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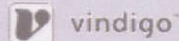
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ROADTRIP

## Getting inside the Eastside

■ Just east of downtown is a wonderland of 35-foot-tall muffler men and giant burritos.

By Leslee Komaiko, Special to The Times

Page through a few of the bestselling Southern California guidebooks. Chances are, you'll find little about Boyle Heights or East Los Angeles, except perhaps a mention of the area's most celebrated restaurant, La Serenata de Garibaldi. It's an unfortunate omission, because there is plenty to enjoy in these vibrant neighboring communities just east of downtown: ornate altars to the Virgin of Guadalupe, 35-foot-tall muffler men, burritos that feed four people and cultural treasures such as Self-Help Graphics & Art.

### Come to eat

The most familiar restaurant to nonresidents is **La Serenata de Garibaldi**, where the fish enchiladas get raves and the cars get valet parked. But there are plenty of other worthwhile culinary adventures to be had.

**El Tepeyac**, too, has earned fans well beyond its neighborhood. Given its celebrity, El Tepeyac is a surprisingly modest place with a jukebox, mirrored walls and motherly waitresses. The four Manuel Special burritos are the big draw. Sure, they cost \$13 or more, but the menu claims each one will feed up to four people. Six is more like it. Even the regular burritos here are three times normal size.

The **King Taco** at 3rd and Ford streets is considered the mother ship of this local chain, with lines at all hours. Choose caritas, al pastor, carne asada, chicken, tripe or hog maw tucked into warm tortillas and topped with chopped white onion and cilantro. They are simple, beautiful things.

### Stay to shop

Part farmers market, part shopping mall, **El Mercado** is housed in a maze-like three-story building. On the lower level, dozens of independent retailers sell everything from mortar-and-pestle sets to cowboy boots. The next level is devoted mostly to specialty food shops — butchers and bakeries — as well as fast-food stands.

The top level is home to three restaurants — La Perla, El Gallo and El Tarasco — which offer the same menu. On Friday and Saturday evenings, crowds fill the terrace outside, waiting for tables. Inside, mariachi bands perform on multiple stages. Between sets, Spanish-speaking comedians and pretty girls in skimpy outfits entertain the crowd of extended families, couples on dates and groups of friends. A photographer makes the rounds carrying an oversized, ornately embroidered black sombrero. For a few bucks he'll snap a picture of you smiling beneath the brim.

### Mufflers, murals

**El Pedorrero** has taken the art of the muffler shop to its extreme. While many exhaust shops in the area distinguish themselves with anthropomorphic muffler men, El Pedorrero is the most conspicuous of the bunch. For starters, there's the royal blue and electric yellow color combination that covers every surface, including a checkerboard pattern in the main work yard. A Batmobile-like vehicle, topped with a giant tire, is parked curbside.



Curb appeal

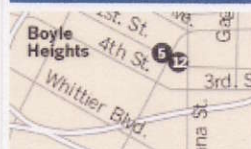
(Annie Wells / LAT)



Recreation

(Annie Wells / LAT)

### GRAPHICS



Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles (LAT)

March 4, 2004



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