

Dining Guide

An Egg-cellent Season

Hardboiled, scrambled, or otherwise fussed over, eggs are the real meat of many Miami menus

By Lynn Roberson
BT Contributor

A fragile, blue-white eggshell and the shrill peeping of a newly hatched starling announces egg season in South Florida. Huge, brown double-yolkers surface in fresh markets. Parents dye Easter eggs, cleverly hide them, and then make egg salad for their offspring. In Miami's chicken-friendly neighborhoods, hens proudly lead parades of fluffy yellow biddies. Spring, and the eggs that come with it, signifies new life. Hindus think eggs so important that their concept of the cosmos is a giant egg. In Russia the Romanovs visited their jeweler, Fabergé, to create an ovoid tribute.

Back in 1954, great American chef James Beard wrote in *How to Eat Better for Less Money*: "It is no exaggeration to say that eggs are the best friend a budget-minded cook can have ... high in protein, filling, nourishing. You could have an egg dish every day of the year with-



David Cohen of Bagels and Company: "I'd say that 70 percent of all our eggs are served scrambled.

out exhausting its possibilities."

And owing to the state of the union, most of us have less money these days.

(The war in Iraq costs \$5000 per second while a dozen eggs costs only a dollar and change.) Turning to the egg this

month for sustenance celebrates the egg as a universal symbol, as well as a tasty, thrifty food, which man has been eating since time began. In fact, egg-laying fowl were domesticated in 2500 B.C.

Here along the Biscayne Corridor, eggs have been players since at least the 1890s. Chickens came with the fruit stands and the groves of oranges, mangos, and avocados. A remnant of local egg lore still stands. A building that was once the Little Farm Store fronts the Little Farm Mobile Home Park, a huddle of trailers at 8370 Biscayne Blvd. Its modest cupola and hint of veranda suggests it welcomed hungry tourists and locals. Today it is a laundry.

David Cohen, who owns Bagels and Company at 110th Street and Biscayne, appreciates Florida history as only a native Miamian can. Open in this spot since 1988, the 85-seat restaurant is especially bustling during spring break. "I love the spirit of the restaurant," Cohen says. "Often we have three gener-

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RESTAURANT LISTINGS

Restaurant listings for the *BT* Dining Guide are written by Pamela Robin Brandt. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, but restaurants frequently change menus, chefs, and operating hours, so please call ahead to confirm information. Icons (\$\$\$) represent estimates for a typical meal without wine, tax, or tip. Hyphenated icons (\$-\$\$\$) indicate a significant range in prices between lunch and dinner menus, or among individual items on those menus.

\$= \$10 and under

\$\$= \$20

\$\$\$= \$30

\$\$\$\$= \$40

\$\$\$\$\$= \$50 and over

MIAMI

Brickell / Downtown

Abokado

900 S. Miami Ave., 305-347-3700
www.abokadosushi.com

Hamachi chiles rellenos? Shiso leaf "nachos" topped with raw spicy tuna, kaiware sprouts, and other Asian ingredients? The Viva, a sushi roll that starts with standard Japanese stuff (spicy tuna, cucumber, avocado), adds typical Latin sabor (jalapeño, cilantro), wraps it all in a flour tortilla, and garnishes it with South of the Border heat (spicy snow crab mix)? Miami hasn't tended to initiate too many food "firsts," but this Japanese/Pan-Latin fusion place is surely one. Intended as the groundbreaker of an international chain, this stylish indoor-outdoor eatery features inventive makis (executed by Hiro Asano, formerly Bond Street's sushi maestro), plus LatAmer/Asian small plates and meals like pasilla chile-braised short ribs with wasabi-shiitake grits. Prices are higher than at neighborhood sushi spots, but in keeping with Abokado's Mary Brickell Village neighbors. \$\$\$

Acqua

1435 Brickell Ave., Four Seasons Hotel, 305-381-3190

Originally an Italian/Mediterranean restaurant, this comfortably elegant, upscale spot switched chefs in 2006 (to Patrick Duff, formerly at the Sukhothai in Bangkok), resulting in a complete menu renovation. Thailand's famed sense of culinary balance is now evident throughout the global (though primarily Asian or Latin American-inspired) menu, in dishes like yuzu/white soya-dressed salad of shrimp tempura (with watercress, Vidalia onion, avocado, pomegranate), a tender pork shank glazed with spicy Szechuan citrus sauce (accompanied by a chorizo-flecked plantain mash), or lunchtime's rare tuna burger with lively wasabi aioli and wakame salad. For dessert few chocoholics can resist a buttery-crust tart filled with sinfully rich warm chocolate custard. \$\$\$\$

Azul

500 Brickell Key Dr., 305-913-8254

Floor-to-ceiling picture windows showcase Biscayne Bay. But diners are more likely to focus on the sparkling raw bar and open kitchen, where chef Clay Conley crafts imaginative global creations - many of them combinations, to satisfy those who want it all. One offering, "A Study in Tuna," includes tuna sashimi, Maine crab, avocado tempura, and caviar, with several Asian sauces. Moroccan lamb is three preparations

(grilled chop, harissa-marinated loin, and bastilla, the famed savory-sweet Middle Eastern pastry, stuffed with braised shank), plus feta and smoked eggplant. Finish with a vanilla soufflé your way, a choice of toppings: chocolate, raspberry, or crème anglaise. \$\$\$\$

The Bar at Level 25 (Conrad Hotel)

1395 Brickell Ave., 305-503-6500

On the Conrad's restaurant/lobby-level 25th floor, the expansive, picture-windowed space around the corner from the check-in desks used to be just a lobby extension. Now it's The Bar, which is not just a watering hole with panoramic views. At lunch it's an elegant sandwich bar; at night it's a raw bar (with pristine coldwater oysters) and (best) a tapas bar serving *pintxos*. That's just the Basque word for tapas, but as interpreted by Atrio's chef Michael Gilligan, there's nothing mere about the generously portioned small plates. They range from traditional items like cod fish *equixada* (a zingy bacalao salad) and saffron-sautéed Spanish artichokes to inventive inspirations like foie gras and goat cheese-stuffed empanadas, or Asian-inspired soft-shell crab in airy tempura batter. \$\$\$

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Egg-cellent

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ations sitting down together for meals here.” What they are eating, he reports, is usually eggs. “We serve 4500 eggs a week. French toast, matzo brei, omelets, wraps, hard-boiled,” Cohen specifies. “I’d say that 70 percent of all our eggs are served scrambled. I learned to cook them when I was five.”

If you like to see fried eggs sizzling along with extra-thick Virginia bacon and real Idaho potato home fries, take a look in the window of Jimmy’s East Side Diner at 72nd Street and Biscayne. Since 1966, Jimmy’s has served up millions of eggs to customers comfortably ensconced in its 100 seats. Proprietor Dennis Tetenes, a Greek from the island of Kefalonia on the Ionian Sea, purchased Jimmy’s in 1998. He is proud that his diner wins awards annually in various local publications and stands by the tradition of serving breakfast from 6:00 a.m. until closing time at 4:00 p.m.

Whether poached, scrambled, served Benedict-style, or whipped into an omelet, eggs are a cozy common denominator in these restaurants

“My eggs come from Florida,” Tetenes boasts. “Dixie Fresh delivers 600 dozen once a week, only two or three days from the farm. We refrigerate 7200 eggs immediately in a special cooler.” He offers a taste of his Greek heritage with a feta cheese, onion, and spinach omelet, not to mention the popular “My Big Fat Greek Salad,” which doesn’t contain any eggs but does include “family herbs.” (For years a pot of basil has flourished just outside the diner’s door.)

Situated across the street from Miami’s oldest cemetery since 1938, the S&S Diner at 17th Street and NE 2nd Avenue, is now a designated historic city landmark, which saves it from falling to a luxury condominium slated for the property. This little jewel of Deco architecture retains its original 22-seat, horseshoe-shaped counter. Two five-point stars adorn the ceiling and the exterior sports most of its original vitrolite (a precursor of plastic) façade.

S&S owner Simon Elbaz opens with a

5:30 a.m. breakfast that features eggs with just about anything you can imagine -- crab cakes, pork chops, salmon croquettes, Italian and Georgia sausage, and for the diet conscious, filets of tilapia and breasts of chicken. On weekdays, breakfast gives way to lunch at 11:30 a.m., but breakfast lasts until 2:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. For the record, Elbaz says he uses 900 eggs a week.

Whether poached, scrambled, served Benedict-style, or whipped into an omelet, eggs are a cozy common denominator in all three of these restaurants. It is worth noting that each opens at the crack of dawn seven days a week, and each offers takeout to the hurried customer. Perhaps the most enjoyable commonality, however, is the devoted group of regulars each has. In these joints, customers get to know the staff, the owners, and each other.

Although many Americans don’t sit down together for a family meal every day, somehow these egg-centered restaurants forge sturdy human bonds. At Jimmy’s, an aging customer who gets her favorite poached eggs plated with cheese grits has brought a baby gift for an expectant waitress. The two ladies

discuss the benefits of natural childbirth and the server’s grandmother, who can hardly wait to hold the baby.

“People consider eggs a healthy thing to eat,” Bagels and Company’s Cohen says. “I don’t think concerns about cholesterol really impact the choice of eggs for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. They are a small package crammed with protein, vitamins, and minerals.”

Despite the fact that eggs have gone from \$25 to \$50 per case of 360 eggs in the last year, Cohen still considers them “a real bang for the buck, delicious and versatile,” compared to other proteins. Besides, he adds, “I think people are in a different frame of mind when they’re eating eggs in a restaurant -- there’s a well-being, a cheer. They’re nourished and nurtured.”

For your information, in order of appearance:

*Bagels and Company,
11064 Biscayne Blvd., 305-892-2435
Jimmy’s East Side Diner,
7201 Biscayne Blvd., 305-754-3692
S&S Diner,
1757 NE 2nd Ave., 305-373-4291*

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

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