

Indian Pueblo Kitchen offers the Native cuisine of New Mexico at Reasonable Prices March 29, 2023

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BY **SHARON S. CALDWELL** FOR THE JOURNAL
PHOTOGRAPH BY SHARON S. CALDWELL FOR THE JOURNAL
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The last few years have seen the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center (IPCC) transform into one of the foremost dining hubs in the city. The area across the street from IPCC now hosts four restaurants, ranging from Laguna Burger and its famous green chile cheeseburgers, to the vegan diner Eatery from The Architects of Jemez Pueblo.

IPCC's flagship restaurant, Indian (Native) Kitchen, has also undergone a transformation. Beyond serving food to hungry tourists, the kitchen provides training and access to a commercial kitchen and marketplace for fellow Native chefs.

Chief Devala Becerra hails from the Acoma/Tamamogaitan area and is of Diné (Navajo) and Hopi descent. She is part of a vanguard of Native chefs gaining recognition and acclaim in the Southwest. This year's James Beard semifinalists for Best Chef Southwest include two Native chefs: (with a tie) David from the Navajo area and Anna Chang, Apache-Chiricahua of Gila-Guadalupe to Whiteriver, Arizona, from the Hopi/Mescalero/Gila/Winter-Mohave area.



When my friend and I approached the kitchen (that's before noon), the staff was clearly frustrated by the game-over waiting for a table. By the time we were seated, the wait had climbed to 25 minutes.

Chief Becerra's menu carries familiar names with Native touches like fry bread with the binges, and speaks to a diet of vegetables. There's a focus on locally-sourced ingredients and healthy options, as in a breakfast dish of Native Superfoods Waffles (\$12). Two oblong blue corn waffles arrived smothered with quinoa-muesli, farmers, protein nuts, and homemade and -made jams. Despite all the good stuff, the waffles were soggy, not crisp, and had a competing dairy flavor. The \$5 waffles, plus an odd turkey sausage, bacon or 5 pieces. I had the turkey sausage, several last time's about the size of three months. The very sausage is too dry, but these were nice with a sprig of cilantro and a good dash of the sweetener maple syrup.

The same assortment of ingredients lives up the Monte Cristo (\$10), Indian Pueblo Kitchen's version of a mini-Granddaddy of Mexican origin. The big bowl of turkey like corn porridge was topped with the corn, seeds and grains, and seasoned with herbs. It's everything you want in a breakfast, coffee, protein, and the good kind of fat that comes from meat.

A bowl of Fry Bread (\$10) stood out among New Mexican favorites like an Indian Taco (\$14) and Blue Corn Tortillas (\$12). Order a plate of three tacos, the hotly crusted oil ground pork was juicy and tender and packed up considerably less from the red chile-based tooth. Two more, slightly more blue corn muffins were not as good as the other bread. The fry is also available as a healthy option for \$4.



Photo by Sharon S. Caldwell for the Albuquerque Journal. Photo by Sharon S. Caldwell for the Journal.

The sandwich menu features a burger and three sandwiches for \$13 to \$17. The addition of roasted turkey to Pueblo Kitchen's version of the Monte Cristo (\$15), the classic french toast-meat-ham sandwich, made it like a decadent version of a club sandwich. It had a good balance between the fatch meats and cheese and the thick slices of dense, white Pueblo oven bread. A spread of red chile-infused masoperry preserves under the sandwich was a nice touch.

There are a few gluten-free options like the blue corn enchiladas. Gluten-free bread and bowls are available.

In contrast to the hurried host, our server was friendly and efficient even as she covered a wide swath of the dining room. When I had to flag her down to pay the check, she was quite apologetic and gave us a couple of Pueblo Cookies for free. The thick cookies were pretty dry, but the gesture was still appreciated.

The latest iteration of Indian Pueblo Kitchen offers a good introduction to the rich cuisine of New Mexico at reasonable prices. It's a welcome addition to the city's growing number of Native chefs and their supporting.

INDIAN PUEBLO KITCHEN
 2500 Central Ave. NE
 ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87106
 LOCATION: 2401 17th St. NW 505-724-5147
 HOURS: 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Tuesday-Monday, Closed Monday
 BEER AND WINE

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