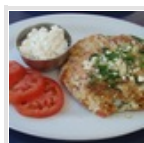
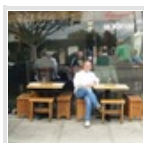
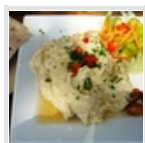
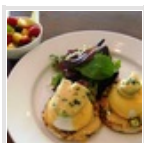


## You Rise, They Shine... Breakfast on Santa Monica's Montana Ave.



Blueberry-Acai Pancakes at Kreation (*Laurel House*)

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By Laurel House/*ChickNotes Guide*, Special to LAist

In a town filled with people who “work from home,” “work the dinner shift,” enjoy expensive expensed breakfast “meetings,” or simply “don’t work,” you’d think that, like coffee shops, breakfast spots would be one of the most popular eateries to open. Sure there are great places around town in random locations with zero atmosphere aside from the amassed a.m. crowd lingering outside for a table. But come on, LA is the place to see and be seen--right?

We want to stroll pre- and post-dining, or at least we like the idea of it, which is why streets like Roberston and Abbott Kinney have become such popular destinations for lunch and dinner. But still... what about breakfast?

Finally, LA has a “breakfast strip” and it cropped up along Santa Monica’s Montana Ave, a street that attracts a cross section of local color- from suited business men to young yoga moms, genius tech entrepreneurs to flip flop wearing writer/actor-types. With over a dozen restaurants and cafes serving up breakfast fare within a mere 17 blocks, one would think that the competition would be steep, but instead it’s like family. Here are a few of the favorites that elevate breakfast to a new level of foodie-goodness:

### **Stefan’s On Montana**

Yes, the Top Chef runner up has opened a second Santa Monica restaurant within 6 months of the first. But this one is a completely different scene. The small space is bright, homey, and simple with a single daisy atop each table and a firepit flickering on the far wall... well, it’s a streaming video of a wood-burning firepit on a flat screen mounted on the wall (no doubt an homage to his other spot- Stefan’s at LA Farm). And, unlike any other place on the street, the chef, yes Top Chef’s chef, is there cooking the line and greeting guests, adding definite flare to the environment. It’s the sort of spot that unexplainably just feels good and forces a smile on even the odd LA rainy day.

While it’s a total visual departure from The Farm (expect for the pit), Stefan scored once again when it comes to food. The daily breakfast, lunch (Panini and salad-heavy) and dinner (featuring fondue) are totally delectable. Want a taste?

Micky D’s Egg McMuffin never knew how good it could get. But Stefan saw its potential and transformed the tasty am drive-thru item into crave-worthy breakfast sandwich perfection with his “Like a Egg McMuffin.” The secret is apparently in the sauce, the hollandaise to be precise. You can, if you must, lighten it up by requesting your poached egg to be a poached egg white instead, shaving off a handful of fat grams while still maintaining the majority of its tastebud glory- but why? Another must- The Nutella and Banana-Stuffed French Toast pretty much defines breakfast decadence. The toast is brioche that’s griddled to become crunchy on the outside, soft on the inside, then it’s “stuffed” with generous amounts of Nutella and thinly sliced banana. The commercials claiming that Nutella is a healthy breakfast item just might make you feel better about the fact that you’re actually basically eating dessert for breakfast. Just try not to lick the plate. Still, the standout dish is definitely the House Benedict, a healthy rendition of the classic dish, this one comes with a poached egg white (yes, white), over avocado, steamed spinach, and an English muffin. But the signature component is, once again, the sauce- an olive-oil based tomato hollandaise (one of 4 made in house- regular, tomato, horseradish, chipotle).

I don’t know, a Santa Monica spot that attracts foodies with its menagerie of house-made hollandaise, health-nuts with its poached egg white benedicts, celeb-gawkers with Stefan on hand, oh, and animal-lovers with outdoor dog-friendly seating...? Only time will tell if this new spot of the star chef is a good idea, or a genius idea. I’m betting genius.

1518 Montana Ave. | (310) 394-7174 | [www.stefansonmontana.com](http://www.stefansonmontana.com).

### **Blue Plate**

After yet another mini-facelift, Blue Plate has emerged with an updated appearance, while retaining its same comforting breakfast fare. Apparently the locals would complain if any changes were made to the menu, and it’s no wonder. Yes, this spot is seemingly a Montana Ave. institution where regulars pop in not only regularly (as in weekly, or even daily), but sometimes twice daily (um, that’s borderline obsessive but considering that I’m known

to do the same thing, I should probably shut my mouth!

Shana, the manager, has been working in some of Montana's most beloved restaurants for 19 years and it's obvious. Guests know her by name, and she knows theirs. Yeah, you can pretty much say she has a following. And it's partially her presence that makes many come back day in and day out. It's like a family.

The food follows suit- comforting, and, because it is in Santa Monica- healthy, just like mama would make (or maybe the caretaker). The dishes are simple, clean, and super fresh with still bright green spinach poking out of Amy's Egg White Frittata (yes, again with the egg Whites), and yet to burst juicy blueberries popping out of the Blueberry Pancakes (which you have the option of ordering individually, two, or three- making them hard to resist as at least a side dish to something else without feeling the guilt of splurging). If the homey atmosphere inspires your need for some serious TLC, try the Hot Oatmeal with bananas and brown sugar or honey- I prefer the honey. Boost the antioxidant count by adding blueberries. What to drink in addition to the gigantic mug of coffee? Try a fruit and veggie combo like grapefruit, watermelon, and carrot, or cucumber, celery, and apple.

Feeling like settling in to your home away from home on the weekend? Wait in line. Literally. Due to the mobs of Blue Plate devotees, you'll be handed a beeper that will vibrate when it's finally your turn to be seated... just in case you stray away to "window shop" in the surrounding mom, pop, and the recent invasion of upscale chain stores along the street. Once it's your turn to return, try and get one of the two outside tables or a window seat- those are the most prized spots and offer the best people-watching views.

1415 Montana Avenue | 310.260.8877 | [blueplatesantamonica.com](http://blueplatesantamonica.com)

### **Babalu**

They might be most known for their almost too good for words baked goods (like Berry Rhubarb Pies stuffed so full they must weight 25 lbs or the German Chocolate Cakes stacked so high that you'll probably gain 25 lbs!), but you must try their Brunch served up only on Saturday and Sunday from 11:30am-5pm. The island-inspired theme that infuses both the décor and weekday lunch and dinner menus also inserts itself into both the weekend breakfast and brunch (breakfast for the early 8am birds, and brunch for those who imbibed maybe a touch to much the night before).

Whatever time you roll out of bed on the weekend, you will be revitalized by Babalu's big taste morning menus, yes menus- one entire menu is dedicated to brunch "specials" and the other, the regular brunch fare, well "regular" with an island twist. Try the Eggs Havana- their take on Huevos Rancheros- a southwestern tortilla topped with fried eggs, pico de gallo, avocado and jalapeno jack cheese. And in addition to your expected offering of fruit of home fries as a side, try the black beans to enhance the island flavor. For something sweet, look to the special pancake of the day. I lucked out with the pumpkin chocolate chip. Okay, so it sounds odd, but with morsels of chocolate that may hold their shape but are smoldering mounds of melted gooiness inside, trapped amidst the sweet soft pumpkin pillows of pancake, somehow tastebud heaven is formed. To wash it down, how about a bottomless mimosa, because, why not, it's the weekend! Hair of the dog?

And, obviously, you cannot leave without at least one baked good item. Not into an entire pie? Not even a piece? That's okay, try one of their notoriously giant cookies! All baked items are baked in-house daily, and if you saw the size of their dessert case, you'd know that that translates to a seriously high demand, a demand that, on special occasions, you can expect to wait in line (and order ahead of time) for.

1002 Montana Ave. | 310-395-2500 | [www.Babalu.info](http://www.Babalu.info)

### **17th Street**

Your old home-style spot is going through a bit of an identity revamp, and it's only adding to its character. Yes, Lenny Rosenberg, who previously owned Mayer's Bakery in the Palos Verdes and The Nosh Of Beverly Hills, is infusing the place with a few deli-favorites from his roots. Daily Breakfast and weekend Brunch now offer up his famous Matzah Brei, a homemade omelet of whipped eggs, milk and egg matzah as well as Egg Challah French Toast. Both of which are truly delish and somehow feel like home. Not to worry, the deli vibe is still coupled with the crowded brunch spot's popular starter- the banana date mini muffins in a bread basket that are requested my most even on weekdays when they're not served (but sometimes stocked anyway just in case).

Feeling the need to feel healthy (after all, this is Santa Monica, the health-nut hub of the world), you will not go wrong with the Whole Wheat Pancakes. Regardless of the carbs, the pancakes (which are so healthy they're hardly deserving the word "cake") come topped with warm cinnamon apple sauce, plus a touch of whipped cream (to temper the healthiness). Want something more traditional (and wholesome, as opposed to healthy)? Try the

Country Omelette stuffed with double smoked bacon, potatoes, and cheddar cheese, plus a side of, you guessed it, Home Fried Potatoes and fruit.

Seems the baked good concept is permeating the street with Lenny's newly renovated bakery upfront serving fresh-baked Black and White cookies (back to the deli idea) that you'd be amiss to go home without, Cinnamon Rugalah, and Red Velvet Cupcakes that just might rival your favorite sweet shop's. Oh, and if you're one of the throngs who can't help but come back for more, come in for breakfast and you'll get a 20% off coupon for dinner, dine for dinner and you'll get a 30% off coupon for breakfast! See... something for everyone!

1610 Montana Ave. | 310-453-2771 | [www.seventeenthstreetcafe.com](http://www.seventeenthstreetcafe.com)

### Kreation Kafe

Sometimes you "discover" a little gem of a restaurant that you wish you could put in your pocket and keep for yourself. Until you realize that that is A. Selfish, and B. Would mean that the spot would close from a lack of business and you would never get to savor its greatness again. That's Kreation Kafe. Regulars there take the whole "regular" concept a step further, creating a routine, a ritual even around the place. They show up on the same days, at the same time, sit at the same table, and order the same dish. I know because I've been doing it for over a year now.

The indoor/outdoor joint is the most interesting in design of them all. At first glance you'd think it only offers outdoor seating because, upon immediate entry you are faced with a small display case of Kombucha and random tarts and desserts, which stands beside the prep station, which leads into an open-ish pea-sized kitchen. Pass all that and you finally enter the main dining section in the back of the house consisting of a wall to wall farmers table for communal dining (or at least sitting very close to your neighbor), plus several individual 4-tops for diners who prefer not to sit shoulder to shoulder with a stranger. The walls do double duty as a garden with random cut outs filled with succulents and an array of grasses. It's beautifully organic... which makes sense considering that's the concept for the food too.

The organic, certified green breakfast, lunch and dinner spot serves up health-conscious dishes with Mediterranean flavors (think kabobs and tabouleh on the lunch and dinner menus). For breakfast, the must-have selections include Roman- two fried organic eggs (but you can ask for them poached or scrambled egg whites) topped with bruschetta that just begins to soak into the perfectly crunchy French baguette, and a side mixed green salad. Get the house-made hummus as an accompaniment. It's delicious without being overly salty, oily, or pungent and it's an oddly amazing pairing with the Roman. Not in the mood for eggs? The Fresh Blueberry Pancakes are a can't miss! The super thin (but not crepe thin) blueberry-dappled pancakes are topped with sliced bananas, California pistachios, and paired with real maple syrup and a shooter of Monavie Acai (that's meant to be drizzled on top, but lots of people sip it instead). But it's not just the food that people come for. It's the people- Kreation's people. Gil- the server, and Frank- the manager are not only seemingly always there, but their smiles permeate the place in a way that I swear is contagious. It's truly one of those places that you find yourself thinking about the night before, and even go to bed early for just so you can get there and dig in sooner.

1023 Montana Ave. | 310.458.4880 | [www.kreationkafe.com](http://www.kreationkafe.com)

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