

Groove is in the heart

Rambo's Kitchen boasts diverse, inexpensive fare and hippie charm

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Rambo's Kitchen
6085 S. Fort Apache Road; 722-2626.



There was a time, long before my years as a metal head and my stint as a punk rocker, when it probably would have been fair to describe me as a hippie. I'm not saying I'm proud of it -- but I definitely remember tie-dyeing my jeans and refusing haircuts for a few years.

Perhaps that's why I like Rambo's Kitchen. If I were to choose one word to describe the tiny sandwich shop on South Fort Apache Road, that word would be "groovy." The place looks like the interior of a Volkswagen Microbus. The color scheme makes me wonder if somebody recently legalized L.S.D. without telling me. And some of the sandwiches seem as though they were inspired by a really good hit of weed. On top of that, the place is named after a dog. And the day-glo color scheme of the menu is practically unreadable without a pair of sunglasses. Yeah, I'm definitely sticking with "groovy."

Lest you think I exaggerate when I allude to the cuisine being inspired by a strong dose of THC, allow me to point out some of the menu items that I doubt would exist absent a severe case of the munchies. Among the many hamburger offerings is one topped with peanut butter and bacon (\$9.89), and another stuffed with a combination of cheeses and then topped with pulled pork, barbecue sauce and an onion ring (\$10.49). Breakfast options include a three-egg burrito with red and green peppers, onions, potatoes, sausage, cheddar, guacamole and salsa (\$7.49) and a Monte Cristo made with deep-fried raspberry-vanilla bread, ham, turkey and Swiss cheese (\$9.89).

Hippie distractions aside, the menu is actually pretty diverse and incredibly well-priced. In addition to assorted sandwiches, there's a full menu of breakfast options that are available all day. A pair of eggs with your choice of sausage or bacon is \$5.69. Biscuits and gravy with sausage is \$5.29. And a single pancake will only set you back \$1.50.

If you're more in the mood for a dinner entree, the assortment is just as good, with nothing costing more than \$15. Chicken-fried steak is reasonably priced at just \$10.98. Meat loaf is \$11.98, 50 cents more with gravy. A chicken breast with your choice of two side dishes is \$9.89. A pair of pork chops with a choice of salad or soup, a potato, vegetables and a roll is the most expensive thing on the menu, coming in at \$14.89 -- although if you're willing to settle for just one chop, it'll only cost you \$11.89.

Better yet, the place has more specials than any other restaurant I know. Daily lunch specials are offered for \$7. Dinner specials are less than \$10. Sunday features all-you-can-eat pancakes for just \$3.99. Wearing tie-dyed clothing will automatically knock 10 percent off your bill. And if you drive up in a car manufactured before 1971 you'll save 15 percent.

Unfortunately, as much as I like the concept of Rambo's, the preparation doesn't always live up to my expectations. A perfect example is the "signature" Rambo Dog: a hot dog topped with pulled pork, chopped onion rings and a choice of cheddar or coleslaw (\$8.29). It's a delicious-sounding concept. But I don't care how kind the bud was, anyone with kitchen experience should know you can't pile that many ingredients onto a typical skimpy hotdog roll. Sure, it tastes great. But you end up eating it one ingredient at a time.

I've had other, similar problems at Rambo's. Sometimes the chips spend just a bit too long in the fryer. Once they forgot I'd asked to substitute turkey for pastrami on my Reuben. Given the friendliness of the staff, I almost feel bad for pointing out their flaws. But the fact is, they're not small mistakes. More attention to detail would make Rambo's a better restaurant.

But maybe that would mess with the laid-back feel. As it stands, I'm willing to put up with a few problems to support a restaurant that has such a distinctive personality. And when I'm spending \$10 on a meal, I'm a lot more forgiving than I am at places with a higher price point. Or maybe I just like the place's hippie vibe.

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