

LONG ISLAND

## A Mexican Newcomer, Like Its Sister, Is a Star



Phil Marino for The New York Times

Besito in Roslyn, with its candles and chandeliers, is an elegant setting for food like salmon manchamanteles.

By [JOANNE STARKEY](#)  
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WHEN Besito opened in Huntington a year ago, it changed the way Long Islanders viewed Mexican restaurants. This was no spare storefront with an earnest but limited kitchen. Nor was it one of the chains serving Tex-Mex favorites and combination plates, where everything tastes the same. Besito was an upscale, elegant spot with exciting food. It immediately flew to the head of the class as the Island's best Mexican restaurant.

Can its owner, John Tunney, repeat his success? The restaurant-going public is understandably skeptical of sequels, but the new Besito, which opened in January in Roslyn, is a winner. Its menu is the same as that in Huntington; Matthew Lake, the executive chef here, was the opening chef there. His résumé includes Rosa Mexicano in Manhattan and Red Sage in Washington.

The staff members, trained by experienced servers from the sister restaurant, are first rate. They are whizzes when it comes to the menu, with its many intricate dishes, complex sauces and exotic ingredients. Additionally, they leave on the table a printed glossary of chilies, sauces and spices.

Both Besitos are beautiful restaurants, but the newcomer wins the crown. One stucco wall, which runs the length of the restaurant, consists of 150 niches, each holding a flickering candle. (They are battery powered and are charged every night.) Floors are dark wood, and the ceiling an arresting combination of eucalyptus reeds and rough-hewn beams. Wrought-iron chandeliers dot the room; still, the lighting is muted, and the helpful staff members pass out tiny keychain flashlights for those who can't see to read the menu.

Start your mini-fiesta with the guacamole, created at tableside to diners' specifications; a companion who hates cilantro was delighted to have it omitted. The chunky treat is served in the rustic mortar and pestle, called a molcajete, in which it is made.

We were especially taken with the queso fundido, a molten mass of baked Chihuahua cheese with chilies, chorizo, cilantro and white onion. The tasty mixture was made to be piled on the soft, warm tortillas that accompanied the dish.

The quesadilla, deeply charred from the grill and filled with string cheese, roasted green chilies, squash blossoms, mushrooms and salsa verde, was another splendid opener that was big enough to share.

Listen closely to the description of the ceviche of the day. The night we tried it, the seafood included baby shrimp, lobster and tiny scallops garnished with avocado and accompanied by plantain and tortilla chips.

There were no strikeouts among the entrees, either. Favorites among the roster of hits were the very tender boneless beef short ribs; the fish (mahi-mahi when we tried it) Veracruzana in a mild tomato sauce dotted with peppers, olives and capers; and spicy shrimp ajillo over a sweet plantain sauce.

The budin de mariscos was a delicious dish consisting of tortillas layered with shrimp, lump crab and tomato salsa, baked in a mild poblano cream sauce. Another mild, pleasing offering was the Swiss enchiladas: two corn tortillas filled with an abundance of shredded white-meat chicken and baked in a tomatillo cream sauce. That sauce had a vibrant citrus flavor and contained onions, cilantro and melted cheese.

Only three desserts were offered, but all won praise. My favorite was the silken pumpkin flan crowned with whipped cream. A bowl of strawberries in a mango cream paired with paper-thin cookies called Marias was another pleaser. Chocolate lovers went for the very moist chocolate tres leches cake.

The best dessert was the churros given gratis to every table. The warm, long spirals of fried dough rolled in cinnamon sugar were delivered in a white paper bag. Along with them we were given tiny Mexican “worry dolls” to be put under our pillows to take away worries. My only worry was the amount of delicious food I’d just eaten.

## **Besito**

*1516 Old Northern Boulevard*

*Roslyn*

*(516) 484-3001*

[www.besitomex.com](http://www.besitomex.com)

## **EXCELLENT**

**THE SPACE** Beautiful Mexican newcomer in a small shopping center. Wheelchair accessibility.

**THE CROWD** Festive groups of friends and, on weeknights, families filling the high-backed, circular booths.

**THE BAR** A U-shaped beauty with open shelves behind the bar, forming a room divider. This is the place for margaritas, shooters, sangria and Mexican beers (eight selections, \$6 each). Small wine list of 21 still wines (\$22 to \$90), with half the bottles under \$30, as well as eight by the glass (\$8).

**THE BILL** Brunch entrees, \$6 to \$11. Dinner entrees, \$16 to \$26. American Express, MasterCard, Visa and Discover card are accepted.

**WHAT WE LIKE** Guacamole, ceviche, quesadillas, queso fundido, Swiss enchiladas, budin de mariscos, garlic shrimp, fish Veracruzana, short ribs, all desserts, churros.

**IF YOU GO** Dinner: daily, 5 to 11 p.m. Brunch: Saturday and Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m.  
Reservations are a must. Call at least a week ahead for prime weekend times.

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