

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Robust, reasonably priced Mexican food truck offers few surprises

Review and photos by
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I've passed the El Azadero truck more times than I can count, and yet I never realized that the food truck offers indoor dining. And, you know, that's kind of a big deal. There are very few months — nay, weeks, the way this rotten, unrelentingly tepid, gray “summer” has been going — where eating outdoors on the North Coast can be reliably comfortable. All the wind, the wetness ... you know.

So, when I pulled into the lot of the former gas station where Azadero's truck is parked (just west of the Astoria-Megler Bridge) I was surprised and delighted to find the former convenience store full of tables (as well as a makeshift storage). I guess I just assumed it was empty or boarded up. Besides Azadero's big burritos, that refuge from the weather probably explains the truck's year-round persistence.

Nonetheless, you still order outside. Azadero offers the expected array of tacos and burritos as well as a handful of plates accompanied by refried beans and Spanish rice. I asked the counterperson for some direction. “What do you like best?” I wondered. “What's most popular?” He returned with the non-answer: “Everything.” I pushed. “Come on, you must have a favorite?” “I like the chicken, the beef, the pork. Everything is good.” OK. Yeah. Thanks.

For reasons I can't wholly explain, I went with the Ya Vaz (\$12). Indeed, the five different plates are all pretty similar — a mix of meats and a few veggies cooked on a flat-top, bound together with melted cheese. I suppose it was the bell peppers that drew me to the Ya Vaz, though meats — including asada, bacon and thin-sliced deli-style ham — greatly outweighed the small cut veggies. It was gooey, salty and piping hot, topped with several slices of avocado. Crisp crumbles of bacon were the most



El Azadero, a food truck located just west of the Astoria-Megler Bridge at the site of a former gas station, offers indoor seating inside an adjacent former convenience store.



The Lengua (beef tongue) taco, left, was supple and juicy compared to the Asada (beef) taco, center. The Pastor (pork) taco, right, has a mild, peppery red sauce.



The Veggie Burrito was packed with lettuce, tomatoes, cilantro, rice, beans and sour cream.

prominent flavor. The Spanish rice was dry and nondescript, the beans slurry, and neither was half as hot as the main course. An accompanying stack of corn tortillas pumped up the starches, making the Ya Vaz a reasonable but not overwhelming amount of food.

After a few bites of the creamy, salty, greasy, egg-less scramble, I set out to balance the meats with Azadero's jalapeño-heavy pico de gallo and the food truck's mix of pickled onions, whose shards of

orange habanero peppers quickly had me welling up. The red and green sauces didn't pack nearly the same punch. The red was dark and smoky, the green thin, dull and almost milky — it almost seemed to evaporate with time. Both were rather mild.

I tried a number of the tacos (\$1.50 to \$1.75 each), served street-style on small corn tortillas, topped with loads of leafy cilantro, diced onions and begging to be dressed further. I most enjoyed the

Lengua. Its supple, juicy texture far outshone the tougher asada. The pastor and chicken were simmered in similar, mild, peppery red sauces, and I'd prefer them all over the fish, which was dry, chalky and crying out for sour cream.

The Veggie Burrito (\$5) was, thankfully, more than just beans and cheese. It was properly portioned with crisp lettuce, a few tomatoes, cilantro, rice and sour cream. It was a good size, in the neighborhood of a 22-ounce

EL AZADERO

Rating: ★ ★ ★

490 W. Marine Drive, Astoria

503-791-2866

HOURS: 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Monday through Saturday.

PRICE: \$ – Easy to fill up
under \$10.

SERVICE: Quick

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS: Vegetarians will do
alright, vegans less so

DRINKS: Mexican soda, bottled
water, canned soda

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Poor
- ★★ Below average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Best in region

can. The otherwise comforting, bacon-forward, eggy Breakfast Burrito (\$5) also featured lettuce, tomato and sour cream, which it would've done better without. And, while we're making suggestions, I'll add another: I'd love to see some of the plate mixtures make it into burritos — kind of like premium editions. I know from what I had with the Ya Vaz that it would've been terrific in burrito form.

As for the rest of the plates, I couldn't find a good enough reason to try another — they all seemed so similar. Instead I tried the quesadilla, with chicken. It was just as you might expect.

Indeed, there were few surprises at El Azadero. It is robust and reasonably priced, albeit a tad greasy. You'll get full, and you'll get in and out fast — no fuss, no muss. You won't, however, uncover any newfound flavors or dining revelations. Unless, of course, you count that indoor dining room.