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## How to Survive Colombia's Craziest Restaurant

by Karen Catchpole | Sep 25, 2014

9-11 minutes

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In 1982, Andrés Jaramillo opened a simple six table *asadero* with his wife Estella in the small city of Chia outside Bogota, Colombia. Things were tough, the future uncertain. Then the restaurant Gods smiled on Andrés and his uncommon mix of great meat and eclectic personality. Today, [Andrés Carne de Res](#) is an institution with a slew of new locations within Bogota itself.

However, the original--which now sprawls over two city blocks on two sides of a busy road engulfing the original location--is still a must-visit for locals and travelers. It's reliably packed with hundreds or even thousands of people on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, the only days Andrés Carne de Res is open. There's a full DJ booth. Child care is available during certain hours. A newspaper called *El Megafono* is published apparently just for staff members, which number in the hundreds. The menu is 70 pages long and the place is packed to the gills with found-object art and original pieces created by a crew of artisans working in on-site studios.

At first the original location in Chia seems like a circus. Then you realize that you've stumbled way beyond the circus and entered a roustabout's fantasy world. It can be overwhelming and you're probably only going to visit once so here are tried and true tips to help you survive Andrés Carne de Res. And don't be fooled by imposters including a place called Andres Carne de Tres in New York City, which seems to have shamelessly, though ham-handedly, blueprinted the concept from start to finish.

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**Tip #1: Go early, pay less.**

After 7 pm on Friday and after 6 pm on Saturday there's a 10,000 to 15,000 COP (US\$5 to US\$7.50) cover charge just to get in the door.

**Tip #2: Early birds also get the best tables.**

With 11 different dining areas and more than 200 tables (each with a handmade red heart bearing a name or word above it) spread over a 6,500 square foot space with a capacity to serve more than 3,000 people, it's easy to get lost in the shuffle. I arrived at 8 pm and was seated between an open kitchen and a beam in a busy service corridor with no view of the dance floor. And you certainly don't want to end up relegated to the enclosed outdoor seating on the road.

**Tip #3: Don't be a vegetarian.**

Though there are some meat-free items on the menu including potatoes, grilled corn, *arepas*, *patacones*, and some salads, the real draw at Andrés Carne de Res (as the name would imply) is meat and lots of it. There are dozens of items on the menu, a 70

page magazine with ads, prepared in five kitchens, including a *parillada* where all meats are cooked over carbon (illegal in Bogota). The restaurant goes through 10 tons of beef, 7.2 tons of pork, and 2 tons of chicken every month.

**Tip #4: Don't say it's a special occasion unless you're an extrovert.**

On a busy night (which is almost every night) there could be more than 400 staff members on duty at Andrés Carne de Res. Some of them work the crowd encouraging patrons to dance and wear silly hats, crowns and sashes. When you walk in you'll be asked if you're celebrating a special occasion. Answer yes and you'll be singled out for even more attention.

**Tip #5: Order half portions.**

It's not listed on the menu but my waitress, Cindy, clued me in to the fact that you can order half portions for half price, which allows you to taste twice the dishes without shelling out twice the cash.

**Tip #6: Drink tequila.**

Andrés Carne de Res is a splurge, especially if you drink. The best bargain on the very pricey bar menu is a bottle of 100% agave La Cofradia tequila for \$70. That's steep, but good tequila is expensive everywhere in Colombia, and compared to \$65 for a bottle of Antioqueno Aguardiente, which you can get in a shop down the block for a fifth of that price, \$70 doesn't seem so bad. Andrés Carne de Res is such a party scene that the flagship location in Chia, about 20 miles from Bogota, offers "Angel Drivers" who, for a fee, will drive you home in your own vehicle if you're too partied out to safely do it yourself.

**Tip #7: Make friends.**

Andrés Carne de Res is more festive in a group and a lot of the items on the menu are meant to be shared. Plus, you'll be really sorry if you drink that whole bottle of La Cofradia all by yourself....

**Tip #8: Don't miss the La Trapa.**

My waitress, Cindy, urged me to try this item which is prepared by wrapping a generous hunk of tenderloin in soaked muslin along with a ton of salt and a dash of herbs. The packet is then placed directly on carbon coals by a cook at a station dedicated solely to making this dish. The muslin chars and is peeled away, revealing the tender, moist meat inside.

**Tip #9: Keep your eyes open for celebrity memorabilia.**

Lots of famous folks have visited Andrés Carne de Res. They range from Chef Ferran Adria to members of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and more than a few of their visits have been commemorated. For example, the bench that Argentinean soccer legend Diego Maradona sat on is now inscribed with something to the effect of "Maradona's butt was here." Colombian artist Fernando Botero left his signature and small pieces of original art throughout the space. Special places of honor are reserved for Colombian Nobel Prize winning author Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Yellow butterflies, a hallmark of the author's magical realism style of writing, can be seen all over the restaurant. Marquez and Jaramillo were friends until the author's death in 2014.

**Tip #10: Sleep in Chia.**

The original Andrés Carne de Res in Chia is located less than 20 miles from Bogota, but the city's infamous traffic can mean the trip takes an hour each way. It's a lengthy and expensive commute, with taxis charging \$70 and up for the ride. Instead, book a room at [Casa Villa Elena B&B](#) and let the owners look after you like family. Breakfast is included and the B&B is just a \$3 cab ride from the restaurant.