

Baja Café

You can get a traditional breakfast at this popular spot in Tucson, or you can go all out with the King Kong: hash browns topped with ham, sausage, bacon, American cheese, pulled pork, green chiles, eggs and a smoked Gouda sauce.

KATHY MONTGOMERY

IF THERE'S A RECIPE for a successful breakfast and lunch place, Kim Scanlan and Gerard Meurer have perfected it. They opened Baja Café in 2014 in a Tucson location that looks straight out of *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*: small, unpretentious and buried in the back of a Broadway Boulevard strip mall, with an oversized menu of innovative, over-the-top, made-from-scratch food.

Scanlan and Meurer have since opened two more locations, and if Tucsonans have had their fill, you wouldn't know it from the lines that form every weekend.

"When we opened on Broadway, we opened because, by the grace of God, we

found a real estate broker who believed in us," Scanlan recalls. "I don't know why. When I put my financial information in front of him, he actually burst out laughing. The first year and a half was, I mean, oh, my God."

In the beginning, Baja Café won hearts and minds with its early-bird weekday special: two eggs with ham, sausage or bacon, plus hash browns and toast, for \$3.75. Today, you can get that special for \$3.99. But this is no place to quibble over a few bucks when the ever-changing menu offers such abundance, including an entire page of creative, Southwestern-inspired eggs Benedicts. Other highlights

include huevos rancheros, French toast and the King Kong: hash browns topped with ham, sausage, bacon, American cheese, pulled pork, green chiles, eggs and a smoked Gouda sauce.

The lunch menu, meanwhile, features burgers, burritos and sandwiches with house-smoked meats. But Baja Café also has a sweeter side. It's justifiably famous for specialty pancakes such as the Pineapple Express, the Pecan Roll and the signature Snickerdoodle, which is dusted with cinnamon and sugar and drizzled with vanilla-bean glaze.

Cocktails are created in the same spirit, from perfectly executed classics to delicious takeoffs with south-of-the-border twists: margaritas crafted with house-made sweet and sour, prickly pear mimosas (served on the rocks), and bloody marys made with chile-infused vodka and rimmed with red chile salt.

What's Baja Café's recipe for success? A little sweet, a little spice, a little naughty and a whole lot of nice.



TUCSON Baja Café (original location), 7002 E. Broadway Boulevard, 520-495-4772, www.bajacafetucson.com