

# Sam's Seaside Cafe

This local Seaside haunt offers value for your hard-earned dollars

A friend of mine remembered going to Sam's Seaside Cafe back in the '90s. She and her high school classmates would pack into the booths and gather around bottomless baskets of fries. The bygone special wasn't on the menu; it was meant for locals. The price: just one dollar.

Now, that deal has dried up, but the values continue, making Sam's — in the heart of Broadway's tourist mecca — a local haunt.

Paramount is the dollar beer special during happy hour. From 4 to 6 p.m. every day — even weekends — Sam's offers beers for a buck. You can get Pabst, and better yet, Session bottles. The price matches — and sometimes beats — retail.

"There are people that have been coming here for years for the sweet, sweet dollar beers," a server told me. "Then at six they fly away." Indeed, the ambiance probably isn't keeping them.

To call Sam's casual or laid back would be an understatement. With booths lining the walls, it's dim, deep and cavernous. On one trip, a damp, musky odor hung in the air, likely the aftermath of a Sisyphean attempt at cleaning ancient floors. The building's east wall is made mostly of windows. They look across a 10-foot alley onto the neighboring building's cedar shakes. While during the day they offer nice ambient light, at night you can hardly tell they exist. The back third of the building is a bar, which looks much like the front, only with TVs and video slots and livelier bursts of conversation.

At times, servers are given the unfortunate task of covering both rooms. Despite being spread thin, I found them good natured. It helps, no doubt, to share with customers that beers are just one dollar. As I witnessed, other patrons were overjoyed — it really is a pleasant surprise. The food, a little less so.

Our server recommended the fish and chips, noting the fish was house-breaded and never frozen. I went with the cod (\$12.75). The three medium-sized pieces of whitefish were beer-battered and terrifically oily. They came with a load of hand-cut fries, and they too were oily. Quickly the fries shriveled, like fingers after a long bath. It seemed as if the deep-fryer wasn't quite hot enough, keeping fish and fries from sealing quickly enough. Everything was edible, and my

companion particularly liked the fish, though he qualified them as a "guilty pleasure."

We both enjoyed the Cheesy Jalapeño Stuffed Tots (\$4.25). With a more defined, crunchy, crusty shell around little flecks of diced jalapeño, cheese and potato, they are the offspring of jalapeño poppers and tater tots. They were also about as creative as the menu at Sam's got. Otherwise, it's soups, salads, burgers, a modicum of seafood, and hot and cold sandwiches.

The Turkey sandwich (\$6.75) was about as simple as it gets, with lettuce, tomato, onion and mayonnaise on white bread. The vegetarian sandwich (aka Tubular Tracy's Veg Supreme, \$6.75) might as well be called the hummus sandwich, as it's the dominant ingredient, flavor and texture. The veggies — avocado, toma-



The Garlic Lover's Burger is blanketed with raw chopped garlic, grilled onions and Swiss cheese.

The Cheesy Jalapeño Stuffed Tots are a crusty shell around little flecks of diced jalapeño, cheese and potato.



to, lettuce, cucumber, onions and mushrooms — were of passable quality, but including the mushrooms raw was a turn-off. It was, if nothing else, filling. And at \$3.75 for a half-sandwich with potato chips, reasonably priced.

At the advice of a regular, I tried the Garlic Lover's Burger (\$8.25) on another trip. The pre-formed, unseasoned patty was wholly blanketed with chopped garlic, as well as grilled onions and Swiss cheese. The amount and preparation of garlic was at once overkill and dulled. Roasting the garlic would've been preferable, as would've a sharper, more pungent cheese.

From the hot sandwiches, a server recommended the Philly Cheese Steak (\$10) with

aplomb. "Without a doubt," she said. While the tender, juicy, thinly-sliced, peppery beef and grilled peppers and onions were on point, tomato and lettuce aren't usually found on a traditional Philly Cheese. Nor is Swiss cheese — provolone and, believe it or not, American and Cheez Whiz are the sandwich's staples. Still, it worked.

So did the Grilled Buffalo Chicken Sandwich (\$9.50), a daily special also served on a hoagie roll. The chicken breast was thick and moist, dripping in bright but un-spicy buffalo sauce and slathered with a thick, pasty, blue cheese spread. Of everything I tried, it was probably the most enjoyable. That said, it's not a flavor that I'll make a point of coming back for. There really aren't any, as up and down Sam's menu the sourcing and preparation are wholly anodyne.

And yet, if the timing's right, I could see myself returning. With a large slice of lemon, mild cocktail sauce and a (thankfully) small oyster, the shooters were another sweet deal. Consider the following: For \$5 you could get two oysters, a beer, and leave a dollar tip. Where else is that even possible?

## 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)

### Sam's Seaside Cafe

Rating: ★★▲

104 Broadway, Seaside

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**HOURS:** 11 a.m. to midnight Wednesday to Sunday.

**PRICE:** \$ – Downright cheap

**SERVICE:** Upbeat and overworked.

**VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS:** Slim.

**DRINKS:** Full bar, soda, coffee and juice

#### KEY TO RATINGS

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