

ECUADOR NEWS - DINING OUT

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Mucki's: Paradise Found, German Style

BY LANCE BRASHEAR

Often, the greatest destinations in Ecuador seem to be hidden, awaiting your discovery. Even if you know what to look for and where to begin your search, the path often seems untraveled, until you finally get there and realize it just simply was not marked.

Even those living a block from Mucki's, one of the most exquisite restaurants in the greater Quito Metropolitan area, may not be able to tell you where it is. There is no roadside marker. People arrive by word of mouth and find it by trial and error.

This German Restaurant in the Valley of Los Chillos, at the foot of the Ilalo Mountain, 35 minutes from Quito, is virtually hidden, not only from the roadside, but from the parking lot. Two large palm trees provide the axis around which lush greenery has enveloped this residential home converted into a rustic, dining hideaway.

The Ambiance

When you arrive, co-owner Thomas Contag is there to greet you as you enter the restaurant through the Beer Garden, a rustic patio - half green house, half barbeque pit - with wooden tables and benches.

Inside, the main dining room has an elegant, yet rustic atmosphere, surrounded by photos, wine bottles and, though the weather rarely demands it, a fireplace.

For a third distinctive setting, head upstairs to the balcony and sit among more antiques, wood-carvings, and greenery for a genuine tree-house dining experience.

With the warm climate, open air design, and the gentle sound of running water, you will not find a more pleasant setting in which to enjoy any meal, let alone the fine options at Mucki's.

The air at Mucki's is fresh and the vegetables fresher. The house specialties are grown and raised on the Contag family farm. If seeing is believing, walk around back to view them for yourself - quail, pheasant, and rabbits, all caged and well-fed around a small vegetable garden.

A Family Tradition

Mucki's is named for the woman who began the restaurant, almost twenty years ago, in her own home. Thomas explains that he and his sister, Heide, continue the tradition begun by their mother. "She started the restaurant with four tables down stairs while she lived upstairs." Today, the restaurant has expanded to take over the entire house and patio.

The cuisine is German, with Mucki's touch, refined over the years by her children. Meals begin with a selection of homemade breads with a green, herb butter. Salad is served next - an array of fresh vegetables, herbs, and apples, covered in the house dressing made of natural yogurt, honey, and more herbs. Before the main meal, Mucki's offers appetizers such as crab legs, escargot, or a delicious homemade pate.

The Menu

There is no printed menu at Mucki's. A few selections will be scrawled in chalk at the main en-

trance. After the salad, Thomas will take your order and it seems most clients know the general offerings: quail, pheasant, duck, lamb, rabbit, pork, beef, and seafood options such as salmon or lobster. If you have trouble deciding, or want a little of everything, the mix grill is a sampling of all meats prepared that day.

When served, the meats come with an array of house sauces. The tender quail meat should be accompanied by the quail-based sauce made with oranges and Grand Marnier. Try your sirloin with a vinegar and mint julep sauce, the sausages with sauerkraut, and the lamb chops and ribs accompanied with honey mustard or apple puree.

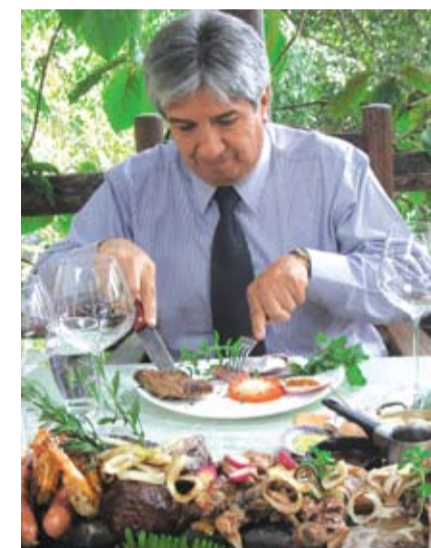
Mucki's has a wine list and full bar, complete with German Beer or their famous Bloody Mary drinks. For dessert choose from the German apple strudel or a selection of crepes, topped with ice cream.

Average price per person is \$35. The restaurant is open Tuesday to Sunday. The busiest times are the weekend, so call in advance.

Getting There

From San Rafael, take Via Tingo. After crossing the bridge into El Tingo, turn left, then make a right just before reaching the church and plaza. Or from Tumbaco take the Intervalles into El Tingo, turning left just past the church. Follow the stone driveway about 50 meters, turn right and then make a sharp left. Just as you begin to feel lost, rest assured, you have arrived.

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MUCKI'S/LANCE BRASHEAR

MUCKI'S: Count on a blend of excellent foods and ambiances in one of Quito's best hideaways.

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MUCKI'S

Pork Roast Recipe (Eisbein)

Ingredients:

- Marinating**
- 7 Pork Roasts (leg of pork)
 - 500g of cured salt
 - 5lt of water
 - ½ cup of sugar

- Cooking**
- 1 tablespoon of liquid smoke seasoning
 - Fresh herbs (oregano, rosemary, laurel)
 - 1 tablespoon of salt
 - ½ tablespoon of sugar

Preparation:

Marinating:

Create a salt marinade, mixing the cured salt with water and sugar until dissolved.

Add the pork roasts and leave them marinating for three days in the refrigerator, completely submerged in the marinade.

Cooking:

Cook the marinated roasts in a pot of fresh water, adding the salt, sugar, and herbs, over a slow fire. Cook for approximately 3 hours. This process softens the meat. If you wish, add a tablespoon of liquid smoke seasoning to add flavor. Or, as an additional alternative, after the roasts have been cooked, smoke them traditionally. Place them in a smoker under a slow fire for about four hours.

Once cooked and smoked, just before serving, place on a hot grill to make the outer layer a little crunchy.

Serving:

This plate is traditionally served with sauerkraut or coal slaw, apple sauce, and battered potatoes with white onion and oregano.

Recipe courtesy of Mucki's Restaurant