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## Taste of Las Cruces: Adventures in eclectic dining at Boba Café

By Richard Coltharp / For Pulse  
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If you just looked at it, you would think it is blueberries in chocolate milk. It is not. It is tapioca pearls (also known as boba) in soy milk tea. And that's where Boba Café & Cabaret gets its name. This restaurant certainly serves this beverage, but Boba Café & Cabaret is more eclectic than that. Way more eclectic.

The phrase on the cover of the Boba menu reads "A blended collection of drinks, salads, sandwiches and soups." The "blended collection" part also applies to everything else about the Boba, including the architecture, the decor, the staff and even the clientele.

Until recently I had never been to the Boba, then found myself there twice in five days, once each for dinner and lunch. What are you in the mood for? Unless it's a hamburger or Mexican food, you can probably find it at Boba. And really, don't we have enough hamburger and Mexican food restaurants in Las Cruces already?

To be accurate, Boba does have some marginally Mexican dishes, such as Albuquerque Chicken Tortilla Soup, quesadillas and tortilla chips with dill dip and salsa. But Mexican is clearly not the focus. The closest description would be Asian, but that would not be accurate, either. The menu can't even quite figure itself out, with actual menu categories called Other Stuff and Etc ...

The Boba also frequently offers weekend dinner musical shows, where you can watch talented locals deliver some songs while you dine. I've not been, but all reports say it's a great show, and a great dinner, for a great price. Sounds far more refreshing and lively than the typical fast food and a movie, for roughly the same price.

Getting back to the food, here's how eclectic an order a four-top table could generate:

Person 1 — Amaretto bubble tea, shrimp-tofu-seaweed soup topped with egg and green onion, an appetizer of green chile chicken wontons.

Person 2 — mango guava smoothie, Thai coconut shrimp salad, mandarin-flavored iced tea.

Person 3 — Cappucino with a shot of Irish cream, tuna salad with green apples, lettuce and Swiss cheese on a tortilla, with a tossed salad.

Person 4 — a Reuben and a Bud.

My first visit I was fortunate enough to arrive for dinner on Caribbean Night! I guess it wasn't too lucky, since Caribbean Nights happen Tuesday through Thursday, three of the

six nights Boba is open. Still, I love Caribbean jerk chicken, and the menu offers jerk beef, chicken or pork. There are also Caribbean shrimp skewers, a spicy fish, jerk steak and coconut shrimp, or Caribbean curry and rice. I tried the jerk chicken, which came on rice and served with spicy orange carrots. I could have selected the zucchini saute instead of the carrots. I got to try both and liked them both, but the zucchini was a bit spicy for others at the table. The jerk chicken was delicious. And huge. It came with two sauces, a spicy jerk sauce and some mango chutney. Both had that wonderful Jamaican blend of sweet and spice. The chutney and the rice, however, contained an unexpected element for me — kidney beans. They were sparse, but made a nice mesh with the other flavors. I don't think I've ever liked kidney beans as much. The menu says the jerk meats are rubbed with Boba's special green chile jerk sauce and marinated overnight. You could taste the hints of green chile, which topped everything off well. Again, the serving was huge. I'm a guy with a hearty appetite, and I happily got a to-go box, and had an excellent leftover lunch the next day. Two great meals for \$8.95.

My only disappointment with Caribbean night? No Jamaican Red Stripe beer to wash it down. However, there was a quite eclectic (there's that word again) selection of other beers. There are the usual Miller, Budweiser and Coors suspects, along with Blue Moon on draft. Included among their \$3.25 "premium" bottles are Anchor Steam, Murphy's Red, Newcastle Brown Ale and Negra Modelo.

When I came back for lunch, there was one guy whose Monday was going well enough (or badly enough) that he ordered up a Bohemia before noon. For a dollar less, you can have one of their "house" brands, which include the classic green bottle of Rolling Rock, or local favorite Tecate in a can. There are wines available too, but as you may have guessed by the three previous paragraphs, I'm more of a beer guy.

That Monday I thought about having the grilled chicken breast sandwich with bacon, lettuce, tomatoes, Swiss cheese, roasted peppers and ranch. Sounds good, right? But I wanted something a little more, say, eclectic, and went for the Pacific Fresh Noodle Soup with chicken, spinach, carrots and green onions. Neither the waitress nor the server knew why it was called Pacific, but when the giant, steaming bowl arrived, and I took my first taste, I had a clue. I think it's called Pacific because it has a Japanese miso base. An enjoyable meal, and the next time I'm a little under the weather, I'm going straight to Boba and ordering this. Just holding your face over the delicious steaminess will make you feel 37 percent better, guaranteed.

My next trip, I'll make a point to dine al fresco on the Boba patio. If you sit in the right spot, at the right time of day, you can watch the alpenglow on a small section of the Organs.

The only thing that wasn't eclectic about Boba was the music. It sounded like they had satellite radio tuned to a 1970s classic rock channel. Every song over the speakers on my two visits was a Top 20 hit from 1970 to 1974 by a caucasian rock act.

And what about the bubble tea? After being an initial skeptic, I really liked it. The dark tapioca pearls are derived from the cassava root and make an nexpectedly nice complement to the soy in the tea. But it did seem a lot like blueberries and chocolate milk.

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## **If you go**

**What:** Boba Café & Cabaret

**Hours:** 10:30 a.m. to 8:45 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

**Where:** 1900 S. Espina St. #8

**On the menu:** Soups, salads, sandwiches, bubble tea. Tuesday through Thursday are Caribbean Nights, with jerk dinners and fish. Friday features Asian dinners and sushi.

**Expect to spend:** Around \$7.25 for salads and sandwiches, around \$9 for specialty night entrees, \$4.95 for a cup of soup, \$5.95 for a bowl of soup.

**Recommended dishes:** Anything from the Caribbean Nights menu Tuesday through Thursday, Pacific Fresh Noodle Soup

**Info:** (575) 647-5900, [bobacafelc.com](http://bobacafelc.com)