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Sun Tea

By Danny Fairchild

What if I told you that some of the best fried chicken in the Tri-States doesn't come from a Colonel, a sailor man, or a supper club? What if I told you it doesn't come from a place typically known for fried chicken at all? What if I told you it came from a boba tea shop?

Actually, you'd probably believe it. I mean... you tell me. Do you believe it? Probably. Because if there's one thing we can all agree on as humans, it's that fried chicken is friggin' delicious. I mean, look at us. If there's a culture that doesn't have a comfort food recipe for fried chicken, it's probably because that culture doesn't have a lot of chicken. But that doesn't mean their poultry is paltry.

If they don't have chicken, they probably have an analog of chicken to fry up good.

And so, it should be no surprise that Korea (specifically South Korea, for reasons I'm not qualified to discuss) has a pretty rich fried chicken tradition.

That's where the boba tea comes into play. And that's where Sun Tea Boba Tea Shop comes into play.

Korean boba or bubble tea generally means milk tea with chewy tapioca pearls, but you can pick from a variety of toppings such as popping boba (think balls of juice that "pop" when you bite them), flavored jellies, and red bean. Not everybody likes boba tea. I'll cop to being one of those people. Texture thing. But if there's someone who doesn't like fried chicken, I haven't met them. Even vegans and vegetarians, even though they don't eat meat, would likely agree that the taste of fried chicken is delicious. They just choose not to partake.

Before WE partake, let's talk about the vibe of Sun Tea Boba Tea Shop. It's very cheerful but not cloyingly sweet. It's a cool hang with a positive feel. A feel that includes a mystery. Sun Tea sets out sticky notes with markers to make a little note or piece of art and stick it to the wall. Our own Kristina Nesteby has far more experience with boba tea shops than I do, and she swears that she's seen boba tea shops throughout the country that do this same thing. Like, it's a part of boba tea culture. But I can't find anything online that talks about it. I asked someone who works at Sun Tea about it, and as far as they knew, it was just something they do to engage the community. Maybe Kristina's lying? I don't know. In any case, one of the cool things you get to do at Sun Tea is draw your muscle-memory drawing of Bulbasaur and stick it to the wall. Or a note asserting your only half-kidding

belief that birds aren't real. Or that boobs are good. It's a living meme wall. Enjoy.

The bathroom? It's labeled All-Gender, I'm happy to say. If that pisses you off because you suck, then take comfort in the fact that it's just a single-occupancy bathroom. Whatever you're afraid of won't happen. So take comfort. Take comfort in that and then die. In any case, the bathroom is clad in all white and therefore easy to tell that it's clean. I didn't have to go, so I didn't put it to a full test, but I'd definitely go boom-boom there.

Ok, food.

What sets Korean fried chicken apart from the fried chicken we're familiar with here in the United States? It kinda depends. Usually, KFC (not the Colonel kind) has a lighter coating and is double fried for double crunch. And here in the states, you're probably getting a once-fried thicker batter. Both delicious. Both acceptable. When it comes to fried chicken though, most cultures



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1. SUNTEA OFFERS A VARIETY OF HOT FOOD SUCH AS KOREAN FRIED CHICKEN, KOREAN CORN DOGS, AND BUBBLE WAFFLES IN ADDITION TO MILK TEAS, FRUIT TEAS, NON-ALCOHOLIC MOJITOS, AND MORE 2. FIND SUN TEA IN EAGLE EYE PLAZA BETWEEN CULVER'S AND CLEAN GETAWAY EXPRESS CAR WASH NEAR THE ASBURY PLAZA HY-VEE 3. GET CREATIVE AND ADD A STICKY NOTE TO THE WALL 4. SMALL, STANDARD-HEIGHT TABLES AND SEATING PLUS BOARD GAMES ARE AVAILABLE FOR DINE-IN CUSTOMERS

eventually figure out the same thing. Seasonings traditionally available might vary by culture, but most eventually land on bread-
ing or battering cuts of chicken and then frying them to crisp, greasy-gold perfection.

So what would be a good comparison for Sun Tea Boba Tea Shop's fried chicken? Breeding-wise, I would say it's most similar to a certain extra-crispy restaurant. But texture is where the similarities stop. If there's one thing more universal than fried chicken, it's sauces. I mean, duh. Nobody is unique for saying, "Hey, I bet it tastes good when I slather this on that." That's at least 65% of all culinary history. But while you might expect a tangy barbecue or a mild sauce with the fried chicken, you forget that you're messing with Korean fried chicken. You can get just their basic-but-not-in-a-basic-way Original Korean Fried Chicken and be perfectly satisfied that it's a suitable chicken dinner. You can turn things up a little by ordering the Salt & Pepper Fried Chicken, which is just what it sounds like. From there you can quickly get into some Korean flavor profiles like Sweet & Spicy. Or Hot & Spicy. Or Garlic Honey. And it's so friggin' good. Amazing, really. Again, some of the best in the Tri-States. Again, from a boba tea shop.

There's yet another surprise about this fried chicken served up delicious and hot out of a (checking my notes again to make sure it's not a mistake...) boba tea shop. We ordered the boneless fried chicken. Boneless made sense for us at the time, but there's bone-in, too. So I expected our boneless chicken to be something similar to a chicken tender off the Sysco truck. Whatever. It's a classic for a reason. But no. It

wasn't a chicken tender. It wasn't white meat at all. It was a boneless chicken thigh! Now... my world has changed for the better since my dark-meat-loving butt discovered that boneless chicken thighs were commonly available. I haven't seen that love reflected on restaurant menus. Until now. It's what chicken tenders would be if the tenders came from the bottom half of the chicken.

Detour to tell you about the bubble waffles served at Sun Tea. I hadn't heard of these before. But you can waffle me anywhere, and I'll be happy. Had to try it. What is it for those of you as ignorant as I was? You know how your typical waffles have like a... well, a waffle pattern? Bubble waffles are what would happen if the pattern fluffed out instead of dented in. It's essentially a reverse waffle. And cuz we got the brown sugar bubble waffle, we found tapioca pearls in it, but in a waffle, it's just like blueberries. No texture issue for me at all. I have to tell you, it's fun to eat. You kind of pull the bubbled portions apart like monkey bread and eat it piece-by-piece. Dust some powdered sugar on it, and I'd be ready to walk around the county fair.

I took that detour to tell you this: If you combine the Korean fried chicken with the bubble waffle... you have yourself Korean chicken and waffles. And you can't tell me that doesn't sound good. Because I know for a fact, it does. As of this writing, Sun Tea doesn't have chicken and waffles on their menu. But Sun Tea is one of the best places around to get chicken and waffles. I said what I said.

We also tried Sun Tea's Korean fried chicken in sandwich form.

Everybody has their opinion on the best chicken sandwich around. You'll likely find me in Sun Tea's corner.

I haven't said a word about Sun Tea's Korean corn dogs. Oh! Do I have your attention? Picture corn dogs that don't just have a cornmeal breading on them. Picture them also breaded in Flaming Hot Cheetos. Or French fries. Or even sweet potato fries. And try to picture that it might not be an all-beef frank that Sun Tea uses, but a friggin' stick of mozzarella cheese. Like a string cheese. Now imagine that this "corn dog" has both all-beef frank AND cheese. I know it's not difficult to imagine. You've probably dreamed of it. I've had the same dreams. I'm here to tell you that our dreams have come true. The corndogs are a meal in itself, so don't expect much room for other things.

What other things? How about I talk about the crab rangoons? Look, it's an Asian-inspired restaurant in the Midwest. They're practically required by law to serve crab rangoons. They are definitely worth the order. The wonton wrapper looks like it's going to be thick, hard, and pokey on your soft palate, but the crispiness gives way easily. Delicious. A little on the sweet side, but not as sweet as other crab rangoons 'round here.

In fact, Sun Tea's fried food game in general is strong, even with the butterfly shrimp. Light and crisp. Not rubbery at all. Bursting on your tongue. I tell you, if they have any Lenten specials coming up, they could finally make the Tri-States forget all about the loss of Long John Silvers so long ago.

Good vibes and good food at Sun Tea. Go there, give it a try, and put a fun sticky note on the wall. ■

Sun Tea

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