

# Guadalajara Taco Shop

The easygoing Seaside restaurant offers more than just tacos and burritos

I was in a bit of a bind. I'd been working outside with two friends in Seaside and owed them a meal. It was after six o'clock, and we were hungry. I had to feed us quickly, well, and without breaking the bank. Furthermore, with the Fourth of July rapidly approaching, tourist traffic was piling up in the streets and at the dinner tables. I circled the city and spied Guadalajara Taco Shop, whose dining room was relatively unencumbered.

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Just two blocks north from the tourist vacuum of Broadway and Holladay, Guadalajara Taco Shop is a world unto itself. It is calm and easygoing with large, west-facing windows that fill the deep dining room with natural light. Dressed with soft tones and mis-matched posters, sculptures and memorabilia, the decor is akin the walls of a 10-year-old's bedroom — unpretentious and charmingly inconsistent.

A teenage girl operated the register. Beside the chalkboard menu are shelves and a case filled with a smorgasbord of mostly Mexican-made products like candies, phone cards and an array of pills, cremes, remedies and ointments I'd never seen at Safeway.

I ordered for the group, getting a bit of everything to share — a burrito, enchiladas, tacos and pork ribs. I paid just over \$30 and left with a cache of leftovers. Of the smorgasboard were two clear standouts: the ribs and the fish and lengua tacos.

The Pork Ribs (\$9.50) came with Spanish rice, refried beans and four corn tortillas. There were two ribs, each thick, about 8 inches long and topped with cilantro and diced onions. It was a solid, but not overwhelming amount of meat. That meat, though, was tender and just

falling off the bone. Lightly seasoned with a (not at all spicy) red sauce, the pork partnered so finely with the rice and beans it made me wonder: Why were pork ribs a rarity at Mexican restaurants?

More common, of course, are fish tacos (\$3) and Guadalajara has made them its own. The cod is breaded, briskly fried and nothing in particular to write home about. But the creamy white sauce, with a pinch of pickle or dill, affords the dish its singular character.

The Carne Asada Taco (\$3) too was a little different than the norm. Topped with onions and cilantro, the chunks of beef were plentiful, moist and contained almost no chunks of fat — fine for not biting into a piece of chewy gristle, less so for rich taste. Overall, it was a little dull.

Much more satisfying was the succulent



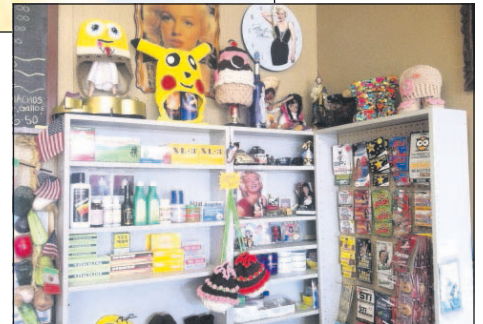
The Carne Asada Taco contains moist chunks of beef topped with onions and cilantro.

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Lengua Taco (\$3). Like the ribs, the beef tongue was slowly, achingly cooked, ready to pull apart thanks almost to gravity alone. It was salty and juicy, almost like it had been stewed.

The Chicken Burrito with a smoky red sauce (\$6) was serviceable, though hardly memorable. For an empty stomach (or wallet) it's a substantial amount of food that, filled with rice, beans, meat and a few onions, satiates without distinction. To be clear: Guadalajara Taco Shop has better tastes to offer.

I returned a few days later in hopes of discovering another. From the Shrimp section of the menu I ordered the Ala Diabla



(aka, the Spicy Shrimp, \$14). Served again with corn tortillas, Spanish rice (pretty standard) and refried beans (lardy in the best way), the dish proffered an array of vegetables. With the buttery, garlicky (though not very spicy) shrimp were sautéed onions, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower and mushrooms. The fibrous ruffage was a welcome edition to the shrimp, which were small but numerous.

As I noshed during this second trip to Guadalajara, the ambiance shifted, becoming a bit more lively. It was still peaceful, not bustling, but again seemingly even further than two blocks from the strip of vintage Americana and tourism that is Broadway. Spanish speakers came both to eat and do business. Some wired money using the red Internex phone on the counter next to the cash register. Others had tacos and caught up over non-alcoholic, sparkling sangria.

Indeed, alongside a few gems in the menu, the culture and auxiliary business orbiting Guadalajara's kitchen have buoyed the 13-year-old, family-owned restaurant. The ambiance benefits too.

## mouth OF THE COLUMBIA

COAST WEEKEND'S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

Story and photos by THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA • [mouth@coastweekend.com](mailto:mouth@coastweekend.com)

### Guadalajara Taco Shop

Rating: ★ ★ ★

65 N. Holladay Drive, Seaside

503-738-4338

**Hours:** 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday to Sunday.

**Price:** \$ — Entrées run from \$5 to \$14.

**Service:** Order at the counter. Takeout available.

**Vegetarian / Vegan options:** Vegetarians should do well, though vegans may struggle.

**Drinks:** Soft drinks including Mexican Coke, Jarritos soda, juice and more.

#### KEY TO RATINGS

- ★ poor
- ★★ below average
- ★★★ good & worth returning
- ★★★★ excellent
- ★★★★★ outstanding, the best in the Columbia-Pacific region