

Portage Park Palates February 2010

-Jill and Jan

Portage Park Palates plus one took a short trip to our neighbors in the Mayfair community. It's just a hop skip and a jump to South America and our first restaurant of 2010, **Ay Ay Picante**. Ay Ay Picante is on Elston between Montrose and Lawrence, just a bit north of The Fish Guys (best fish monger in the city).

Ay Ay Picante serves Peruvian fare and it is one of the best in the city in my opinion. I find that in talking to people about Ay Ay Picante, they either say, oh that place is great, we go all the time or, I never heard of it. To the readers who never heard of it, this place has over 500 reviews on Metromix, time to go.

It was probably good that we had a small group because the menu is extensive and I would not have room to put everything in this review if we had more people. I am going to mention at this time that the size of the menu may be scary, but the reason for this is each and every selection tells you how it is prepared. If you take away this great addition, the size of the menu is normal.

The interior of the restaurant is set with comfortable tables and chairs. The main lighting is from table candles, very romantic, but may be hard to see for some of you. The walls and menu are decorated with the famed Nazca line drawings from the Peruvian desert.

As soon as you sit down the attentive wait staff brings water, cut up limes, bread and a jalapeno sauce for dipping. You can BY OB here so they also bring ice for the beer and open your wine without needing to be asked. Our waiter, Jonathan, was friendly and willing to help with any questions we had. We ordered two appetizers, Palta Rellena Con Pollo (\$9) and Papa Rellena (\$7). The former is a stuffed avocado with shredded chicken (I am not going to put full descriptions in this review, the menu is great at telling you the preparation take some time and go to <http://ayaypicante.com/>) the latter is a twice cooked mashed potato ball deep fried and stuffed with beef and vegetables. Both were great and a good sample of the "small plates."

For our entrées we had the Seco De Cordera (\$15) a good rich lamb stew cooked in Inca beer, Churrasco A La Parrilla (\$18) a grilled steak with Peruvian spices and the Pollo Saltado (\$14) chicken breast meat with cilantro and tomatoes served with fries. All the entrées come with sides like rice, salads or frijoles canaries. This is all well explained in the menu. Everyone of the entrées were winners.

As usual, we did not have room for dessert, but, as usual, we did our part for the review and we all got a dessert of our own. Tres Leches (\$5) three milk cake, Flan De Café (\$5) flan with coffee and Alfjo (sp) (\$3) dulce de leche sandwiched with two cookies. The coffee flan was the big hit but the others also get a thumbs up. Ay Ay Picante is very well known for its Ceviche. The Ceviche has its own section of the menu and should not be missed. We did not try any at this trip only because of the small size of our group and the need to try different things. Also, you should not overlook the marinated red onions that show up on some plates. Try them for a more then pleasant surprise.

I can't say enough good about Ay Ay Picante. Take some time and go to Metromix, read the reviews. Make sure you go to their web site and look over the menu. For the readers who have tried them, go back. For you who have not make it your next adventure. Ay Ay Picante is at 4569 N Elston. It is BYOB and is open 7 days a week 11 am to 10:30 pm. Phone 773-427-4239.

Once a month we will be eating at a restaurant in the Portage Park area and writing an article that will appear in the newsletter about the visit. Our visits are anonymous to the owners – so we do not receive special treatment. We are also paying for our own meals.

If you are interested in joining us please contact us at communications@portagepark.org. We will notify you of the location of the restaurant. Our requirements are that you do not notify the restaurant; we will divide the check up evenly, share the dishes and offer opinions for the review. An article about the restaurant will appear in the following PPNA newsletter. If you have a favorite restaurant you would like to suggest, please send your suggestions to communications@portagepark.org