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Swedish meatballs, new potatoes and Princess Cake at IKEA
photo by Leah Ratliff

Meals are served cafeteria-style and you're expected to bus your own table – a large sign is there to remind diners of the link between self-service and low prices. The cafeteria is everything you'd expect from IKEA: clean, modern, spartan and no-frills. Yet it's very pleasant and the second-story location is filled with light from floor-to-ceiling windows. In the middle of the seating area – within sight of mom and dad, wherever they might sit – is a kid's area with a television and suitably diminutive furniture.

The cafeteria is everything you'd expect from IKEA; clean, modern, spartan and no-frills. Yet, it's very pleasant and filled with light.

Drinks are available at the beverage station -- refills are free. Unfortunately, Swedes apparently don't yet realize the importance of fresh-brewed tea to Texans – only the soda-machine variety is available. Skip this and get the lingonberry juice instead. This Scandinavian relative of the cranberry makes for a refreshing drink.

On recent visits the food generally exceeded expectations. The poached salmon was moist and flaky with a mild herb butter sauce. The accompanying boiled red-skin potatoes were perfectly cooked, while the steamed veggies were a little inconsistent – carrots crisp, broccoli mushy.

The signature Swedish meatballs were quite tasty – fifteen bite-sized meatballs served with a brown gravy and more boiled potatoes. A splash of lingonberry compote provides some color and a nice tart/sweet complement to the savory meatballs.

Although IKEA missed the boat on iced

Beds, Shelves & Lunch at IKEA

By Lee Ratliff

WHEN IT COMES TO the so-called big box mega-stores of recent decades, arguably none are bigger than IKEA. Before IKEA came to Frisco, it was not uncommon for metroplex shoppers to make pilgrimages to Houston for weekends spent wandering acres of sensible Swedish home furnishings.

Now that we have our own blue and yellow behemoth, we don't have to travel so far, but many people still spend the better part of a day shopping there. And many shoppers, finding themselves hungry

and tired halfway through a marathon shopping spree, step into the IKEA restaurant to recharge.

While some mega-stores like Costco or Wal-Mart offer a selection of hot dogs and hamburgers, IKEA is much more ambitious. They serve dishes that would not be out of place on the menus of upscale restaurants. Poached salmon and chicken Marsala are among the entrees available and are served in a pleasant atmosphere to boot.

Still, IKEA stays true to its frugal roots.

Stephenson's Apple Cake

IKEA offers an international flair to their apple cake. Discover an all-American version with this recipe from Stephenson's Apple Farm near Independence, Missouri.

2 cups sugar
1 cup shortening
2 eggs
2 cups flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. nutmeg
2 tsp. cinnamon
juice & grated rind of 1 lemon
5 cups apples (peeled & finely diced)
1/2 cup pecans (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cream sugar and shortening. Add eggs one at a time and beat well after each addition. Combine flour, soda and spices. Add flour mixture to sugar and egg mixture. Add lemon juice and rind. Mix well. Fold in apples and nuts. Pour batter into 9 x 13 inch greased pan. Bake 350 degrees for 1 hour.

Stephenson's Apple Cake made by Miriam Johnson photo by Chris Johnson



Chicken Marsala, mixed vegetables, and apple cake at IKEA

photo by Leah Ratliff

tea, they don't ignore local traditions altogether. In a nod to Texas cuisine, they often serve chicken-fried steak. Certainly not a Texas-sized portion and with breading that is eerily similar to that of Kentucky Fried Chicken, their interpretation of a local classic was nonetheless passable, with good mashed potatoes and cream gravy.

With a couple of exceptions, most of the dishes are almost entirely devoid of spices or seasoning, but it seems to work with the simplicity of the ingredients, allowing the often subtle flavor of the main component to come forward. This approach also makes it easy for diet-conscious diners to order a healthy meal of lean proteins and vegetables, while avoiding empty carbs and caloric sauces.

However, think twice before passing on the real standout of the menu - dessert. The Princess cake - enthusiastically recommended by a lady waiting in line - was very nice.

Consisting of layers of sponge cake filled with raspberry preserves and topped with whipped cream and marzipan, the cake

was somehow both decadent and light. Even better was the apple cake. Despite the name, this dessert is more like an impossibly tall apple pie with a crumbled cake crust. Served with a delicious vanilla sauce, this treat is a great way to end your meal. Finally, the rich Daim torte is perfect for those looking for a sugar fix: dense almond cake layered with a cream filling and topped with crunchy Daim toffee candy and milk chocolate.

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Like most things at IKEA, the most remarkable aspect is the price. Lunch entrees start at \$2.50 and top out at

\$6. Desserts are all under \$3, with the perfectly good lingonberry mousse only \$0.99. Still more amazing are the kid's meals with drink – only \$0.99 - and the breakfast meal, also \$0.99. Breakfast is served from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and includes eggs, bacon and hash browns. Some families have made the IKEA breakfast a new Saturday morning tradition. Where else can you feed a family for less than \$10?

Food selections at IKEA aren't limited to the cafeteria, however. Their food market offers many Swedish prepared foods to take home, including large bags of the pre-cooked, frozen meatballs, lingonberry preserves, cookies, candies, etc. And, like Costco, you can still pick up a hot dog and soda at the "Bistro" just after checkout.

While the fare at the IKEA restaurant may not quite reach the level of great food, it is good food – sometimes very good - and undoubtedly a great value. Given their competition, the food is certainly better than it needs to be and for that IKEA should be praised.

Lee Ratliff is our expert "foodie" and owner of Ambrosia Creamery.

*Poached Salmon, mixed vegetables and lingonberry cake at IKEA
photo by Leah Ratliff*




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