

DINING

Mad About You

A great Greek dinner for under \$8—and you can get it at a drive-thru.

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Anyone who prides himself or herself on being a restaurant snob—and admittedly, I am sometimes right there—might want to take this early opportunity to turn the page. This week, I'm highlighting a restaurant for the proles.

As much as *City Weekly* founder John Saltas and my Greece-born pal Al Viny keep trying to enlighten me about the pleasures of authentic Greek cuisine, I inevitably find myself going back to the popular street food that I learned to love in New York City. You know, the meat and potatoes of Greek cooking: gyros, souvlaki and fries. Since Salt Lake City is sadly lacking in street vendors selling gyros and souvlaki from carts, when I need my fix for Greek fast food, I head over to the Mad Greek.

Jerry, Linda, and Mary Tzakis—former owners of the Hellenic House Restaurant—now have a half dozen or so Mad Greek and Mad Greek Express restaurants peppered throughout the Salt Lake Valley. My favorite is the 2100 South location, which is also dangerously close to my favorite toy store, Best Buy. Luckily, the money I don't have to spend getting a good meal at the Mad Greek leaves me with extra cash to spend on stuff like the *Strangers With Candy* DVD set and cell-phone accessories that I really don't need.

Like the other Mad Greek restaurants, the one on 2100 South is a "drive-thru/walk-up/dine-in" restaurant, take your choice. What it *isn't* is fine dining—unless, that is, your focus is on the food, which is more than just fine.

The classic gyro (pronounced YEE'-roh) sandwich (\$3.95) at the Mad Greek is as yummy as I've had anywhere, and a tad plumper than most. Like everything else at the Mad Greek, the portions are generous. The rotisserie-cooked slices of gyro meat at the Mad Greek—a mix of lamb, pork and beef seasoned with oregano, pepper and paprika—is tender and juicy, served in warm pita with sliced onions, tomato and a scrumptious tzatziki sauce. Tzatziki is a traditional gyro and souvlaki accompaniment made from strained Greek yogurt, garlic, olive oil, cucumber and lemon juice. Sometimes when I'm feeling spunky, I request my Mad Greek gyro tzatziki-free and just douse my sandwich with Tabasco. Nontraditional perhaps, but one of the best hangover cures I've ever found. For an extra \$2.50, you can add a soft drink, fries and fry sauce to your gyro at the Mad Greek.

If you can get your kids to just *try* a gyro once, they'll probably never eat another hamburger in their lives. If not, the Mad Greek offers a range of charbroiled burgers ranging from \$1.69 for a plain hamburger to \$4.25 for a double bacon cheeseburger. In my opinion, they are vastly superior to anything served up at the Carl's Jr. next door. Predictably, my stepson on a recent visit to the Mad Greek immediately zeroed in

on the chicken nuggets (\$3.25) and mozzarella cheese sticks (\$3.45), covering at least two of the major food groups: fried poultry and fried dairy. We all loved the homemade tapioca pudding (\$1.35), browned a bit on the top with a savory nutmeg glaze.

When did you last enjoy a complete dinner for \$7.95? Mad Greek dinner platters (all priced at \$7.95) include rice pilaf, a Greek salad, garlic bread, drink and dessert of tapioca or rice pudding. Some of my favorite Mad Greek platters include the spanakopita (a flaky spinach pie) platter, the dolmathes platter (stuffed grape leaves) and the breaded, fried shrimp platter. My advice: Skip the chicken teriyaki with rice platter. It's not really the most satisfying dish on the Mad Greek's extensive menu.

But the mother of all dinner platters at the Mad Greek is the daily special lamb shank. I've never been to the Mad Greek when the lamb shank *wasn't* a daily special. Now picture this: For \$7.95, you get a ten-



Lamb, bam, shank you, ma'am: Mad Greek's lamb shank is served with spaghetti and salad.

der, braised lamb shank bathed in a natural sauce. The plate—porcelain, not plastic, with actual metal utensils, by the way—runneth over with a hearty Greek salad and about a half-pound of spaghetti. Oh, and then there's the drink, dessert and grilled garlic bread on the side. I can't even purchase a freakin' lamb shank at my local supermarket for \$7.95, yet my \$7.95 Mad Greek lamb shank platter could have easily served two or three people. How's that for value?

Although it's a walk-up or drive-thru situation at the Mad Greek, I've always found the service there to be enormously friendly, helpful and flexible. You don't get the evil eye asking for substitutions, and although it's basically counter service, a nice lady always brings my dinner platters right to my table.

If you're looking for a change from the same old boring party platters this holiday season, why not go Greek? The Mad Greek sells a Greek Fiesta Platter, which serves four-to-six people, loaded with a variety of homemade Greek specialties like dolmathes, Greek olives, feta cheese, baklava and much more for \$24.95. There is also a mezadokia platter with a variety of meats to serve up to 4 people, priced at \$16.95.

So whether it's a Denver omelet for breakfast or a meaty shank of lamb near closing time, I am mad about the Greek. **EW**

MAD GREEK
4504 S. 900 East
50 E. 2100 South
171 N. Redwood Road
5400 S. 3965 West
4700 S. Redwood Road
Open daily 9 a.m.-10 p.m.