

RUBEE'S RESTAURANT SPOTLIGHT ...

AN URBAN ESCAPE TO THE CARIBBEAN

ARTICLE BY CHRISTINA BARRUETA / PHOTOS BY MICHELL JONAS PHOTOGRAPHY

"Come find your rum" is the beckoning welcome of The Breadfruit and Rum Bar, a Jamaican gem in downtown Phoenix. Partners and co-owners Dwayne Allen, a Jamaican native, and Danielle Leoni have found a way to bring a Caribbean oasis to the desert. Their goal was to "introduce Phoenix to the vibrant culture that is Jamaica and the wonderful cuisine", and they have done just that. Chef Leoni fell in love with the hallmarks of Jamaican cooking - superlative fresh seafood, meat, vegetables and fruit combined with fiery peppers and warm spices - and as a result, Breadfruit fans have too. To capture the distinctive flavors of Jamaican cuisine, they use Jet Fresh seafood, authentic ingredients such as pimento spice and



wood to smoke and season dishes, and take advantage of the bounty available from local farmers and ranches. The tropical vibe is also captured in the atmosphere. The Breadfruit, a friendly casual spot decorated in cheerful bright hues, and the attached Rum Bar, with its 100+ bottle collection of rums lined up on wooden shelves lit by Red Stripe lamps, capture the essence of island living.

Start with Appleton Rum Sea Scallops, sweet diver scallops flown in from Maine, lightly coated in a dusting of jerk seasoning, seared to a spiced crust, and basted with Appleton rum. Mouth-watering. Crispy rolls can be ordered stuffed with fresh fish, pickled ginger, and fragrant mango accompanied by a red pepper calypso sauce, or filled with creamy avocado and



Eighteen Karrots & Kiwi Reserve

sweet plantains to dip into a savory mango chutney. Rum-glazed prawns are sautéed with garlic and thyme, perched on roti (Jamaican flatbread) and garnished with crumbles of feta goat cheese. Wild Mediterranean mussels sit plump in their shells after having been smoked over pimento wood and then draped with a spicy-sweet mango-rum reduction.



According to Dwayne, if jerk "isn't spicy, it's an imposter; it needs to pepper you up a bit and that's our signature here." Deliciously fiery with lingering heat and layered fruit and spice, I'm addicted, and happy to hear The Breadfruit will soon be packaging it - I'll be stocking up. Tongue-tingling jerk chicken can be ordered as a grilled breast entrée, served over a fresh house tropical salad, or chopped and piled high on an MJ buttermilk roll. Jerk shrimp arrives smoky and skewered, or in a salad combined with cooling avocado. Another spicy favorite is Escovitch fish, featuring what fish was freshest that day, with Jamaican escovitch sauce (vinegar with habaneros, onions and pimento). On my last visit, it was pristine American red snapper simply seasoned and blackened. Heed the

suggestion to get a bit of pickled onion and fruity habanero on each morsel - the perfect bite. Served with Jamaican rice and peas (thyme and coconut-scented rice with red beans), festival (a sweet baked bread stick), Ital slaw, and



Escavitch



Scallops



Mango & Fish Rolls

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grilled pineapple, it was accompanied by a perfect sampling of traditional Jamaican side dishes that are also served with other entrees. More classic Jamaican dishes dot the menu. You'll find Chicken and Dumplings with Blue Mountain curry, whole wheat dumplings, and softly caramelized plantains or tender Brown Stew Chicken with Pickapeppa and cho-cho (chayote squash). Nightly specials may introduce rich Jamaican goat stew in glossy curry or braised oxtail from local Double Check Ranch with West Indies polenta. A special treat on weekends is a homage to street food fare. Street Side Jerk Chicken features a juicy half organic pastured chicken from Two Wash Ranch in New River, marinated in jerk rub and slow-smoked over pimento wood (from the Jamaican allspice tree). Only a dozen are cooked each night, so go early to avoid being disappointed!

Save room to finish up with a moist slice of raisin-studded sweet potato "pudd'n" with ginger or decadent coconut custard ganache parfait with rum whipped cream.

Beer and wine (AZ Pillsbury and Dos Cabezas) is offered, but as befits the title Rum Bar, the historic spirit has a starring role. Dwayne as Spirit Program Director has amassed Arizona's largest collection of premium and vintage rums. The impressive 100+ Rum Manifest is divided into such categories as Silver, Amber, Premium Aged, Overproof, Black and Cachaça. In addition to Jamaica, explore rums from Brazil, Trinidad, Venezuela, Guyana, Guatemala and beyond.

The same care and focus on quality ingredients that go into the menu also carry over to the craft rum cocktails. Hand-squeezed fruit juices, fresh cane syrup, house bitters and tinctures (such as cardamom, lavender, and lemon blossom) are an integral part of Dwayne's mission to "create new experiences, and rekindle the love affair with rum cocktails." Perhaps start with the Daiquiri Agricole (Depaz Blue Cane Rhum, lime and demerara syrup) which he describes as "our simplest and most sophisticated cocktail" or a pina colada that will spoil you for all others (garnished with hand shaved and toasted coconut). Seasonal additions to the spring menu include Eighteen Karrots (Appleton Estate V/X, carrots, ginger, lemon

and pimento dram), the color of a sunset sky, and the celadon-hued Kiwi Reserve (Mount Gay Special Reserve, kiwi, lemon, pineapple and lemon blossom).

Want to sample? Order a rum flight. The current Flights to Panama introduces three premium rums from the Varela-Hermano distillery which produces Abuelo rums from Panama. How about a cocktail pairing? The helpful cocktail menu is divided into categories such as "First Course" or "In the Middle" to choose the perfect partner for your appetizer or entrée. Maybe you think an aged sipping rum and a cigar might be a fine way to end the night. Well, the Rum Bar has that covered too, with a cigar lounge in the cozy back courtyard. Want to learn more about rum? The Rum Bar offers fun and educational classes led by Dwayne, with the most recent one starting with bottomless Kingston Rum Punch and hors d'oeuvres and progressing to pairing chocolate truffles with rums.

Fresh, vibrant Jamaican cuisine in a friendly, casual atmosphere paired with wonderful rum cocktails – it's always Island Time at The Breadfruit.



The Breadfruit

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www.TheBreadfruit.com

Monday - Thursday
5pm-10pm

Friday & Saturday
Dinner until 11pm
Cocktails until Midnight

Christina Barraeta is an avid Chowhound, passionate about food, wine and spirits. A transplant from Boston, she loves finding new locations to whet her appetite. You may follow her as Rubee on Chowhound.com or @Rubeel00 on Twitter.

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