



Chef Richard Sandoval offers Pan-Latin flavors, as well as salads, ceviche, carved meats and desserts for Toro Toro's executive lunch buffet.

Let's do lunch: Toro Toro's buffet upgrades on-the-run experience

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MIAMI—For business travelers, timing is everything and, when it comes to lunch, timing is even more critical. Chef Richard Sandoval, who has appeared as a contestant on Bravo TV's *Top Chef Masters*, took into consideration the challenges that patrons would experience while on the go when he conceived Toro Toro, the signature restaurant at InterContinental Miami.

The culinary author, TV personality and restaurateur created the full Executive Express Lunch buffet that attempts to offer a high-end, quality lunch for patrons on the run. The buffet, which is served Monday through Friday, offers a varied selection of Pan-Latin favorites, a signature staple of Sandoval's, as well as a rotating chef's selection of salads, ceviche, carved meats and desserts.

and you want to enjoy a meal," said Sandoval, who oversees more than 35 Mexican and Pan-Latin restaurants throughout the U.S., Dubai, Mexico, Serbia and Qatar. "Lunch is all about timing. When travelers don't have a booked event, they'll break for 45 minutes to an hour for lunch. The Executive Express Lunch has worked out very well for attendees of conferences or business meetings."

Since opening in 2012, following the InterContinental Miami's property-wide renovations, Toro Toro has been one of the highest rated restaurants in Miami on TripAdvisor. At press time, the restaurant ranked third on the travel review site and highest among restaurants affiliated with a hotel. A number of customer reviews praised

The Full Executive Express Lunch at Toro Toro features a salad bar with ceviche and avocado salad—two favorites among regulars.

the efficiency and value of the Executive Express Lunch buffet.

Hotel management has also received positive feedback in person regarding the executive lunch buffet. "Guests, as well as local professionals who work in downtown Miami, value the quality and convenience of Toro Toro's Executive Express Lunch buffet," said Robert Hill, general manager, InterContinental Miami. "We've gotten feedback from business and meetings travelers that the executive express buffet allowed them to enjoy a fresh, healthy and high-quality meal while under strict time constraints, saving them from resorting to fast food or eating on the go."

Hill added, "Guests especially appreciate that they are able to sit down and immediately begin taking advantage of the buffet offerings, including fresh salads, ceviche, soup, rodizio-style grilled meats, sautéed vegetables and a selection of freshly baked desserts."

Sandoval credits much of the restaurant's accolades to the hotel's F&B staff for executing a timely and well-organized lunch buffet, but also looked to the menu. "In order to get people into the restaurant, they would need to feel engaged," he said. "I think it's critical, just not for reviews, that the quality of the menu is the most important. If you're not serving a consistent product day in and day out, then diners are not going to write great reviews."

The lunch buffet's ever-changing menu offers carved meat options such as turkey breast, as well as roast pork chops, fish and shrimp, which have changed on a weekly and monthly basis. However, the selection of salads and ceviche typically remains consistent. "The great thing about the executive lunch is that's a pretty expansive offering," said Sandoval. "We want to make

sure we have an attractive offering so guests would not leave the hotel and grab a bite real quick."

According to the hotel's management, the ceviche served on the variety salad bar has been the most popular item on the buffet. The avocado salad is also a favorite. The hot item section, which rotates meats everyday, includes signature picanha and chorizo. "Regulars enjoy this aspect since they can have a little something different each time they visit, but still enjoy the consistency of knowing they have a variety of salad, soup, meat and carbs," said Hill.

InterContinental Miami targets business and leisure travelers, both domestic and international, who are looking to stay in the downtown Miami area. It is within close proximity to cultural establishments and entertainment venues, such as the Perez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, Bayfront Park and American Airlines Arena.

Situated across from the hotel's check-in desk, Toro Toro attracts a large number of professionals from local businesses in downtown Miami who congregate at the restaurant's lounge while waiting to be seated. "It's important for guests to see a lively environment," said Sandoval. "If guests see an empty space, they would likely go somewhere else."

Born in Acapulco, Mexico, Sandoval was educated at the Culinary Institute of America, and began to make his mark on the New York City dining scene with the openings of his two contemporary French restaurants, Savann and Savann Est. He drew from his family's cooking influence when he opened his first Mexican restaurant in New York in 1997. Sandoval specializes in contemporary Latin cuisine and combining Latin



ingredients with modern culinary techniques.

Sandoval explained that he has learned one of the most crucial aspects when serving lunch. "The most important factor is timing," said Sandoval, who was nominated for a James Beard award in 2011. "Restaurants become so busy in the beginning of the day, and it is challenging to keep up with the volume of patrons. With an express buffet lunch, guests and visitors have the opportunity to get a quick bite in a limited amount of time."

Aside from the executive lunch buffet, Toro Toro offers a new twist on the traditional Pan-Latin steakhouse experience, with F&B options that range from meat cooked on the rodizio grill to a selection of fresh seafood and salads, hot and cold tapas-style plates, an expertly curated wine list and a hand-crafted cocktail menu centered around Latin spirits, according to Hill.

"Whether guests are looking to try our top-notch selection of steaks, or opt for lighter fare, there are plenty of options to choose from at Toro Toro," he said. "Toro Toro is unique because it offers guests exceptional quality for the price while serving up a Latin twist on traditional steakhouse dishes at a prime location in the heart of downtown Miami."

He added, "Our chefs and master mixologists take pride in providing a uniquely local experience to our guests by creating one-of-a-kind menus, such as our hand-crafted cocktail list, which includes non-traditional ingredients like jalapeno pepper-infused ice cubes and sandalwood incense garnishes."

For hoteliers contemplating fulfilling the lunch needs of their business guests or local patrons, Sandoval suggested three key

elements—quality, timing and offering. "Always keep in mind that if you're trying to attract a lunch clientele, I think the offering is important but timing is critical," he said. "When people

go out to lunch, they have limited time. Think about serving a great, quality meal. You must dispel the misconception that serving a fast meal would offer low quality." **IHB**

Toro Toro caters to leisure travelers, as well as local professionals from downtown Miami.

