

# Ecola Seafood Restaurant & Market

Raw, preserved or prepared, this Cannon Beach restaurant serves authentic eating experiences

“Friends don’t let friends eat farmed salmon,” reads a sign at Ecola Seafood in Cannon Beach. It continues: “We serve only quality ocean troll-caught salmon.”

The sign hangs among a wave of fishing-related ephemera, most prominently a series of family photographs. They document children growing up alongside the family business. Dressed in rain-slickers and standing on the decks of boats, the kids display their catches.

It’s more than a sentimental show. The Beckman family own and operate two commercial fishing boats. They’ve been at it since 1977. The market and restaurant opened in 1993, and here the Beckmans sell their catch of both salmon and halibut. (The rest, like the crab, comes largely from Bornstein Seafoods, a West Coast regional provider with facilities in Astoria.)

The offerings fall into three basic categories: raw (like whole Dungeness crab and salmon steaks), preserved (like smoked tuna or pickled herring), and prepared (fish tacos and sandwiches). In a handful of trips I found myself more drawn to the raw and preserved offerings than the dishes that came from the kitchen.

Which is no dig Ecola Seafoods’ fish and chips (we’ll get to them). It’s more that fish and chips (and clam chowder) are everywhere on the North Coast; smoked mussels and seaweed salad, not as much. And it was through this lens I most enjoyed Ecola Seafoods: Creating a tasting platter — the kind of thing you might enjoy with a few friends, some wine and cheese — made for more exciting and authentic eating experiences. Indeed, for around the price of an entrée, one can gather a picnic’s worth of nibbles.

Ecola Seafood’s smoking is done in-house, and since salmon and halibut are currently out of season, they’re the best way to get a taste of what the family has caught. The prices — like \$28.99 per pound for smoked Chinook salmon and halibut — might afford a bit of sticker shock, but remember: A pound of smoked fish is also a lot of fish. You eat it in tiny bites. For around five bucks you’ve got yourself a cell-phone or wallet-sized chunk that’s enough to share.

Of the three smoked fillets I tried, I most enjoyed the peppered salmon. It was flaky and familiar, though perhaps overly-sapped of its oils. It was also hastily de-boned — in a small chunk, my companion and I discovered three. Drier still, the fibrous halibut was almost chalky. The Smoked Tuna (\$19.99 per pound) was tough and more resembled a jerky. It frayed, almost like an old rope.

But there was something about that roughness I quite liked. It felt like food that belonged on a hiking trip, in a backpack beside some trail mix. There, it would be an absolute delicacy.

Now, I realize my reactions to the smoked fishes might sound harsh. But know this: While they didn’t blow my mind I will indubitably finish them all.

From other smoked offerings I tried the Mussels (\$3.99 for a small cocktail, \$6.49 for the large). Along with the house-made cocktail sauce they were delightful. Meaty and chewy with blackened edges and that smokey essence, it was almost as if they’d been barbecued.

Both heavy and velvety smooth, the Pickled Herring (\$3.99 for a small cocktail, \$11.99 per pound) were tactilely quite exciting. The bite-sized chunks were slick, supple, brine-y and buttery. I think I enjoyed them more experientially — the texture was so distinct. My companion, meanwhile, was head over heels for the lightly sweetened whitefish.

A Seaweed Salad offered both a palate cleanser and a different type of oceanic essence. That



At Ecola Seafood, you can pick and choose preserved items to make an exciting tasting platter, like smoked mussels, front, pickled herring, left, and a seaweed salad, back.

said, I’m absolutely stumped why it costs as much as it does, particularly the small cup at \$6.99. (In bulk it’s \$19.99 per pound)

Even after three trips to Ecola Seafood I still harbor a little fear that I might’ve missed out on something. With two long coolers, accouterments stacked above and below them, as well as numerous menu boards behind, there’s a lot to choose from. I had trouble deciding, and I noticed a number of customers with similar difficulties. They’d offer to let me go ahead, or visa versa, and almost inevitably the other would decline: “I’m still thinking...”

On one of those three trips I found the counterperson both knowledgeable and happy to help. The other two visits, however, I was on my own.

## 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)

### Ecola Seafood Restaurant and Market

Rating: ★ ★ ★

208 N. Spruce St., Cannon Beach

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**HOURS:** 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily

**PRICE:** \$\$ – Entrées run from \$10 to \$25, bulk foods have high sticker prices but good values lurk

**VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS:** Probably not the place, save for pescatarians

**DRINKS:** Soda, coffee, tea, beer and wine

#### KEY TO RATINGS

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