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Good Eats in San Diego!

There are plenty of excellent restaurants in San Diego. Here are a few of our favorites:

- **Taste of the Nation** (Coronado): Okay, this is *not* a restaurant. It's a charity event, run by Share Our Strength. This annual event is usually held at Loews Coronado Bay Resort on a sunny spring Sunday. This year (2003), it is scheduled for May 18, from Noon to 4:00 PM. Brigid and Russ have assisted since 1999, and Russ has managed the [Taste of San Diego web site](#) since then. For details, visit the web site, or call (619) 628-5477. In 2003, General Admission tickets cost \$50. VIP tickets (which include valet parking, a goodie bag, assured seating, and access to a cocktail bar) are available for \$75.

To be assured of learning about plans for the next ToTN, you can [sign up for the mailing list](#) that I set up for them.

100% of the admission fees go to hunger relief organizations. The event is coordinated by [Share Our Strength](#). The food and venue are all donated, and everything is run by volunteers. There is *very* little overhead, and all of that is paid for by corporate donors.

- **Chez Nous** (Scripps Ranch, 9821 Carroll Canyon Road, 858-566-4766): Mediterranean eclectic. A family-run operation. Chez Nous has fabulous sandwiches, and they are especially famous for their lamb sandwich. They are very creative with their menus -- it's a perfect place for an informal business lunch!
- **Aux Délices** (Miramar): A surprisingly good French restaurant with California influences. Pricing is moderate (which is to say, relatively inexpensive, as French restaurants tend to go). 6904 Miramar Road, 858-549-9751. They're nicely hidden away behind the Denny's, across from the empty plinth at Miramar MCAS, where the E-2C used to "fly".
- **Trattoria Panevino** (downtown): Fine italian dining. On the expensive side, but worth every penny. Don't miss the cannoli cake for dessert.
- **Marine Room** (La Jolla): California seafood. This place is elegant -- okay, it's expensive, but worth it! They're into food *architecture*, with lots of creative vertical constructions with your entrees, including interesting usage of lotus root slices. The food is wonderful, and the view is hard to beat, especially if you can time your visit to meet a high tide. The restaurant is at the southern edge of La Jolla Shores, and the waves come right up to the restaurant. (The place is famous for having its windows occasionally blown out by storm waves.)
- **Island Boy Grill** (Sorrento Mesa): 858-452-7708, 10066 Pacific Heights Blvd (cross street Barnes Cyn)
Crave some Hawaiian food? This is it, buddy! Cheap, fast, good food (lunch only, I think). Try their kalua pig, or their ribs, or their teriyaki chicken. If you want to stretch your envelope a little, try some lomilomi salmon (salmon ceviche). Want to stretch a little further? On weekends, they sometimes serve poi -- definitely an acquired taste. Much easier to enjoy is the laulau -- also served only on weekends. Laulau consists of various meats and fish, wrapped in taro leaf (I think -- in any event, it's some kind of edible leaf) and steamed. I happen to really like it, having been introduced to it by a friend who grew up on Oahu.

- **Aswan Cafe** (La Mesa): This is a not a gourmet place, by *any* means. It's just a great place to inexpensively sample a wide range of eclectic cuisine, including creole, african, and soul. On Saturdays and Sundays, Aswan holds a "brunch" that runs from 9AM to 3PM. You can stuff yourself with a delicious gumbo (with crab and shrimp), jambalaya, fried catfish, yams, greens, salmon, african egg and chicken stew, sambosas (veggie and chicken), waffles, pancakes, grits, eggs and omelettes to order, roast turkey, roast beef, red beans & rice, and several desserts, including a very nice peach cobbler. The brunch costs \$15, and includes soft drinks. 7404 University Avenue, 619-464-7100 (9/7/02)
- **Armenian Café** (Carlsbad): 760-720-2233, 3126 Carlsbad Blvd, Carlsbad, CA 92008-2908. Excellent food. Similar to Greek. Best rack of lamb I've had!
- **Ashoka The Great** (Miramar): Don't confuse this with Ashoka, the not-very-good, in La Jolla. Ashoka The Great has an excellent all-you-can-eat lunch for \$5.95 on weekends. Very nice. 9474 Black Mountain Road, (858) 695-9749
- **Aladdin Mediterranean Café** (Clairemont): Middle Eastern. Excellent babaganoush, hummous, salads, wood-fired pizzas, lamb, garlic dip, falafel... Here is a [Digital City review](#). 5420 Clairemont Mesa Blvd, 858-573-0000. They also have another Café in Hillcrest, which we haven't tried.
- **Emerald Seafood** (Kearny Mesa): Cantonese Chinese. Best chinese food south of Monterey Park. This is an classy Hong Kong-style restaurant. The Saturday and Sunday mid-day fare is dim sum, and it is among the best in the West. Dinners are pricey, but worth every penny. You can get *fresh* fish here, right out of the tank. At dinner, try the Honey-Walnut Shrimp, for an appetizer. Tell them "Brigid Tam"'s husband sent you! 8-)
- **Balboa Tofu House** (Kearny Mesa): Korean. If you have a sinus condition, or you're just in the mood for a spicy, hot soup, try this place. For \$7.50, they'll promptly serve you a bowl of bean curd in a crock so hot that the soup is at a rolling boil when it arrives at your table. Reach into the basket of fresh eggs, and break one into the soup right away. Stir it into the soup. Munch on the kimchee and pickled veggies that accompany your soup. Quench your burning lips with the tumbler of cool roasted corn tea. When they ask you whether you want the white or brown rice, go for the brown. It's purplish from the black rice that they add, along with some peas. [KFMB's Unknown Eater has reviewed this place](#). In 2001, they added several other Korean specialties, so if you don't like tofu, you will still probably find several things to enjoy.
- **India Sweets and Spices** (Miramar): Vegetarian Indian. Very cheap. *Not* a place to take your date. It's a good place to get an inexpensive, decent (but slightly greasy) meal. No atmosphere, though. It's right next to Ashoka The Great.
- **Bombay Sweets and Snacks** (Miramar): Similar to **India Sweets and Spices**, and right across the parking lot. Slightly more comfortable, and they focus more on southern Indian cuisine, including masala dosa, idlis, rassam, and all the other goodies. Yay!
- **California Thai Café** (Miramar): Thai. This place is very good. Be sure to try their mussel appetizer: We were served a crock, full of succulent greenlip mussels in a fabulous broth, with just a hint of picante bite, along with a garlic/vinegar dipping sauce. When you finish the mussels, be sure to not overlook the delicious broth. I have to admit that it's been a couple of years since we've been back to this place. It's probably time to visit them again. 9550 Black Mountain Rd, Suite A (a block north of Miramar Rd, corner of Black Mountain and Activity). 858-566-5021.
- **Marriott Harborside** (downtown): Brunch. Fabulous brunch, but expensive at \$30 per person, or so.

- **Souplantation** (all over): Salad bar/Soups/Pastas. Very inexpensive, and *potentially* very healthy. This is the best salad bar I've seen.
- **Star of India** (La Jolla): Northern Indian.
- **Nine-Ten** (La Jolla): California creative cuisine. We were lucky enough to enjoy a "Mercy of the Chef with Wine" dinner for four there, and the food was incredible. Every course was a pleasant surprise. The ladies were served different dishes than the gentlemen -- which worked out wonderfully, since we were able to double the number of dishes we could taste. Michael Stebner (formerly of Azzura Point) is the executive chef, and he enticed my favorite dessert chef, Jack Fisher, to join him. Jack's signature is to use herbs in many of his desserts. You should definitely try Nine-Ten, if you can. Like Sally's, the price is on the higher end of the spectrum, but it is entirely justified by the quality of the food, atmosphere, and service!
- **Sally's** (Downtown): Continental/Seafood. Sally's is in the Hyatt Regency, right next to Seaport Village. Stephane Voitzwinkler is the executive chef, and it's always a pleasure both to taste his work, and to watch him and his staff do their work. How do I know about the latter? I'll let you in on a little secret, and I hope it doesn't backfire on me: If you can put together a party of 8-12 people, you can arrange for a "Chef's Table" dinner in Sally's' kitchen. No, it's not hectic. It's wonderful. You get to walk around this wonderfully efficient kitchen, converse with the friendly staff, watch them "plate" the dishes (which Stephane usually does himself)... You must arrange for the Chef's Table well in advance, and Stephane will personally work with you on the menu (he has an incredible range of cuisines at his disposal). If you like seafood, I cannot recommend the Seafood "Appetizer" highly enough. This is a huge platter, mounded high with ice, and loaded down with succulent chunks of Maine lobster, king crab, the freshest oysters (this is one of the few places I will dare to eat raw oysters), marinated mussels, **huge** sweet shrimp, ... Dang, I'm salivating! It's the best cold seafood platter in San Diego. And everything else is every bit as good, including their amazing dessert platter. Figure on \$90 per person (*before* wine) for a five-course dinner. Yes, that's a lot of money (well, *we* consider it so), but it's the kind of splurge that you won't regret! And [here](#) is a review of Sally's. One Market Place, downtown San Diego, 619-687-6080.
- And now for a *stinker*: **The Catamaran Hotel's Summer Luau** (Mission Bay). We received two complimentary tickets to a Summer 2003 luau at the Catamaran. I wasn't expecting much, and yet I was underwhelmed. The face price on these tickets was **\$50** apiece. For that price, you get a free mai tai, a "Hawaiian buffet", and live polynesian music and dance.
 The mai tai: the bartender was ridiculously over-generous with rum -- perhaps 3+ ounces in each 10 oz cup, filled with perhaps 5 oz of ice -- it was disgusting, and neither of us got past the first sip);
 The "Hawaiian buffet": There were a couple of noodle dishes, a dry "teryaki" chicken breast (not much flavor), some fish that was fairly tasty, and some nondescript beef. There was also a "salad" that consisted solely of spring greens and an overly sweet raspberry dressing. Despite the Catamaran's advertising, there was no kalua pig. (They did have a roast pig on display, though.) Dessert consisted of ice cream and coconut cream pie. While the coconut cream pie *was* pretty good, I wouldn't consider it very Hawaiian.
 The music and dancing were pretty good, but not good enough to entice us to wait for the second set, during which they would be fire dancing...
Bottom line: At \$20 per ticket, there would be no reason to complain. \$50, though, is outrageous for lukewarm, mediocre, inauthentic Hawaiian food; a cup of nearly pure rum on ice; and some decent music and dancing.