



BEACH EATS

Check out these casual, summertime snacks on the way to or from the shore in Laguna.

BY EILEEN KEIGHLEY





From left: Avocado toast and iced coffee at Blk Dot Coffee; the Protein Acai Bowl at Active Culture; pizza and beer at Slice, which offers a wall of self-serve taps

Long summer days and the impossibly blue Pacific Ocean provide the perfect backdrop for Laguna Beach. At dawn, the early surfers go on patrol, descending the steps at Thalia, making fresh footprints well before 7 a.m. They are quickly followed by paw prints as the daily dog walkers and then morning meditators make the most of the new day. Finally, the leisurely beachgoers arrive, locals and holiday-makers alike, complete with umbrellas, beach toys and sunscreen. By day's end, those still on the beach are joined by newcomers waiting in anticipation for the sunset to frame Catalina Island in the distance. Whatever the beach's draw, part of the fun is what to eat—and beach days can be a hungry business.

Luckily, just a few steps away from the sand in any direction, the food choices are vast in this town. Beachgoers can enjoy a tantalizing mix of flavors, from a traditional pancake breakfast to fuel the day ahead to burgers, tacos, acai bowls, fresh smoothies and more for noshing after a few hours on the sand or in the surf.

Of course, you can also stay at the shore and enjoy the view while dining at a local gem: Lost Pier Cafe. The oceanfront concession at Aliso Beach Park is managed by The Ranch at Laguna Beach. Here, an early riser can enjoy a paper bag of warm beignets, avocado toast topped with a fried egg, or a very generous breakfast burrito flavored with smoky salsa. Stick around for lunch, when the eatery serves salads, burgers and fish tacos. The locally sourced fish is well seasoned with blackened spices, giving it a bit of a kick in contrast to the avocado mash and slaw tossed in chipotle crema, garnished with fresh slices of radish from The Ranch's Harvest restaurant garden. Wash it down with a glass of wine

or beer, recently added to the menu, in a toast to the stunning scenery.

START THE DAY RIGHT

For those who want a full belly before they arrive at the beach, Laguna has morning meals covered, from a complete American breakfast to soaked oats and flavorful coffee. Check out the Penguin Cafe, established in 1942 and serving up homey breakfasts including the Penguin O'Brian platter with eggs, potatoes, green peppers, mushrooms and cheese. Those in the mood for pastries should head to the Orange Inn, which was established in 1931 and is known for its freshly baked muffins, cinnamon rolls and bagels alongside fluffy omelets and breakfast burritos. Downtown, Anastasia at

the end of Ocean Avenue, puts on its own twist. Try the popular Eggs Laguna, which delivers a flavorful combination of poached eggs served with a fresh basil sauce, avocado and thyme.

For an alfresco breakfast, make your way to the Sapphire Pantry patio, frequented by residents and surfers as they drink Lamill Coffee and enjoy a breakfast burrito before venturing to the beach or going about their day. The hot tea selection is impressive as is the grab-and-go lunch lineup, all ready-made for taking to the shore. Another alfresco eatery is Heidelberg Cafe & Bistro, across the street from Sapphire, serving up omelets, baked items and a broad selection of eggs, including the Eggs Ahi Tataki with seared tuna, grilled cherry tomatoes and a creamy ponzu



Left: Shirley's Bagels offers a variety of bagel sandwiches for breakfast and lunch. Right: The Grove on Forest's truffle egg toast features organic poached eggs, fontina cheese, prosciutto and white truffle oil.

OPPOSITE PAGE: SUN & SURF LOGO: HUNTER HUANG; THIS PAGE: TOP MIDDLE: COURTESY OF ACTIVE CULTURE; BOTTOM LEFT: COURTESY OF SHIRLEY'S BAGELS; BOTTOM RIGHT: JAMES TAYLOR



From left: Lobster roll at Lost Pier Cafe; sandwiches at Jan's Health Bar; blackened salmon salad and beer at La Sirena Grill's south Laguna restaurant; a slice of pepperoni pizza and beer at Gina's Pizza, which has two locations in town

sauce. Downtown, The Grove on Forest (within the Lumberyard Mall) and Zinc Cafe & Market on Ocean Avenue, both feature dog-friendly patios and serve up some scrumptious specialties, including The Grove's truffle egg toast, complete with organic poached eggs, fontina cheese, prosciutto and white truffle oil, and Zinc's mainly vegetarian options from quiche to French toast.

In south Laguna, zpizza serves up avocado toast, as well as smoked salmon and egg salad options in the morning, plus breakfast pizzas; bowls with organic eggs, roasted veggies and nitrate-free bacon; and overnight oats topped with chia seeds, maple syrup and seasonal fruit.

For a local's vibe, don't miss out on the variety of independent coffee shops. On South Coast Highway, Laguna Coffee Co. offers its own versions of popular items: Try the overnight soaked oats served with apple crisp, chocolate, vanilla or blueberry toppings. Tippy's is a quirky little cafe that brews its own tea flavors and offers a selection of preservative-free foods. The owners also love dogs and feature an adoption poster board in the front of the shop. Or, find yourself in north Laguna and enjoy an avocado boat from the Blk Dot Coffee, which fills half an avocado with a scoop of tuna and is then sprinkled with bacon bits.

BOWL FOOD

From sweet to savory, breakfast to dinner, Laguna embraces the bowl food culture. Gu Ramen offers the traditional Japanese dish of ramen noodles in a broth with various toppings and levels of spice, while The Stand Natural Foods has been serving up vegan bowls for 44 years, including the eatery's famous hummus

bowl. Jan's Health Bar in north Laguna offers a protein bowl with a choice of meat or vegetarian options topped with crunchy carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes and special seasoning.

Faye Wickland, who owns the Active Culture cafe on South Coast Highway, sees bowls as a healthy option. "Bowls provide a good alternative to meat," she says. "They are hearty. A lot of men will gravitate to a bowl rather than a salad, as they are a good balance of vegetables and protein."

Flavor is key. Wickland explains that in developing the bowl and salad menu, the first thing to get right was the sauce. "The Evolution Bowl started with the Slammin' sauce, and then I instinctively knew what would work with it," she says.

What ingredients are in the sauces remains a secret. The OG sauce gives the Wholesome Bowl a unique flavor, outselling all other menu items tenfold. It has more than 20 ingredients, and while many try and emulate it, Wickland is positive no one ever will. For those who want a taste of it at home, they sell it in mason jars.

The acai bowl also remains highly popular as a breakfast or lunch pleasure. Naturally sweet, an acai bowl marries the superfood acai with other ingredients including juice, hemp milk and fruit, and can then be topped with favorites like berries, banana, granola and honey. For organic options, Banzai Bowls serves Makai acai while Active Culture uses Sambazon acai and The Stand offers a wild-harvested, unsweetened organic and non-GMO variety. Tippy's, Jan's Health Bar and Shirley's Bagels also have acai bowls on their menus.

NO FORK REQUIRED

Hand-held options such as pizza, empanadas, sandwiches and burgers make for tasty fare that's easy to enjoy. The Coast Highway is dotted with burger restaurants for dining in or to-go orders. For tradition dating back to 1951, try Husky Boy Burgers, only two blocks from Divers Cove. The pastrami burger is fully loaded to satisfy any hungry beachgoer. Be sure to also ask for the freshly made zucchini fries, served with ranch dressing.

At the other end of town, Ruby's Diner provides a traditional diner experience, complete with classic cars parked out front, an ocean view and an impressive rooftop patio to enjoy the burgers and shakes. Elsewhere along Coast Highway, try the chicken burgers at the Orange Inn, the homestyle burgers and hot dogs at Penguin Cafe, or the Kobe beef Havarti cheeseburger served with french fries or sweet potato fries at Sapphire Pantry.

For a meat burger alternative, try Slapfish at the end of Broadway. With locations along the coast and beyond, the chain delivers quality, affordable seafood in a casual setting. From taquitos to bowls, lobster plays a large part in Slapfish's menu and provides a truly indulgent addition to both the grilled cheese and a surf 'n' turf burger.

After a long afternoon at the beach, pizzas are a perfect way to end the day. Gina's Pizza, still a family business, has two sit-down restaurants, one near Fisherman's Cove and the other near Brooks Street and Oak Street beaches where you can watch the sunset from the patio. For a to-go option that is within feet of Main Beach, the Pizza Bar offers more than 18 choices sold as slices or whole pizzas. It also offers gluten-free and vegan options. At the end of Forest, Slice is a modern-style pizzeria to sit

down or take away. It creates its pizza dough with imported Italian flour topped with red sauce featuring organic tomatoes for a rich and deep flavor. An added novelty, its self-serve beer system gives the chance to try many different beers—guests may use the wall of taps to pour just a taste or a full pint of their selection. When in south Laguna, Zpizza offers gourmet pizzas as well as gluten-free crust and natural ingredients like non-GMO flour, organic tomato sauce, preservative-free pepperoni and mozzarella from grass-fed cows, even offering a pie with cauliflower crust: the Arugula Pesto Pizza Salad topped with a veritable salad of baby arugula, heirloom tomatoes, avocado, lemon vinaigrette and a drizzle of balsamic glaze.

Sandwiches are another great type of grub to grab for the beach, and Laguna has lots of options. Shirley's Bagels is found at the Ocean Street end of The Plaza downtown. Open early, it serves more than 20 different bagels from sweet to wholesome to savory, including sandwiches like the egg white veggie with nonfat cream cheese, avocado, red onions, spinach and bell peppers. Koffee Klatch, up from Mountain Road Beach, opens at 7 every day and offers Stumptown Coffee along with bagels and locally made Gecko Cookie baked goods.

In north Laguna's Boat Canyon Shopping Center, Jan's Health Bar offers its popular tuna sandwich to hungry guests. Owner Poppy Holguin takes a holistic approach to serving good food. "We are about the feel-good factor, about eating real food to feel, function and look your best," she says.

For a vegetarian sandwich, try the avocado variety from The Stand, served on a choice of squaw, whole wheat or rosemary garlic sourdough bread, topped with—of course—avocado, as well as lettuce, tomato, alfalfa sprouts, lemon-herb dressing and guacamole.

Sergio's Empanadas, up the block from Anita Street Beach, showcases authentic Latin American empanadas—an ideal choice for eating on the go. The eatery's pastries are freshly baked with several meat and vegetarian fillings, including a homestyle chicken potpie or the spicy pork with corn. The fillings are flavorful and the pastry light, served with homemade chimichurri sauce.

TACOS, BURRITOS AND MORE

Tacos, the original hand-held street food, are a perfect, casual meal choice in Laguna with many options. Rasta Taco, on Beach Street downtown, offers something different. With a patio seating area to enjoy beer and wine, owner Mario Melendez believes it's "like a Tiffany box—it's small, but truly one of a kind."

SCOOPS, SHAKES AND SMOOTHIES

COOL OFF WITH SOME OF THESE FROZEN TREATS AFTER A DAY IN THE SUN.

ACTIVE CULTURE

This popular shop on South Coast Highway features frozen yogurt by Velvet Yogurt plus coconut-based shakes in addition to a healthy menu of bowls, salads, wraps and more. (949-715-5188; activeculturecafe.com)

BANZAI BOWLS

This shop not only offers bowls, but also pitaya, acai and fruit smoothies including hemp and almond milk. (949-715-8989; banzaiBowls.com)

CHANTILLY ICE CREAM

Laguna's oldest ice cream shop, on the corner of Forest and Park avenues, serves Dreyer's ice cream with every topping imaginable, plus some sorbet and smoothies. Cash only. (949-494-7702)

DOLCE GELATO

An innovative and fun family-owned gelato parlor brings new flavors every Friday as well as a selection of vegan options in this downtown spot on Broadway Street. (949-715-9249; gelatobydolce.com)

GELATO PARADISO

The line moves quickly and is worth it for freshly made waffle cones and a selection of around 20 gelato flavors in the Peppertree Lane shop. (949-464-9255; gelatoparadiso.com)

HUSKY BOY BURGERS

Pull up to this roadside stand in north Laguna for a shake, smoothie, root beer float, sundae or banana split. (949-497-9605; huskyboyburgers.com)

JAN'S HEALTH BAR

Find a feel-good choice of smoothies and juices at this north Laguna shop. (949-371-0023; janshealthbar.com)

Offering Mexican-Jamaican street tacos, created with local ingredients, Melendez is proud of the menu and its roots. "The Jamaican jerk chicken taco is a new take on the chicken taco, not to mention the most popular item on the menu for a reason," he says.

For a more traditional Mexican hole-in-the-wall experience, Papa's Tacos in south Laguna is open to grab a taco or burrito as a reward for climbing the stairs down to Thousand Steps or Table Rock beaches. Heading north, in the

MOULIN

Sit and savor your ice cream served the French way in a traditional coupe glacee at this downtown cafe on Forest Avenue. (949-715-6990; moulinbistro.com)

ORANGE INN

Home of the original fresh fruit smoothie going back as far as the 1930s, this cafe continues to impress with its cold concoctions. (949-494-6085; orangeinncafe.com)

PENGUIN CAFE

For shakes at this longtime local diner, choose from flavors like strawberry, chocolate, peanut butter, coffee, lemon or banana—or mix and match. Floats and malts are also available. (949-494-1353; penguinmaltshop.com)

PROJECT JUICE

Freshly made juice and organic superfood smoothies can be ordered here in a variety of flavors such as Sunset Beach and Berry Blaze. (949-484-0239; projectjuice.com)

RUBY'S DINER

The iconic 1940s diner in south Laguna serves up a selection of shakes and ice creams in just about every flavor imaginable. (949-497-7829; rubys.com)

SHIRLEY'S BAGELS

Offering much more than bagels and sandwiches, this shop also makes acai bowls and smoothies in flavors from pina colada to Very Bery Bliss and Mangolicious. (949-494-6296; shirleysbagels.com)

THE STAND NATURAL FOODS

A local landmark, The Stand serves up vegan juices, smoothies and shakes using organic nut milk, produced daily on the premises. (949-494-8101; thestandnaturalfoods.com)

shopping center opposite Montage Laguna Beach, you will find the larger of two La Sirena Grill restaurants in town. Both serve similar menus with changing specials, but the larger one also serves beer and has a wide variety of brews on tap.

Other popular options include Taco Loco and Adolfo's, which both have outdoor seating. At Taco Loco and the larger La Sirena, those sitting outside might even catch a glimpse of the ocean across the highway as the sun sinks below the horizon—the perfect end to any beach day. **LBM**