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Is this the Hottest Drink On Earth?

By Aurora Rodriguez

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- Mercadito Midtown
3252 N.E. 1st Avenue, Miami
786-369-0430

Seeking a Cinco de Mayo that's a little more sizzle than just another hangout fizzle? Then Mercadito Midtown has your fix.

This year Miami's newest Mexican resto-lounge is daring patrons to stop by and taste the "Hottest Drink on Earth", the Vato Loco. Concocted by the Tippling Bros – a beverage company in charge of creating cocktails for all Mercadito Cantina restaurant locations including New York City, Chicago and Miami - the tequila-based cocktail is so spicy that it takes a signed waiver to give it a try.

Those brave enough to stop by Mercadito Midtown for a taste will have their picture posted on the restaurant's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/Mercadito.Restaurants) the next day. The cocktail also will be featured on The Today Show that morning. (Now that's definitely caliente!)

Other Cinco de Mercadito specials include a \$40 sharing menu, \$5 tequila shots, a live Mariachi Band and, thanks to your friends at Miami.com, if you mention the word "Agave" at the bar you will receive a complimentary Mercadito shot.

We took a moment to chat with the Tippling Bros beverage director Paul Tanguay about the drink, their Today show appearance and what locals can expect during Cinco de Mayo.

What was the inspiration behind the Vato Loco?

We wanted to create the hottest drink on earth. It was just kind of a challenge trying to create something that was drinkable with intense spices to it. My business partner, Tad Carducci, came up with the idea. And then it was also a tongue-in-cheek idea to make the hottest drink in the world. Some might wonder, is it the hottest drink? Well, it does come with a flame on it! The result was a fantastic drink that gives you a slow burn as you drink it.

What's in the mysterious cocktail?

We've got to keep it a secret, but it does have seven different chilis in it. Fresh chilis, marinated chilis and smoked chilis. Some are dry and they all give it layers of flavors. We take some of the peppers and infuse tequila with it. We use a dry pepper for the tequila infusion and then we make simple syrup out of some smokey peppers. Then, we make a pineapple puree and we add some fresh chilis. There's actually a lot of work involved in making the cocktail, it's about three different steps, but it's fun. I love what I do.

What can we expect from the Today Show appearance? How did that appearance come about?

We just sent it out there, the idea of the hottest cocktail of the world and they jumped on it and wanted to feature it on the show. It's very exciting. It's going to be featured live with the Kathie Lee Gifford [and Hoda Kott] segment after 10 a.m. so everyone should definitely stay tuned for that.

What can locals expect from a Cinco de Mayo at Mercadito Midtown?

A huge party. We're gonna be shaking margaritas and preparing shots of tequila in a satellite outside bar. It's going to be lots of fun, especially with the live Mariachi band and live entertainment that's expected. Definitely full of surprises.

Do you plan on having the Vato Loco that evening? How many times have you had it and how does it feel when you have one?

Definitely! I've had to have it many times during the process of making it, since some options didn't work and some were undrinkable. It's always an arduous task to create a recipe, especially something this extremely spicy. Once you sip it, you get this intense fruitiness and green flavors from chili and pineapple then these subtle smoky notes and last but not least a slow burn, a warming sensation going down your esophagus and throat. It's definitely intense.



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Any advice to those looking to sip on the Vato Loco this Cinco de Mayo?

We do require people sign a waiver; there is a contract involved. It's a fun contract, nothing serious. Then I just wish them the best of luck!

The Vato Loco is \$12 during Cinco de Mayo starting at 5 p.m. at Mercadito Midtown, 3252 N.E. 1st Avenue, 786-369-0430. For more information, check out www.mercaditorestaurants.com (<http://www.mercaditorestaurants.com>).

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