

# ON THE MENU

## The Gossiping Gourmet

# Nirvana in the fullest sense

BY ELLE HARROW AND  
TERRY MARKOWITZ

**T**he consistently good food and the changing seasonal menu keep bringing us back to Nirvana Grille in Laguna Beach. This attractive, comfortable space is divided into the bar area with tall communal tables for eating and drinking and the cozy dining room. A beautiful stone wall provides a backdrop to the bar while large windows give the room a light and airy feeling and small, original plein air paintings decorate the walls. Larger parties of 10 to 12 can dine at a private table in the back. In warmer weather, there is a covered outdoor patio upstairs called the Bliss Bar.

In keeping with the latest trend, the menu features a dozen or so small plates that can be shared or combined to make a meal. You might try the roasted poblano chile stuffed with spinach, artichokes, shallots, cream and Parmesan and served with cream cheese garlic toast. A popular French dish that we hardly ever see anymore is raclette cheese fondue, accompanied by boiled potatoes, green beans, prosciutto and cornichon pickles.

A nice selection of salads can also be served in an entrée-size portion for \$5 more. The restaurant is somewhat famous for its kitchen sink salad, which has a little bit of everything in it: baby spinach, romaine, applewood smoked bacon, blue cheese, red onion, roasted



**NIRVANA VEGETABLE PLATE** served at Nirvana Grille in Laguna Beach.

beets, green beans and croutons in a creamy balsamic dressing. A bit on the healthier side is the organic curly green kale salad with cranberries, red onion, feta, pine nuts and preserved lemon vinaigrette. You also have the option of adding one of nine different proteins to any salad or entrée for an additional price.

We started our meal with a "small plate" of sweet potato fries that could have fed a family of four. The crispy potatoes were dusted with

cinnamon and paprika. They came with a tart, sweet, sour cream and maple syrup dip. We had to stop eating them to leave room for the rest of the meal.

Rack of lamb was lightly crusted with bread crumbs, pistachios and a touch of Dijon mustard, but the coating was soft and really didn't add much flavor. However, the juicy chops didn't need anything extra. The meaty quintet was served with some excellent Yukon gold mashed potatoes and

buttered broccolini.

Chef Lindsay was brought up in a vegetarian home, so it is no surprise that her vegetable platter is one of the best around. A large variety of seasonal vegetables were each cooked to the peak of perfection, retaining their distinct texture and flavor. What was missing but easily added was salt and pepper. Mushrooms, green beans, carrots, swiss chard and lightly seasoned tomatoes were accompanied by lentils, butternut squash puree

and lovely caramelized onions. Although this is a nonmeat-eater's delight, a protein can easily be added to satisfy carnivores as well.

If you are an ice cream aficionado, you might want to try one of the housemade varieties, which include salted caramel and goat cheese maple.

Although Chef Lindsay's pie crust is quite good, the apples that she chose did not have much flavor, and the caramel sauce was not mixed evenly throughout.

### Nirvana Grille

**Where:** 303 Broadway, Suite 101, Laguna Beach  
**When:** 5 to 9 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 5 to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 5 to 9 p.m. Sunday

**Prices:**  
Small plates: \$8 to \$13  
Entrées: \$19 to \$39  
Burgers: \$10 to \$15  
Desserts: \$5 to \$12

**Wine:**  
Glass: \$8 to \$18  
Half-bottles: \$16 to \$65  
Bottle: \$26 to \$275  
Corkage fee: \$20  
**Information:** (949) 497-0027 or [nirvanagrille.com](http://nirvanagrille.com)

Finally, we found a great vegan dessert — raw organic, cashew, almond, salted caramel pie with an almond, macadamia crust sweetened with lucuma (a South American fruit that is dried, powdered and used as a sweetener). On top of the crust is a thin layer of raw cacao and salted caramel, followed by a luscious custard made with almond, cashew and coconut milk, enriched with coconut oil and sweetened with agave. A dusting of raw cacao powder completed this spectacular dessert.

One other nice feature of Nirvana Grille is that it is within walking distance of the theaters and the art festivals.

**ELLE HARROW and TERRY MARKOWITZ** were in the gourmet food and catering business for 20 years. They can be reached for comments or questions at [m\\_markowitz@cox.net](mailto:m_markowitz@cox.net).

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