

Forbes

A Meal Of True Dallas Delicacies Found At Smoke Restaurant

Many years ago when I was at the SEC, I made a speech in Dallas. I flew in and went to a big conference centre, made my speech and left. I saw – and, what’s worse, ate – absolutely nothing. Here I was, 30 years later, and I was determined not to make that mistake again, as I really do love barbecued beef.

To make up for my past experience, I flew in on a Sunday evening, even though my conference didn’t start until Monday evening. In this way, I knew I could eat not one – but two – meals before I would be on duty at the New Cities Foundation Summit. I had done a bit of research and found that local opinion thought Smoke served some of the best barbecue. Unfortunately, as I was a day early for the conference, there was no one around to share the experience with me. Undeterred, I asked the concierge to make me a reservation for one at Smoke, and went off with real anticipation.

This was Sunday night and, in addition, Fathers’ Day, and the restaurant was really packed. As I sat in the corner, I felt very lucky to have gotten a table in this busy, bustling, barbecue beef joint. I say that with lots of admiration and gratitude, because they seemed to have made room for me when the restaurant was really booked full. The restaurant was not fancy at all – just as you would expect. It had a big bar in the centre, with a back room that seemed even noisier than the front room where my little table in the corner was located. It was clear that the local customers were happy, as they indulged in their huge platefuls of luscious-looking meats.

As I sat there on my own, feeling very pleased with myself for being there, and about to order a huge dinner, I couldn’t help thinking back to my early days as a lawyer in 1975.

I had been sent to Boston to work for United Brands, and was quartered in the Commodore Hotel in the Prudential Centre. It was a perfectly ordinary, charmless, place, but it was near the office where I was working and was within walking distance of a shopping centre. As I knew no one, I ate alone in my hotel room every night. One day, however, when I couldn’t bear the thought of room service yet again, I booked a table at the restaurant in the Ritz Hotel to try dining alone. It was, unfortunately, a disaster. The head waiter put me on a table

right in the middle of the room, and, although today I am sure it wasn't true, I thought everyone was staring at me, thinking "what is wrong with this girl that no one will eat dinner with her?". I couldn't bear it and I fled after the first course, never to venture out of my

hotel for a meal on the rest of the trip. So I ate alone with a room service dinner every night for the next two months that I was there.

Now it is almost 30 years later, and things have changed. First of all, I am a confirmed foodie and lust after new and different local cuisines. Secondly, I write restaurant reviews, and dining alone is often the best way to actually taste the difference between barbecued beef in one restaurant and the same dish in the next one (which was the case here), and, thirdly, I have grown up!

Now I know to pick a table on the side of the restaurant in order to be inconspicuous, and to bring a book or newspaper for company. I also understand that the people in the restaurant have better things to do than stare at me in dismay.

So with this long preamble, there I was in Smoke. The TV at the bar was showing a sports, there was piped-in Country & Western music, and I was confronted with a great menu of Texas meals.

The only unfortunate thing about dining alone is that you can't taste everything on the menu, so I ordered carefully. For the first course, I chose smoked sausages. These were four varieties – all were different and, thankfully, only a half of each was served so it was like eating only two. They were grilled and well-done, which for me, even though I like rare meat, is the right way to eat sausages. Actually I like them burned, which these almost were, and they were spicy and interesting. Thankfully they were not too much to eat, because the next course was a big barbecued beef sandwich, with four different kinds of homemade barbecue sauce – spicy, sweet, mango and vinegar. Interestingly, the best was the traditional one that was already on the beef.

It was unbelievably delicious – the beef was pulled apart – but not too much – so it wasn't stringy, as it can be. In addition it was not just a slice of pot roast on a roll, which it also can be, and which doesn't taste authentic. The sandwich was basically filled with bite-size chunks of barbecued beef, with lots of sauce and lots of spice. The accompanying spicy coleslaw was perfectly piquant and set off the beef perfectly.

Link: <http://onforb.es/1qkLUYy>

Others around me ordered short ribs that looked great, and huge slabs of roast beef, but my barbecue beef sandwich was just what I had come to find.

I was truly in pig heaven – or should I say “cow heaven”, and then something even better happened: Dessert arrived!

It turns out that they have different ones every day, so there is no printed menu. My pretty waitress, however, suggested churros with caramel sauce or the key lime pie with soft meringue topping. This choice was too much for a mere mortal to handle, so the answer to each one was clearly “yes please”, and was I ever glad I said that. Out came both. The first was a plate of lovely warm little South American churros – which are like donuts, only long and thin and crusty on the outside and soft and mushy on the inside. Serving them with caramel sauce (which is my favourite) and whipped cream was a perfect idea, even though I skipped the whipped cream – you have to sacrifice something – especially when the fabulous key lime pie was following closely.

Delicious key lime pudding set in a homemade graham cracker crust (just like I used to make at home) was topped with a mountain of soft, sweet meringue that truly melted in your mouth. Even better, I separated some of the copious meringue and spread the mixture on the churros. The combination was much better than the whipped cream that had been provided. I could not believe how easily I ate both desserts without a bit of guilt or remorse. All I could think of was how lucky I was to be in there at this happy party, eating my way to barbecue heaven, and not having any one there to make me feel guilty.



SMOKE – a busy, bustling, barbecue beef joint

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