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A culinary tour through Soul de Cuba Cafe



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Cook's Corner

Do you want to take a culinary tour of Cuba, taste its cuisine and inhale the spices? Would you like to visit Africa in your free time? Well, there is a hidden treasure across the Q Bridge at the corner of Crown and High Streets that will feed your soul. Soul de Cuba Café, a tiny restaurant with tremendous flavors will be sure to please.

You can easily imagine you are in another country with the earthen-colored walls and warm tile. Cobalt blue lamps drop from the ceiling and the scents in the air, pleasingly unfamiliar. "The Soul de Cuba concept is rooted in the idea of promoting and preserving Afro-Cuban culture through sharing traditional Cuban and African food and art."

We began our first experience at Soul de

Cuba with Mojitos. I ordered the traditional and can easily say it is hands down the best I've ever had. I truly felt I was in a commercial and thought at any moment the movement in the restaurant would be pulsating to the beat of the muddler. Then I scoffed at my husband's order for a Mango Mojito, for messing with purity. However after tasting his, I found myself hoping he didn't finish it and I'd have an excuse to glom. However, that was not to be.

We shared fantastic, sizzling chicken and beef empanadas as an appetizer, while taking in the Afro-Cuban culture through artwork and family memorabilia in the cozy dining room. Our thoughts went to each country, culture, people and politics

that often divide.

We next ordered two cups of soup, *sopa de frijoles negros* (abuela's famous recipe of black bean soup made with exotic spices) and *sopa de gabanzo* (chickpea soup made with Spanish chorizo sausage). Both were equally wonderful. Had we ordered a bowl, we could have easily made the soups our meal, but there was too much to choose from to stop there.

We then spoke to our lovely, accommodating waitress and asked for a recommendation to really see what Soul de Cuba represented. *Ropa Vieja* was suggested, apparently a favorite among visitors to Cuba. This traditional dish is made with shredded beef and cooked with onions in a light tomato sauce, served with *arroz*

blanco (white rice), *frijoles negros* (black beans) and *platanos maduros* (sautéed plantains). The flavors of tomato and onion are offset by the sweetness of the fresh plantain while the rice and beans speak for themselves.

We were yearning to try the dessert *empanadas de mango y guava* (lightly fried pastry shell filled with either guava or mango preserves along with cream cheese), but being full, we decided in the ever so famous words "to leave something for next time."

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