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LA Theatre 101: Where to dine before the show in Downtown LA

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Destination: Downtown LA. You've got tickets for a show at the Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson Theatre, Walt Disney Concert Hall, or perhaps Nokia Theatre. But where the heck do you eat? I can solve your problem in one word: Ciudad (pronounced "see you dad"). Its reputation precedes it—this downtown hotspot was opened by Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger, those gringa queens of Latin cuisine, in 1998—and happily, the restaurant lives up to it.



Peruvian Ceviche; photo courtesy of Ciudad.

Love at first sight? It was for me. It started—and nearly ended—with the ceviche, not with the dish but with a photograph I saw beforehand. Food rarely tastes as good as it looks; Ciudad's Peruvian Ceviche—made with mahi mahi, avocado, lime and ginger—tastes better than it looks. My recent dining experience nearly ended there because it was difficult to stop eating (it's big enough for 3-4 people to share as an appetizer). The Argentine Empanadas my gal pal and I ordered next—one made with wild mushroom and warm chipotle sauce, the other with spinach, pine nuts and raisins—were every bit as good as they sound.

For my entrée—and it wasn't easy to choose—I selected the Roasted Poblano Chile Relleno, an extraordinary concoction of potato rajas, cotija cheese, salsa verde, and spiced tomato sauce. From first bite to last, a pure delight. Luckily, I'd brought along my extra stomach, so I didn't have to leave a morsel of it on my plate.

My girlfriend didn't fare as well with her Pan-Seared Arctic Char, abandoning it early on for dessert. The Goat Milk Cajeta Flan with caramel sauce and the Warm Banana Bread Pudding with rum and hazelnut whipped cream were divine. All in all, a most pleasant dining experience that begs to be repeated soon. And if you have an aversion to posh restaurants, have no fear—Ciudad has a unpretentious down-to-earth feel, not unlike a '50s coffee shop that's been given a stylish makeover.

Hot tip: Grab the free shuttle to any of the theatres mentioned above, Tuesday through Saturday evenings, and save yourself the hassle and extra expense of parking.

Ciudad, 445 S. Figueroa St. at 5th St., Los Angeles, CA 9007; call 213-486-5171.

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