

Rita's Date Guide for Guys: *AZTECA RESTAURANT & CANTINA, COLLEGE PARK, MD*

by Rita Colbert, ritacolbert.com



*Eating at Azteca is like
a party with friends!*

Greeted at the door with a friendly smile and hearty handshake, you feel as if you are being welcomed into a good friend's home! With vibrant and bold colors, and a bar that replicates an authentic Mexican cantina, walking into Azteca feels like walking into a Mexican fiesta!

In the last few years, I've watched online as James Burick (a member of Singles in the Suburbs) and his partner, Mario Orellana, transformed a vacant retail space into a colorful, Tex-Mex, restaurant! When it was finished, I couldn't wait to try it out, so I called up Buck and convinced him that this was the location for our second date field trip! Casual and fun, I felt right at home at Azteca!

WHAT TO WEAR

You'll be perfectly comfortable in jeans at Azteca but, guys, please don't confuse casual with dowdy! This is a date after all! Jeans are okay but balance them with a crisp dress shirt and, please, no sneakers! Take into account where your date is coming from and be sure to dress to complement her attire.

WHAT TO ORDER

The food is incredible and the menu showcases Mario's Latin heritage offering a variety of authentic Mexican and Tex-Mex options! Buck and I wanted to order EVERYTHING! James pulled up a chair and walked us through our options and, before we could say a word, Mario had Ceviche Mixto (shrimp, filet of flounder, marinated in lemon juice, spices & cilantro, served with avocado) on the table and ice cold margaritas in our hands!



Where is It?

9505 Baltimore Avenue
College Park, Maryland 20740
(301) 474-8226
<http://azteccantina.com>

Hours: Daily, 11am-11pm

Parking

There is hidden, free, parking in the back (if you aren't able to pull into one of the spaces located immediately in front of the restaurant).



Pocket Guide to a Date at Azteca

Style: Casual

Expect to spend: \$50 - \$90

Best tables: By the front window

Best evening: Thursday (less crowded)

Order: Plato Picadera Especial or call ahead for the Paella Marinera for Two

Drinks: Azteca Sunrise (for her) and the Bluebird (for him). Both should enjoy Azteca's delicious margaritas!

After dinner: Dessert and a cocktail coffee in the cantina

Where to make your move: Cozy up next to her in a corner table of the cantina.

Mario explained that authentic Tex-Mex dishes often center on combination plates with multiple options on one platter, so we decided to be adventurous and ordered the Plato Picadera Especial! And especial it is, consisting of Codorniz (Quail), Mexican Sausage, Beef, Chicken, Ribs, Shrimp, Yuca, Pico de Gallo and onions (although, I suggest substituting the onions with another vegetable of your choice.) Have you ever had quail? Neither had I and now I wonder why I waited so long! An ample serving, there will be plenty to share and eating off the same plate will create an immediate level of familiarity that will help set the tone for the rest of the evening!

WHAT TO DRINK

As any good party host would do, Mario kept the beverages coming and we eventually had to decline another margarita, recognizing that one of us would have to drive home! We suggest that your date have the Azteca Sunrise, the restaurant's Signature Drink. It's pinkish red, fruity and fun to just look at! Men, you have a wide selection of quality, Mexican, beers to choose from, but if you're feeling adventurous as well, order the "Bluebird." They won't tell you what is in the drink but it's tasty!

WHERE TO SIT

When you make your reservation, ask for one of the tables by the window. You'll be far enough away from the bar that you can start your evening in a quieter location, but you'll still be able to view the activity throughout the entire restaurant.

WHERE TO GO AFTER

Like any good celebration, the party at Azteca can last well into the night! After dinner, head over to the bar and enjoy a delicious dessert and coffee cocktail. Azteca's bar replicates the feeling of an authentic, Mexican, cantina. Grab one of the back, left, tables for two. You'll be close and comfortable under soft, dim lighting. We highly suggest ordering a few of the restaurant's gelatos to sample and share (chocolate, mango, rum raisin, chocolate with jalapeno, Mexican vanilla, papaya or cinnamon)!

My night at Azteca was enjoyable! From the moment you step through the door you feel as if you are being welcomed into someone's home! The staff's focus is on ensuring that you have a great night—and with good food and drinks flowing freely—you will! Be sure to follow our secret tip #2 to experience Mario's personalized, and most delightful, cocktails!

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Secret Tip #1

If your date loves Paella, call ahead and order The Paella Marinera for Two (consisting of lobster, shrimp, fish, mussels, scallops, calamari & clams, simmered in saffron rice with green peas & sweet pimientos.) This dish has a cooking time of 40 minutes and the chef will work with you to ensure that the timing of its completion fits perfectly with your arrival.



Secret Tip #2

Call ahead and speak to co-owner, Mario Orellana. Let him know that you heard about Azteca through Rita's Date Guide and he'll be sure to personally greet you at the door! Ask him to recommend a beverage and he'll disappear behind the bar to whip up an ice cold concoction for you both. He'll see to it that by the end of the night you know the entire staff! You'll leave Azteca feeling not only that you've had a great night, but that you've also made good friends! It's a party you don't want to miss!