



Life's a Picnic

WITH INDOOR DINING AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES LIMITED DURING THE PANDEMIC, PACKING A BASKET TO ENJOY A MEAL OUTSIDE GIVES LOCALS A REFRESHING WAY TO RELISH THE BEST OF NEWPORT'S BEACHES, PARKS AND CULINARY OFFERINGS.

BY THERESA BOEHL AND NEWPORT BEACH MAGAZINE STAFF

On any given afternoon or weekend in Newport Beach, you're likely to see them: couples lounging on blankets, friends seated in a circle, families gathered around a picnic bench. Between the warmer spring weather and recent pandemic restrictions, this classic outdoor activity is more appealing than ever. An unhurried way to enjoy delicious finger foods, superb vistas and excellent company, a picnic can turn any corner of town into your personal alfresco dining spot.

"Picnics are so conducive to a safe, open-air experience and are inherently

socially distant," says Doug McClain, senior vice president and chief marketing officer at Newport Beach & Co, which runs the city's visitors bureau. He's personally enjoyed many picnics with family and friends throughout the pandemic, taking advantage of marvelous scenery and helping support local businesses at the same time. He points out that there are endless ways to picnic in and around town.

"Newport Beach is diverse in its landscapes and waterscapes, which makes it easy to find a spot to picnic for any occasion," he says.



The Charming Picnic (opposite page and above left) and L&M Picnics (above right) create luxury custom picnics for clients in Orange County either at a park or right on the sand at the beach complete with food, decor, blankets, pillows and more.

TASTY VITTLES AND TOP-NOTCH VIEWS

So where should picnic newbies head for their first grub session under the sun, and which local culinary treats allow for leisurely, no-fuss nosing? There's no one-size-fits-all picnic in Newport Beach, but residents are spoiled for choice when it comes to places to go and bites to savor.

For a family-friendly get-together, McClain recommends Newport Dunes Waterfront Resort & Marina with its oval-shaped cove, or the stretch of sand near Marina Park Community & Sailing Center on Balboa Peninsula. Both parks have public restrooms and lots of space for fun in the sand and water.

Begonia Park in Corona del Mar is another winner for families, thanks to impressive ocean panoramas and wide-open green spaces perfect for laying down a picnic blanket. McClain says he attended a birthday picnic there for a friend, whose family surprised her the Ruby's Diner food truck, complete with burgers, fries and milkshakes.

For a setting that's a little more off the beaten path, take your basket full of goodies to Crystal Cove Historic District, a slice of the state park that's home to a collection of 1930s- and 1940s-era cottages, some of which have been remodeled to their former glory. No time to pick up snacks? Grab takeout from Crystal

Cove Shake Shack, a burgers-and-fries mainstay, just upstairs from the historic district.

Those planning romantic picnics will be dazzled by the dreamy aura at Inspiration Point in Corona del Mar, especially as the sun casts its glow over the waves during sunset. Swing down East Coast Highway and snag takeout at Rose Bakery Café or Gary's New York Style Deli before settling in on a bluff-top bench to watch the sky's fiery transformation.

For convenient to-go hors d'oeuvres, McClain recommends ordering the cheese and charcuterie board from Lido Bottle Works, an attractive spread with a selection of meats and cheeses, plus pickles, crackers and house mustard. The eatery is located in Lido Marina Village, right by the water. And, if you've never considered a floating picnic, put it on your list, McClain says.

"We love to rent an electric boat with delicious bites and beverages and take in the beautiful Newport Harbor views," he says. "You can call ahead at various waterfront restaurants along the harbor, dock and order food from the comforts of your boat."

FARM-TO-PICNIC OPTIONS

While scrolling through Instagram, Aubrey Yarbrough, community development manager at

Farmer Mark, which facilitates the Newport Beach Farmers Market, says she's seen the picnic trend taking hold around town. More and more market visitors are tagging vendors in the photos they share of impromptu Sunday picnics during market hours from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Newport Beach Pier.

With nearly 30 weekly vendors slinging everything from fresh produce and baked goods to dips and cold-pressed juices, the farmers market allows picnickers to build a meal that's a bit more customized than takeout from a restaurant. Get a sampling of an array of fresh, locally produced picnic foods—all in one place.

"With everyone being locked in, but the outdoors being free, people are definitely going out and having meals outside," Yarbrough says, adding that it's worth putting some planning into a picnic to make it feel special. "I think you might as well be intentional about it and make it an evening or an afternoon out. You don't have to just eat on the park bench."

Yarbrough suggests grabbing flowers to serve as the centerpiece of your picnic and to upgrade the experience. "We have a great flower vendor—Maldonado Farms—and that would make it so special," she says. Potted plants, too, are available through Torres Garden, for those who want longer-lasting options.



Whether having a picnic on the water or setting down a blanket at Inspiration Point in Corona del Mar (bottom left) or on the beach anywhere from the Balboa Peninsula to the Back Bay (bottom, third from left), plenty of stunning options abound in Newport Beach.

Next, grab a local kombucha variety from Daily Kombucha, such as the passion fruit-orange-guava kombucha. Stock up on all-natural finger foods, such as berries from C&L Farms.

Then, wander over to Bakeshack's booth to grab a loaf of artisan sourdough bread or a freshly baked baguette, a nod to the Parisian style of picnicking. "I like the French way," Yarbrough says. "They are so good at picnicking."

Choices for spreads at the market include everything from hummus made by Mom's Specialty Foods to cultured vegan cheese from Misha's Kind Foods. Then pick out a bundle of fresh cilantro or parsley, Yarbrough says, to add a little pizzazz.

And don't forget indulgent sweets to finish off your alfresco meal, such as irresistible cookies from Lucky 13 Sweets & Treats. Choose from flavors such as chocolate chunk, snickerdoodle, peanut butter and oatmeal raisin or give the lemon bars a try.

"Cookies are such a great picnic item because you don't have to have a fork or a plate, and they don't spill," Yarbrough notes.

PERSONALIZED PICNICS

As fun as curating a picnic can be, certain occasions call for help from the professionals. Enter Newport-based L&M Picnics, which provides two-hour custom picnics with all the trimmings: a table, blankets and pillows, dishes, decor, charcuterie, sparkling water, a Bluetooth speaker and string lights if the picnic is at sunset. All setup and cleanup is provided.

"We like to keep our picnics classic, crisp and simplistic with a touch of boho when requested," says Liz Carlson, who started the company in September with Meadow McAllister. "... There is definitely demand for picnics right now. People are looking for alternative ways to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, proposals or entertaining out-of-town friends."

Carlson and McAllister came up with the idea for this endeavor during the pandemic. "We loved hosting our friends and having parties, so we figured why not make this something bigger that could be COVID-friendly during this time," Carlson says. "We also wanted to support other local businesses in the Newport community."

Clients may add to the basic package with elements like an umbrella, cabana (when at the beach), locally made hummus and a veggie plate, cupcakes from a local bakery, games like cornhole or giant Connect Four, a seasonal bouquet or balloon arch.

"We love to create something special and unique for our clients," Carlson says.

The Charming Picnic, another luxury picnic service company, also serves clients in Orange County. The company delivers full picnic setups—including a picnic umbrella for beach settings or a lace teepee for parks, a table, floral arrangement, charcuterie board,



Charcuterie and cheese from Lido Bottle Works makes for perfect picnic fare.



Kombucha (top right) and fresh produce like berries and cherimoya (bottom left) await shoppers assembling a picnic meal at the Newport Beach Farmers Market on Sundays at Newport Beach Pier.

fresh fruits, desserts, drinks and more—all beautifully arranged in the location of your choosing.

Founder Charmaine Dalton says her two-hour custom picnics have been popular for all kinds of special occasions, especially as people seek alternative ways to convene amid a ban on large gatherings.

"I wanted to create something where people could still celebrate their special milestones, whether it was anniversaries or birthdays or even proposals," she says.

Extra touches like a giant Jenga game, a Bluetooth speaker for music and a chalkboard with a custom message add to the ambiance. When the day of the picnic rolls around, all the guests have to do is show up and enjoy; the company handles everything from start to finish—even cleanup.

For Newport Beach clients, Dalton says custom picnics on private beaches and at private residences have been especially popular, but, for public picnic spots, she personally recommends Galaxy View Park for its Back Bay setting and stunning sunset views.

No matter where you choose to set up your picnic, you'll be in a prime position to enjoy the dazzling, one-of-a-kind landscape stretching out before you. For Dalton, that's one of the benefits of spending time outdoors in this town.

As she says, "Newport Beach has that special element of luxury that you feel when you're here." **NBM**