

Restaurants

(Commentary provided by zagat.com)

Westwood

Gardens on Glendon
1139 Glendon Avenue (Wilshire Boulevard)
(310) 824-1818

'Pleasant' is the operative word at this "favorite" Westwooder that "still stands out", "even with all the new hip places" around it; "designed for adults", it features "beautiful atmosphere", a "magnificent variety" of "great-tasting" Californian dishes ("don't miss the guacamole") and service that's "all class with no attitude."

Price: \$30 and under

Napa Valley Grille
1100 Glendon Avenue (Lindbrook Drive)
(310) 824-3322

"Civilization has returned to Westwood" say relieved fans, who flock to this "attractive", "airy" Californian, the latest link in a mini-chain from the people behind Cafe Del Rey; "yuppies" and the "power lunch" bunch gather to dine on seasonal, wine-country-inspired fare paired with "terrific wines (natch)", and though frugal sorts moan about "small portions" at "high prices", reservations are nevertheless hard to come by."

Price: \$50 and under (approx. \$31-\$50)

Palomino
10877 Wilshire Boulevard (Glendon Avenue)
(310) 208-1960

With its "big bar scene", "colorful" "faux masterpieces on the walls" and service "sans attitude", this "happening" Cal-Med bistro (part of a national chain) is a "great addition to Westwood"; as scores suggest, the "incredible" "decor is better than the food" -unless you've ordered the "outrageous crab dip" -but most diners don't seem to mind.

Price: \$36 and under

BJ's Brewhouse and Pizza
939 Broxton Avenue (between Le Conte & Weyburn Avenues)
(310) 209-7475

These rollicking, family-friendly eateries emphasize big portions of solid Americana, along with a selection of deep-dish pizzas that are a tip of the toque to Chicago; most locations also feature in-house breweries and large-screen television sets for watching the big game.

Price: \$30 and under

Brentwood

Gaucha Grill
11754 San Vicente Boulevard (between Gorham & Montana Avenues)
(310)447-7898

"If you like garlic" and want a "little taste of Buenos Aires", then head to this "affordable" Argentinian chain where "tasty chicken" and solid steaks (especially the skirt) are topped with a winning chimichurri sauce; the less enthused go "more for the convenience than the quality."

Price: \$25 and under

The Cheesecake Factory

11647 San Vicente Boulevard (between Barrington & Wilshire)

(310)826-7111

Acolytes routinely brave "perennially long waits" to choose from a "dizzying", "something-for-everyone" menu of Eclectic eats at this "moderately priced", wildly popular "kid-friendly chain; but small appetites beware, everything from the "unusual" avocado egg rolls to the "sinfully delicious" cheesecakes comes in "monster portions."

Price: \$30 and under

Pizzicotto

11758 San Vicente Boulevard (between Gorham & Montana Avenues)

(310)442-7188

"Divine pizza", "awesome pasta" and "amazing gnocchi" are three reasons this "lovely little" Italian "squeezed" into Brentwood is no longer a "secret"; this "perfect trattoria" is "busy" and "noisy with enthusiasm" these days, but that doesn't deter regulars who simply "ask for a table upstairs" (where it's "a little quieter") and enjoy the "wonderful food" and "friendly service."

Price: \$30 and under

San Gennaro Cafe

140 Barrington Place (Sunset Boulevard)

(310) 476-9696

This "dependable" "NY-style eye-talian" duo "puts the 'neighbor' back in great neighborhood dining", offering a "friendly" "mom-and-pop" atmosphere in which to enjoy "generous portions" of "well-priced" "basic family-style" food and "good cheap wines"; no wonder they're "always jammed"; P.S. there's a "Sinatra wanna-be lounge act" at the Culver City branch on Friday and Saturday nights.

Price: \$31 and under

Taiko Restaurant

11677 San Vicente Boulevard (Barrington Avenue)

(310) 207-7782

With two branches in diet-conscious areas of town, these "healthy", "stylish" Japanese noodle shops are bringing the gospel of udon and soba to trendies in need of a break from sushi; in addition to "combo meals that are a great value", look for "excellent eggplant with miso" and "delicious Chilean sea bass."

Price: \$30 and under

Santa Monica

Border Grill

1445 Fourth Street (between Broadway & Santa Monica Boulevards)

(310) 451-1655

The Two Hot Tamales (Susan Feniger and Mary Sue Milliken) flex their foodie muscles at this "colorful", "avant-garde" Mexican in Santa Monica that's "a lot of fun" (especially "if you know sign language", as it can get "loud"); regulars routinely "dream about the food" and drinks, including "the best" margaritas and guacamole, along with "fish Veracruz to die for", but since it draws everyone from "tamilies to tequila drinkers", "go at odd hours, when there are fewer people."

Price: \$30 and under

Cafe Montana

1534 Montana Avenue (16th Street)

(310) 829-3990

Ladies who lunch" (and shop) tuck into "classic" Californian cuisine at this "bright and shiny" "beacon of friendliness" on one of the Westside's prime retail streets; also good for "candlelit dinners", it offers plenty of "star sightings" along with "reliable" burgers, pastas and salads and "delicious" desserts, including a Key lime meringue pie that's "better than the ones in the Florida Keys"; those in touch with the cosmos suggest that the decor may be in "need of a dose of feng shui."

Price: \$27 and under

Chez Mimi

246 26th Street (San Vicente Boulevard)

(310) 393-0558

The superlatives bunch up like cars on the 405 for this "hidden" "Gallic delight" set in a "cozy house" with an "adorable patio" on the Westside; though a few find it "overpriced", "return visits are inevitable" because "Mimi's warm welcome is as genuine as her food"; chances are you'll also detect "love in the air" at this "quaint" spot that feels like a "French country inn."

Price: \$35 and under

Il Fornaio

1551 Ocean Avenue (Across from Santa Monica Pier)

(310) 451-7800

Wonderful bread" from a "fantastic bakery" is the specialty of this "bright, cheery" upscale Italian chain, which also keeps patrons coming back with "creative pastas", rotisserie chicken, lots of daily specials and monthly supplemental menus featuring dishes and wines from different regions of The Boot.

Price: \$30 and under

Kay and Dave's

262 26th St. (South of San Vicente Boulevard)

(310) 260-1355

"Healthy Mexican" cuisine is the concept behind this "very friendly" twosome where parents "bring the kids" (who are given crayons and paper and get their drawings put up on the walls), then settle in with "great agave margaritas", "lard-free standards" and more unusual items like "Baja tacos made with swordfish."

Price: \$20 and under

Ocean Avenue Seafood

1401 Ocean Avenue (Santa Monica Boulevard)

(310) 394-5669

"Fish must feel honored to be served here" say admirers of this "lovely" Santa Monica spot, one of the "best of the King's Seafood chain" that helped bring the concept of haute seafood to town; its "amazing menu" of "marine delights" changes frequently, but the preparations are always "interesting" and it features an "excellent" "oyster bar happy hour -need we say more?"; P.S. "sit on the piano and enjoy the ocean view."

Price: \$40 and under

PF Chang's

326 Wilshire Boulevard (4th Street)

(310) 395-1912

No reservations means there's "always a long wait" at this upscale "contemporary" Chinese chain where "lettuce wraps done right" and "crab wontons to die for" are complemented by "very cool" Asian decor ("replicas of warriors"), a California-focused wine list and trendy martinis; sure, "it's a formula, but a nice one."

Price: \$30 and under

Updated July 2008

Beverly Hills

Crustacean Restaurant

9646 Little Santa Monica Boulevard (Bedford Drive)
(310) 205-8990

This Vietnamese seafooder is a veritable "dreamscape" that allows you to "walk on water" (or at least on Plexiglas above a koi pond) on your way into a celeb-heavy "Beverly Hills scene" with a trendy bar and "beautiful", "exotic" dual-level dining room; the "tab" food includes "garlic noodles to die for" and a "special house crab" from a "secret kitchen" (only family members are allowed in the sanctum sanctorum); P.S. remember to 'bring your wallet.'

Price: \$40 and under

The Grill on the Alley

9560 Dayton Way (Wilshire Boulevard)
(310) 276-0615

"An old reliable", this "man's restaurant" offers a taste of "Manhattan for the Hollywood biggies" that's as "close to a New York steakhouse" as they're likely to find; "superb" cuts, some of the "best martinis in Lalaland" and "professional, welcoming" service from "waiters who have been there forever" make this booth-and-brass venue "in a Beverly Hills alley" a "big treat anytime"; P.S. 'celeb sightings are guaranteed at lunch.'

Price: \$43 and under

La Scala

434 N. Canan Dr.
Beverly Hills, CA 90210
(310) 275-0579

"You can hear them chopping two blocks away" from this "old Hollywood" Italian institution, known for its fabled "addictive" chopped salad, "good" minestrone and other "comfort food" for 'Beverly Hills matrons'; the "red leather booths are much in demand", perhaps because 'JFK dined in them' -as did everyone else.

Price: \$35 and under

Matsuhisa

129 N. La Cienega Boulevard (Wilshire Boulevard)
(310) 659-9639

Before there were branches of Nobu in the capitals of the world, there was this "low-key" Japanese seafood cafe in Beverly Hills that's once again No.1 for Food in LA thanks to a "great variety" of "continually innovative", "visually stunning" sushi that "bursts with flavor" (and well it should at roughly "\$3 a bite'), along with 'incredible' cooked items like the "wonderful black cod in miso"; insiders say "try the hidden omakase room."

Price: \$45 and under

Spago

176 N. Canon Drive (Wilshire Boulevard)
(310) 385-0880

Though it may not have the highest ratings in the Survey, Wolfgang Puck's "celebratory" Beverly Hills flagship Cal-Eclectic is "still the place to be seen" and the one SoCal restaurant that everyone (from "tremendous celebs" to "out-of-towners") wants to dine at; expect "beautiful surroundings", "amazing", "heady" combinations from chef Lee Hefter and attentive service at this destination that put LA on the culinary map and helps keep it there.

Price for Lunch: average of \$50 per person

Pride for Dinner: average of \$75 per person