

A trip to Louisville just for the food

From barbecue to Indian, this city has many choices

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For The Dominion Post

Mention Louisville, Ky., and three things come to mind: horses, baseball bats and barbecue.

During a recent frigid weekend visit, we focused on the food and found a lot to like. The culinary delights of Louisville, the 16th largest city in the U.S., range from exotic and pricey to comfort foods which are easy on the stomach and the pocket book.

We stopped in at Mark's Feed Store (marksfeedstore.com) in Middletown, a local chain barbecue restaurant. The hickory smoke drifting through the parking lot left no doubt in our minds that this was the real thing. The decor was slightly less authentic, but we quickly realized that what you hang on the wall matters not when serving up pig as mean as Mark's. Once seated, we wasted no time asking our server for recommendations.

"Ribbs."

We ordered a round of sweet teas and an appetizer.

Feeling adventurous, we asked about the deep-fried pickles. Imagine a potato chip with a sour kick, then drench it in Mark's Original or Red sauce. We preferred a little bit of both. The Original had a kick of mustard, what we'd think of as Carolina style. (Don't tell anybody in Louisville we said that.) The Red was the tomato-based sauce, smoky with a touch of honey. We all opted for pork selections, either pulled pork or ribs.

It was easy to see why Mark's had been voted "Best of Louisville" seven times for their ribs and barbecue by readers of *Louisville Magazine*. The only thing on the menu we weren't sure of was a local dish called burgoo, essentially a spicy stew with vegetables, chicken and pork. It was tasty, but next time we'd pass and order more ribs. Mark's dessert specialty is Buttermilk Pie — think creme brulee with crust — topped with vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce. It was a wonderful finish.

Upon receiving the check, our server's eyes twinkled and she said, "Since this is y'all's first time at Mark's, the manager will be by to talk to you, and your dessert is on us." The manager gave us a first-timers' survey to fill out



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Mark's Feed Store is known for its barbecue and has been voted "Best of Louisville" seven times for its ribs and barbecue by *Louisville Magazine*.



Personalize your own bat at the Louisville Slugger Museum.

and brought each couple a large bottle of the Mark's Original BarBQ Sauce and two 15 percent off cards to be used over the next 30 days. Incidentally, when we filled out the question about what we liked most about Mark's, "the sauce" was a given.

Lite meal platters were \$4.79, while meal combos went as high as \$14.99.

Ernesto's is a local place serving authentic Mexican food at a reasonable price. Entrees run between \$6.95 and \$11.95, and there are daily specials throughout the week. The atmosphere at

the Shelbyville location is scaled back with across-the-border decor in need of a little touch-up, but the service and food were wonderful.

Having spent a large amount of time in Mexico, we judge all Mexican restaurants on their chips, salsa and cheese. Ernesto's homemade chips and salsa scored big with our group; and the white cheese literally melted in our mouths. Our various entrees consisted of traditional chilaquiles (tortilla chips covered in grilled chicken, white cheese and red sauce), beef and chicken enchiladas and hard tacos with beef, all served with refried beans and rice.

India Palace Restaurant (indiapalaceky.com) was next on our list. It is a privately owned restaurant which offers everything Indian from naan breads to desserts like Gulab Jamun and Kheer.

Appetizers and sides range from \$2.50 to \$8.95, while meals come in around \$7.95 to \$15.95. Because some of our dining party had never tried Indian food, we started with regular and garlic Naan, vegetable samosas and pakoras, and papa dams, which weren't on the menu, but they were happy to accommodate us.

For our meals, we passed around servings of chicken curry, chicken punjabi, chicken karahi and chana masala, a chick pea dish with a red sauce. The karahi with its stir-fried onions, bell peppers and tomato-based sauce was the biggest hit, though the entire dining experience was relaxing and rewarding.

And, of course, what destination isn't ranked by travelers nationwide for its pizza? Though Louisville is home to the Papa John's franchise, we opted for a small local chain, Wick's Pizza Parlor and Pub (wickspizza.com), which provided us with funky atmosphere and incredible pizza.

There are four locations; we visited the one in Middletown. Four of us split the cheese bread — basically a pizza crust covered with garlic butter, and Mozzarella and Romano cheeses, then baked. Next, we ordered a 16-inch pie with pepperoni and mushrooms and had plenty to box up for leftovers.

The dinner with four drinks ran us about \$35. In addition to pizza, Wick's offers salads, "sandwiches" and pasta dishes. Appetizers cost between \$3.50 and \$9.25, while pizzas and meals range from \$5.99 to \$31.50, depending on toppings.

Any visitor to Louisville should tour the countryside and its many horse farms, as well as the Louisville Slugger Museum downtown — as soon as they figure out how to pronounce Louisville. Where else can you get a personalized Louisville Slugger bat? But given the choice, we'd consider trading the baseball bat for more of that buttermilk pie.