

Fire with flavor

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Chi'Lantro's Kimchi fries

Justin Da

By Justin Davis August 26, 2010

When temperatures reach triple digits in Austin—and they always do this time of year—Austinites take any measure they can to cool off. Indulging in the flash and fire of Tabasco and its ilk may seem like a paradoxical solution to beating the August heat, but it's a widely held belief that eating spicy food helps the body cool down. As the pseudo-scientific explanation goes, eating spicy foods increases the heart rate and expands blood vessels, causing increased sweating and the activation of feedback-controlled temperature managers in the brain. (Keep that in mind if you find yourself *and* your tongue burning at this weekend's ***Austin Chronicle Hot Sauce Festival***.) Of course, not being ones to emphasize pain over pleasure, *The A.V. Club* knows plenty of dishes around town that will make you sweat without letting their spiciness outshine their flavor.

New India Cuisine (2407 S. Congress Ave., Suite A2, 512-445-9727)

Hurts so good: A light recoil cough and some possible face scrunching

Order a Thums Up cola and made-in-house garlic naan to go with your chicken vindaloo, and don't worry about missing its spicy kick among the large pieces of potato and chicken floating in the bowl of dark orange curry, white rice, peas, cardamom, cumin seeds, and star anise. There's still something different about New India's vindaloo, though—and thankfully not in a "**“mutated by alien technology on Red Dwarf”** way. Besides roasting and grinding all of its own spices, the restaurant uses no cream in its vindaloo. Instead, it reduces tomatoes and other ingredients

down to get the necessary creamy texture.

Texas Chili Parlor (1409 Lavaca St., 512-472-2828)

Hurts so good: Gleefully blinded by tears of tongue-searing, lip-burning spiciness

The Chili Parlor's habanero and pinto bean chili sneaks up on diners and strikes with a ninja-like attack of spiciness to the back of the throat. But that doesn't hide the deep, meaty flavor of the broth or the somewhat nutty flavor of the pinto beans. For a distinctly different experience, the XX chili—the "medium" on the Chili Parlor's "X" to "XXX" heat index—has a much less soupy consistency, with large, tender chunks of stew meat that fall apart with the slightest stirring of this bean-less bowl of Texas red.

Mama Roux (13000 N. I-35, 512-490-1304)

Hurts so good: Long-lasting tingling sensation on the inside of your mouth

With its white linen tablecloths and a backdrop of dark wood and red brick, Mama Roux projects the feel of an upscale New Orleans café. However, the restaurant fits into the "everything's bigger in Texas" ideal with a spicy gumbo served in a bowl so large, it could've capped the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Lumps of catfish (or whatever fresh fish is available in the kitchen), large shrimp, crawfish, and andouille sausage (trucked in from Louisiana every Tuesday) swim in the silky brown roux with tomatoes, okra, and the standard "holy trinity" of bell pepper, onion, and celery. All parts are well-seasoned and cooked without flaw to a slurp-from-the-bowl finish. Follow that up with a slice of Tabasco cheesecake, which, despite being the size of a small hybrid vehicle, is still as light and airy as a dream. A slow-building and lingering burn from the infused Tabasco-pepper jelly pleasingly coats the mouth, contrasted by the tartness of the strawberries and the sweetness of the raspberry sauce.

Chi'Lantro (check website for location)

Hurts so good: A few beads of sweat, a runny nose, and potential stains from the spicy orange sauce

The smell of fresh-cut french fries permeates the air around Chi'Lantro's roaming food truck. The mobile Mexican-Korean barbecue offers two spicy varieties of fries, one of which is piled high with caramelized kimchi, bulgogi (with a choice of beef, pork, chicken, or tofu), cheddar jack and Monterey Jack cheeses, cilantro, onion, Korean peppers, and a spicy orange sauce. (A slight shifting of contents reveals the bright red color that identifies the presence of sriracha in the sauce.) The sourness of the kimchi brings out the spiciness of the sriracha, but this is balanced out by the sweet—and faintly salty—bulgogi, as well as the smothering layers of cheeses. Like watching Worf from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* do a **guitar-smashing homage** to John Belushi, Chi'Lantro's postmodern, culture-clashing cuisine has a bizarre and unmistakable charm that you may want to experience over and over again.

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