



Mi Ranchito Steak & Seafood

by Rich Belmont



Food for Thought reader Jenny Parker contacted me to recommend Mi Ranchito in Dubuque. She writes the “food was excellent and the customer service even better”. Thank you Jenny! You obviously know good food when you taste it. Members of my tasting team and I have now been to Mi Ranchito several times and can confirm Jenny’s experience.

This restaurant is no ordinary cheese and cilantro Mexican eatery claiming to offer “authentic” Mexican cuisine. Rather it is a Mexican Steak and Seafood Restaurant. In fact the menu cover states “We are not authentic, we are homemade”. By this the owners mean their kitchen goes beyond the definition of authentic meaning conforming to the original Mexican cuisine in style and methods. They cook everything on their menu from fresh ingredients and only prepare it when you order it as if you were visiting their home in the old country.



Mi Ranchito is owned by the Luna family and opened in September, 2013. Alberto Luna grew up on a farm in Arperos in the State of Guanajuato, Mexico. His father brought the family to California and then to Chicago. Alberto grew up in Mount Prospect, IL.

After spending a few years as a musician and visiting his hometown where he met his future wife, Gloria, Alberto returned to Illinois to begin a career in restaurants. He worked his way up from dishwasher to cook to manager

in several fine dining establishments including Jameson’s Charhouse, Mount Prospect; La Hacienda de los Fernandez, Addison; and Jimmy’s Charhouse in Elgin.

When Alberto relocated to the Galena area he continued his career at Chestnut Mountain Resort. He says he also learned a great deal from working with Emiliano Ramirez at Salsa’s Dubuque and with Juan Dorantes at L. May Eatery in Dubuque and Ayala’s in Galena.

Mi Ranchito Steak & Seafood

1091 University Avenue, Dubuque, IA 52001
563-556-0563 / Facebook.com/MiRanchitoDubuque

HOURS: Mon – Wed, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Thu – Sat, 11 a.m. – 9 p.m., Sun 11 a.m. - Close

DINING STYLE: Come as you are

NOISE LEVEL: Conversational

RECOMMENDATIONS: Queso Fundido Oaxaca, Guacamole & Chips, Coctel De Camaron, Chicken or Chorizo or Chicharron Burrito, Gloria’s Quesadilla, Torta Steak, Torta de Tinga de Pollo, Carne Asada de Mi Ranchito, Milanesa de Pollo, Camarones al Mojo De Ajo, Carnitas Michoacán, Paella Valenciana Huevos a La Mexicana, Pastel de Tres Leches

LIQUOR SERVICE: None

PRICES: Lunch: \$2.50 to \$7.98, Dinner: \$2.50 to \$21.99

PAY OPTIONS: Cash, Debit, All Credit, Local Checks

ACCESSIBILITY: Ramp to Front Door and Restrooms

KIDS POLICY: Menu, High Chair, Booster

RESERVATIONS: Yes **CATERING:** Yes

TAKE OUT: Yes **DELIVERY:** No **PARKING:** On Street

Alberto is very lucky he met Gloria on one of his hometown visits. She is also from Arperos and many of Mi Ranchito’s recipes come from her grandmother and mother. Alberto and Gloria are seen here with their son, Jesus and goddaughter and waitress, Angelica Flores.

They always dreamed of owning their own ranch. So after years of saving they finally got to open Mi Ranchito which means “My Little Ranch”. Admittedly it’s not a ranch but it is a great place to experience real Mexican food and not the Americanized version.



When you sit down in Mi Ranchito you are immediately warmly greeted and served warm corn tortilla chips and pico de gallo, salsa verde and salsa roja. The pico de gallo is fresh, uncooked chopped tomato, white onions and chile peppers. The homemade green sauce is a purée of tomatillos, onions, jalapeños, garlic, sea salt, black pepper and olive oil. The red sauce is a mixture of boiled tomatillos, tomatoes, onion, black pepper, sea salt, garlic, guajillo and pulla peppers.

These condiments are not just to be enjoyed with the chips. They can be put on anything you order. They are fairly mild so if you are like me and like to spice up your food with hot sauce (salsa picosa) just ask your server for a hotter version. The kitchen will gladly prepare either salsa roja or salsa verde with extra jalapeños added in.

Even though you are served complimentary chips I highly recommend you try the Guacamole (pictured next to the salsa below left). When you order it avocados are hand mashed with extra virgin olive oil, sea salt, black pepper and pico de gallo. It is so fresh and thick you need to use a chip as a shovel to put it onto the chip you are eating.

The Queso Fundido Oaxaca (wuh-HAH-kuh) is also excellent. This is not Oaxaca cheese but is the Oaxaca style of melted Pepperjack cheese with jalapeños slices and crumbled chorizo sprinkled on top.

Incidentally you will find several of the entrées contain chorizo. Alberto makes this Mexican sausage himself. He takes a mixture of 2/3 beef and 1/3 pork and marinades it with salt, garlic, pulla and chipotle peppers. The resulting flavor is wonderful not because it is spicy hot but because it has the smoky taste of the chipotles.



Since this is a seafood restaurant it’s a good idea to indulge in some delicious seafood appetizers. There are several choices including oysters in the shell, shrimp cocktail and the impressive Vuelve a La Vida Coctel. This literally translates to “Cocktail Returns to Life”

and means a fresh mix of oysters, octopus, shrimp and fresh crab meat are spiced up with a cocktail sauce of horseradish, tequila, ketchup, orange juice and lime juice.



Lunch at Mi Ranchito is a tempting assortment of Tacos, Burritos, Gorditas and Tortas. The Burritos are 15 inch flour tortillas stuffed with your choice of meats plus lettuce, tomato, onion, cilantro, cheddar and mozzarella cheese, beans, rice and covered with Queso Bravo cheese. Queso Bravo is a mix of mozzarella and cheddar and a little sour cream, chopped jalapeños and cilantro.

Gorditas are handmade corn pockets stuffed with your choice of meat and vegetables and Tortas are the Mexican version of sub sandwiches. Tortas are made with a Telera



roll which is similar to a Bollilo only a little softer and fresher (pictured left). You order these with pork, steak, chicken, chorizo, cabeza, vegetables or chicharron. This last one is really good particularly if you like

bacon rinds. Chicharron (Chi-Cha-Rone) are pork skins that are fried and pressed to squeeze out the fat.

The Torta Ahogadas is a good one for those of us looking for spicy food. You pick your meat, seafood or vegetables then have it all put into the roll and covered with a hot sauce of chopped green and red jalapeños.

Sometimes I prefer a late breakfast at lunch time. The Huevos a La Mexicana is not on the menu but you can order it any time. Three eggs cooked any style are served over either salsa roja or salsa verde mixed with pico de gallo and a side of tortillas. I like to order scrambled eggs, mix them with the sauce, and make my own breakfast burritos.



Having dinner at this restaurant is the same as going to Alberto and Gloria's home for a Mexican home cooked meal. The Carne Asada de Mi Ranchito is a Black Angus Choice cut Ribeye steak cooked in a fry pan

in Creole herbs and topped with grilled onions, jalapeños and chile de arbol. It is served with a side of Nopalito Salad. Nopalitos, by the way, are the naturally flat stems, called pads, of the Prickly Pear. They have a light slightly tart flavor and are a favorite of Southwestern Tex- Mex foodies.



The Milanese de Pollo is very popular. A thin sliced chicken cutlet is dipped in egg yolk, dredged in homemade bread crumbs with onion and garlic powder and fried in oil.

Fajitas are also in great demand. Slices of chicken breast or steak are cooked with Creole seasonings and lemon pepper,



cilantro, thyme and garlic and then mixed with simmered green and red bell peppers, onion and mushrooms. Those who like spicier fajitas ask for jalapeños.



One of my favorite meals is Carnitas Michoacán Style. Carnitas are chunks of pork and are a staple in the Mexican State of Michoacán. Alberto's recipe calls for pieces of pork browned on the grill and sprinkled with salt, orange and peach juice, garlic, extra virgin olive oil and garlic. Then they are roasted for 3 hours.



Seafood lovers are in for a real treat at Mi Ranchito. The Paella Valenciana is a mix of jumbo shrimp, clams, mussels, baby scallops, king shrimp langostino and chorizo grilled with Creole herbs and Spanish white wine and mixed with garlic rice.

By the way, the langostino served in this country is usually the squat lobster which is neither a true lobster nor a prawn. It is cooked and served whole with head and feelers attached. If you are like me and don't like to have your food staring back at you ask for the langostino to be exchanged for something else like more shrimp or scallops.

In fact, everything on the menu can be custom ordered to suit your tastes. You are welcome to ask your server to

have any ingredients added or deleted from any entrée. The kitchen is prepared to modify most items to meet the needs of vegetarians and the requirements of low- carb and gluten-free diets.



The Camarones Al Mojo de Ajo are jumbo shrimp sautéed in garlic sauce and they are excellent. So is the Huachinango a la Veracruzana which is a double filet of red snapper grilled with the skin on the bottom with green tomatillo salsa and olives and topped with a Veracruz style spicy red sauce.



And like I always say: a fine dinner requires a delicious dessert. There is a caramel flan and two fried ice cream treats. One is coated with Captain Crunch and one with roasted coconut. The standout dessert, though, is the Pastel de Tres Leches. This is a white cake made with evaporated and condensed milk and heavy cream. It is a fitting end to a delightful dinner.

Thank you, Jenny, for recommending this great place for Mexican cuisine. As so often happens wonderful food is served in a restaurant that doesn't look like much from the outside!

