

OOC

A longtime Anaheim resident and librarian gives the inside scoop on Orange County's coolest culinary offerings
By Scott Douglas La Counte

EATS



Think of a meal, any meal, and you'll find an establishment cooking up an authentic dish of it on the cheap in Orange County. But, while known for its diversity of culinary fare, Orange County is less reliable when it comes to transportation: buses (www.octa.net) are slow, and taxis are expensive (call 1-800-TAXICAB, then wait an additional 20-40 minutes for your cab to arrive and expect to pay \$5 for the first mile, \$2.65 for each subsequent mile). Since the farther you travel outside of Anaheim, the greater the variety of cuisine you'll encounter, if you really want to get a taste of what Orange County has to offer, you're better off renting a car at or near the airport or befriending someone who rents or owns one. For those planning to stay within a three-mile radius of the convention center, there's one other option (besides walking, of course): the Anaheim Resort Transit (ART). ART operates daily, usually between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m. (times vary, so

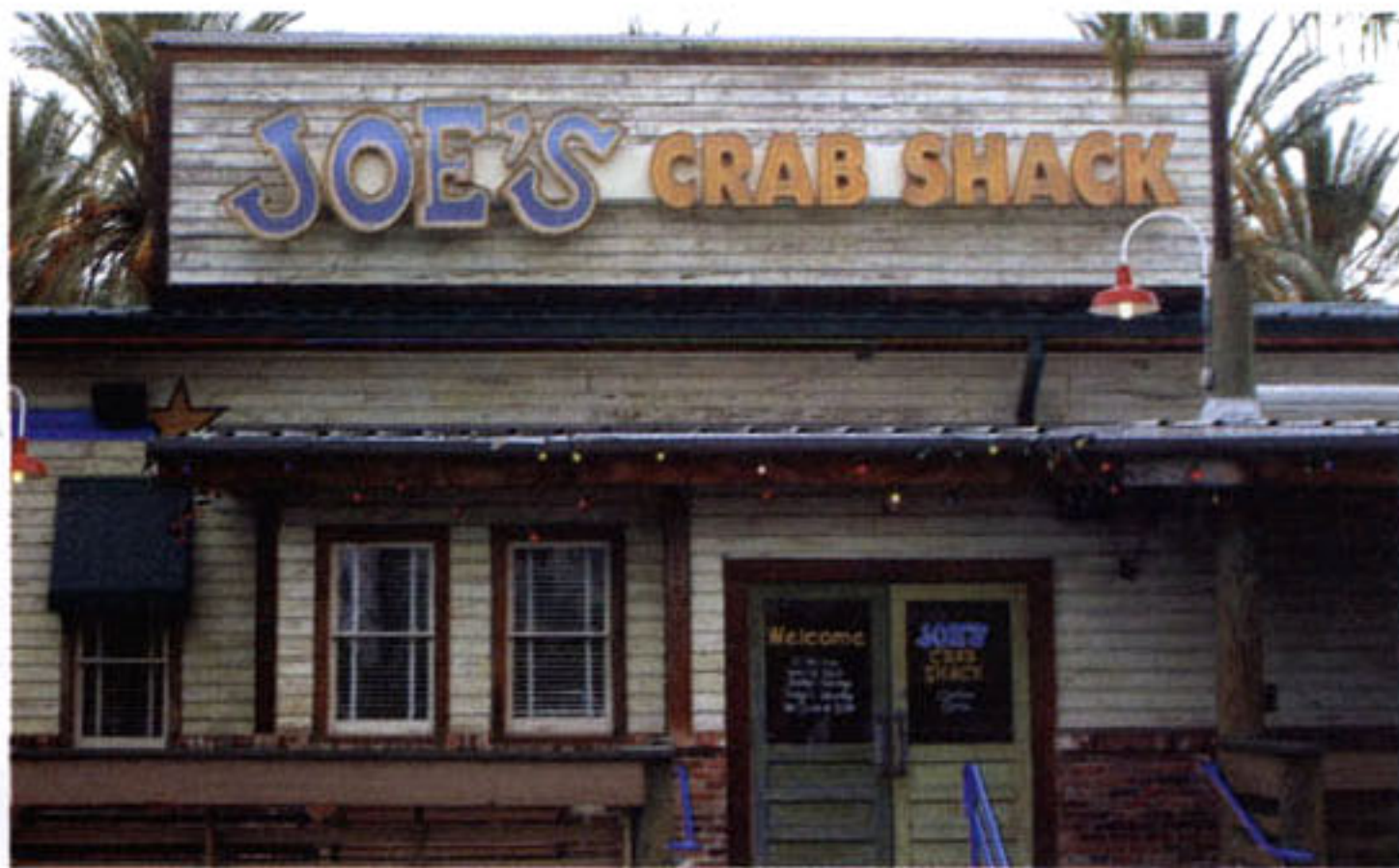
check the ART timetable at www.rideart.org). It has several stops along Harbor Boulevard, where almost all the conference hotels are located, and, for \$3 a day, will get you to local spots including Disneyland, GardenWalk, Angel Stadium, Honda Center, Amtrak Station, Crystal Cathedral, the Block at Orange, and the convention center.

The listings below hit ten major Orange County areas: the convention center vicinity, Downtown Disney, Anaheim GardenWalk, Platinum Triangle, Downtown Anaheim, Downtown Fullerton, Buena Park, South Coast Plaza, the Lab area, and Newport Beach. Each area ranges between a half-mile walk to an 18-mile drive from the convention center. Also included, for the adventuresome, are a few stops that, while fairly close to the convention center, are somewhat off the beaten path. Enjoy the ride!

Most restaurants listed take all major credit cards. The area code is 714, unless otherwise indicated. Distance in miles from the convention center appears in parentheses.

KEY TO SYMBOLS	
\$	Up to \$15
\$\$	\$15-\$30
\$\$\$	\$30-\$45
\$\$\$\$	\$45-\$60
PRICING CRITERIA: MENU'S HIGHEST-PRICED ENTRÉE	

Scott Douglas La Counte (aka Scott Douglas), Librarian, Anaheim Public Library, has lived in Anaheim for all his 30 years. Author of Quiet, Please: Dispatches from a Public Librarian, he says he has personally tasted "everything affordable" in this article



THE MANY FACES OF THE OC Top row (l.-r.): Ralph Brenna's Jazz Kitchen in Downtown Disney combines live music with Cajun cuisine like crawfish spring rolls (pictured); The Cannery in Newport Beach specializes in seafood; Downtown Anaheim's stately White House Restaurant serves dishes like Romeo Gigli Salmon Chocolat (inset). 2d row (l.-r.): Conventioneers can dine at the elegant Pinot Provence at South Coast Plaza; at the low-key Joe's Crab Shack; or take in a cheery breakfast special (below) at Goofy's Kitchen in Downtown Disney

CONVENTION CENTER AREA

Carl's Jr. 2119 S. Harbor Blvd. (.7 mi.), 971-5641; Mon.-Thu. 6 a.m.-11 p.m.; Fri.-Sat. 6 a.m.-1 a.m.; Sun. 7 a.m.-11 p.m. www.carlsjr.com. \$

Carl's Jr., one of the West Coast's most well-known fast-food chains, is most famous for its charbroiled hamburger and

chicken sandwiches, but on a hot summer day, its milk shakes will hit the spot, too.

Joe's Crab Shack 12011 Harbor Blvd., Garden Grove (1.2 mi.), 703-0505; www.joescrabshack.com. Sun.-Thu. 11 a.m.-10 p.m.; Fri.-Sat. 11 a.m.-11 p.m. \$

A stone's throw from Outback Steakhouse and Red Robin (both listed below), Joe's Crab Shack offers the best seafood in the area and has a beach vibe that's hard to imitate. Many of its meals, such as the shrimp platter, are big enough for two.

Marri's Pizza & Italian Restaurant 1194 W. Katella Ave. (.5 mi.), 533-1631; www.marrispizza.com. Mon.-Thu. 11 a.m.-11 p.m.; Fri.-Sat. 11 a.m.-12 a.m.; Sun. 11 a.m.-11 p.m. \$

This hole-in-the-wall Italian joint, just a ten-minute walk from the conven-

tion center, sits in a small strip mall. It is the only restaurant at which you'd have caught my grandmother drinking a beer, because, as she said, you "could never have pizza that good without one."

Mimi's Café 1400 S. Harbor Blvd. (.9 mi.), 956-2223; www.mimiscafe.com. Mon.-Sun. 7 a.m.-11 p.m. \$

Because this upscale, Parisian-themed café is across the street from Disneyland, it tends to be crawling with tourists all hours of the day. Its breakfasts—with dishes like build-your-own tacos and freshly baked quiches—are the area's best.

Outback Steakhouse 12001 S. Harbor Blvd., Garden Grove (1.9 mi.), 663-1107; www.outback.com. Mon.-Thu. 4 p.m.-10:30 p.m.; Fri. 4 p.m.-11 p.m.; Sat. 3 p.m.-11 p.m.; Sun. 2 p.m.-10 p.m. \$\$

On the corner of Harbor Boulevard and Chapman Avenue, this venerable 20-year-old Australian steak house also serves chicken, fish, and pasta dishes and makes all its sauces and dressings from scratch. Enjoy the casual, Australian-themed indoor décor or eat in comfort in your own car via curbside service.

Red Robin 12007 S. Harbor Blvd., Garden Grove (1.1 mi.), 971-4882; www.redrobin.com. Sun.-Thu. 11 a.m.-10 p.m., Fri.-Sat. 11 a.m.-11 p.m. \$\$ This chain restaurant specializes in customizable burgers of every variety: gourmet beef, grilled salmon or turkey, crispy fish, blackened chicken, BBQ pork, garden, or lettuce-wrapped. Top your burger



of choice with a serving of garlic parmesan steak fries (if you're daring) or a side salad (if you're dieting), and you're all set.

DOWNTOWN DISNEY

(downtowndisney.com/anaheim)

The easiest district to get to from the main conference activity (though also the most touristy) for a day of shopping, dining, and entertainment, Downtown Disney is located off the 5 Freeway, just a mile or so from the convention center. If you're coming from out of town and are planning to make a day of it, park at the Disney Theme Park (\$11) and travel between Disney's California Adventure Park and Disneyland Park via Resort Tram (there's also a Disneyland Monorail for entry into the park). Out-of-towners just wanting a dining experience should park instead at Downtown Disney District Parking, where the first three hours are free and an additional two hours can be validated at the table-service restaurants nearby. At Downtown Disney you can shop for presents at the Disney Store, see a concert at the House of Blues, catch a movie at the AMC Theater, unleash the kid inside you (there's a Build-a-Bear Workshop, a LEGO Imagination Center, and plenty of arcade-style games at the ESPN Zone), and dine at establishments ranging from restaurant chains like the Rainforest Café to the true Disney experience at Goofy's Kitchen, which has regular appearances by Disney characters.

Goofy's Kitchen, 1150 W. Magic Way (1.3 mi.), 956-6755; ethoka.notlong.com. Mon.–Sun. 7 a.m.–9 p.m. \$\$\$

Located in the Disneyland Hotel, this is the ideal buffet-style birthday spot. The peanut-butter-and-jelly pizza and Mickey Mouse-shaped waffles will especially appeal to kids. Guests of all ages can get their photos taken with Goofy and pals.

Napa Rose, 1600 S. Disneyland Dr. (.6 mi.), 635-2300; guowa.notlong.com. Mon.–Sun. 5:30 p.m.–10 p.m. \$\$\$\$

Located within Disney's Grand California Hotel, Napa Rose provides the ultimate in California dining. The prices are high, but the chefs will make you whatever you want; simply tell them what you're in the mood for and they'll help you make the right choice. This is especially true if you are a vegetarian, as these dishes aren't always on the menu.

Rainforest Café 1515 S. Disneyland Dr. (1.6 mi.), 772-0413; www.rainforestcafe.com. \$\$ Choose from a menu of seafood, beef, chicken, pizza, pasta, and desserts like the

Sparkling Volcano. An adjoining Retail Village sells safari-themed fare.

Ralph Brenna's Jazz Kitchen 1590 S. Disneyland Dr. (.6 mi.), 776-5200; www.rbjazzkitchen.com. Sun.–Thu. 11 a.m.–4 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.–10 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 4:30 p.m.–11 p.m. \$\$

At this two-story replica of a French Quarter eatery, you can enjoy Cajun cuisine for brunch (blue crabmeat-and-angel hair pasta pancakes), lunch (Creole onion soup), or dinner (crawfish spring rolls) while listening to live music. As to seating, there's an interior open-air courtyard and a "Jazz Balcony" overlooking Downtown Disney. Music starts at 6:30 p.m. daily and continues until closing (on Sundays, the jazz lasts through brunch).

PLATINUM TRIANGLE

If you're hoping to catch a ball game while in town, Angel Stadium is just a couple of miles from the convention center (the Oakland Athletics will be in town the week of the conference to challenge the Angels). Adjacent to Angel Stadium is the Grove of Anaheim, a venue for concerts, plays, and awards ceremonies, and a quick jog from the Grove (also on Katella Avenue) is the Honda Center, home of

the usual flavors—chocolate, strawberry, and vanilla—plus pineapple.

JT Schmid's Restaurant & Brewery 2610 E. Katella Ave. (2.5 mi.), 634-9200; www.jtschmids.com. Mon.–Thu. 11 a.m.–10 p.m.; Fri.–Sun. 11 a.m.–11 p.m. \$\$

Across from the Honda Center and a short ten-minute walk from Angel Stadium, this is the best restaurant/bar to go to before or after a game or concert. The menu is mostly comprised of steaks, pasta, pizza, sandwiches, and handcrafted microbrews; hours vary during sporting events and on weekends.

DOWNTOWN ANAHEIM

To get to Downtown Anaheim, walk or drive a few minutes north on Harbor Boulevard (those with cars will find plenty of free parking nearby). Get off at Broadway, and one of the first things you'll see is Anaheim's recently remodeled Central Library. Head east on Broadway to Anaheim Boulevard, where you'll also find Anaheim's new Muzeo, in front of which is Anaheim's Carnegie Library, now part of the small museum and offering its own unique glimpse of Anaheim's past.



PRICES RUN THE GAMUT Napa Rose, at Disney's Grand California Hotel, serves mouthwatering appetizers (above left) as preambles to pricey but delectable entrées; a more affordable option is Downtown Anaheim's Pho Republic, a Vietnamese eatery not far from Anaheim's new Muzeo

the Anaheim Ducks hockey team. If Los Angeles is in your heart, catch either an Amtrak (\$20 round trip) or Metrolink (\$13.25 weekdays, \$10 weekends round trip) train at Anaheim Station, located on the north side of the Angel Stadium parking lot at 2150 E. Katella, into downtown L.A., just a 30- to 40-minute ride away.

Burger Boy 1650 S. State College Blvd. (1.9 mi.), 938-0222; caburgerboy.com. Sun.–Thu. 5:30 a.m.–10 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 5:30 a.m.–11 p.m. \$ Twenty-five years old and going strong, this restaurant chain deals in Mexican cuisine, American cuisine, and fast food. Breakfast is served with home fries or beans and rice. Milk shakes come in all

Anaheim White House Restaurant 887 S. Anaheim Blvd. (1.9 mi.), 772-1381; www.anaheimwhitehouse.com. Mon.–Fri. 11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m. and 5 p.m.–10 p.m.; Sun. 11 p.m.–3 p.m. \$\$\$

If stepping into the White House makes you feel like you're walking into a part of history, that's because you are. This 100-year-old mansion was converted into a Northern Italian restaurant in the 1980s and has since received numerous food awards. The White House offers visitors an elegant dining atmosphere, though the prices might be a little high for some. The easiest way to get there is via a northbound Harbor bus. But if you feel uncomfortable passing through some of Anaheim's

more destitute (though perfectly safe, to this reviewer's experience) areas, consider driving if you are going at night.

Mos No. 2 1008 W. Lincoln Ave. (2.9 mi.), 772-8543. \$

From the street, Mos might look a bit dirty and rundown, but don't let that fool you. Roll down your window, and the wonderful aroma will convince you that you can't judge a restaurant by its appearance. This is an outdoor eatery only, so bring your sunscreen. Take the Harbor bus to Lincoln, then head west on Lincoln for about 500 feet. Best Teriyaki Bowl ever.

Pho Republic Noodles & Grill 30 S.

Anaheim Blvd. (2.8 mi.), 999-1200; Mon.–Thu. 11 a.m.–9 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 11 a.m.–10 p.m. \$

Pho Republic's menu of Vietnamese food, featuring dishes like grilled pork chops and chicken skewers (nearly everything comes with noodles or rice), is good enough to warrant multiple visits. Located on the corner of Lincoln, Pho Republic is just a few hundred feet from Anaheim's new Muzeo. The easiest (though not most direct) route to take is the Harbor bus to Lincoln, then walk east about half a block.

Varsity Burgers 600 W. Lincoln Ave. (3.2 mi.), 956-2772; www.varsityburgers.com. Mon.–Fri. 6:30 a.m.–10 p.m.; Sat.–Sun. 7 a.m.–10 p.m. \$

This eatery's menu is a perfect blend of Mexican and American food. If you love avocados, try the Ham Torta; if you really want a hearty meal, order the Grande Breakfast Burrito. Sunday mornings can get a little crowded, with congregants filing in from the church next door.

FOR THE ADVENTURER

If you want to stay local but would rather not hit the tourist haunts, try these restaurants for something a little more off the beaten path.

Al-Sanabel Restaurant & Bakery 635 S. Brookhurst St. (3.5 mi.), 635-4353; Mon.–Sun. 8 a.m.–9 p.m. \$

Brookhurst abounds with Middle Eastern restaurants. This writer's favorite is Al-Sanabel, which specializes in flat-bread pizza topped with ground beef and Lebanese sausage.

Chris' & Pitt's BBQ 601 N. Euclid St. (3.6 mi.), 635-2601; www.chrisandpittsbbqrestaurants.com. Fri.–Sat. 11 a.m.–12 a.m.; Tue.–Sun. 11 a.m.–10 p.m. \$\$

Orange County fans of steak all have one recommendation: Chris' & Pitt's. Also on the menu: special-battered shrimp, broiled

cold-water swordfish, and breaded pork chops, most served with a side of fries and a sprig of parsley. If traveling by bus, take the 50 west on Katella.

Cortina's Italian Market 2175 W. Orange Ave. (3.9 mi.), 535-1948; Pizzeria—Mon., Wed., Thu., Sat. 11 a.m.–8 p.m.; Fri. 11 a.m.–9 p.m.; Sun. 11 a.m.–4 p.m.; Market—Mon., Wed.–Sat. 9 a.m.–7 p.m.; Sun. 9 a.m.–4 p.m. www.cortinasitalianfood.com. \$

A family-owned and -operated establishment since 1963, Cortina is half market (selling wines and Italian, European, and domestic groceries), half sit-down/take-out pizzeria. A local hangout, it's also a favorite cop haunt.

El Conejo Feliz 1750 W. Lincoln Ave. (4.5 mi.), 991-0540; Mon.–Sun. 11 a.m.–10 p.m. \$

Back when the members of No Doubt used to live in Anaheim, they would eat at Mexi-Casa (listed below), right next door. It's decent, but for the most authentic Mexican food and atmosphere, go for El Conejo Feliz. There's often dancing and live music after 8 p.m. (especially on the weekends), so if this isn't for you, make sure to get there early.

El Pollo Inka Anaheim 400 S. Euclid St. (3 mi.), 772-2263; www.inkaanaheim.com. Mon.–Sun. 11 a.m.–10 p.m. \$\$

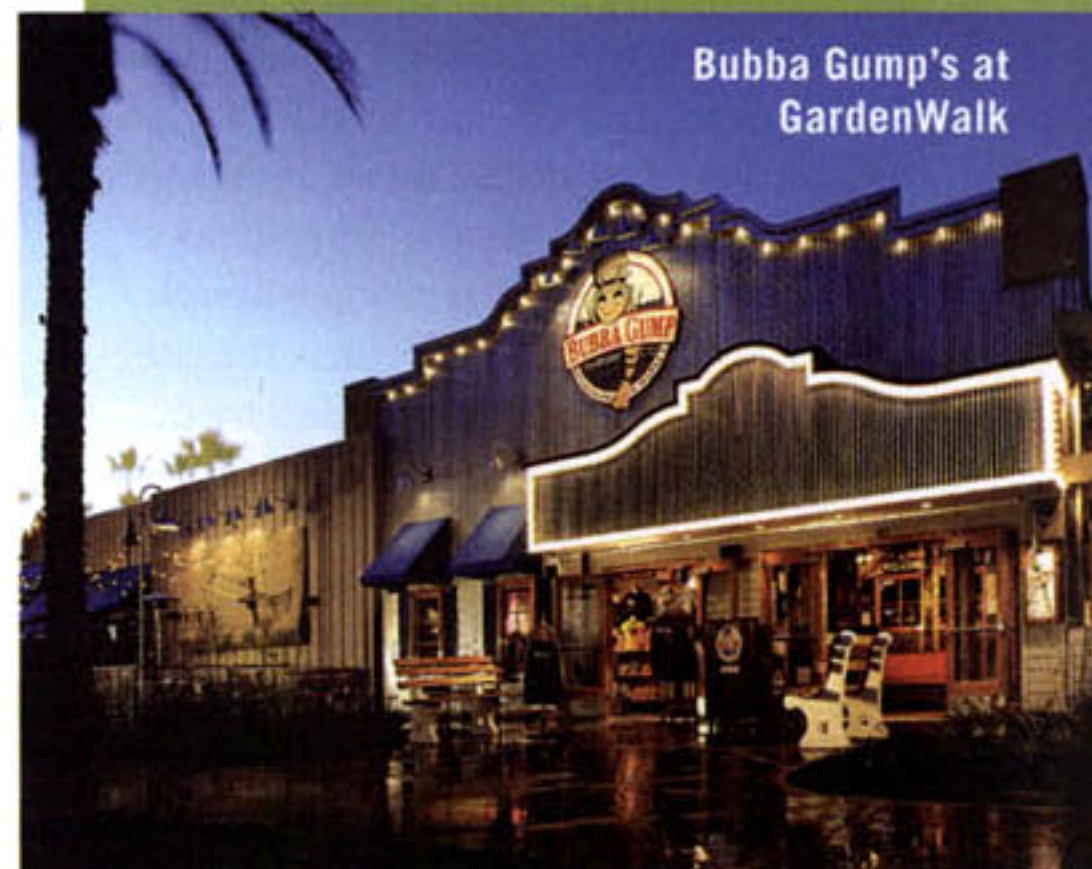
You'll find everything from fried plantains to purple corn pudding at this dimly lit Peruvian restaurant. If you go on a weekend, call ahead, as that's when the restaurant floor turns into a dance floor, with salsa, swing, and jazz theme nights.

El Taco 615 S. Euclid St. (2.7 mi.), 535-2059. \$ Anaheim has several little taco stands; in fact, all of Southern California (SoCal) does, and you should definitely try at least one of them. At El Taco, go for the Fiesta Bowl—a plate loaded with rice and beans and topped with guacamole, sour cream, and cheese. If traveling by bus, take the 50 west on Katella.

Essential Thai Cuisine 2415 W. Lincoln Ave., Suite H (5.2 mi.), 761-4585; Mon.–Fri. 11:30 a.m.–3 p.m. and 5 p.m.–9:30 p.m.; Sun. 12 p.m.–9:30 p.m. \$

This hole-in-the-wall Thai restaurant has an always-friendly staff ready to help if you're unsure of what to order (pad thai with jasmine tea is a good bet). Just down the street is Dad Miller Golf Course, where Tiger Woods perfected his game while in high school. If traveling by bus, take a northbound Harbor 43, head west on the Lincoln 42, and exit at Gilbert.

New in Town: GardenWalk



Bubba Gump's at GardenWalk

The grand opening of the Anaheim Resort District's new three-level outdoor mall, Anaheim GardenWalk (www.anaheimgardenwalk.com), at 321 W. Katella Avenue, just a five-minute stroll and .9 miles from the convention center and containing some 50 retail shops and restaurants, will have occurred one month before ALA's own big kickoff. These modestly priced chain restaurants opened there since late 2007:

Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. Suite 101, 635-4867; www.bubbagump.com. Mon.–Sun. 11 a.m.–10 p.m. \$\$

California Pizza Kitchen Suite 104, 991-0305; www.cpk.com. Mon.–Thu. 11 a.m.–10 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 11 a.m.–11 p.m.; Sun. 11 a.m.–10 p.m. \$\$\$

Cheesecake Factory Suite 100, 533-7500; www.thecheesecakefactory.com. Mon.–Thu. 11:30 a.m.–11 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 11:30 a.m.–midnight; Sun. 10 a.m.–10 p.m. \$\$\$

McCormick & Schmick's Suite 109, 535-9000; www.mccormickandschmicks.com. Mon.–Sun. 11 a.m.–11 p.m. \$\$\$

P.F. Chang's Suite 120, 507-2021; www.pfchangs.com. Sun.–Thu. 11 a.m.–11 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 11 a.m.–midnight. \$\$\$

Roy's Hawaiian Fusion Suite 105, 776-7697; www.roysrestaurant.com. Sun.–Thu. 5 p.m.–10 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 5 p.m.–10:30 p.m. \$\$

To see the Haskett Branch Library, one of Anaheim's newest facilities, take a 20-minute detour by walking south on Gilbert, making a right onto Broadway, and continuing until just a few hundred feet past Magnolia Avenue.

In-N-Out Burger 600 S. Brookhurst St. (3.8 mi.), 949-509-6200; www.in-n-out.com. Sun.–Thu. 10:30 a.m.–1 a.m.; Fri.–Sat. 10:30 a.m.–1:30 a.m. \$

There aren't a lot of fast-food joints that pride themselves on fresh food. In-N-Out has been a West Coast staple for dozens of years. If you're an East Coaster, see what all the fuss is about: treat yourself. The never-frozen, pure-beef burgers go on a standard sponge-dough bun and are topped with lettuce, tomatoes, and American cheese. If traveling by bus, take the 43 on Harbor North.

La Palma Chicken Pie Shop 928 N. Euclid St. (3.9 mi.), 533-2021; Mon.–Sat. 9 a.m.–8 p.m. \$ La Palma is the kind of place at which



WEST COAST HOT SPOT In-N-Out Burgers is to burgers as Coney Island is to hot dogs; what's more, the chain puts a healthy spin on conventional fast-food sling

your grandparents might eat—it's been around for years and is the most affordable place in town to get a full-course dinner. Though the establishment is a little rundown-looking, the food—especially the chicken pot pie—is top-notch.

Mexi-Casa 1778 W. Lincoln Ave. (4.4 mi.), 635-2612; Mon.–Thu. 11 a.m.–9:30 p.m., Fri.–Sat. 11 a.m.–10 p.m. \$

You'll like Mexi-Casa, which has been serving SoCal since the 1960s, only if you like your Mexican food significantly Americanized. A popular stop for families and college kids.

Original Pancake House 1418 E. Lincoln Ave. (3.6 mi.), 535-9815; www.originalpancakehouse.com. Mon.–Sun. 6 a.m.–2 p.m. \$

The Original Pancake House is home to the best apple pancakes this Anaheim resident has ever tasted. Huge portions at affordable prices make this the spot not to be missed for breakfast. Avoid weekdays, as they tend to be busy.

IN-N-OUT PHOTO C/O IN-N-OUT BURGER; ANTONELLO PHOTOS C/O FRANK GROFF INC.; GYPSY DEN CAFÉ PHOTO BY SCOTT DOUGLAS LA COUNTE



The Mall and Antimall

SOUTH COAST PLAZA

A freeway separates the South Coast Plaza from the Lab area (below), both in Costa Mesa, but the two could be worlds apart. Expect a 30- to 40-minute drive from the convention center, depending on traffic. A bus or shuttle will take twice as long.

If you're looking for a place to spend your hard-earned dollars, the South Coast Plaza (www.southcoastplaza.com; 3333 Bristol St., Costa Mesa), with its 280 boutiques, 30 restaurants, four spas, and three performing arts venues, is for you. It should come as no surprise that surrounding some of the county's finest (i.e., priciest) shopping districts are also some of its finest (i.e., priciest) restaurants. Those traveling by bus will get the full Orange County experience, as it passes through the lower-income

areas of Santa Ana, whose downtown is undergoing development. Bus riders may tend toward the low-income and homeless; shuttle passengers will all be tourists.

Antonello Ristorante 3800 S. Plaza Dr., Santa Ana (12.9 mi.), 751-7153; www.antonello.com. Mon.–Fri. 11:30 a.m.–2 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.–9:30 p.m.; Sat. 5 p.m.–9 p.m. \$\$

Owner Antonio Cagnolo's mother, who's been known to help out in the kitchen, must be proud: Zagat's described her son's restaurant as "Orange County's Best Italian...even worth the drive from L.A." The wine list boasts 700-plus foreign and domestic labels.

Pinot Provence 686 Anton Blvd., Costa Mesa (12.4 mi.), 444-5900; Mon. 6:30 a.m.–9 p.m.; Tue.–Thu. 6:30 a.m.–9:30 p.m.; Fri. 6:30 a.m.–10 p.m.; Sat. 7 a.m.–10 p.m.; Sun. 7 a.m.–9:30 p.m. yieyi.notlong.com. \$\$\$

If Pinot Provence is on your agenda, call ahead to reserve a table. Private dining rooms and patios are ideal for shared per-

sonal and business confidences. Among the pricey but deserving dishes are duck breast "sous vide" and Angus beef filet.

The Whole Pita 3940 S. Bristol St., Suite 113, Santa Ana (12.1 mi.), 708-3000; Mon.–Sun. 11 a.m.–9 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 11 a.m.–9:30 p.m. www.thewholepita.com. \$

Signature Greek dishes like Souvlaki and Gyro make up the menu of this health-conscious California restaurant on the corner of Bristol and Sunflower. Casseroles like lamb stew and moussaka come with a side of pita bread and made-from-scratch soup. Baklava for dessert!

THE LAB AREA

For a cheaper, trendier alternative to the nearby South Coast Plaza, head down the street to the Lab (2930 Bristol St., Costa Mesa), known by locals as "the Anti Mall." Hip thrift stores like Buffalo Exchange and kitschy retailer Urban Outfitter make up most of this military night goggle factory-turned-strip mall, whose better-known restaurants are:

DOWNTOWN FULLERTON

Downtown Fullerton, a historic area roughly seven miles from the convention center best reached by hotel shuttle, is where locals go for their nightlife; there's also a small playhouse on Harbor Boulevard called the Maverick Theater (call 526-7070 to see what's playing). During the daytime, the area is known for its dozens of small boutiques and cafés. For restaurants, head north on Harbor Boulevard toward either Commonwealth or Chapman avenues.

Angelo's & Vinci's Café Ristorante 550 N. Harbor Blvd., Fullerton (7 mi.), 879-4022; www.angelosandvincis.com. Mon.–Thu. and Sun. 11 a.m.–9 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 11 a.m.–10 p.m. \$\$\$

DINING ADVENTURES Enjoy executive chef Franco Barone's (l.) Italian specialties at Antonello, with its rustic dining room (ctr.), part of the lure to South Coast Plaza. Al fresco and healthy at the Lab's Gypsy Den Café

The Gypsy Den Café 2930 Bristol St., Costa Mesa (12.6 mi.), 549-7012; www.gypsyden.com. Mon.–Thu. 7:30 a.m.–11 p.m.; Fri. 7:30 a.m.–midnight; Sat. 8 a.m.–midnight; Sun. 8 a.m.–11 p.m. \$ Zagat's raving review of this café begins, "If your aging hippie aunt opened her sitting room to strangers..." The Gypsy Den's menu caters to the health-conscious crowd,

offering, e.g., gabacho Mexican breakfasts with nonrefried black beans, lengthy vegetable wraps, and near-sin-free carrot cake.

Native Foods at the CAMP 2937 Bristol St., Costa Mesa (12.6 mi.), 751-2151; Mon.–Sun. 11 a.m.–10 p.m. www.nativefoods.com. \$

Located at the CAMP, a shopping enclave by the Lab that's ideal for the high roller/sports enthusiast, Native Foods uses fresh, organic, vegetarian- and vegan-friendly ingredients whose nutritional content is made readily available. Even the mayo's nondairy!

Zipangu 2930 Bristol St., Costa Mesa (12.6 mi.), 545-2800; www.zipanguoc.com. Mon.–Thu. 11:30 a.m.–2 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.–midnight; Fri. 11:30 a.m.–2 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.–1:30 a.m.; Sat. 5:30 p.m.–1:30 a.m.; Sun. 5:30 p.m.–10 p.m. \$

This Japanese sushi restaurant has two menus to choose from: one offering traditional, authentic sushi dishes, the other offering modern Japanese fusion cuisine. Sample exotic cocktails at the bar and lounge.

The place for authentic Italian food and atmosphere. If you're on a budget, the pizzas are each large enough to serve six or seven. You can also choose from as many as 50 different pasta dishes as well as an array of seafood, chicken, mesquite-grilled, and other specialty items. All food here comes in large portions.

The Cellar 305 N. Harbor Blvd., Fullerton (6.7 mi.), 525-5682; www.cellardining.com. Tue.–Sun. 5:30–9 p.m. \$\$\$\$

Should you be in the mood for romance while at ALA, the best place to take your fling is the Cellar, where you'll dine on French cuisine and drink wine in a candlelit room. The Cellar is located beneath the old California Hotel on Harbor and Wilshire. Budget shoppers beware: this is one of Orange County's most expensive spots.

The Olde Ship 709 N. Harbor Blvd., Fullerton (7.1 mi.), 871-7447; www.theoldeship.com. Mon.–Sat. 11 a.m.–11 p.m.; Sun. 9 a.m.–11 p.m. \$\$

There's only one place to go in Orange County for great spotted dick, and that's the Olde Ship. Just a few hundred feet north of Chapman Avenue, this British-owned and -operated restaurant finely replicates a British pub, offering over 20 beers on tap and over 20 single malts.

Rutabegorz 211 N. Pomona Ave., Fullerton (6.9 mi.), 738-9339; www.rutabegorz.com. Mon.–Thu. 11 a.m.–9 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 11 a.m.–10 p.m. \$\$

A homey bohemian café located in the heart of Fullerton, Rutabegorz is known for its healthy foods (wraps, vegetable crepes, fresh juices) and great salads (among them: summer, chicken, spinach). Since it first opened its doors in 1978, Rutabegorz, whose interior décor evokes a Tuscan villa, has grown increasingly environmentally conscious: its thermoformed plastic take-out containers are made of corn!

BUENA PARK

Located on and around Beach Boulevard (Highway 39) and a 15-minute shuttle ride from the convention center, Buena Park is today a popular amusement park. But before there ever was an amusement park to speak of, there was Mrs. Knott's.

Mrs. Knott's Chicken Dinner 8039 Beach Blvd., Buena Park (7.9 mi.), 220-5055; zeipii.notlong.com. \$

A busy, small, sweet restaurant with delicious fried chicken that's just the place to take Mom on Mother's Day. Standing before the amusement park entry and surrounded by other (comparatively inferior) restaurants as well as various upscale shops.

NEWPORT BEACH

If you want to see the Orange County beaches, the best and easiest one to get to from the convention center is Newport. Drive or hitch a ride and expect to be on the road, assuming you're not taking the freeway during rush hour, for 40 to 50 minutes (two hours by bus). Small boutiques and harbor boat tours will give you plenty to see.

The Cannery 3010 Lafayette Rd. (17.7 mi.), 949-566-0060; Mon.–Wed. 11:30 a.m.–10 p.m., Thu. 11:30 a.m.–10:30 p.m., Fri.–Sat. 11 a.m.–11 p.m., Sun. 11 a.m.–9:30 p.m. www.cannerynewport.com. \$\$\$

Order fresh sushi upstairs in the Asian dining room, head to the water-level Grill Room for a steak and salad, request a margarita at the Jellyfish Bar, or eat on the all-weather patio overlooking the Rhine Channel. Just call in advance to reserve a table—wherever you'd rather have it.

Charlie's Chili 102 McFadden Place, Newport Beach (18.1 mi.), 949-675-7991; Mon.–Sun. 7 a.m.–10 p.m. \$

This is the best little hole-in-the-wall in all of Newport Beach. Located at the foot of the pier, it's a small eatery known for, you guessed it, chili: chili omelettes, chili hamburgers, chili fries. Of course, if you don't like chili, the restaurant's other food (burgers, for one) is still worth the trip. Great for people-watching; you'll feel like you're right on the beach.

Gulfstream 850 Avocado Ave. (18.3 mi.), 949-718-0187; Mon.–Thu. 9:30 a.m.–10 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 9:30 a.m.–11 p.m.; Sun. 9:30 a.m.–9 p.m. taloch.notlong.com. \$\$\$

Like the Cannery, Gulfstream is known for its seafood—e.g., tuna copia, plank salmon, red snapper—but offers an array of other tantalizing choices, too, like braised short ribs or crispy chicken. Call in advance to reserve a table.

Wilma's Patio 203 Marine Ave. (19.1 mi.), 949-675-5542; Mon.–Thu. 7 a.m.–8:30 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 7 a.m.–9:30 p.m.; Sun., 7 a.m.–8:30 p.m. www.wilmaspatio.com. \$

Breakfast is a favorite at this family-owned and -managed restaurant (try the Balboa Belly Bomber: a warm French roll stuffed with egg), but lunch and dinner aren't bad, either: fresh seafood, Mexican dishes made from the cooks' family recipes—even Italian. Best thing, it's on an island: from where the Harbor 43 lets off, take the Balboa Island Ferry (\$1 per person, \$2 for cars plus nominal fee for passengers).