

# Some of the Best Mexican Food in Town

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Camarones Rellenos are served in front of a small feast. Served with guacamole, sour cream, and salsa, the fried shrimp are breaded and stuffed with cheese and peppers. (Joshua Phillip/The Epoch Times)

NEW YORK—Gabriela's Restaurant offers a kaleidoscope of colorful dishes that dazzle the eyes and please the palate. The restaurant serves some of the best Mexican food you can find in the city, with dishes pulled directly from traditional family recipes.

Located at 688 Columbus Ave. on the Upper West Side, the restaurant is a favorite of the locals, gaining its popularity from a unique menu and large selection of

close to 80 tequilas. Most of the dishes are soft, with a fresh, clean flavor, hinted with a variety of sauces, light lemon, and herbs. Each table also has a bottle of authentic hot sauce.

It also doesn't hurt that most dishes are under \$20, with a lunch menu priced under \$10.

The dining area has a pleasant atmosphere. There's plenty of room, big tables, and a friendly staff. It combines traditional Mexican decorations with a hint of class—large wooded doors, fine drapes, and well-balanced lighting. There's also an outdoor dining area.

Among the more popular dishes is the Pollo Yucateco. It is served with beans, spanish rice, lettuce, tomato, and a side of tortillas. It also comes with a choice of sauces. The chicken is marinated with sauce made from lemon zest. Like many of the dishes, the taste is mild and pleasant, dancing with an array of flavors and hinted with a dash of lemon.



A fine meal of Pollo Yucateco, quesadillas, and tacos are served with a margarita and a side of tortillas. (Joshua Phillip/The Epoch Times)

Their tacos and flautas are also very good. The Flautas Jalisco are listed as appetizers, yet can act as a meal in themselves. They come lightly fried and have a soft, crunchy tortilla. Rolled inside is your choice of chicken, beef, or cheese. They come with cheese melted over the top and are served with a “tomatillo” sauce, which is made

from avocado and cilantro.

Kids often like quesadillas—which is a traditional dish of cheese melted between two tortillas. The

quesadillas served at Gabriela's are wonderful. They're also listed as an appetizer. They come with a side of guacamole, sour cream, and are sprinkled with chopped tomatoes and cheese. In addition to the cheese filling, you can also add beef, chicken, avocado, or tomato. They're bliss at first bite, combining a soft, lightly crunchy tortilla with an array of flavor.

Most of the dishes are served with fresh, homemade tortillas. The soft tortillas are the traditional way of preparation, yet may seem a bit strange for anyone accustomed to Taco Bell's nacho-like tortillas. A good tortilla should hold its shape and not break when rolled with meats and sauces. It should be soft, without being chewy. They should also have a light taste, not overpowering any other flavors. Gabriela's passes all the standards with flying colors.



Tamarindo (left), horchata (center), and jamaica (right) sit on a table at Gabriela's Restaurant. The three non-alcoholic drinks are a rare find that shouldn't be missed. (Joshua Phillip/The Epoch Times)

A surprising find is their horchata, jamaica, and tamarindo. These non-alcoholic drinks are rarely made well outside Mexico and Southern California, yet are pulled off nearly flawlessly at Gabriela's. Horchata is a creamy traditional drink made from rice

and cinnamon; jamaica is a sweet, floral drink made from hibiscus flowers; while tamarindo offers more of a fruity, tangy flavor and is made from tamarinds.

Another rare find is their mole'; a savory sauce made from chocolate, paprika, and other spices. It's often served over chicken and is available as an option for several dishes (including the Chicken Yucateco.) Mole' has a taste difficult to compare to anything else. It melts in a variety of spices, carried by a deep flavor.

The recipes are traditional family dishes from Yucatan, Mexico. According to Nat Milner, the owner of Gabriela's, the recipes came from a nanny working for Ardie Cutler, Milner's late uncle and the man who started it all. "He would come home from working at all these restaurants and the food was just tremendous that she was cooking in his house," Milner said.

The nanny's name was Gabriela Hernandez, hence the restaurant's name. Cutler was a friendly, "hungry man who knew what he liked," said Milner. He is attributed with the starting of several restaurants in the City, including Ollie's and Carmine's. Cutler brought Gabriela's family from Mexico to become his partners in the restaurant. All have since retired, leaving Milner as the owner.

What they've left is a colorful assortment of dishes that are hard to come by elsewhere.

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