



# CARNIVORE CARNIVAL

5

LOCAL RESTAURANTS SERVE UP MEATY DISHES

BY EDIE JAROLIM • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACKIE ALPERS  
(UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)





outhern Arizona's cattle-ranching past is well documented, but the region's love affair with meat likely dates back to the Paleolithic period, when hunter-gatherers roamed the land. Groups of people still gather to hunt for meat, but now it's far easier to find. Top spots catering to carnivores in Tucson range from modest taquerias to upscale chophouses, from recent arrivals to local institutions.

**Charro Steak** spans both ends of the newness spectrum. You can't detail Tucson's culinary history without highlighting El Charro Café, established in 1922 and claimed to be the country's oldest Mexican restaurant still run by the same family. Charro Steak is its latest offspring, an instant downtown hit when it opened in 2016.



El Charro

The restaurant is both a tribute to and an update of the steakhouse the family had in Casa Grande in the 1940s. The large, open room—it once housed southern Arizona's first indoor car

**INSTEAD OF THE TYPICAL CREAMED CORN, YOU'LL FIND ELOTE CHARRED AND MIXED WITH COTIJA CHEESE AND DUSTED WITH CHILES.**

dealership—has a contemporary look, with lots of natural light. But rustic details include a meat rack-turned-tequila holder found on a family ranch in Mexico.

Beef, free-range and butchered in house, is the star of the menu. The most popular cuts are the US classics: T-bone, boneless rib eye, New York strip, filet. But the sides get a south-of-the-border



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The boneless rib eye from Charro Steak 1

The Charro Burger topped with a charred poblano 2

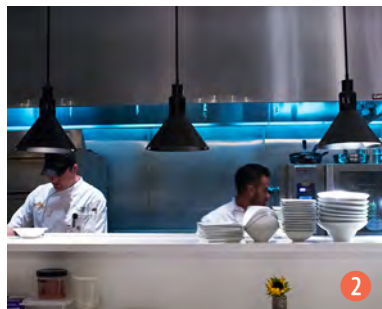
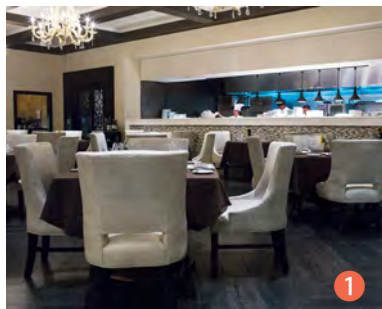
Owner and executive chef Carlotta Flores 3

The rustic interior of Charro Steak 4

Tucson's Favorite T-Bone at Charro Steak 5

COURTESY OF CHARRO STEAK





spin. Instead of the typical creamed corn, for example, you'll find *elote* (Mexican street corn), charred and mixed with cotija cheese and dusted with chiles. After dinner, a margarita flan stands in for key lime pie.

**PY Steakhouse** is an oasis of serenity in the bustling Casino Del Sol Resort, owned and operated by the Pascua Yaqui people on Tucson's south side. The Rat Pack would have felt at home in the simple but elegant dining room, a study in black and white with sparkling chandeliers—not to mention in the low-lit cigar lounge and the nearby high-roller gaming rooms.

They would also have recognized much of the surf-and-turf menu. Beef tartare and lump crab cakes are among

**T**HE RAT PACK WOULD HAVE FELT AT HOME IN THE SIMPLE BUT ELEGANT DINING ROOM, A STUDY IN BLACK AND WHITE WITH SPARKLING CHANDELIERS.

the appetizers; salads include a wedge with blue cheese; basted, broiled, or braised steaks are entrée staples; and every Wednesday brings a prime rib special. The whiskey list is voluminous, with samplings offered in flights based on region of origin, production method, or age.

Likely less familiar to the original Oceans 11 crew: porcini mushroom salt as a steak supplement, chorizo and cilantro in the broiled oysters, and a tandoori spice rub for the rack of lamb.

- 1 PY Steakhouse's elegant dining room
- 2 Take a peek at the chefs preparing entrées.
- 3 Decadent bone marrow steak topping
- 4 Add a lobster tail for your own surf and turf.



That would hold true too for cocktail ingredients like vanilla pecan orgeat and chai fig. Unfamiliar, maybe, but in the hands of PY's talented chefs and mixologists, innovation is very tasty.

Tucson's east side was long dominated by ranch spreads, one of them belonging to the Bedient family. It was their horsey upbringing—which included eating steak almost every night—that inspired Ken and Lisa Bedient and their children, Kevin and Logan, to open **The Horseshoe Grill** on the side of town they knew best. They enlisted the talents of their son-in-law, Andy Romero, whose long cooking resumé includes the Tanque Verde Ranch Resort.



A horseshoe-shaped bar is the centerpiece of the spacious dining room. The walls are decked with items from the family ranch: coiled ropes used in local rodeos, chaps worn by Lisa, a Navajo horse blanket gifted by a friend. But while the decor is fascinating, most diners' eyes are riveted on the open kitchen, where mesquite-smoked meat emerges from Tucson's first indoor smoker. Can't decide on your entrée meat? A sampler plate lets you try smoked baby-back ribs, sausage, pulled pork, and brisket. Portions are so generous that you might wonder how anyone gets back to work without a nap after enjoying one of the lunch-time special burgers or steaks.

**A HORSESHOE-SHAPED BAR IS THE CENTERPIECE OF THE SPACIOUS DINING ROOM.**



- Freshly smoked baby-back ribs **1**
- Taste it all with a sampler plate. **2**
- The horseshoe-shaped bar **3**
- Fill up on classic meat and potatoes. **4**





1

Immigrants are essential to the dining life of any city worth its salt—or soy sauce. (Of course, only the Pascua Yaqui and other native peoples can avoid the immigrant label in Tucson.) **Takamatsu**, a Japanese/Korean restaurant in midtown, demonstrates that ranchers—whether Mexican or Anglo—have



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no monopoly on barbecue. The difference is that, in Korea, it's traditional to cook your own at specially designed tables with built-in grills.

The meat to be roasted falls into two basic categories, marinated and unmarinated.

Bulgogi, the best known of the first group, is thinly sliced rib eye soaked in a

**I**T'S TRADITIONAL TO COOK YOUR OWN AT SPECIALLY DESIGNED TABLES WITH BUILT-IN GRILLS.



JACOB CHINN

sweet-and-peppery mix of soy and sesame oil. Popular cuts of the second type include pork belly and beef deckle, the fatty underside of brisket. Along with the meat, you get sides to throw on the grill—onions, raw garlic, and jalapeños—as well as small dishes not intended to get the heat treatment, such as kimchi. The final step in this elaborate dining ritual: wrap all the ingredients of your choice in the accompanying lettuce leaves.

Yes, lettuce wraps existed in many countries before the Paleo diet became all the rage—at least the modern interpretation of it. Recent studies show that cave people ate carbs. You definitely won't want to forgo



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- 1 Combine all the pieces to create a delicious meal.
- 2 Cook all your meat at the grill built into your table.
- 3 Go raw with a sushi boat.



them at **BK Tacos**, especially if you go for the specialty: Sonoran hot dogs. The buns that enfold Tucson's famous bacon-wrapped beef franks are baked fresh every day for BK and are large enough to hold the default toppings: pinto beans, onions, diced tomatoes, mayonnaise, mustard, and a house-recipe jalapeño

## THE BUNS THAT ENFOLD TUCSON'S FAMOUS BACON-WRAPPED BEEF FRANKS ARE BAKED FRESH EVERY DAY.

sauce, with a roasted yellow chile on the side.

You'll find other things to add on the condiments cart: several types of salsas, guacamole, cabbage, and cucumbers. These are equally complementary to another BK favorite, the Caramelo: *carne asada* and cheese in a flour or corn tortilla.

The original southside restaurant, which grew out of a taco stand, remains very popular, but the newer branch in midtown has table service and serves alcohol—cocktails as well as beer and wine. The ancient hunter-gatherers



moved around too much to ferment beverages, but Tucson has a 4,000-year history of agriculture, so there's reason to believe we had a jump on producing spirits.

If not, we're doing a good job catching up.

*When it comes to meat, Contributing Dining Editor Edie Jarolim has chops: Her great uncle was Sigmund Freud's butcher in Vienna (see [freudsbutcher.com](http://freudsbutcher.com)).*

Carne asada and cheese **1**

Sonoran hot dog, the Tucson staple **2**

The casual interior of BK Tacos **3**



## PALEO PURSUITS

**BK Tacos** 2680 N. 1st Ave., 520-207-2245;  
5118 S. 12th Ave., 520-295-0105; [bktacos.com](http://bktacos.com)

**Charro Steak** 188 E. Broadway Blvd., 520-485-1922,  
[charrosteak.com](http://charrosteak.com)

**The Horseshoe Grill** 7713 E. Broadway Blvd.,  
520-838-0404, [thehorseshoetucson.com](http://thehorseshoetucson.com)

**PY Steakhouse** Casino Del Sol Resort,  
5655 W. Valencia Rd., 520-324-9350, [casinodelsol.com](http://casinodelsol.com)

**Takamatsu** 5532 E. Speedway Blvd., 520-512-0800,  
[takatucson.net](http://takatucson.net)

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