



Drive-thru Gourmet

Bojangles' meals are all the rage

Revel in its biscuits and Cajun chicken

When I take a trip, I like to take in the local fast-food specialty. So this week, I reached out for a three-piece dinner, including two sides and the most fantastic buttermilk biscuit that ever crumbled down my chin, at Bojangles' Famous Chicken 'n Biscuits — the ragin' Cajun chicken chain exploding in the Southeast.

And it's heading our way. Bojangles', which started with one restaurant in North Carolina in 1977, now has 378 restaurants in 10 states, with 50 more on the drawing board for 2007. Bojangles' is taking direct aim toward Houston and Texas, and the bull's-eye is on KFC, Church's and Popeyes' backs.

Unlike those big three, Bojangles' serves only one kind of fried chicken — Cajun. But it's not the spicy flamethrower that Popeyes and Church's serve up.

Bojangles' boasts a more subtle Cajun flavor. The chicken — always fresh, never frozen — is marinated for a minimum of 12 hours in a secret blend of spices. What is it about fried chicken that makes the chain restaurants so secretive about their recipe? You know, if you keep too many secrets cooped up, one day nice men in lab coats waving butterfly nets come and take you away.

Here's the Bojangles' blueprint: three pieces of deep-fried Cajun chicken, two side dishes and one buttermilk biscuit.

Total calories: 854 (for the chicken); fat: 54 grams; dietary fiber: 3 grams; carbs: 34 grams. Manufacturer's suggested retail price: \$4.99-\$5.99 depending on your choice of chicken pieces. I went with a breast, thigh and drumstick.

Things are done differently at Bojangles'. For starters, unlike its chicken rivals, Bojangles' isn't afraid to serve breakfast.



BOJANGLES RESTAURANTS INC. **DINNER'S ON:** This two-piece meal includes rice and beans.

Bojangles' opens at 5 a.m. with a full breakfast menu, including a huge chicken, egg-and-cheese biscuit that beats the stuffin' out of a McMuffin.

All breakfast sandwiches are available morning, noon and night. Breakfast is boom time for Bojangles. About 35 percent of its business is done during the morning rush. And Bojangles' is obsessive about its biscuits. They're made from scratch all day long.

The side dishes are off the charts, too. The macaroni and cheese is made with four cheeses. The corn is so sweet (a strain developed exclusively for Bojangles' by Texas A&M University) that it's served without butter or margarine.

A comparison with Popeyes is only natural. Popeyes is heavier on the spices, heavier on the breading and nearly doubly heavy on calories and fat.

We're not into crunching numbers in the drive-through, though. We're just into crunchy chicken, and Bojangles' delivers big time on taste, price and quality.

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