul

Urban Seoul offers a sizable but focused variety of Korean and Mexican inspired dishes. Our favorite is the tteokbokki. A mainstay in Korean bar cuisine, these smooth gnocchi-like shapes made of glutinous rice flour are served in a flavorful and lightly spicy red sauce.

Along with the spicy rice cakes, we recommend to the kimchi pancake quesadilla, which is a kimchi pancake with filled with grilled chicken, green onions, a combination of mozzarella and cheddar cheese, kimchi sour cream, and, of course, kimchi. Served with a cilantro sauce that we couldn't get enough of, this is a must-get.

With an extensive drink menu featuring flavored sakes, soju bombs, draft beer and non-alcoholic sips like sakura fruit tea and iced matcha, there is something to please every palate.

Urban Seoul: 2750 Alton Parkway, Ste 13, Irvine; Urban Seoul 2.0: 714 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

OUTSIDE IRVINE

Best Garlic Noodles: Anqi

Anqi is an Orange County institution featuring Mama Helene An's one-of-a-kind recipes. Part of the House of An family of restaurants (which includes Beverly Hills staple *Crustacean* and San Francisco's *Thanh Long*), **Anqi** features healthy and delicious traditional Asian dishes with a modern twist. Artisanal cocktails (do not miss out on *Daughter of the Dragon*) and house made desserts make **Anqi** a not-to-miss experience.

Without a doubt, **Anqi** makes the best garlic noodles. Hailing from Mama An's secret kitchen, where only An family members and employees with over 10 years of experience can go, the noodles

are soft and supple with the perfect amount of garlic to provide flavor and essence, yet not overpower as one would expect. There is a secret sauce that lightly coats the noodles, taking them to the next level without drowning them. The noodles are delicious on their own, but for those looking for an extra oomph, they can be ordered with a protein such as a perfectly seared shaken beef or Peking roasted chicken.

In the past 20 years, only six dishes have earned a permanent spot on all House of An family restaurants' menus and it is no surprise that the garlic noodles are one. Make sure you order two portions so you can have leftovers!

3333 Bristol Street, Costa Mesa.

BEST TACOS



BEST OF
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COURTESY OF CHA CHA'S LATIN KITCHEN

IRVINE'S BEST TACOS

FROM CLASSIC TAKES ON THE TRADITIONAL TACO TO UNORTHODOX CREATIONS.

BY SCOTT FEINBLATT

When it comes to finding some amazing tacos in the U.S., Southern California is pretty much the place to be. This list provides an overview of some favorite local joints as well as a couple of nearby outliers that are worth the trek. Keep in mind that variety is the spice of life. Read on to see what we mean, and enjoy!

Puesto

At Puesto, guests can expect a royal experience. While they do have a full bar, colorful salads, appetizers and seafood dishes, the menu's tacos run the gamut from chicken al pastor (melt-

ed cheese, hibiscus and chipotle tinga, avocado and piña habanero pico) to grilled portobello (cilantro chimichurri, papas fritas and avocado). Their collection of nearly a dozen varieties of designer tacos are presented as impressively as they are comprised of delicious ingredients.

8577 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine; 3311 Michelson Drive, Irvine.

Cha Cha's Latin Kitchen

Cha Cha's provides more nouveau chic. Their menu is extensive and includes salads, sandwiches, enchiladas and flautas. They also have a bar with numerous cocktail and tequila options.

Their taco options include: chicken, steak, carnitas or wild mushrooms. Your presentation will look like such a work of art that you will be tempted to preserve its beauty by not consuming it. Naturally, after photographing your meal with your phone, this impulse will pass as you escort your taste buds to heaven.

13126 Jamboree Road, Irvine.

Falosophy

All right, now don't get upset, but we're doing a little something borderline with this one (no pun intended). This food truck's description of their Falosophy creations is "spicy modern tacos."

There are three entries in Falosophy's modern taco selection, and they are: falafel (avocado, pineapple-pickled jalapeños, pickled red cabbage, cilantro-garlic sauce and tahini); chicken shawarma (pickled daikon and carrots, pineapple-pickled jalapeños, cilantro and garlic sauce); and slow cooked leg of lamb (sumac-onions, parsley, pineapple-pickled jalapeños, pickled turnips and tzatziki).

Food truck (locations vary).

OUTSIDE IRVINE

Tortas Y Jugos Sahuayo

For Tortas Y Jugos Sahuayo, we're willing to drive to Tustin. They are really best known for their tortas, smoothies and desserts (their concha with ice cream is the stuff dreams are made of). However, since their chicken, beef and chorizo tacos are delicious too, we thought we'd let our readers know that there's some very tasty Michoacán flavor waiting for them just beyond the Tustin border.

14520 Newport Ave., Ste B., Tustin.

KoJa Kitchen

You ready for something mind-blowing? Try Japanese/Korean fusion in the form of a taco. There are certainly plenty of non-taco items on their menu, but the tacos they do have are pretty special. There is the beef taco (Korean BBQ beef, sautéed onions, sesame vinaigrette lettuce, red sauce, Japanese mayo, fried onions and nori), the braised pork taco (miso-coconut braised pork, arugula, garlic aioli, masago, lemon wedge and fried onions), the chicken taco (Korean BBQ chicken, sesame vinaigrette lettuce, wasabi mayo, cilantro and fried onions), and the Zen Taco (soy and portobello mushroom patty, sesame vinaigrette lettuce, red sauce, Japanese mayo, fried onions and nori).

2943 El Camino Real, Tustin.

BEST VEGAN FOOD



IRVINE'S BEST VEGAN SPOTS

FROM THAI-CHINESE FUSION TO A CAFE INSIDE WHOLE FOODS.

BY EVAN SENN

Living a plant-based lifestyle in Southern California is no longer the burden it once was, and Irvine is one of the most vegan-friendly cities in Orange County. With its great range of diverse cultures, Irvine welcomes every kind of cuisine as well as people to its community. With over 65 square miles to its limits, Irvine is a big place to navigate – but, don't fret, we've got you covered. Whether you're a full vegan or vegetarian-curious, we've compiled the best vegan spots in Irvine

for your plant-based adventures.

Butterleaf

At the top of our list is Butterleaf. Although it is a fast-casual counter-spot, the food coming out of Butterleaf is delicious and satisfying, regardless of whether you're a vegan or just veg-curious. Simple and straight-forward, Butterleaf offers diners five main options for food and additional side dishes, drinks and sauces. The burger, burrito, tacos, bowl and salad are hugely portioned

and all mouth-wateringly good. The Avocado Bombs and poutine appetizers are also huge and decadent. If you can find parking at the TRADE Food Hall, you've got to stop by this awesome little vegan gem.

2222 Michelson Drive, Irvine.

Thai Café

If you're craving traditional Thai food with a vegan edge, Thai Café is the only place you should go. With no website and an unassuming house-like

brick-and-mortar facade on the corner of Jeffrey Road and Walnut Avenue, the Thai food served at this tiny local favorite is mouth-watering. Vegan and gluten-free friendly, you can alter just about any dish to make vegan if you aren't satisfied with the already vegan and vegetarian section, and the servers are hard-working and personable. Thai Café is great for takeout or dine-in, and has a casual but pleasurable dining room experience.

14715 Jeffrey Road, Irvine.

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BEST VEGAN FOOD

The Wheel of Life

This environmentally-friendly Thai-Chinese fusion restaurant has been around for ages and is the perfect place to take recent converts or Chinese food-loving vegans who rarely get the satisfaction of eating faux dark meat Asian cuisine. Luckily, the food at The Wheel of Life is actually healthy for you! With favorites like beef and broccoli, sweet and sour chicken and pad woon sen, this humble family-owned vegan Asian restaurant has great service, diner-esque ambiance, and delicious vegan Asian comfort food for all. **14370 Culver Drive, Irvine.**

Pho Ha Noi

A quiet Vietnamese sit-down restaurant with a lot to offer vegans, Pho Ha Noi is a casual but friendly spot to get delicious vegan buns, stir fry or spring rolls. There is no website to view menu items, but their pho and bahn mi are not vegan. There are, however, many classic Vietnamese options that are. The lemongrass tofu bun is a local favorite and the tofu spring rolls are gigantic, delicious and cheap. **14021 Jeffrey Road, Irvine.**

Mokkoji

The ultimate secret vegan hot-spot in Irvine is a Shabu Shabu bar called Mokkoji. Although this place serves many other kinds of diets, they offer a vegan plate option, vegan apps and even a gluten-free sauce option for those who need it. They have rotating craft beers, amazing servers who actually care about your dining experience, and a wait that will make you feel like you're in Hollywood – but it's worth it! Their spicy miso broth, ponzu sauce and goma sauce will make you feel like you are cooking your own food at a restaurant is the only way to eat out. Their music is hip and loud, the ambiance is steamy and personable, the beer and sake are amazing, and the food is fresh and healthy – a great vegan date night spot! **14041 Jeffrey Road, Irvine.**

The IRV

The unsung hero of this rundown is The IRV. Yes, this place is the café inside the Whole Foods in Irvine, but this casual dining spot has table service, craft beer and cocktails, and innovative plant-based (and gluten-free) cuisine. The vegan cauliflower nachos, vegan sushi rolls, market vegetable flatbread, and kung pao veggie noodles are

some of our favorites, but there are tons of options here for the vegan and gluten-intolerant crowd. The best part – they have brunch! Grab your crew and head over to The IRV for some awesome mimosas or bloody marys and indulge in a healthy Plant Pusher Bowl with chipotle Field Roast sausage, hashies, tofu scramble and avocado. **8525 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.**

CAVA

If you're craving good Mediterranean food, CAVA is a perfect location for your vegan Mediterranean needs. A chain of gorgeously curated fast-casual Mediterranean cafes, CAVA allows diners to choose every aspect of their meal. Taking cues from the Chipotle model, at CAVA, you get to start with a base of salad, a bowl, pita or combo, and add spreads, protein and toppings. The falafels and roasted seasonal vegetables are delicious and their hummuses and harissa are vegan and quite tasty. This is an easy and casual option for a vegan Mediterranean meal in Irvine. **3972 Barranca Parkway, Irvine.**

Blaze Pizza

Another delicious vegan option is Blaze Pizza, which offers vegans and gluten-free folks a cheap and easy pizza that they get to customize to their hearts' desires. This chain's traditional and gluten-free crusts are vegan, and it also offers Daiya vegan cheese to go on the customized pies. For a vegan sauce, try the classic red, spicy red, barbecue sauce or just a simple drizzle of olive oil. **4255 Campus Drive, Irvine.**

Veggie Grill

With two locations within Irvine city limits, Veggie Grill is an easy and accessible casual dining spot with seasonal specials and a variety of flavor profiles for vegans. Vegans generally consider Veggie Grill one of the last resorts for full-vegan dining options, but for mixed parties of vegans and non-vegans, this chain satisfies many. The menu is designed to fulfill the newly vegan's non-vegan cravings with comfort food at the forefront of their options. With strong-flavored sauces and dressings, and internationally-inspired options, Veggie Grill is a solid choice for quick and tasty vegan food. **13786 Jamboree Road, Irvine; 732 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.**

BEST ITALIAN FOOD



ANGELINA'S STRIPED BASS BRANZINO
PHOTO BY ANNE WATSON

IRVINE'S BEST ITALIAN FOOD

FROM MORE MODERN TAKES ON THE CUISINE TO VPN-CERTIFIED PIZZAS.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY MICHAEL COOPER AND SUSAN HORNIK

CUCINA enoteca

Part of the Urban Kitchen Group family of restaurants, CUCINA enoteca is a modern kitchen focused on creating dishes that bring together the seasonal bounty of Southern California. We recommend the beet and citrus salad, along with the squid ink linguini. The tasty salad consists of grapefruit, pickled kumquat, mâche, chili granola and labneh. The squid ink linguini is lovingly crafted with muscles, clams, shrimp, fennel soffritto and arrabbiata. As someone who's not a huge seafood eater, the squid pasta makes me rethink my food preferences because of how delicious all of this seafood is when put together.

532 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

Davio's Northern Italian Steakhouse

The menu at Davio's Northern Italian Steakhouse is inspired from Northern Italian cuisine and includes handmade pasta, seafood and, of course, steak. Favorites include the \$100 meatball, which is made of American Kobe Wagyu beef, black truffles and a molten center of truffle cheese and faux gras. It's then topped with a champagne cream sauce and more shaved black truffles, and served with a glass of Barolo. If meatballs aren't your thing, go for the crab cake. It's one of Davio's signature dishes, consisting of lump crab cake that's oven baked and topped off with a whole grain mustard sauce.

18420 Von Karman Ave. #100, Irvine.

Angelina's

A little slice of authentic Naples has found a home in the middle of Irvine. Indeed, Angelina's Pizzeria in the Los Olivos Marketplace has gone out of its way to provide genuine and delicious Italian fare beyond just pizzas. The establishment is Vera Pizza Napoletana (which translates to Traditional Naples Pizza), or VPN, certified, which means their pizza has met a set of rigorous and delicious standards. Try the vegetariana, a white pizza where the dough and cheese melt in your mouth. Complete with roasted bell peppers, eggplant, onion, mushrooms and basil, it's the Buffalo mozzarella cooked Neapolitan-style combined with the soft crust that really makes this pizza stand out.

8573 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.

North Italia

North Italia, the modern Italian concept from restaurateur Sam Fox, has locations in Santa Monica, El Segundo and Irvine. Their variety of pizzas is surely a highlight of the menu. The restaurant makes pizza dough twice daily, and also has gluten-free crust options. Other highlights include the white truffle garlic bread and chicken parmesan.

2957 Michelson Drive, Irvine.



BEST COCKTAILS



IRVINE'S BEST CRAFT COCKTAILS

THESE LIBATIONS ARE A CUT ABOVE THEIR PEERS.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY EVAN SENN AND ARIELLE ROUDE

The art of a craft cocktail is in the nuanced and careful balance in each concoction. A craft cocktail takes time, often infused with herbs and vapors, and has artistic and thoughtful details in its design and presentation. There are hundreds of places in Irvine to get a drink that is labeled a "craft cocktail," but only a few that can prove that their cocktails are crafted with care and thoughtfulness, truly earning that title.

Paul Martin's

Paul Martin's is a high-end classic American restaurant and bar with international inspiration in its cuisine. Paul Martin's bar, however, is even better. With classic pre-prohibition era craft

cocktails and a flare for presentation and customer service, this is our high-end favorite. With your choice of drinking on sofas, private high-tops, at the bar, or at one of the many communal tables, this is a bar for every kind of drinker, but with a special gift for classic craft cocktails. We recommend the **Chilton**, the **Vesper Martini** or the **Manhattan**. **534 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.**

Y.N.K.

Y.N.K., aka You Never Know, is an eclectic micro-bar inside the lobby of the Irvine Marriott. Alongside its charming and quirky design, this speakeasy-inspired bar also serves delicious craft cocktails for every kind of taste. Not all their drinks are winners,

but their bartenders are experienced and passionate mixologists that are not afraid to wow customers. With rotating seasonal craft cocktails and a "pick your poison" option where you get to choose every detail that goes into your cocktail – including the garnish – Y.N.K. is an intimate and enchanting little gem that will satiate your craft cocktail cravings without any fuss.

18000 Von Karman Ave., Irvine.

Andrei's Conscious Cuisine and Cocktails

Andrei's Conscious Cuisine and Cocktails is an enjoyable high-end experience in a very a strange space. A spacious second floor restaurant and bar, Andrei's cuisine is health-conscious

high-end omnivorous food, but their bar program is classically inspired by international craft cocktails and spirit-forward American tastes. Each drink is crafted with care and designed with nuanced details that light up in your mouth. The environment is relaxed and elegant with an open floor plan and central bar.

2607 Main St., Irvine.

The IRV

A surprising find in the craft cocktail search is The IRV at Whole Foods Market. This casual café and bar is always busy, covered in televisions and has become a favorite daytime spot. But if you go toward the end of the night, you'll be pleasantly surprised at the friendly service and interesting concoctions available at The IRV. Their craft cocktails are balanced, subtle and often made with organic spirits. The **Carrot Top**, **Honey Fennel Smash** and **Beet Gimlet** will clean your internal organs while treating your taste buds and fulfilling that deep desire for a nuanced craft cocktail. **8525 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.**

Tokyo Table

Celebrating their 10th anniversary this year, Tokyo Table offers a huge menu of cocktails including many easy-drinking Tokyo-style mojitos, Japanese margaritas, Geisha Sakeinis, and a number of different Japanese-tinged infused mules. But, they also offer a handful of new classic Japanese craft cocktails that are balanced and thoughtful. Their **Tokyo Old Fashioned** is a perfect, spirit-forward classic cocktail with a contemporary twist, and they can also make you a custom craft cocktail with meticulous care.

2710 Alton Parkway, Irvine.

Javier's

A local favorite, Javier's has the perfect mix of ambiance and classic margarita options, making it the ultimate romantic night out on the town. Try their **Granada Margarita** that adds a kick of pomegranate liquor to their classic margarita mix. Its sunset colors are almost too pretty to drink. Or try a more tropical flavor with their **Pina Margarita**. This margarita is refreshing with fresh pineapple and a splash of St. Germain. Another local favorite is their **Jalapeño Margarita**. This margarita brings the heat with pieces of jalapeño added right into the drink.

Irvine Spectrum, 536 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

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BEST FARMERS MARKETS

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IRVINE'S BEST FARMERS MARKETS

SKIP THE SUPERMARKET AND GRAB YOUR PRODUCE FROM THE SOURCE.

BY EVAN SENN

Everyone loves a good farmers market. An open-air market full of fresh produce, great face-to-face interactions with farmers, chefs and artisans, and a perfect place to educate yourself or your family on fruits, vegetables and health. In addition to offering locally sourced fresh produce and goods to the community, farmers markets help preserve farmlands, and promote economic stability and sustainability. Luckily, here in Southern California, we have the optimal weather for farmers markets and a huge variety of local farmers and artisans to choose from.

Irvine Certified Farmers' Market

Taking place on Saturday mornings at Mariners Church, this is a local favorite for farmers markets in the area. This large market has tons of vendors, offering something for everybody. We're talking about locally grown Asian vegetables, fresh seafood, honeys, organic and non-GMO fruits and vegetables, grass-fed organic meats and cheeses, the best nut selection in the area, live music and more. This market isn't the cheapest, but the quality of goods and foods are well worth the cost. The vibe and atmosphere at this market is friendly, welcoming and plentiful.
5001 Newport Coast Drive, Irvine; Sat., 8 a.m.-noon

O.C. Great Park Certified Farmers Market

The Great Park Certified Farmers Market is the quaint but lively market taking place on Sunday mornings in the center of the gorgeous Great Park, near the Palm Court Arts Complex. This destination farmers market has delicious vegan cheeses, handmade salsas and hot sauces, fresh organic produce, wood-fired pizzas made on the spot, locally sourced meats, a good selection of food trucks, handmade natural pet foods, Hawaiian shave ice and other custom desserts, some of the best empanadas around, a great selection of artisan pickles, olives and nuts, and a ton of other independent small businesses.
6950 Marine Way, Irvine; Sun., 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

OUTSIDE IRVINE

Orange Home Grown Farmers & Artisans Market

Although the Orange Home Grown Farmers & Artisans Market is all the way in Old Towne Orange, this is a huge farmers market event every Saturday and is definitely worth the journey. The vendors here offer amazing locally grown fruits and vegetables, sustainably sourced eggs, meat, seafood, cheese (vegan and non-vegan), hummus, spreads, salsas, baked goods and other artisan products. The crowd is lively and excited. There is usually live music or an awesome DJ, a kid's club area, cooking demos, a pet-sitting area, yoga classes onsite, and a ton of different food trucks for people to enjoy.
303 W. Palm Ave., Orange; Sat., 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Laguna Beach Farmers Market

The Laguna Beach Farmers Market is an intimate and high quality market. Open to the public Saturday mornings, this market has very few food vendors but a great curated selection of produce, meats, cheeses, fresh baked goods, organic juices and kombuchas, spreads, dips, honeys and salsas. Most vendors here offer samples of some of their best sellers, which is a great plus, but you might want to leave your dogs at home (they're not as welcome here as most other farmers markets). If you head west for this gem, you've definitely got to try the jumbo tamales and the crepes.
Parking Lot 12, 521 Forest Ave., Laguna Beach; Sat., 8 a.m.-noon.

Tustin Certified Farmers Market

The Tustin Certified Farmers Market is one of the more affordable farmers markets in the area. On top of that, it takes place in gorgeous Old Town Tustin near Cream Pan, making it a great little mid-week jaunt for fresh ingredients and tasty treats. They offer free parking for guests of the farmers market, a great assortment of Asian fruits and vegetables, amazing hummus, fresh bread, eggs, seafood, flowers, salsas and oils. They also have a good, yet small, selection of food vendors, with freshly made kettle corn, tamales and fresh dog food!
El Camino Real and 3rd St., 245 El Camino Real, Tustin; Wed., 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

**BEST OF
IRVINE
FOOD**



COURTESY THE WINERY

IRVINE'S BEST BREWERIES AND WINE BARS

FROM HIGH-END BARS TO A PLACE TO GRAB YOUR FAVORITE BEER TO GO.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY ARIELLE ROUDE AND EVAN SENN

Are you looking for a relaxing spot to enjoy a nice glass of wine or craft beer? In Orange County alone, you can find dozens of wineries and breweries

that offer tap and tasting rooms. We've been to all the great beer and wine spots in Irvine and can tell you without a doubt what places should be your first – and maybe only – stops.

Bacchus Bar and Bistro

Bacchus Bar and Bistro is the perfect neighborhood hangout spot to have a nice glass of wine. Here you can try one of the 50 wines they offer by the glass.

Or if you are looking to commit, you can choose from over 200 bottles to buy and try. With such an extensive collection, Bacchus offers the perfect wine for every occasion. They even have a wine club, so the experience doesn't have to stop after your first visit.

6735 Quail Hill Parkway, Irvine.

Left Coast Brewing Co. & Distillery

Left Coast is new to Irvine, but has been making stellar independent brews out of San Clemente since 2004 and has won over 23 different awards for their full-time beers. Located on Irvine Center Drive, the tasting room offers a great energetic vibe with five main beers brewed onsite – Barranca Brutty, Hella Swell, Del Mar St., Boogie for George and Nelson Reef – as well as several craft spirits produced at the location.

6652 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.

Backstreet Brewery

Originally a microbrewery and pub, Backstreet Brewery opened in Irvine back in 1998 and has become a local favorite ever since. Set inside Lamppost Pizza, Backstreet creates universal craft beers for every palate. This family-owned brewery began with just four different styles of craft beer – Tomahawk Double IPA, Set Sail IPA, Rita Red Ale and Rydin' Dirty Rye IPA – but has expanded and continues to add new beers to the bottle lineup. We suggest trying Backstreet Brewery's Rita Red, Oktoberfest Festbier or the Blood Orange Animation IPA. Your taste buds – and your buzz – can thank us later.

14450 Culver Drive, Irvine.

TAPS Fish House and Brewery

On the higher end of dining destinations, TAPS beer and booze is fairly affordable and on par with the best bars in all of O.C. for craft beer and craft cocktails. TAPS has brought home 103 medals for their craft beer, including a silver medal for their Irish Red at the 2018 Great American Beer Festival. Their reputation for ambiance, service and quality of beer has made them a favorite independent multi-location brewery. If you like a nice red ale, then you should definitely try their Irish Red Ale, but we are also low-key obsessed with their Amend This American Pilsner and their Grapefruit American IPA.

13390 Jamboree Road, Irvine.

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BREWERIES & WINE BARS

Old World Liquor

If you're not in the mood to go out to a brewery but are still craving craft brews, you'll definitely want to stop by Old World Liquor to pick up a few rare bottles or some of your favorite local beer. A local hidden gem kept afloat by local residents, this spot has a great selection of craft beers from near and far! If you're in the area, drop by and grab a Firestone Walker Lager, a Bear Republic Racer 5 or an Arrogant Bastard Ale by Stone, and enjoy a craft beer in peace.

4800 Irvine Blvd., Ste. 101, Irvine.

Anthill Pub & Grille

Although parking on UCI's campus can be difficult and makes any quest for beer seem like an epoch, Anthill Pub & Grille on UCI's campus probably has the best craft beer selection in all of Irvine and is worth the journey. They rotate their tap beers regularly and seem to try and surprise their regular craft beer connoisseurs by getting rare beers that most other beer bars in the O.C. don't get. We highly suggest the Deschutes Black Butte Porter and the Anchor California Lager.

215 Pereira Drive, Irvine.

OUTSIDE IRVINE

Wine Lab

Located in Costa Mesa's anti-mall, Wine Lab is the perfect combination of modern and fresh. It offers two ways to get your wine fix: flights or pours by the glass. Presented in their signature test tubes, Wine Lab offers three- to six-tasting tube flights that showcase different themes of wine. Their wine by the glass menu is a large beautiful variety of wines ranging from bubbly whites to deep reds. Wine Lab also offers a variety of food to go with your wine, including amazing cheeses and meats with which you and your friends can build your cheese and charcuterie boards.

2937 Bristol St., Ste A101B, Costa Mesa.

Orange Coast Winery

If you are looking for a more traditional winery experience to enjoy a glass of vino, Orange Coast Winery has got you covered. This winery offers the experience of a traditional tasting room that allows both members and non-members to enjoy a variety of wine tastings. Their classic tastings usually include six glasses of a variety of reds, whites and rosés. If you are ready to jump on the wine train and become a member, you will get to experience tons of exclusive deals, including free cheese boards, guests and significant discounts for wine purchases.

869 W. 16th St., Newport Beach.

The Winery Restaurant and Wine Bar

This upscale dining experience comes with a side of first-class wines to drink and enjoy. Wine country becomes the focal point of all their menus, allowing every course and every meal to have the perfect counterpart in their magnificent wine cellar. The Winery's wine list includes over 650 bottles that change weekly. They even take their wine process one step further by ensuring that all of their wines have a home in their climate-controlled cellars.

3131 W. Coast Highway, Newport Beach; 2647 Park Ave., Tustin.

The Lost Vine

The Lost Vine proves that coffee and wine are a match made in heaven. This sustainable wine bar has a list that is always rotating, so you will never be bored. The relaxed atmosphere is embedded with fun themed nights for their customers to enjoy. Kick off the week on Tuesday with their Five Tastings at 5 Deal. Here you will be able to enjoy generous tasting pours of five wines for only \$12. The Lost Vine also has a fantastic Wine Wednesday deal where if you buy a bottle of wine, your second bottle comes in 50 percent off.

13011 Newport Ave., Tustin.

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IRVINE'S BEST DESSERT SPOTS

FROM BELGIAN WAFFLES TO A MINDBENDING FUSION OF HOT AND COLD SENSATIONS, THESE OFFERINGS SATE SWEET TOOTHES.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY ARIELLE ROUDE, RYAN NAJJAR, RUKSANA HUSSAIN AND MICHAEL COOPER

After's Ice Cream

After's combines our two loves: doughnuts and ice cream. What sets it apart from most ice cream joints are two key things: their signature milky buns and their unique flavors. Milky buns are handcrafted glazed dough buns that act as the perfect vessel for your ice cream. They are always fresh and hot, providing a nice complement to the cold sensation of the ice cream. Ice cream offerings range from milk and cereal to twists on classic flavors like Madagascar vanilla.

2738 Alton Parkway, Irvine.

85°C Bakery

For a sweet pastry, try their choco bun, taro swirl bun or matcha chocolate bun. All these breads burst with sweet flavor whenever you take a bite. They even

have a fantastic selection of savory pastries to choose from, including garlic cheese bread, sausage rolls and potato cheese buns. Locals swear by their classic brioche bun roll and their mini cheese tarts. If pastries are not what you're looking for, the bakery also offers a large selection of cakes and other sweet treats. You can order anything from full-sized cakes to mango tarts and slices of blueberry cheesecake. **2700 Alton Pkwy, Suite 123, Irvine; 915 Spectrum Drive, Irvine.**

Meet Fresh

From the moment you enter the door, you immediately feel the coupled sensations of warmth and sophistication. Their many, many options are listed on a backlit board along the wall, including various types of jellies, puddings,

shaved ice and red bean dishes, snacks and beverages. We recommend the Q Mochi: the toppings bring the dish to lofty heights, introducing themselves like a fist of flavor pummeling the tongue. Perhaps it's better described as a bear hug with a running start; it's intense, but it offers nothing but love. **2710 Alton Parkway, Suite 105, Irvine.**

Sweet Comforts

Sweet Comforts is proving that waffles are much more than breakfast food. By making beautifully sugared handmade waffles and putting them on a popsicle stick, Sweet Comforts has made a dessert that is portable and less messy than most. Try a Bam Bam waffle, their classic Belgian Liège waffle dipped in white chocolate and topped with fruity pebble cereal, cheesecake

bites, powdered sugar and a white chocolate drizzle. Another favorite is their Cookies and Dream waffle. Dipped in Oreo cookie butter, this waffle is then topped off with Oreo cookie crumbles, powdered sugar and chocolate drizzle. **2222 Michelson Drive, TRADE Food Court, Irvine.**

Sunmerry Asian Bakery

For fresh Asian pastries and desserts and a variety of breads and cakes look no further than Sunmerry, where you can find delicacies such as taro milk cake, BBQ pork chashu bolo buns and green tea croissants. Try the matcha daifuku, strawberry Japanese pudding, rainbow roll cake and more.

14805 Jeffrey Road, Suite E, Irvine.

OUTSIDE IRVINE

The Dirty Cookie

The Dirty Cookie is the perfect spot to pick up dessert for your next dinner party. This place gives a whole new angle on what it means to be a cookie. The Dirty Cookie takes different flavors of cookie dough and molds them into a small cup shape. These cookie shots come in classic cookie flavors like chocolate chip, red velvet, churro, and cookies and cream. You can pour milk or any liquid of your choice right into the middle of the cookie. For an adult party, you can even add your favorite type of liquor such as Bailey's or Kahlua! **2493 Park Ave., Tustin.**

Sidecar Doughnuts

Visit Sidecar when you want a unique spin on a glazed doughnut – or any doughnut for that matter. With a revolving door of flavors every month it is hard to pick a favorite, but here are some of the must-tries: their butter and salt doughnut and their signature huckleberry-flavored doughnut. Another unique flavor is their basil eggs Benedict doughnut. It is a savory raised doughnut filled with a poached egg, basil and a delicious sauce.

270 E 17th St., Ste 18, Costa Mesa.



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