

Continued from previous page

They chose the name Rapa Nui, the native name for Easter Island off the coast of Chile. To honor the people of Easter Island, they are donating all proceeds from mug sales to the Easter Island Foundation. The charity provides scholarships for islanders and builds libraries to keep their history alive.

Servers wearing Hawaiian shirts have that friendly island vibe. It's noisy as it is filled with lively young people out for a fun night. The menus are contactless, which means you point your phone's camera at a QR code on the table to see the offerings on Rapa Nui's website.

Soriano explained that they are staying true to the original Tiki drinks. The Mai Tai is the original Trader Vic's recipe from the 1930s. Every day they spend hours squeezing citrus and other juices for the drinks. Even the orgeat (almond syrup) is made from scratch. This care of ingredients and time spent on the beverages is why, like other Tiki bars before it, the drinks run around \$15. The price also reflects more than a shot of alcohol in each drink. There are 2 ½ ounces of rum in the Painkiller. The enormous Scorpion Bowl (\$45) comes in a "smoking" giant shell and is meant for four or more people.

Other exotic drinks include the Sidewinder's Fang that has two types of rum and the Fog Cutter with dry gin, orange, orgeat, light rum, and more. I had the Macadamia Nut Chi-Chi with vodka, pineapple, frothy coconut cream and nutty sweetness from macadamia nut liqueur.

A drink like that could be easily watered down, but care is taken to use special ice that doesn't quickly melt. It was easy to drink and tasted like a dessert. Best of all, it was cool and helped balance some of the spiciness in the food.

The menu is Pacific- and Caribbean-influenced. Chef Rud spent time in Asia and fell in love with the food. Rapa Nui was his chance to have fun with the recipes and flavors he had discovered. We tried a sampling of several items, and as one friend said, "They are all equally delicious." No one dish stood out as being better.

We started with the fried chicken in a house-made Bao bun with a hint of sweetness. Most Bao buns have the filling inside, but these followed the trend of folding the bao bun like a taco. The "KFC sauce" (Korean fried chicken) gave it a unique deliciousness. It starts with a pinch of gochujang red chili paste for a bit of zing. Tamari, lemon juice, lemongrass and fish sauce are



Seared Tuna Poke with Kalbi instead of soy marinade.

among the 17 sweet and salty secret ingredients that complement the savory fried chicken. The acid of the house-pickled cucumbers with seasoned rice vinegar and nutty tones of sesame add dimension.

Next came the red curry duck bits. Large chunks of duck confit were mixed with a bok choy salad in a miso vinaigrette and served over coconut rice. The house-made curry, miso dressing and coconut were subtle flavors, allowing the duck's distinct meatiness to hold its own. Duck skin is crispy fried and crumbled on top to add texture.

The Seared Tuna Poke was served strewn on a black plate with small chunks of avocado, pickled onion and cucumbers. Rather than traditional tuna poke flavor, it had been marinated in kalbi — used in Korean barbecue short ribs. This gave it more complexity than a soy sauce marinade. We used the large, light, crunchy wonton chips to

Rapa Nui Tiki Bar

360 SW Powerhouse Road
Above Saxon's Jewelers in the Old Mill
541-668-6611
rapanuitiki.com
Reservations or walk-in welcome.

scoop up the tuna, vegetables and Sriracha mayo dip that had a hint of spiciness. This dish had it all — from the smooth, creamy mayo to light crunchy wontons to a spicy kick to the fresh coolness of avocado and cucumber. I may have had more than my share.

For a vegan option, there is the fried tofu bowl with bok choy and peanuts. The tofu had crunchy edges but was creamy and silky, picking up the rich, smooth tamari sauce

flavor. It's served on coconut rice. Even the meat eaters at the table loved this rice bowl.

While all of the other dishes we ordered were Pacific Rim-influenced, the Jerk Chicken originates in Jamaica. Jerk marinade is an odd mixture that tastes more like fruit than its ingredients (none of which are fruit). While jerk chicken can be overpowering, this marinade was subtle and complemented by pineapple and mango salsa. It's also served with coconut-flavored rice.

There are many ways to enjoy Rapa Nui Tiki Bar. Eating in the bar while watching episodes of "Gilligan's Island," at a table under thatched "roofs," on the balcony that seats 40 or as takeout and delivery (which includes drinks, until the COVID-19 rules change). Taking an Uber to the bar may be a good idea to get the complete let-loose experience.

■ Reporter: barb@barbgonzalezphotography.com