

## La Hacienda de San Angel: The Newest Dining Option in Epcot's Mexico Pavilion

by Heather Macdonald, *PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)*

The shoreline in front of Epcot's Mexico pavilion has long been home to a quick-service restaurant, La Cantina de San Angel, in a small, low building. Nothing stands still at Disney, and the cantina closed, to make way for a bigger restaurant.

Since construction began, over a year ago, there was some concern that the new building would be an eyesore on World Showcase Lagoon, blocking the view of the pyramid that serves as the pavilion's main building. Now the construction has ended and the new building, which houses both the quick-service restaurant, La Cantina de San Angel, and a table-service restaurant, La Hacienda de San Angel. I find the building beautifully done. The outside walls are a cheery, sun-washed yellow, and the roof has terracotta accents and a blue tiled dome. It also has outside seating, under a wood gazebo.

La Hacienda de San Angel is only open for dinner, beginning at 5:00 pm. During the day the restaurant is used as seating for the counter service restaurant. I dined there during the week before Christmas. I approached the podium and was checked in and handed a pager, which I was told would work throughout the pavilion. Although I was a bit early for my Advance Dining Reservation, my pager went off just a few seconds after it had been handed to me, and we were led inside. The inside of the restaurant is themed to look like a house that has been converted into a restaurant, with several small rooms near the entrance and a larger dining room separated into different sections by decor items. The inside walls are painted a cream color, with dark wood accents. The red and blue tiled ceilings are highlighted by several different glass light fixtures that add a wonderful touch. Throughout the restaurant there are tons of small art pieces that really bring through the theme of a converted house. The pieces, which range from vases and painting to small sculptures, all look like they might belong in a personal collection.

I was seated directly next to a window that overlooked World Showcase Lagoon. I have heard that the view for Illuminations is good. The big picture windows let in lots of light during the day, giving the restaurant an open, airy feeling. I decided to start my meal with one of their specialty margaritas! The options included Rose, Blueberry Basil, and Lime Raspberry, along with a classic. I opted for Orange Mango Fire,

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which was tasty and included ginger liqueur and a chili powder-dusted rim. It had a nice kick and was a good way to relax into my meal.

Instead of bread service, La Hacienda offered tricolor chips and two types of salsa. The first was a green tomatillo salsa, which I found a bit too sweet for my liking. It's common to add sugar to any tomato-based sauce to cut the acidity, but I think they went a little overboard. The second was a traditional, deep red tomato and chili pepper salsa. This had a good kick, but again I thought it was missing something. I struck gold when I mixed the two together!

I wasn't super hungry when I arrived at La Hacienda. I was more interested in an appetizer than an entree, so my server brought me chiles toreados y chorizitos, sweet roasted peppers and mini chorizo sausages. I was underwhelmed. The peppers were roasted nicely, but needed more basic seasoning; I'm talking salt and pepper here, folks. The mini chorizo sausages lacked the spice and seasoning of authentic chorizo sausage. I'm used to chorizo having quite a good spice profile, and found these bland. The portion size, however, was huge. I probably didn't need to eat that many sausages in one sitting.

I held onto my menu, in case I wanted to add something else to my meal. It gave me time to peruse the rest of the offerings. First thing I noticed right off the bat is that the menu is tiny. There are only seven entree offerings and two of them are designed to be shared by two people. Those are mixed grills -- one offers meats and the other a selection of seafood. I really wish they would rethink this, as a solo traveler is not going to spend \$50 on an entree designed for two. The plates coming out of the kitchen looked like they could feed an entire family. The rest of the entrees include a flank steak, a roasted pork tenderloin, fried shrimp tacos, grilled tilapia, and a chili pepper-marinated chicken.

Service was attentive throughout the meal. My food appeared in a timely fashion and my water glass was kept full. My server did appear to be slightly overwhelmed by the demands of the large table next to me, but did a good job keeping up! He did try to entice me into ordering something else, but I was just too full, although I wanted to try the black bean soup. Perhaps I'll give it a shot on another trip.

Overall, the decor in the restaurant is lovely. I just wish a little more thought was put into the quality and quantity of food. While I will return to try the soup and the taco sampler appetizer, it won't be on the list for a repeat visit for a while. I'd like to give them time to work out the kinks in the kitchen. I imagine this restaurant will have the same kind of draw the outside tables at the Rose and Crown have, a view of IllumNations during your dinner.

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*About The Author: Heather is a PassPorter Message Board Guide (moderator). She lives in New Orleans and works for a major hotel chain as a bartender. Heather visited Walt Disney World as a child and after surviving Hurrican Katrina, thought it would be the perfect escape vacation! She loved it so much that she has been 10 times in the last five years.*

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