

eat&drink

Does bacon make everything better at Kaiser Tiger?

By Michael Nigrant | FOR REDEYE

I'd like to say that Chicago is officially over the bacon craze, but evidence to the contrary just keeps coming. Baconfest, the local annual festival of all things bacon, just celebrated its sixth year serving 4,500 guests and 7,800 pounds of bacon. On Saturday, Chicago welcomes the Bacon Chase, a 5K run (or a 0.05K dash for the ultimate slacker) with bacon-scented race bibs and unlimited bacon at the finish line. And now there's Kaiser Tiger in the West Loop, a beer, bacon and sausage hall serving up deep-fried bacon, bacon sausages, bacon dipping sauces and bacon flights. It seems you can't keep a good pig down. MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR.

REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE. REDEYE@TRIBUNE.COM | @REDEYEATDRINK

WHAT'S WITH THE NAME?

Co-owner Chris Latchford said he wanted to use a German word in his meat-centric restaurant's name to honor butchers, who were usually "old German guys," and "kaiser" means king or caesar in German. The choice to feature a tiger as the restaurant's namesake was more serendipitous. "I'll came up with this logo design where I put a top hat on a Tiger and I liked it," he said.



Kaiser Tiger

1415 W.
Randolph St.
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Take it or
leave it



Down to pork



It also seems that bacon does not make everything better. At least not when it came to Kaiser Tiger's bacon grenades (\$12), which are deep-fried, beer-battered, bacon-wrapped spicy beef and pork meatballs. The batter was sweet, but dense and crumbly, like a Long John Silver's hush puppy that had been tanning under a heat lamp for far too long. The bacon inside and the crusty remains of the meatball had me lapping up the side dish of Three Floyds Alpha King beer-spiked barbecue sauce like a parched desert traveler.

Then again, legends falter once in a while. Bacon came back strong in another dish called The Bomb—think mom's meatloaf reinvented by a meth-bingeing Guy Fieri-type—in which a lattice of crispy brown sugar-rubbed bacon slices enrobes two pounds of pork, two pounds of beef and a pound of pepper bacon all inflamed with a blend of sriracha, horseradish and other spices. Kaiser Tiger co-owner Chris Latchford can't take credit for the creation. "We didn't invent it. The recipe has been on the Internet for years, but we bring some sweetness and spice to it that no one else has," he said. "It's been good for us. ... We serve it at our other bar, Paddy Long's, and we were on Travel Channel and Food Network because of it."

A whole five-pound bomb costs \$70 and likely would require the commitment of at least five other drunk paleo-dieting friends. The good news is that you can get a slice of the bomb topped with bubbling pepper jack cheese, a dollop of the Alpha King barbecue sauce, lettuce, tomato and onion all served on a pillowy bun for \$14. This is the route I took. The barbecue sauce and the crispy, cooling veggies offer a nice contrast to the rich fire and sweetness of the meat. Though for \$14, I wish it would have included a side of excellent house-cut Belgian frites. Then again, a single order of frites, which really is enough for two people, is only \$3 and comes with a side of dipping sauce. You can choose from eight different sauces; I dug the creamy, smoky blue cheese-bacon-walnut dip.



Though I focused on the over-the-top bacon items, I also had enough room to sample some of the sausages. Local outfit Makowski's Real Sausage Co. makes them especially for Kaiser Tiger using co-owner Pat Berger's recipes. They were incredibly juicy with snappy casings; I especially liked the chicken muchacho (\$12), a jalapeno-tequila sausage that tasted a touch like a spicy margarita/green chili taco meal in encased meat form. Undeniably, beer still does make everything better, and the list at Kaiser Tiger, which features 24 drafts including Three Floyds' coveted Zombie Dust pale ale, is pretty killer. I also highly recommend the eminently bitter, skunky and yet highly drinkable Dark Horse double IPA Smells Like a Safety Meeting (\$8 for 10 ounces; \$4 for 5 ounces).

The other certainty about Kaiser Tiger is that it is a man's man's man cave filled with tufted leather banquettes and industrial iron railings. Dudes outnumbered ladies at least two to one when I visited, ensuring that even if it isn't exactly a triumphant bacon fest, Kaiser Tiger certainly is a sausage fest.

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