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## Dining out: Other Red Iguana's also worth the wait

Iconic Mexican restaurant expands, but keeps moles, local favorites intact.

By Vanessa Chang  
Special To The Tribune

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Very few places in Salt Lake City, let alone the entire country, inspire such reverence as Red Iguana. Many of you have sung its praises to a clueless co-worker recently emerged from the underside of a rock or posted your soliloquy on Yelp or Chowhound convincing even more people to visit the colorful, if faded, enclave.

Now they've opened a new location, aptly named Red Iguana 2.

The new location doesn't serve as a diplomat to some far-flung corner of our local culinary map. Rather, it promises to alleviate the concentration of diners who gather daily at the original location that's only a few blocks away. And everything -- the electrifying look, the saturated flavor, and the universal appeal of huge portions -- is

very much intact in the new location.

Few restaurants would attempt to pull off this feat of culinary attraction. That is, planting a second location so close to the first, and in a quiet strip of the warehouse-and-railroad district, and still expect to attract diners in search of shorter wait times, house-made chips and salsa and an excellent cucumber-imbued Pepino margarita (\$6.25). Simply put, people love this place.



A free mole sampler is on the menu at the new Red Iguana on South Temple and 800 West. (Paul Fraughton / The Salt Lake Tribune)

For the most part, such sentiments are justified. Few of the diners I know consider this local institution as just OK. Even then, it's usually a case of poor decision-making skills than Red Iguana's kitchen skill. I'm sorry, but "okay" is what you can expect if you veer toward a chimichanga (\$8.05 to \$8.25) versus the layered flavors of hours-long braising, aromatics and tender meat in the house chile verde (\$10.95).

Still, when The Voracious One offered me a bite of his Tacos a La Iguana (\$9.20), I was ashamed that I had written off the plate as pedestrian. Instead, its tender shreds of beef were flavorful, succulent and the perfect juicy foil to the form-fried house made tortillas. The edible wrappings are nothing like the oversized corn chips we're used to from the market or fast-food

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Patrons of the new Red Iguana on South Temple and 800... (Paul Fraughton/ The Salt Lake Tribune)

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joints. Instead, they are oil crisp and absorbent enough to carry the meat and all its resulting juices, the perfect middle ground between the stereotypical perception of Mexican food and the real deal.

Then there's the wait. If you time it well, like an early lunch (11-ish) or a later dinner (9 to 10 p.m.), the wait is minimal. And at the new location, on the weekend, free valets will take care of parking. The wait is more bearable because after you're seated the servers move with such efficiency. There's a sizeable lobby with a bench, hot-hued walls and a projected black-and-white reel from Mexico's cinematic Golden Age.

The thing is, while you're sitting there watching the love of Orson Welles' life, Dolores del Rio, do



A Mole Poblano platter at the New Red Iguana on South Temple and 800 West. (Paul Fraughton/ The Salt Lake Tribune)

her sultry thing with Pedro Armendariz, you get the idea this set up is no gimmick. Layers of flavor. Layers of soul. A home-hewn, bold appeal with bright colors and delicious flavors. In other words, a reliable antidote to last night's dinner at a restaurant that resembled a Banana Republic more than a place to be physically and emotionally fed.

One of the best examples of Red Iguana's offerings is, of course, its kaleidoscope of moles (\$14.95 to \$15.95). During one visit, we were offered a mole sampler (free) to give us an idea which intense and complex sauce we'd prefer with chicken or turkey.

Nevermind that The Voracious One and I have tried each several times, we appreciated the gesture, a refresher course on how the addition of a guajillo and ancho chile take a sauce from the Aztec

earth-browns of a mole negro (sublime over pockets of refried bean *enomoladas* (\$8.85), by the way) to a the brick red brightness of a poblano. A pint of take-out mole is as good at home, especially with a roast chicken.

As a general rule, I gravitate to the third and fourth pages of Red Iguana's huge menu. There are many good things outside of this self-imposed boundary, such as the creamy enchiladas suizas (\$8.95) and the fiery *amarillas* (\$8.95). But it's the shredded braised pork with achiote (related to annatto, the stuff that makes cheddar so orange) in the *cochinita pibil* (\$12.85) carmitas, or the starchy, cheesy goodness of the zingy *papadzueles* (\$8.85) that are my comfort foods.

That, and the dense flan that comforts and cools those suffering from an exhilarating chile burn.

Sometimes though, you want that fire in your belly. And the Red Iguana 2's electric flavors do the job so addictively. So I leave you with the same bit of advice I give anyone inquiring about Red Iguana 1 or 2. *Yes, it is so worth the wait.*

E-mail **Vanessa Chang** at [food@sltrib.com](mailto:food@sltrib.com).



A chili relleno platter at the Red Iguana on South Temple and 800 West. (Paul Fraughton/ The Salt Lake Tribune)

**Tribune's Restaurant Rating System**

**Overall rating**

- ★☆☆☆☆ Good
- ★★★★☆ Very good
- ★★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Extraordinary

**Entree price**

- \$ Entree under \$ 10
- \$\$ 10 - \$18
- \$\$\$ \$18 - 25
- \$\$\$\$ Above \$ 25

**Restaurant Noise**

- 🔊 Quiet (under 65 decibels)
- 🔊 Can talk easily (65-70)
- 🔊 Talking somewhat difficult (70-75)
- 🔊 Raised voices (75-80)
- 🔊 Too noisy for normal conversation (80 plus)

The Tribune covers the cost of all meals at reviewed restaurants. Star ratings are based on a minimum of two visits. Ratings are updated continually based on at least one revisit. There is no connection between reviews and advertising.



**Red Iguana 2**

- ★★★★★
- Food » ★★★★★
- Mood » ★★★★★
- Service » ★★★★★
- Noise » 🔊🔊🔊

The satellite of this Mexican food landmark is also delicious, thanks to its kaleidoscope of mole entrées, made-from-scratch tortillas and tender-braised meats. Wash it all down with a Pepino margarita and finish with a delicate, eggy flan.

Location » 866 W. South Temple, Salt Lake City; 801-214-6050

Online » [www.rediguana.com](http://www.rediguana.com)  
Hours » Monday to Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.;  
Friday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 11  
p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.  
Children's menu » Yes  
Prices » \$\$  
Liquor » Full bar  
Corkage » \$4.50  
Reservations » Large groups only  
Takeout » Yes  
Wheelchair access » Yes  
Outdoor dining » No  
On-site parking » Yes  
Credit cards » All major

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