

O.C.'s Best: Happy Hour

Originally a break for U.S. Navy personnel in WWI, today's rendition is ingrained as an after-work ritual

November 5, 2014 | Katherine Nguyen | [Add a comment](#)



PHOTOGRAPH BY PRISCILLA IEZZI

It's the gleaming light at the end of the tunnel for us Orange County working stiffs—something to look forward to as soon as we clock out for the day. But it's not just drinks that draw folks in; the discounted bar noshes at these seven spots take the social outing to a whole new level.

1. Charlie Palmer at Bloomingdale's

The stylish post-work crowd gathers here for half-price select wines and handcrafted cocktails, and \$4 and \$5 bottled beers. Get here early, slide into a cozy leather couch, and order the charred edamame with yuzu and citrus salt (\$8.50)—it's mouthpuckeringly addictive. The spiced lamb meatballs with braised tomatoes and pita is another great pick (\$11). 4 to 7 p.m., and 9 p.m. to midnight daily. *3333 Bristol St., Costa Mesa, 714-352-2525, charliepalmer.com*

2. Brio Tuscan Grille

One of the county's newest restaurants offers worthy Italian fare such as handmade pastas, but its happy hour menu is not to be missed. Plates include pristine beef carpaccio; crispy eggplant fries with creamy horseradish and pomodoro dipping sauces; certified Angus beef burger with house-made chips; and crispy ravioli and black pepper shrimp (\$4 to \$6). Select wines and cocktails are \$4 to \$6, too. 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. and 9 p.m. to close, Monday through Friday at the bar. *618 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine, 949-341-0380, brioitalian.com*

3. Urban Grill and Wine Bar

A respite from the chains that abound in Lake Forest, this restaurant's happy hour is beloved by locals. Get the grilled cheese with aged cheddar, Gruyere, and pesto (\$4), or indulge in the warm tri-tip sliders with shaved beef, caramelized onions, horseradish cream sauce, and provolone (\$7). All draft beers and house red or white wines are \$2 off, too. 3 to 6 p.m. daily, at the bar. *27412 Portola Parkway, Foothill Ranch, 949-340-2055, urbangrillandwinebar.com*

4. Lark Creek Newport Beach

You'll find a lineup of killer deals, from \$1 oysters to \$4 chickpea fries with harissa aioli to \$4 Kennebec fries—made using a 12-step process that includes double-frying the spuds and sprinkling them with sea salt for golden, light-as-air bites—easily some of the best frites in O.C. Enjoy pork belly sliders (\$6) tucked in fluffy brioche buns, or a miniature version of the signature barbecued chicken tamale pancake. Drinkwise, there's \$1 and \$3 craft beer specials, \$5 wines on tap, and \$7 mules. 3 to 6 p.m. daily. *957 Newport Center Drive, Newport Beach, 949-640-6700, larkcreeknb.com*

5. Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Bar

This happy hour draws a crowd even before the restaurant opens at 5 p.m. It might have something to do with the specials, called 5 for \$6 till 7: five kinds of wines by the glass, cocktails, and bar bites such as crisped pork belly, carpaccio, baked brie—even their signature prime burgers with fries!—all \$6 each until happy hour ends at 7 daily. *455 Newport Center Drive, Newport Beach, 949-720-9633, flemingssteakhouse.com*

6. Wildfish Seafood Grille

For years it has drawn a consistent following for its happy hour, catering to the well-heeled coastal O.C. crowd. Can't-miss items include shrimp and pork potstickers (\$8); jumbo lump crab cakes (\$13), kung-pao style calamari (\$12), and steak and lobster tartare (\$11). Well-crafted cocktails include cosmopolitans, lemon drops, martinis, margaritas, and mojitos (\$6). 4 to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, all night Sunday and Monday, in the lounge. *1370 Bison Ave., Newport Beach, 949-720-9925, wildfishseafoodgrille.com*

7. Hamamori

In addition to gorgeous sushi and omakase, this Japanese mainstay might have some of the best happy hour items you've never tried: jumbo *okaki* asparagus, two spears rolled in smashed Japanese rice crackers, fried to crispy perfection (\$6); melt-in-your-mouth sweet soy spare ribs (\$7); and our favorite, the shiitake mushroom frites with a truffle-and-horseradish dip (\$6), as tasty as it is beautiful. \$4 Kirin draft beers, and \$6 to \$7 wine and sake specials. 5 to 6:30 p.m. daily. *3333 Bear St., Costa Mesa, 714-850-0880, hamamorisushibar.com*

Tags: 2014, bars, best, brio tuscan grille, charlie palmer, fleming's, hamamori, happy hour, lark creek, O.C., Orange County, urban grill, wild fish