

## Mozambique Peri-Peri Does the Mazavaroo

This Newport Beach restaurant is the cheaper, fast-casual sister of the venerable Laguna Beach original

By **EDWIN GOEI** Friday, Feb 17 2012

The last time I ate the woefully underappreciated sausage called boerewors, it was at a now-shuttered South African bar in Long Beach. It's as basic a tube steak as you can imagine: mildly spiced ground beef stuffed into casing with bits of fat, browned on the grill, and served with its two ends as stubby as a just-extinguished cigar. The texture is coarse, closer to a hamburger than a hot dog, and at Mozambique Peri-Peri in Newport Beach, it can be had in a hoagie roll as a sandwich; as the third protein in a full-on combo meal also involving chicken and shrimp; or, best yet, in a roti wrap stuffed with French fries and a slathering of tomato bredie sauce, an almost-fruity stew of tomato and spices that I'm shortchanging when I describe it as kind of South African version of Italian ragu.

The restaurant lovingly refers to this sausage wrap and others similar to it as African burritos. It does so because it directly competes with Chipotle and other fast casuals next door. And it's an apt descriptor, especially when you consider the peppa drop steak wrap, with its seasoned chunks of grilled beef and beans, could almost be mistaken as a carne asada burrito. You can't blame Mozambique for resorting to terms we can understand—how else to familiarize its African cuisine with customers who would otherwise be unfamiliar? Most who walk in to Mozambique Peri-Peri will need something to relate to when they survey the list of foreign-sounding ingredients such as peri peri and mazavaroo. The cashier—often a doe-eyed blonde, always two degrees happier than her customers—is also a tour guide. "Do you have any questions about our menu?" she brightly asks everyone who enters.



Mary Pastrana

Triangle of tastiness



Mary Pastrana

Affordable in Newport!

Peri peri, she'll tell you, is the house spice—an African chili pepper that Mozambique bottles in a hot sauce that resembles a cross between Tabasco and Italian dressing. Mazavaroo is a Mauritian pesto of sorts, made by pulverizing green chiles into a paste that's dribbled onto the restaurant's mazavaroo fries. The sauce is thinner than Peruvian aji and chunkier than chile verde; with every bite, the hotness builds to a slow, steady burn that eventually leaves your mouth numb, your brow damp, and you forever spoiled for any mound of fried potatoes left unpackled by the piercing blend.

I'll go so far as to say that a meal consisting of a boerewors roll with a side of mazavaroo fries is the best plate of food, period, at this Irvine Co. plaza. The Bluffs features Daphne's, Chipotle and Pei Wei, all of which offer nothing that compares. While it's true that Mozambique Peri-Peri is to the original Mozambique in Laguna Beach as Pei Wei is to P.F. Chang's, this restaurant is the better ambassador for its forebear than Pei Wei can ever be to its parent chain. With a mirrored wall and classy, black seat cushions, the dining room itself has an elegance unusual for a fast-casual. It's easily the Theron in a plaza full of Kardashians. Most important, the two cooks on staff work as though they are feeding a finicky Laguna Beach crowd. Watch them in action, and you'll see vegetables sautéed to order in blazing-hot pans, steaks searing atop a smoky grill, and hot fries going airborne, tossed into a bowl under a blizzard of salt.

The prices are, of course, the main difference. As of this writing, Mozambique Peri-Peri offers a roasted pork chop as big as **Gibraltar** served with surprisingly buttery mashed potatoes and a still-crisp sauté of broccoli, zucchini and red peppers for about the price of two Subway foot-longs. The chicken curry bowl is even cheaper, and the way the gravy seeps into the yellow **Moroccan** rice is as remarkably satisfying as seeing the Springboks in action. Mozambique's curry shares the tomato pep of Indian chicken tikka masala and the milky warmth of Thai yellow curry. It would also be appropriate to sample some samosas as a side dish—the flaky, triangular parcels are also Indian imports to South Africa.

When you are ready to go past the "burritos," ask for the Combo **Maputo** Platter, which eats like a **CliffsNotes** summary of some of the original eatery's best items. A small offering of boerewors is included, alongside a quarter of the peri peri chicken criss-crossed with char, two bifurcated grilled shrimp, a cup of spicy black-eyed-pea stew, pineapple slaw and more of those addictive mazavaroo fries—the gateway drug that will, sooner or later, compel you to go directly to the supplier in Laguna Beach.

*This review appeared in print as "Do the Mazavaroo: Mozambique Peri-Peri is the cheaper, fast-casual sister of the venerable Laguna Beach original."*