



MEMORIES OF MEXICO With a tropical atmosphere and terrific food, Las Palapas is the next best thing to being there.

Viva Las Palapas!

**MARVELOUS MEXICAN RESTAURANT
A TROPICAL TREAT** by Noelle Chorney

LAS PALAPAS
910 VICTORIA AVE
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When I heard Las Palapas was opening on Victoria Avenue—offering a resort-like escape from the months when it is difficult to enjoy being a prairie person—I thought, “These guys could be on to something.”

And happily, they are. On my first visit, I knew they had a hit on their hands—we stopped in on a dismal, rainy May evening, and were immediately buoyed by the bright, tropical colours, energetic music, and servers dressed as if they really were working at a resort in Mexico or Cuba. It certainly put us in the mood to focus on our experience instead of the dreary weather, so we had ourselves a margarita.

The menu reflects the ‘getting away from it all’ theme very well. I was most excited to find a selection of shrimp dishes that immediately carried me back to a trip to Mazatlan. I never thought I’d have a

chance to taste coconut-battered shrimp again, and yet there they were, along with jerk-style, classic peel and eat, or chipotle selections.

There are several other appetizer options, including a series of chicken wing flavours, guacamole, and nachos topped with your choice of meat, and a daily ceviche (cold citrus marinated seafood)—none of which are more than \$12. Since I was enamoured with the shrimp, we ordered those—as well as the ceviche, since it’s hard to find in Saskatoon.

Amazingly, the shrimp were even better than the ones from Mazatlan. Despite the fact that the shrimp in Mexico had been recently pulled from the ocean, Las Palapas did more justice to them, using a lighter, more coconutty batter, and offering a delicious sweet chili dipping sauce.

Our entrees that evening were also very good, although I liked everyone else’s dishes better than my fish taco. I think the tacos just have plainer flavours (not bad, just not as interesting) than the burrito and enchilada combinations—which were delightful. And the chef’s specialties stand out even more—I mooched as many bites of my friend’s Ribeye de Jalapa, dredged in coffee grounds and topped with chilies and pickled onions, as she would allow.

Even the side dishes stand out—and with sweet potato fries as the standard side, how can you go wrong? Each taco, enchilada, burrito or quesadilla comes with a choice of two side dishes, including the fries, a tasty and tangy bean salad, refried beans, Spanish-style rice, or a tossed salad. That translates to lots of delicious food on your plate.

I also stole several mouthfuls of my husband’s black bean and roasted veggie burrito. It was delicious, full of caramelized vegetables, cheese and beans. My husband has become a burrito convert—almost every time we’ve been back to Las Palapas, he’s gone for one. His new love is the Big Burrito, a combination of beef, pork, lots of sauce, and vegetables.

As for myself, I’ve fallen in love with the pozole, a slow-simmered Mexican hominy soup. It’s a meal in itself at lunchtime, although I often like to pair it with the fresh and delicious shrimp and avocado salad, to share with my lunch date. The soup is available in a pork, chicken or vegetable broth. You can customize your bowl at the pozole bar, which offers fresh cheeses, chilis, salsa, fried tortillas, radishes, pickled onions and other treats to add to your soup. The broth is delicious by itself, and with the added fun of making your soup different every time, I can’t resist. I confess that I often take a little pile of pickled onions (made in-house) to nibble on without adding them to my soup.

On a recent visit, we also sampled the Doubles Diablo, a Jamaican appetizer of simmered, not-too-spicy chickpea and pita sandwiches. We’ve also enjoyed the Veracruz-style snapper, topped with tomato and olive sauce, the seafood enchiladas, and the Kahlua Fruit Fondue. The fondue was more pudding-like than fondue-like, but it was still worthy of dipping pineapple.

We still have yet to make our way through the entire menu, despite our frequent trips back to Las Palapas. I’ve got the nachos in my sights, as well as the chicken stuffed with chorizo and seafood. Oh yes, and the mango cheesecake just might happen to fall into my mouth in the near future as well.

In fact, we’re almost looking forward to winter, if only so that we can cozy up in the bright and cheery atmosphere at Las Palapas and pretend we’re somewhere warm.

