



BEST BITES

Queen Of Korean

As a military brat, I have had the privilege of living in a variety of places around the world, one of which was Seoul, South Korea. At the time, the Asian culture was very new to me. I was surrounded by a setting known for its rich history, beautiful landscapes and top-notch cuisine. So when I was asked to review Fredericksburg's Choi's Korean Kitchen, you can imagine how excited I was to reconnect with my past on a culinary basis.

Located off of Route 3 East in the Westwood Village Shopping Center— it's directly across the street from Starbucks— Choi's is a dining Mecca for local Korean foodies. From the exterior, the relatively new restaurant looks petite and humble; the type of mom-and-pop eatery you'd visit when you're in the mood for a quick bite. On the inside, however, it's a completely different story. The place is stylishly decorated and expansive; you can easily sit 50+ people in the dining rooms to the left and right of the entrance. The setting is minimalistic and inviting— a classy atmosphere that sets a soothing mood for dining. Upon entering, my first thought was how this would be the perfect venue for a family outing or first date. My second thought: If they put this much thought into the elegant décor, than the service must be fantastic.

I was right. Within seconds of sitting down, I was greeted by a waitress who was fluent in Korean and very attentive to my needs. I could tell she was adamant about making my inaugural experience a memorable one. I admitted that my Ko-



rean was a little rusty, so she kindly walked me through the menu, highlighting some of the most popular dishes along the way. I told her about my love for kimchee (spoiled cabbage; a delicacy in Korea), and she eagerly suggested a few entrees that offered a healthy portion of the staple. A quick glance at the menu and I could tell they had gone above and beyond in their offerings. It helped that there were photos next to a dishes' name, a nice touch for those who are new to Korean cuisine. I knew immediately this wasn't the type of fare you'd find at your standard buffet. Instead, I found a vast selection of reasonably priced (between \$6-14) authentic Korean meals.

After scanning the menu, I placed my order and prepared to wait a good amount of time before eating. I was surprised when they brought the food out in less than 10 minutes; that really spoke to their dedication to customer satisfaction. After they handed me my appetizer— I ordered Man-doo, or fried dumplings— they set a sample of eight different dishes before me, each in a small cup. I hadn't asked for them, but apparently it's part of the Choi's experience. I was given the chance to try a variety of Korean delicacies without an additional charge. I sampled everything from tofu and spiced potatoes to cooked fish and bean sprouts, all divine in texture and taste. If I wanted more of something, all I had to do was ask. It was a generous offering that went a long way in preparing my palate for the main course.

I followed the dumplings with a large bowl of kimchee

and Jap Chae, an entree that's spicy and overflowing with flavor. It came out hot and appealing to the senses, a large dish of fried vermicelli noodles intermingled with vegetable slices and shrimp in soy sauce. It took awhile for me to pick the noodles up with my chopsticks (which were metal, a classy touch), but I managed to get it. For the next half hour, I cycled through the oriental entree, the kimchee and the nibblers. I made it a point to savor every morsel of food, wanting to appreciate the healthy mix of spices and oils. It was, to say the least, perfection on a platter. The entire meal was so delicious and expertly seasoned, I felt like I was back in Korea.

Choi's Korean Kitchen is a rarity in the region's smorgasbord of dining options. Not only does the restaurant pride itself on coupling superior service with excellent food, but it's a committed to bringing the essence of Korea to each and every diner. Though it's not in the most convenient of locations, Choi's is one of the best Korean restaurant in a fifty-mile radius. You'd have to go to Washington, D.C., or Richmond to find something on par with this delicious dining option. If you're looking for exquisite dishes without going into credit card crisis, this is the place to be. Just remember to bring your tastebuds!

— Nicholas Addison Thomas

Choi's Korean Kichen

1964 William Street (Plank Road)
 Fredericksburg, VA 22401
 Phone: 540-372-6434
 E-mail: choikitchen@aaultman.us
 Web: www.choiskoreankitchen.com

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