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# Best of the Best

By Shelley Stepanek

*Shelley Stepanek is President of DSA, the oldest non-profit tourist association in the state, along with being on the board of ticket brokers. Shelley has previously owned three restaurants.*



## Havana 1920 In Downtown San Diego

Havana 1920, a fantastic and intimate Cuban restaurant located at 548 Fifth Ave. in the Gaslamp Quarter, just south of Market Street, was my breakfast stop on a recent Monday. Owners Joe Santos and Aleko Achtipis should be proud of their endeavor!

This is a great way to start off a morning on vacation. We began with a Double Seven coffee, strong enough to send chills thru my body; I hadn't had Cuban coffee since I was last in Tampa. On Mondays the restaurant gives you a cup on the house. The milk accompanying it is served piping hot and there just happens to be two little Cuban cookies on the saucer. I also tried another coffee, the Cubana Cortado with creamy textured milk.

The food menu is an extension with empanadas, filled with a variety of ingredients, from picadillo, ham and cheese, cream cheese and guava, or portobello mushrooms, spinach and cheese. Cuban black beans, with peppers and onions with plantain chips, is another great choice. I had a tropical taco, filled with avocado,

pico de gallo, chignon cheese blends with an egg and bacon on a flour tortilla. There are also burritos and Cuban toast to try, and sandwiches, of course with the headliner being the ever-popular Cuban sandwich with pork, ham, Swiss cheese, pickles and mustard on Cuban bread; or a tortilla sandwich with tomato, EVOO and tortilla Espanola (which is a potato quiche). If you like the yuca plant, the fries are great. They serve cheese-stuffed potatoes and croquets de pollo.

This two-story restaurant has a great view of Fifth Ave. Each room is totally decorated with Cuban Motif. There is the side panel from Copacabana Airlines going up the stairs, and two walls filled with every Cuban Cigar box probably ever made; and on the tables are plenty of artful empty cans of Cuban coffee for your utensils. I love the place! Take a stroll down Fifth Avenue and see how the area has grown up in the last 10 years.

Located at 548 Fifth Ave. 619-369-1920.  
[www.havana1920.com](http://www.havana1920.com)



## Bleu Boheme—An Elegant French Dining Place In San Diego's Kensington District

I discovered a real hidden gem in San Diego. While I used to live there and owned my own Italian restaurant in Point Loma, this elegant place was not one I had heard of. Well, my recent trip uncovered it, and it is a jewel.

Situated on a corner in the Kensington District, Bleu Boheme has a ton of charm. Beautiful candles line the tables, there are fresh flowers and backlit ice bins hold lovely wines. The chef and restaurateur, Ken Irvine, has made this the Best French Restaurant named by *San Diego Magazine* from 2010-2017.

Let me say the staff is all superb. My guest and I started with two wines picked by our waiter, Ray Aguilar: a Jean Loron Gamay Noir 2016 and a Chamonix Bordeaux Blend 2014, which we enjoyed while waiting for the freshly baked bread to arrive. My friend Maria ordered a piping hot bowl of French onion soup, while I tried the salade de chèvre chaud with artisan greens, goat cheese three ways, mustard vinaigrette, grapes and pears. As a shared appetizer, the epinard au gratin spinach was large enough for four people. It came with thick cut house-smoked bacon, golden balsamic glaze, white cheddar and fontina béchamel. I truly believe this was the best I have ever tried. Our main courses were saumon royale—king salmon, soubise, fingerling potato, haricot vert, sorrel and pistou crème; and boeuf bourguignon consisting of Angus beef cheeks in red wine, mushroom, house-smoked bacon, carrot, baby potatoes and caramelized pearl.

Other items on the menu include maison shiitake and oyster mushroom raviolis with sautéed fresh spinach, tomato relish and fines herb sauce; coquilles St. Jacques—diver sea scallops

with broccolini, parsnip purée, sherry and port reduction; entrecôte de porc—curry-marinated Duroc bone-in pork chop with Brussels sprouts, pommes purée and port-fig sauce; and confit de canard moulard—duck leg confit, beluga lentils, smoked pork belly, white kale and apple balsamic reduction. Another great menu item is the paillard de poulet—jidi chicken breast with Parisian gnocchi, white kale, parsnip purée, brandied mushrooms and chicken jus.

Brioche aux canneberge et chocolat blanc brioche bread pudding with cranberries, white chocolate and caramel sauce; gâteau au trois fromages mascarpone with chèvre goat and cream cheeses with almond crust and raspberry sauce; and crème brûlée with rich vanilla French custard topped with a crunchy sugar crustard are some of the desserts. Our waiter did miniature portions of all three. If you wish to truly indulge, the profiteroles choux pastry puffs filled with vanilla ice cream and dark chocolate sauce, Bohème crème glacée (chef's daily selection of house-made ice cream) or the les fromages imported French cheeses with house-made accompaniments will certainly be the finishing touch.

Reservations may be made by calling 619-255-4167. Located at 4090 Adams Ave. Bleu Bohème is open from 5 to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 5 to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Social hour is from 5 to 6 p.m. daily, serving specially-priced appetizers and drinks.

[www.bleuboheme.com](http://www.bleuboheme.com),  
[www.facebook.com/bleuboheme](https://www.facebook.com/bleuboheme) and Twitter and Instagram @BleuBohemeSD.



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