

# Restaurant review: Orlando I-Drive's Kafe Kalik

## International Drive restaurant has island flair

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The scope of eateries with an International Drive address is mind-boggling. Some are worthy of the traffic snarls while others barely prompt a tap of the brakes.

In the recently renovated Prime Outlets, Kafe Kalik is adding more Caribbean spice to the Central Florida dining scene. The menu, which largely celebrates the Bahamas, is broad enough in scope to fit most wallets and palates, and its shopping-destination location is a good fit for those bored with food courts.

We started with the conch fritters (\$8.50). The ivory conch meat was ground with fresh herbs, peppers, onions, and I could detect tomato paste. The fried rounds were tender and delicious. The kettle-fried coconut shrimp (\$12) was tasty and came with an orange marmalade dip. The shrimp are stretched and then battered, so at first glance they look like slender seafood corn dogs. Junkaroo chips (\$7.50) are nachos done up island-style with vibrantly colored tortilla chips, long plaintain crisps and yucca chips covered with melted gouda and Cheddar cheeses, diced tomatoes and onions and sliced jalapenos. Served with sour cream, guacamole and a pigeon pea relish. (Pigeon peas, which have a nice nutty taste, also show up mixed in with rice for some of the sides.)

The deep-fried Bah-Mex Lobster roll (\$11), packed with lobster, corn, black beans, peppers, onions and cheese, had a nice flavor but the layers of paper-thin wrapping that encased became a crumbly mess with each bite.

The conch chowder (cup \$5.50, bowl \$7.50) is stewed with peppers, onions, tomatoes, a touch of thyme, potatoes and carrots. The resulting broth was a luscious, spoon-coating mixture, spicy without inducing sweat.

For entrees, the yardie-spiced curry chicken (\$18) was a fragrant melange of boneless chicken strips stewed in a mild yellow curry. Aromatic jasmine rice gave it a touch of Thai cuisine.

The chicken in a bag (\$16) made for the most interesting presentation. You can order it fried, jerked or rotisserie-cooked. The server suggested jerked or rotisserie so I went with the latter. At the table, diners open a parchment pouch filled with juicy chicken seasoned with garlic, lime and thyme. Also inside the wrapping are sweet potato fries that become soft from the moist steam and soak up the seasonings.

The Cajun-rubbed mahi mahi (\$27), came on a bed of stewed Creole tomatoes and with rice mixed with pigeon peas. At first glance the rub made the fish look dry, but it was nicely cooked.

If you are dining with a group on a chilly day, order the Bahamian bullabesa (\$34). A cast-enamel, Dutch-oven-size pot is brought to the table with as many bowls as you would like. This flavorful stew includes shrimp, medium-size scallops, sweet crab meat, corn cobbles and other veggies and a meaty lobster tail in a rich tomato broth. In this family-style service, diners can ladle out exactly what they want over jasmine rice. The bullabesa can easily serve four adults, so the \$34 quickly divides down if you are splitting the check.

I can't imagine room for dessert, but a warm and comfy slab of chocolate bread pudding (\$6.50) is good for sharing.

Servers on both visits were attentive and helpful in making menu decisions.

If you have an outlet shopping spree on your holiday to-do list, skip the food court and enjoy the island flavors and atmosphere at Kafe Kalik. With a sushi bar, cold station (ceviche, carpaccio and the like), sandwiches, salads, steaks, seafood, pasta, soups, stews and a laundry list of appetizers and sides, you can satisfy the hunger pangs of everyone in your shopping entourage.

Eating out on a budget

The servings at Kafe Kalik are ample, making it easy to eat within a budget.

Dinner under \$15: Order the baby Bahama burgers (\$8). The three sirloin sammies are more slammers than sliders and come with chips and slaw. Finish with a dessert to share, such as the creamy tropical fruit ices (we liked tangerine) that come with a warm, cream-filled doughnut puff (\$4.50).

Dinner under \$10: The "lite" sampler soup and house salad is \$9 and comes with a bread basket. Kick in another 75 cents and order from the Bahamian-style chowder bar (\$9.75) that can serve two. The chowder is made to order from your choice of seafood, peppers, onions, potatoes, carrots and tomatoes.