

DIM SUM is YUM at Phoenix Palace

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SPECIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC

When it comes to gathering family and friends to eat and talk and eat some more, the Chinese are old hands.

They were nibbling dim sum about a thousand years before we Americans turned brunch into a similar Sunday pastime. If you've never tried dim sum, Phoenix Palace offers a deliciously accessible intro to the elaborately prepared small plates. If you're already a devotee, don't wait another minute.

Scene: Phoenix Palace is a big room, packed with tables, some outfitted with lazy Susans, and large enough to seat the multi-



Steamed dumplings at Phoenix Palace, which quizzically is in Chandler.

generational families arriving in droves on Sundays. A small takeout area near the front door makes it possible to grab a few snacks and go. But who would want to when dim sum celebrates the noisy movable feast of traditional trolleys laden with gorgeous goodies?

It's all about abundance and instant gratification. You see something you like and "follow your heart"—which is dim sum's colloquial translation.

Service: More carts per minute than any other dim sum restaurant in town. And most of the servers speak some English while a few are fluent. They're universally friendly and willing to describe what they're pushing.

Food: Don't be spooked if you see a bowl of chicken feet whiz by. They're the exception, not the rule, in a tradition known for its refinement. Do expect an array of dishes so pretty, you won't care if you know what you're eating.

No one makes better char sui bao, steamed buns filled with sweet barbecued pork, because no one else gets the dough this fluffy or the pork this moist. They're amazing, but so is every dumpling and pastry here. We loved

PHOENIX PALACE BUFFET

When: 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily, dim sum 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily.

Where: 2075 N. Dobson Road, Chandler.

Details: 480-855-4047.

Price: \$.

What the symbols mean: Cost of a three-course meal, without beverage, tax or tip, per person.
\$ — Under \$20
\$\$ — \$20 to \$40
\$\$\$ — \$40 to \$60
\$\$\$\$ — Over \$60

the slippery rice-flour roll filled with beef and splashed with sweetened soy sauce. How gow, pleated bunnets of pink shrimp, and firm jellyfish dumplings made us purr with pleasure, as did a sweet, shiny bun filled with shredded coconut, and a little pastry perfection called Snow Mountain, its interior rich with coconut custard.

Spicy salt shrimp, nestled on taro sticks and topped with jalapeño and green onion, are all salt and crunch while crisp-skinned roasted duck, served with pickled vegetables and peanuts, is aromatic with



Savory small-plate Chinese dishes are perfect for sharing at dim sum restaurant Phoenix Palace.

five-spice. Mashed taro comes stuffed with pork and wrapped in a crispy lace; pan-fried taro cakes, unctuous with pork fat, is a different experience altogether. After all the heavy dishes, steamed Chinese broccoli, drizzled with oyster sauce, seems bless-

edly light and healthful. **Lowdown:** Get there before the 11:30 a.m. crush. But turnover is quick. Come with a group to sample more things. Items categorized A-E range \$2.25 to \$6.25, which means two can eat a table's worth for \$35 or less.