

Cip's Offers Taste Of Island History Along With Good Food



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Cip's Place on Sanibel Island is named for Jimmy Cipriani, a longtime islander who always made time for good company and good food. The former owner of this property on Periwinkle Way, Mr. Cipriani is immortalized on the restaurant's "wall of faces," a painted mural that depicts the local legends who shaped the communities of Sanibel and Captiva.

It's nice to see local history being preserved and celebrated. In fact, if memory serves, that's a remnant or replica of an old Sanibel ferry hanging over the bar, a boat called the Yankee Clipper that carried passengers to and from the mainland before the original causeway opened in 1963.

Doubtless, there were limited restaurant options available to those long-ago visitors. They might have enjoyed a freshly caught fish fillet, but it likely wasn't served as it was to us, Veracruzstyle topped with pico de gallo and garnished with piquant caper berries. It's possible they could have dined on scallops plucked from Pine Island Sound, but those shellfish surely weren't tucked into a tomato-based broth delicately infused with saffron, fennel and fresh herbs.



Chorizo and melted manchego make an unusual bruschetta topping



A martini glass makes a dramatic vessel for tuna poke.

Such are the advantages of modernday dining at Cip's Place, whose casualsounding name and down-to-earth price points belie a serious approach to cuisine. And by serious, we don't mean \$15 Kobe beef burgers with truffle-oil-laced pommes frites. We mean serious attention to interesting flavor combinations built on a strong foundation of cooking techniques. How else to manage a family friendly menu that ranges from a grouper BLT to beef tenderloin au poivre with brandy peppercorn sauce?

We found our way to the Forever Green Shops, one of those tree-camouflaged plazas that line Periwinkle Way, on a recent weeknight when we figured seasonal traffic was still weeks away. Although there were plenty of tables available indoors and out when we arrived, the place quickly began to fill up and the volume went up a few notches.

Sipping glasses of house red (\$5) and smokys NI The Crusher Pinot Noir (\$8) — that took a little — too long to arrive — a we quickly put in an appetizer the ba order to get ball rolling. The restaurant appears to be adequately staffed, and the management was visibly active in the dining room, but it seemed like they weren't quite ready for the seasonal crush.

A stemmed glass made a dramatic presentation for the chilled poke martini (\$10.95) — diced raw yellowfin tuna marinated with ginger and teriyaki and folded into a salad of avocado, tomatoes, scallions and sesame seeds. Overall, it was more sweet than spicy and very fresh tasting. Fried wonton triangles were inserted into this tuna mountain like crunchy flags. We found it a bit challenging to dip into the martini glass without spilling the abundant salad, but we managed to collect every tasty morsel that went astray.



Cioppino is a good showcase for local seafood



Snapper Veracruzana is one of many seafood options at Cip's



Chocolate ice-box cake was sweet but not too sweet.

The chorizo bruschetta (\$7.95) would make a very good bar snack to go along with a beer or two if you're heading home from a day at the beach. Crumbled spicy Spanish sausage plus melted manchego cheese on toasted bread? More, please. It was only when I looked back at the menu later that I realized a cilantro pesto was missing. It would have added another interesting layer of flavor, but it wasn't really missed.

Entrees took a bit longer than expected to arrive, but the restaurant had gotten considerably busier. If you're looking for a lighter main course, Cip's offers an extensive array of "islander favorites" ranging from a grilled Reuben and simple deli wraps to more imaginative temptations such as root-beer-roasted pork and a buttermilk fried chicken breast with sage gravy.

We were in a seafood mood, so we went with the aforementioned snapper Veracruzana (\$19.95) and cioppino (\$24.95).

The large snapper fillet was lightly breaded with cornmeal, which gave it nice crunch while sealing in the fish's natural moisture. A deep crimson stripe of pico de gallo on top added considerable flavor to the mild fish, with a pleasingly smoky-spicy note that suggested chipotle chilies in the mix. On the side were rice and black beans that obviously had not come from a can, based on their glossy finish and non-mushy texture.

The cioppino also was spot-on. Each sea scallop, clam, shrimp and hunk of grouper was perfectly cooked through but not overdone. The bountiful seafood lent its briny juices to a tomato broth that was light in consistency but rich with the flavors of fennel, saffron and Pernod. It was simply a great way to showcase the local seafood.

The homemade desserts at Cip's should not be missed, and the smallish portions won't push you to the edge of overindulgence. The chocolate ice-box cake (\$5.95) — layers of milk chocolate mousse and chocolate wafers in a graham cracker crust — satisfied the sweet

tooth without making it ache. A miniature lemon bundt cake (\$6.95), served warm and dripping with citrus glaze, was a citrus-lover's delight.

From start to finish, Cip's was a good place for one last food fling before leaving the islands to the snowbirds and tourists until spring. See you on the other side, Cip.

in the know

Cip's Place

2055 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel;
472-0223

Ratings:

Food: ★★★★★

Service: ★★★

Atmosphere: ★★★★★

>> **Hours:** 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m. daily.

>> **Reservations:** Accepted

>> **Credit cards:** Accepted

>> **Price range:** Appetizers, \$8.95-\$10.95; entrees, \$8.95-\$25.95

>> **Beverages:** Full bar

>> **Specialties of the house:** Sandwiches and seafood entrees

>> **Volume:** Can be loud when busy

>> **Parking:** Shopping plaza lot

>> **Website:** www.cipsplace.com

★★★★★ **Superb**

★★★★ **Noteworthy**

★★★ **Good**

★★ **Fair**

★ **Poor**