

ZAGATSURVEY

2004 TIKRIT RESTAURANTS



What's New

Despite their notoriously poor table manners, lack of culinary knowledge, questionable hygiene, and absence of funds to dine out, I've always held out great hope for the Iraqi dining scene. And with the overthrow of Saddam's regime, I've not been disappointed. Iraqis have reinvented themselves as gastronomic enthusiasts. (Almost) Gone are the days of unrestrained cardamom usage (on Kashi Lean? Come on, people!). And now commonplace, throughout the country, are dishes expertly accented with cilantro, dill, and-yes!-mesquite.

Noisy Neighborhoods: Keep an eye out for the ever-inventive Tigris region. This bustling area has seen a surge in activity and promises to deliver the goods in 2004 and beyond.

Tightening the Belt: With unemployment teetering around 80%, savvy Iraqi restaurateurs have been forced to cut corners, in an effort to ride out the difficult economic times. One reviewer remarked that "it was a bit unsettling to see the numerous chefs rummaging for vegetable bits in the outhouse refuse pit," especially noting he had just polished off the butterbean and corn appetizer.

Since the average cost of a meal, including concubine, is a mere 7¢, budget eats promise to bolster Iraqi efforts to strengthen an ever-expanding-and-impressive--culinary resumé.

Jerry Soverinsky
Halabjah, Iraq
May, 2004

10 Notable Farewells

1. Saddam Palace I
2. Saddam Palace II
3. Saddam Palace III
4. Saddam Palace IIb
5. Praise Saddam
6. Saddam is Great
7. Saddam is Excellent
8. Hussein! Hussein!
9. Uday and Qusay's Rainforest Café
10. Taco Saddam Hussein Bell

F D S C

Cheesecake Factory **30 21 18 8c**

■ "A menu as long as Saddam's atrocities" awaits "unruly mobs" of diners clamoring for "yummy salads" and "a Pasta Da Vinci that's to die for." Dissenters maintain that "it's nothing more than American imperialism" masquerading as "the quintessential dessert" with a "vanilla bean cheesecake that's overrated." PS: the Halabjah location now offers carryout.

Chuck E. Cheese **24 21 7 2c**

■ Insisting that "the walking rat [mouse] is too damn scary," diners complain that "this isn't fun, it's chaos," "even for Arabs," in addition to which, "the fountain sodas are syrupy." Supporters praise a pizza pie that's "every bit as good as keftah" "without the noxious late-night gas."

Emeril's **21 21 21 6c**

■ Fans of Food TV's omnipresent food guru gush over "shrimp jambalaya that melts in the mouth" and homemade marscapone that "you'd happily kill your sister over." While some moan "what's with the smiling Emeril posters over the urinals?" most are only too happy to fork over "a handsome bounty" for "copious meals" that while "lacking finesse," are "welcome alternatives to starvation."

ESPN Zone **16 21 15 5c**

■ "Paradise without the virgins," this Euphrates newcomer in the refurbished Tikrit Garment District offers "groovy burgers" and "sinful fries" in a "jihad-like atmosphere that never slows down." Dissenters grumble "TV coverage emphasizes too much basketball, not enough squash" with "arcade games that are difficult to learn" and "Zone Queso Chips that fail to hold their dip."

Hooters **30 30 30 5c**

■ "Titties galore!" gush male regulars to this Tuz newcomer located in a converted elementary school. While "the trademark wings are scrumptious," don't overlook the quesadillas that "are consistently flavorful" despite cheese that some lament "tastes dirty." Most caution "beware of man-juice that puddles under four-tops"; lazy busboys are only too willing to let it "crust over." One admirer whines, "I wish we hadn't been Westernized, I'd love to rape the shit out of the hostess."

Joe's Crab Shack **28 28 28 3c**

■ "Kooky and capricious" with "a waitstaff that's wackier than [former Iraqi Information Minister] Muhammed Saeed al-Sahaf," this "modestly-priced" seafood "hits the spot" with "consistently good fare" and a "crab daddy feast that unites Shiites and Sunnis alike." While its "coconut shrimp misses the mark," local Arab children are "so smitten with the popcorn shrimp" that they "routinely dance a jig."

Olive Garden **17 21 22 6c**

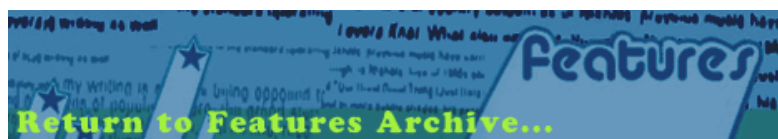
■ Ululating locals flock to this "smart Italian" that serves "kick-ass chicken Vesuvio" in a "convivial and welcoming atmosphere" that's a "welcome respite from ranting sheiks." While detractors cite long lines that would "dwarf the Haj," most maintain that "the capellini pomodoro makes everything seem sane." PS: the Bustamli location now serves "wonderfully-complex" California Rieslings.

McDonald's **28 28 28 3c**

■ "ḡḡḡḡḡ! ḡḡḡ ḡḡḡḡḡ!" exclaim those impressed by the "delicious, fat-laden burgers" and "Allah-sized sodas" that leave diners searching for a "comfy sofa" to decompress their "quickly-expanding asses." While some point out that "everything tastes the same," supporters respond, "Stay at home, you nitpicking mother-fuckers. More for us." PS: Drive-thru now available in Tikrit (owing to local bombing).

Panda Express **23 11 16 3c**

■ Tikrit natives "really dig" the "black pepper chicken that tastes like camel" at these fast-food Far East favorites. While "décor is nothing to write home about," the "smiling line cooks can disarm the most violent guests," and its veggie spring rolls are "manna wraps from heaven." Dissenters warn against dining on Sundays, when "the place is swarming with Jews" who "frequently ask to switch tables."

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