

El Chico

Friendly staff, huge portions of food, memorabilia madness

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In the same vein as Chili's or Applebee's, El Chico serves huge portions of solid, often calorific food, while various themed memorabilia hangs from the walls. Thankfully, the décor isn't too imposing and the staff are helpful and friendly. And considering the newness of this restaurant it's not too empty, so it must be doing something right.

No sooner had we been shown to our booth – the pattern on the seat covering designed to look like a poncho – a basket of warm tortilla chips and spicy salsa dip landed on our table. As we perused the menu, our drinks – a non-alcoholic pina colada and Mexican Flag (the place is unlicensed) – arrived. As with all restaurants of this style, the trick is to plan ahead. Portions are huge, so for most people a main will suffice, but if you do want to kick off with an appetiser, the chicken poblano taquito, consisting of small flaky morsels of chicken, deep fried in a crispy spring roll-style shell, with a guacamole and sour cream dip to share, will suffice.

In terms of mains, all of the classic Mexican dishes, from tacos to enchiladas, rice and refried beans, are listed, and from they are all done very well. I selected a giant plate of Guadalajara tacos – soft discs of floury taco laid over each other around a shell of sour cream, bonded together by melted jack cheese and covered in onion, peppers and fajita steak. Meanwhile, my companion chose the chicken and mushroom fajitas – a construction kit of sour cream, dip, rice, salad and warm tortillas, followed by a sizzling skillet of expertly spiced and flavoured meat and vegetables. And, once assembled, the fajitas were excellent.

With portion sizes of this calibre, there will be little left of the appetite after the mains. But having seen another sizzling skillet, this time containing a chocolate brownie and cinnamon ice cream, we had to give in and find room. Sure enough, the dessert was brought to our table, the smell of the butter sauce poured by the waitress filling the air as soon as it hit the hot metal. It continued to sizzle and bubble away as we devoured the chocolate sponge.

Altogether, El Chico is a pleasant enough experience, delivering very good food – as long as you are sensible with the amount you order. And like the themed décor, the service doesn't force itself on you. Best of all, it doesn't cost that much. We will definitely be back to El Chico.

The bill (for two)

Pina colada (non-alcoholic) Dhs16
Mexican Flag (non-alcoholic) Dhs16
Large water Dhs8
Chicken Poblano Taquito Dhs31
Chicken Mushroom Fajitas Dhs59
Guadalajara tacos Dhs42
Brownie sundae Dhs22
Total Dhs194

By Becky Lucas