

Cheap eats: Daphne's Greek Cafe

By Douglas Brown

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Greeks own lots of restaurants across the country, including along the Front Range. Many of these restaurants are diners that serve moussaka along with cheeseburgers and chocolate milkshakes. Sometimes the *avgolemono* - a classic Greek chicken soup charged with lemon flavor - rocks. Other times, not so much.

You'd hope when a Greek place jettisons the jalapeño poppers and hot dogs in favor of *spanakopita* and *souvlaki*, the Greek dishes would shine.

Daphne's Greek Cafe, a small chain with outposts in California, Arizona and now Colorado, does a great job with some of its Greek preparations, and a serviceable job with others. Some dishes I wouldn't recommend.

The prices are good, though, and the atmosphere - at least in the Boulder restaurant we visited- is bright and welcoming.

My wife and I took our young daughters there for an early dinner just a few days after the place opened. We'd driven past it a few times, and the lines were always long. They hadn't receded much by the time we got there.

Unfortunately for us, this crush of business led to menu vacancies. No *falafel*. No *spanakopita*. No half-chicken plate.

I started with a cup of the *avgolemono* soup, an excellent serving of chicken and egg gussied up with a lot of lemon. I highly recommend the soup. With one slurp, my daughters instantly were covetous of my order.

The soup came with a few wedges of warm, soft pita bread that was a perfect sop for the dregs of soup at the bottom of the cup.

We also ordered an appetizer of dips - *hummus*, *tzatziki* sauce and "fire feta," which is a melange of cubed feta cheese and chile heat. The hummus was a flavorless flop; we tried it during two visits, and both times it was insipid. The fiery feta was good as a dip, but later on a Greek salad it overwhelmed the salad with heat.

I went with a quarter-chicken of white meat, and I'll order that again. The skin was crispy, the meat juicy, and the flavors redolent of lemon and olive oil.

On another visit we ordered the gyros plate, and it was excellent: long, thin strips of salty-crispy gyro meat pairing perfectly with Greek salad, warm pita and Daphne's rather stiff, almost like sour cream, *tzatziki* sauce.

We also got the *falafel*, but it was heavy with grease and lacked flavor. We won't order it again.

My kids gorged on the marinated chicken breast strips, which were moist and had that omnipresent lemon zing.

The *spanakopita*? Well, as they say in Minnesota, "it's different." Whether it was dropped into a fryer or just sauteed in olive oil, it didn't work. The spinach-and-cheese pie was swimming in grease.

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Daphne's Greek Cafe

Greek|1695 29th St., Suite 1248, Boulder, 303-440-2946| \$1.50-\$9|Sunday-Thursday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; MC, Visa, Discover, Diners Club, American Express; parking. Also at 575 Lincoln St., Unit B, Denver, 303-832-0445

Front burner: Great gyros, avgolemono soup and chicken. Boulder restaurant has a pleasant atmosphere.

Back burner: Subpar hummus, spanakopita, falafel.