

# Happy

# Hour

## Stepped-up bar snacks

By Amelia Levin

There's no better place than a sunny, warm beachfront town to enjoy happy hour drinks and eats. Newport Beach has a host of restaurants serving great post-work deals, with offerings that far exceed what might be your usual bar food expectations of boring sliders or stale popcorn. Take a look. Note that prices listed may change.

### Pizzeria Mozza

From acclaimed restaurateur Joe Bastianich and “queen of sourdough” baker Nancy Silverton, Pizzeria Mozza offers a special bar menu that spans from lunch into late afternoon until 5 p.m. on weekdays before regular dinner service begins. Enjoy a dessert and a glass of wine with your pie for \$30. Guests can choose between 15 different types of pizza, from fennel sausage with panna, red onion and scallions to mixed mushroom with fontina, taleggio and thyme and pizza alla benno with speck, pineapple, jalapeños, mozzarella and tomato.

### Bosscat Kitchen and Libations

Monday through Friday, 3-6 p.m., this lively “gastropub” offers \$5 draft beer and wines paired with \$5 or \$6 items. There are pig pickin’ tacos with pulled pork and slaw, thick-cut “happy” bacon, avocado toast topped with a slice of rare-cooked ahi tuna, pickled ginger and wasabi, and the Bosscat grilled cheese with short rib and onion marmalade.

### 21 Oceanfront Restaurant

This waterside restaurant right on Newport Beach pier offers Social Hour at 21 in the bar and lounge Sunday through Thursday, 4-7 p.m., with \$8 well drinks and select wines by the glass as well as \$6 beers paired with a variety of discounted menu items. Guests can choose a cup of cheesy French onion soup; marinated fillet skewers with mushrooms, peppers and onions; a salmon poke stack with avocado, seaweed salad and taro chips; fried calamari; or an oven-baked Italian flatbread with tomatoes, caramelized onions, rosemary, Parmesan and stracchino cheese. Larger dishes include jumbo lump crabcakes; marinated New Zealand lamb chops with a bordelaise sauce; blackened seared ahi tuna with seaweed salad, wasabi, ginger and soy; blackened salmon tacos with cabbage, chipotle aioli and mango salsa; and the 21 Bar Burger with English cheddar, a brioche bun and crispy Parmesan fries.

### Sol Cocina

Sol Cocina’s happy hour, 3-6 p.m., Monday through Wednesday, includes wine at \$3, margaritas starting at \$5.50, and fun small bites by chef Deborah Schneider, cookbook author and James Beard Award nominee. Look for the Mexican Hot Dog, Firecracker Quesadilla and Watermelon Copita,



which are newer items available only during happy hour. For the hot dog, Schneider tops a grilled hot dog on a mayo-toasted roll with crisp bacon, cheese, chipotle and “secret sauce,” lettuce, pico de gallo (a roasted spicy green chili salsa) and pickled jalapeños for a truly loaded dog. The quesadilla comes stuffed with cheese, grilled chicken, avocado, Sriracha sauce and fried tortilla strips for crunch. The watermelon cocktail is made by muddling the fruit with Corralejo Blanco tequila, fresh lime juice and a touch of agave nectar before being shaken and strained over fresh ice.

## Red O Restaurant

Pair \$7 house margaritas with a happy hour menu offered 3-6 p.m. daily that includes half-price small-bite and sharable items such as street tacos, empanadas, ceviche and queso fundido with Monterey Jack, fontina and white cheddar cheeses spiked with caramelized onion, poblano chilies and homemade chorizo. For the tacos, corporate chef Marc Johnson has helped to develop a mixture of traditional and crisp-fried versions, including a crispy short rib taco with adobo-braised meat that’s stuffed into hand-pressed tortillas, deep-fried and topped with morita (red) salsa, shaved lettuce, pico de gallo and queso fresca. There’s also a Coca-Cola-braised carnitas taco with tomatillo salsa, chicharróns, pickled red onions, queso fresco and cilantro. A shrimp ceviche, aguachile (yellowtail crudo with spicy lime and serrano broth) and ahi tartare offer lighter shareable options.

## A & O Kitchen + Bar

Balboa Bay Resort’s Beat the Clock happy hour offers \$4 wines that go up by \$1 each hour until 7 p.m. alongside dishes such as slow-roasted pork rack with savory barbecue sauce and roasted Brussels sprouts. An outdoor patio offers views of the ocean as well as fire pits for keeping warm at night.



ABOVE: Red O’s ahi tuna tartare, top, and chicharróns, poke tacos and carnitas tacos.





## Building a better happy hour menu

As profits continue to be pinched in restaurants, maximizing bar sales can help drive daily revenue, especially late at night but also between lunch and dinner service. With cocktails so advanced these days, however, when it comes to happy hour and bar snack menu development, the food paired with the drink has to be spot-on.

To learn what it takes to make a great happy hour menu, we caught up with Marc Johnson, corporate chef for Red O Management, which operates four Red O locations in California, including one in Newport Beach. “You want a mix between finger foods, small bites and some shareable items,” says Johnson, who aims to offer between seven and 10 items on happy hour menus. Anything more, he notes, can be overkill, but a decent range of selections will keep guests happy.

Spicier and richer small bites, such as carnitas-filled empanadas and street tacos, including some crisp-fried ones, pair well with refreshing beers and margaritas, while sharable dishes such as ahi tartare and shrimp ceviche offer lighter options. While Johnson says Red O staffs its happy hour accordingly, serving up dishes that are quick and easy to make can speed up service for tired guests just getting off work and looking for a quick drink and bite to eat.

## 3-Thirty-3 Waterfront

This popular happy hour hangout offers a special menu 3-6 p.m. weekdays with creative cocktails for \$8.95 and indulgent snacks such as the spicy jalapeño/chorizo cheese dip and chicken drumettes paired with some lighter offerings such as citrusy ceviche. The house DJ spins Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

## Fig & Olive

This bright and breezy California-chic restaurant offers an *aperitivo* happy hour 4-7 p.m. every day with signature cocktails such as the Piscine (sparkling wine with fresh strawberries) and Summer in Provence (gin, housemade rosemary/thyme syrup, muddled blackberries and lime juice), as well as wine by the glass for \$8. Guests can choose between two crostini plate options (three for \$6, six for \$11) that include toppings such as kabocha squash with pickled mushroom and pear; Burrata with tomatoes, pesto and balsamic; and manchego with figs and Marcona almonds. There are also three tasting plates for \$9 in French, Spanish and Italian versions, with various types of olives along with cheeses, charcuterie and croquettes.

## The Cannery Seafood of the Pacific

Happy hour includes \$2 off cocktails, draft beers and wines by the glass, as well as bar snacks and appetizers such as short rib sliders with cheese and pickles, and agedashi tofu—deep-fried soft tofu with a crispy shell and creamy interior paired with tsuyu, a dipping sauce made with soy sauce, mirin, dashi and a touch of sugar.

## The Crow Bar and Kitchen

During happy hour, 3-6 p.m. daily, guests can enjoy wines, draft beers by the glass and well cocktails for \$5 paired with appetizers such as pickled onion dip, avocado toast, and piquillo pepper and smoked blue cheese hummus. Truffle fries can be used for dipping. ■

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: 1) Bosscat Kitchen's thick-cut “happy” bacon. 2) A taco on the happy hour menu at Sol Cucina. 3) Red O's house margarita pitcher.

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PHOTO CREDITS Above, left to right: Bosscat Kitchen and Libations, Sol Cucina, Red O Restaurant