

# Culinary Confessions: Mari Luna in Pikesville

**By Father Leo Patalinghug**

When people think of Latin foods, they sometimes expect “Tex-Mex,” cumin-spiced or chipotle flavors only. While there are consistencies in Latin flavors, there is just as much variety. Mari Luna in Pikesville offers a diversity of traditional flavors without borders.

**Ambiance:** Contrasting colored walls give a traditional feel with a modern design and open layout. Maria Luna has a spacious bar and comfortable furniture. Mood lighting, a separate banquet area and open rooftop summer dining give locals a unique place for fiesta fun.

*4 out of 5 halos*

**Service:** Servers were efficient and friendly, willing to offer honest opinions and menu education to help patrons explore the variety of Latin foods. The noticeable and friendly smiles from the polite staff make you feel at home.

*4 out of 5 halos*

**Menu:** A thoughtfully condensed menu offers familiar dishes with surprising twists: guacamole appetizer samplers with goat cheese and pomegranate; Cuban and Creole-spiced grouper crusted with plantains; a deconstructed version of shrimp enchiladas; and two types of paella. Seasoned braised lamb, beef and pork dishes are regularly featured specials. Sunday offers a popular brunch.

*4 out of 5 halos*

**Beverage selections:** Red and white sangrias, tequilas, margaritas and Spanish beers are popular. There’s also a limited wine selection. Mari Luna is a good place for fair-weathered happy hours and weekends.

*3 out of 5 halos*

**Food:** The food is well-seasoned and tasty, but sometimes suffers from technical issues. Peruvian chicken was baked, not rotisserie; paella was flavorful and plentiful, but missing the pan-crusted rice texture since it wasn’t cooked in a paella pan. The restaurant’s newly featured appetizer of white and purple potato puree, topped with crab and salmon was delicious. Desserts were satisfying, though not particularly “Latin.”

*3 out of 5 halos*

It’s easy to limit our experience of a culture’s cuisine by the fast-food mentality. Mari Luna offers the appropriate variety worth exploring, outside the boundaries.



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