

LA WEEKLY

THE 10 BEST RESTAURANTS IN PASADENA

BY BEN MESEROW

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Plates and aguas frescas at El Metate

Ben Meserow

El Metate

Somewhere inside every real Angeleno (and most fake Angelenos, too) is an innate affection for big-plate Mexican-American food. El Metate doesn't exactly fit the archetype, but it follows similar lines. It is the kind of place where giant scoops of rice and refried beans form a goopy brown and yellow yin-yang that takes up half of your colossal plate, with a little dusting of cheese over the beans and a casual gesture at a salad stacked into one corner. The entrees at El Metate are hearty and often covered in sauce, whether it's a burrito or *tampiqueña* or a heaping helping of carne asada and chorizo cooked together in their salsa *molecajete*. The menu is gigantic, offering mariscos and burritos and just about everything else, but your best bets are the daily specials, a rotating selection of dishes that come with one of their excellent *aguas frescas*. The chairs aren't particularly comfortable, sometimes the TV is too loud and the lighting isn't ideal, but that only adds to the charm - it feels a little like you're eating in your grandmother's living room, if your grandmother was Latina and made outstanding peanut salsa. 12N. Mentor Ave. (626) 229-0706. elmetate-cafe.com