

Paradise Found

The helpful servers ease the line woes at Paradise Bakery & Café.

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The long line of customers waiting to place orders at Paradise Bakery & Café can make you wonder what in the world they were thinking when the owners chose the name. I expected to encounter a crowd on a Thursday at lunchtime, and I did: The line was long and every table occupied. But at 1:45 on Saturday afternoon, I thought the place would be slow. Nope. At one point I looked behind me as I awaited my food order, and there had to have been at least 30 customers in the line that stretched all the way back to the entrance. Maybe Paradise Bakery & Café isn't for everybody, but it sure looks like it is.

I've been to other Paradise Bakery & Café locations. In the greater Phoenix area, they are nearly as ubiquitous as Starbucks in Seattle. And there's a Paradise Bakery & Café tucked away in Aspen's Snowmass Village, where the glamorous and glitterati gather before a day of skiing and cell phoning. They sip hot java and nibble on fruit & yogurt parfaits (\$3.75) or the occasional Mediterranean omelet, stuffed with feta cheese, tomatoes, kalamata olives, roasted red peppers, ham and scallions (\$5.95). But I've never seen anything like the mobs that gather at the Paradise Bakery & Café in Sugar House.

Perhaps part of Paradise's popularity is the service. That may be a strange thing to suggest, given that there actually aren't any servers at Paradise Bakery & Café. There is no table service per se, although there are bussers who pick up after customers. The service comes in the form of helpful advice and smiling faces that you'll find in the various lines at Paradise: The cookies and sweets line, the coffee line, the sandwich line, the salad line and the lines to pay for it all. First though, you might be offered a free "chipper," which is a mini-cookie, by the restaurant's smiling greeter. Nibbling on a chipper helps pass the time while you get your bearings.

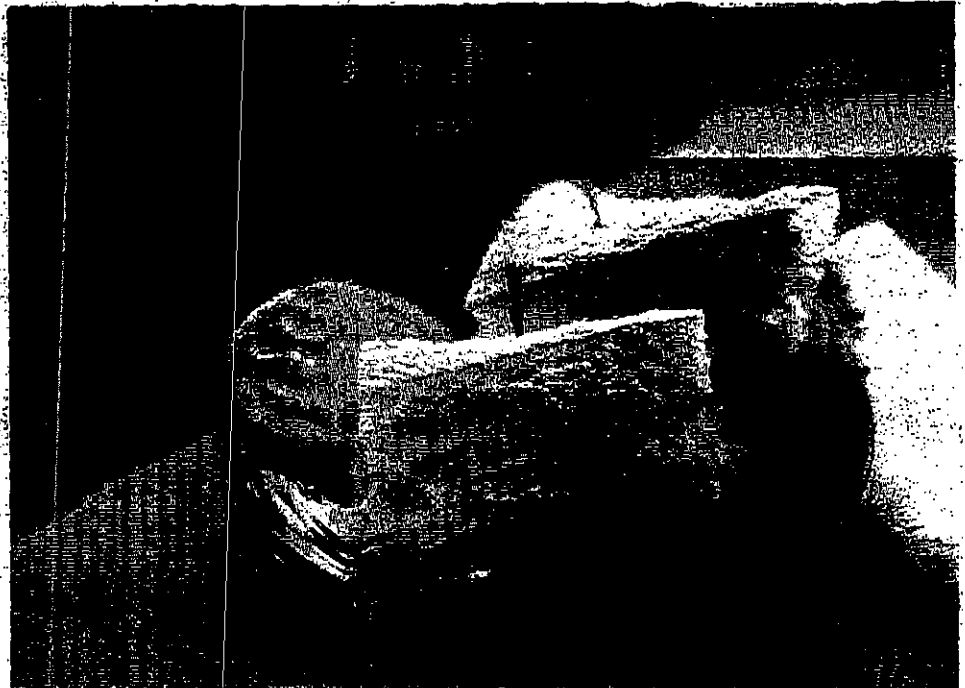
Having been to Paradise Bakery & Café a few times now, I'm a pro. But on my maiden voyage my lunch companion and I needed counseling and guidance, since the long line to order at Paradise—which might actually be as many as four confusing separate lines—can be daunting and would probably scare away anyone not paid to write a restaurant review. Happily though, our pleasant Paradise sherpa showed us the way and before we knew it, we had a tray of food in our hands, which included free samples of Paradise's awesome fire-roasted tomato soup and a killer raspberry bar that I advise eating in huge quantities. The folks at Paradise Bakery & Café are eager to let customers sample the wares, the way the folks of a craft bread-and-pop bakery might do.

But since I'm a connoisseur of *schadenfreude*, all the helpfulness and smiling that takes place at Paradise Bakery & Café is, at first, a

little off-putting. It tends to freak me out. Frankly, everyone there is so damned friendly and eager to assist that I felt like I'd been dropped into the middle of a Moonie meeting. Can these counter workers really all be that happy? If so, there must be profit sharing involved, because no completely sane person could possibly be this content and bubbly assembling sandwiches and salads. But they are. And that's one of the things that make waiting in lines at Paradise tolerable, maybe even pleasant: You make lots of new friends.

Although the freshly baked breads at Paradise Bakery & Café don't reach the artisan level of say, Crumb Brothers, Volker's or Pierre, they are still very good. I especially liked the crispy crust and chewy center of the ciabatta bread that surrounds both the Mediterranean turkey sandwich and my favorite Paradise offering: slices of fresh mozzarella and tomato, served with a subtle but effective basil pesto-mayo. But what really sets that Caprese-style sandwich apart is the inclusion of roasted red peppers, giving it a helpful kick.

The honey-cured ham and Swiss served on soft sourdough with



Basil-dazzle: Paradise Bakery & Café's Mediterranean turkey sandwich is served with pesto mayonnaise.

mayo, Dijon mustard, lettuce and tomato is perhaps the least interesting of all the sandwiches at Paradise Bakery & Café (\$6.50 each, including a free chocolate-chip cookie) but was a lot less messy than the tomato, basil and mozzarella sandwich, which I suppose counts for something. On the other hand, the tuna sandwich is anything but pedestrian, with big chunks of albacore tuna served on rustic multigrain bread with mayo, lettuce, tomato and crunchy sprouts. By the way, since the folks at Paradise are always happy to please, you can have your sandwiches made with whatever bread you prefer. If you want your chicken-walnut-salad sandwich on a buttered croissant rather than molasses bread, go for it!

Or maybe it's the salad-lovers who make this place so popular. The oriental salad with strips of chicken breast and fragrant hints of sesame and ginger (\$5.25) was as outstanding as it was massive. And kids aren't overlooked at Paradise either, with choices of macaroni and cheese, grilled cheese, turkey and ham, peanut butter and jelly, and "bites from mom and dad (free)." Smiling faces, friendly service and good food: Hey, that's likely to draw a crowd! **EW**

PARADISE
BAKERY & CAFÉ
1010 E. 2100 South
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Breakfast, lunch
& dinner
Monday-Saturday
Breakfast & lunch
only Sunday