

Caribbean Flavas: Best food eva?

Starving Students think this place rocks the casbah.

By Jacqueline LeBlanc and Matt Cormier

The Starving Students wanted to spice things up. They decided to follow the curry smell downtown and ended up in front of Caribbean Flavas, situated at 123 York Street in Fredericton.

Jackie's verdict:

I've been meaning to try Caribbean Flavas for quite some time. I had often caught a glimpse of the snazzy décor as I walked by its window on York Street, and I wondered what the menu looked like. I had an inkling it would satisfy my taste buds. I was right.

As soon as I walked into the spacious restaurant, I already knew I would enjoy my experience. The colourful walls and Caribbean décor transported me to some all-inclusive resort down south. I could already taste the delicious spices, and I had just crossed the threshold.

I don't usually spend too much time of the review discussing service, but this time, I can't remain silent. Caribbean Flavas had, by far, the best service I have ever encountered. The moment we entered the place, our jackets were taken and hung up for us in the closet. Our chairs were pulled out for us as we were seated. Every time one of the staff members (who are all part of the same family) came to our table, they treated us with utter respect, courtesy and politeness. I felt like royalty.

Now the best part: the menu. The menu was filled with a variety of delicious Caribbean dishes. Everything had odd spices or sauces I had never really heard of. Many of the meals included coconut, something I steer clear of as a rule. But there was still lots for me to choose from.

To start, we shared an order of beef samosas (\$6.50) that put the market's ones to shame. I never understood why anyone would stand in the cold for a samosa, but these delicious goodies shun light on Fredericton's favourite triangle treat. We also tried a Caribbean seashell (\$7). I swear to you, I licked every bit of that contraption off my side plate. (Subtly with my finger, of course. I'm not a complete pig!) For my main dish, I ordered a tropical steak (\$20). This was no ordinary steak. It was the best steak I've had in this city. It was tender, had a lovely, spicy coating and had a scrumptious red pepper sauce drizzled over the whole plate. The steak came with a side of sweet potato fries - a Jackie favourite.

No room for dessert, I polished off my meal with a piping hot cup of peppermint tea (\$2.25).

This meal was perfect. Everything about Caribbean Flavas made me swoon. All but the prices, which are quite hefty. My argument, though, is that since the joint isn't licensed, you end up paying the same as you would elsewhere. Also, the prices are similar to other gems in the city such as Racines or Amicis. If you're up for a great meal, check out Caribbean Flavas.

The owner stopped us on our way out to promote his new initiative. Wanting to appeal to

hungry Frederictonians who want something different than wing nights or nacho nights, he's decided to create an appetizer night at his restaurant. For \$10, he said patrons could have a healthy portion of exotic appetizers - what he called a 'party platter'. Sounds like I have a date every Tuesday night.

I give Caribbean Flavas a 10 out of 10. I want more.

Now.

Matt's verdict:

It's very difficult to find a place that has both a unique menu and delicious food. This isn't so much a fault of those restaurants who strive to offer something different, but rather of our Atlantic Canadian taste buds. We're simply used to certain things, and many of us will prefer foods that are familiar. Nonetheless, finding the type of dish that is both original and great tasting is a great feeling.

Our foray into Caribbean Flavas was expected to fall into the usual exotic food mould. I imagined we would opt for a few "unique" dishes, find ourselves broadening our cultural horizons, and leave with a feeling that it was generally as good as many of the other places we've visited. I was wrong.

The place was moderately busy, but nothing ridiculous. A door greeter asked for our jackets upon entry, which was kind of snazzy. Caribbean music set the tone, mixing with an overall décor that was mostly bright and festive, though not overly. I also found it quite interesting that the restaurant was built with an open kitchen concept, meaning that you could effectively watch the cooks and staff as they bustle to and fro, preparing meals. In many cases, open kitchens tend to result in more noise than usual, but not here. In fact, I barely heard more than a low sizzle throughout the entire evening, which is certainly commendable.

We were led to our seats and given menus without needing to wait. A vast majority of the menu was comprised of things I had never seen, as expected. Mostly due to our inability to make any single choices this evening, we settled on a pair of appetizers. The first was a serving of beef samosas (\$6.50). They arrived in halves, cooked to retain a perfect measure of crispiness, and complete with a delicious dipping sauce. The only negative thing I might say about this dish is that it left me wanting another two, maybe three servings - they were just that good. Samosas being as popular as they are in Fredericton, I'm amazed I had never so much as heard mention of what may possibly be the best ones in town.

With the order of samosas properly inhaled, we set our sights on our second appetizer - a Caribbean seashell (\$7). Logic suggests I would be disappointed by this one, considering how won-

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drous the last order had been. Fortunately, this would not be the case at all. In fact, while the samosas were quite possibly the best in the city, the concoction that was this Caribbean Seashell was almost certainly the best appetizer I have ever eaten - period. I could barely describe what it was mind you, except maybe to say that it resembled a sort of thick, chowder-like substance, complete with seafood treats inside. At the risk of embracing a drastically abused cliché - not that asserting it makes it right - you have not lived until you have tried this appetizer.

What could I possibly expect from the main course? I chose a jerk red grouper (\$20), in no small part because I'd never tried grouper, and, in

all honestly, knew nothing more of it than that it was some sort of fish. The price tag was moderately hefty in comparison with other places, but it was still a brilliant choice. I fully enjoyed every single bite, and was left, once again, hoping in vain that another serving would magically appear on my plate. It came with a side of rice, arranged in an upturned cone shape. Though the seashell remained the highlight of the evening, the grouper's slightly tangy, slightly spicy taste came very close to usurping the freshly crowned king. All in all, to give Caribbean Flavas anything less than a maximum 10 on 10 review would be nothing short of blasphemy. I implore you to make a point of going there, if only for an appetizer or two.

Cheers. [i]