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Giddyup, There!

A taste of Scottsdale reveals cosmo-cuisine in cowboy country

June 05, 2008

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Jewish Exponent Feature

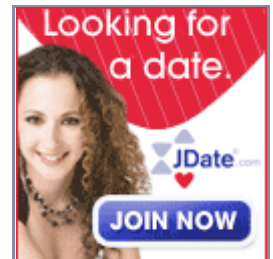
For many eastern U.S. Jewish families and retirees (my paternal grandparents included), Phoenix/Scottsdale has historically been a go-to destination -- so much so that it has now grown into America's fifth largest city.

That said, 21st-century Scottsdale (even with its rustic "Old Town" co-existing next to all things new and different) is hardly the sleepy little place where your parents or grandparents hid out between November and March.

Thanks to fashion and foodie-ism, Scottsdale is bustling with superb concept restaurants, uber-hip shopping areas and boutique hotels. While the recent Giants-Patriots Super Bowl showdown took place in nearby Glendale, much of the real action was downtown Scottsdale, where celebrities and general visitors alike seemed surprised at how the city had come of age.

That weekend, the W Hotel Scottsdale hosted a preview and ultimate tailgate party for its soon-to-open property with savory nibbles from "it" sushi spot Sushi Roku, and performances by P. Diddy, Snoop Dog and Kid Rock. Even with this youthful streak running through the city (long after Eli Manning and fellow athletes scored on the field and in celebrity gifting lounges), there is plenty of dignified sophistication to be found.

Thanks to the visionary restaurateurs of Spaghetti Western Productions, downtown Scottsdale can reveal an artsy side beyond its fabled art galleries. SeaSaw is a clean canvas -- it looks like many other neighborhood sushi bars -- where 2007 James Beard-winning chef Nobu Fukuda creates works of art with fresh fish and vegetables. Flavors are



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complex and extraordinary, though it's hard to get past how beautiful his creations look.



It's cowboy country with Rancho De Los Caballeros, a must-see site.

both in terms of flavor (flawless dishes meant for sharing) and visually (the restaurant's curving runway points in the direction of Mix, a multilayered shopping experience that rivals Scoop in New York and Fred Segal in L.A.).

By night, Canal, thanks to its waterfront location (a local canal turned destination, thanks to revitalization efforts by the city, and the various restaurant and retail-development companies) transforms readily into a nightclub tailor-made for hipsters of all ages over 21.

Estate House hosted private parties throughout Super Bowl weekend, thrilling the likes of John Travolta and Paris Hilton. Based on the quality of its neighboring restaurants, however, its charm is sure to outlast the fleeting glimpse of fame and embrace locals, just as the other restaurants do.

Deli Delicious

Uptown, near Scottsdale Road and Shea Boulevard, if it's the flavors of home you crave ("home" being Philadelphia or New York), Chappy's Deli does it well -- no frills, all locals and great food. And if you want the frills and the exotic, Ling & Louie's has the whole Asian-fusion thing going, but in a format that is family-friendly in terms of price and selection.

And when not noshing but in the mood for some soul food: The Jewish Collection -- and extensive assemblage of Judaica -- recently opened here.

Meanwhile, back at the Rancho ... The time-tested Rancho De Los Caballeros in Wickenburg has fit the bill for several generations of Jewish families from New York, Chicago, Boston and Philadelphia wanting to put their city-slicker ways on the back shelf for a few days or weeks.

While the 50-year-old resort 60 miles northwest of Phoenix metro has a few modern touches (such as their posh day spa) and one of the best resort golf courses in the United States (as cited by *Golf Digest*), the overall flavor of the experience is old-

Cowboy Ciao, down the road a-piece, brings just a touch of rustic Italian flavor to traditional and solid upscale Western fare. They also have originality, with a particularly extraordinary chopped salad with the most unconventional ingredients and superb chops.

Canal (owned and managed by another restaurant group, Savory Scottsdale), serves up a different sort of fusion-comfort food combined with runway fashion. Though this sort of concept has been tried before (Fashion Café in New York failed spectacularly), Canal's lunch hour subtlety and local color works



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school cowboy charming.

While Phoenix metro (Chandler) does have the lovely, Native-American managed Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort with adjoining casino, Rancho De Los Caballeros is a Western getaway in every sense of the word (especially for adults, as the resort has had a chock-o-block kids' program and family-specific activities in place since 1948). There are times when fewer bells and whistles means more of a good thing.



As for food? There is dining a plenty at Canal's (above and below).



Rancho De Los Caballeros has all the comforts of home, if those comforts include horseback-riding, skeet-shooting, tennis, cultural seminars and antiquing in nearby Wickenburg.

Between skeet-shooting, mesquite campfires, bird-watching and nature hikes, or even a desert-inspired treatment at Spa De Los Caballeros, you can enjoy fantastic coffee in the resort's library, and either play poker or brush up on your history. Beyond the hodge-podge of old mystery novels and card tables, guests can read about local Native American culture, or dig a little further to uncover the property's many volumes of photo albums dating back to Rancho Caballero's opening.

To keep heading "West," destination-wise, be sure to take the time to drive along the backroads for more surprises, such as character-filled local diners and shops.

For more information, visit: www.arizonaguide.com or the Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau at: www.scottsdalecvb.com.

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