

# MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local  
restaurant review

## Need a new burger joint? Try Ruby's

Review and photos by  
**MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA**  
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It's raining burgers. As the Mouth I eat so many. It's ridiculous. Ten-year-old me wouldn't be able to fathom that this is a job.

But on the North Coast, burger and microbrew joints are as prolific as puffins. I suppose it's because such restaurants offer familiar, filling fare that's tourist-friendly — you know, when they've already had fish and chips or clam chowder for lunch.

As things stood, I didn't think there was room for any more burgers — at least, anything less than a creative evolution.

And yet.

Ruby's Roadside Grill opened in early September. Months of construction tore a long-shuttered gas station on the south end of Seaside down to the studs. The retrofit that emerged is sleek and handsome. Ruby's is full of *au courant* touches — reclaimed wood, a vintage-style sign with exposed lightbulbs and windowed bay doors. In the summer when they pull the doors up and let the fresh air in, Ruby's ought to be downright placid. The restaurant's east face opens upon expansive views: a grassy field, pond and rolling hills. Picnic tables provide seating inside and out. There's also a massive, gas-fueled fire pit. Near the size of a VW bus, it radiates more than enough heat to make off-season outdoor dining reasonable. Design-wise, Ruby's feels like something you might find in Portland or, rather, Seattle, where the owners live.

The staff are friendly locals. They take orders at the counter. There are eight different burgers, all which come a la carte. Fries and other sides are sold separately, and I like that — I toss too many unwanted fries on the compost. There are a few other entrées like hot dogs and barbecue shrimp

tacos, but Ruby's focus is clear: burgers *uber alles*. The firmly medium-sized, 6-ounce patties are cooked to order. All I ate were ordered medium rare and most came that way — a little pink in the center. Only once did I get one that was full-on medium. All were well seasoned. The patties are hand-formed, and the beef is above average, though not quite enough to make you gasp in wonder.

Rather than hip, the accoutrements are more tried and true. Instead of kimchi, truffle oil and pork belly, you'll find bacon, avocado and garlic aioli. Nowhere is Ruby's trying to flip the burger on its head. Narrowly focused, the restaurant is shooting simply for solid execution and mostly hits the nail on the head.

Of the burgers I tried, the Seaside (\$9.95) was my favorite, with its tightly coiled, bacon wrapped Walla Walla onion and a vinegar-forward, almost mustard-y, barbecue sauce that prized a serrated edge well before sweetness.

The Cabo (\$8.50), with a thick blanket of melted jack cheese, pickled onions and avocado — along with lettuce and tomato — was a slightly blingy but mostly standard burger — a worthwhile standard, mind you.

The Hombre (\$9.50), with a smooth layer of refried beans spread beneath the patty, was topped with hefty dollops of pico de gallo, sour cream, a dab of enchilada sauce and crunchy Frito chips, was a gentle merge into the left lane. The cook suggested I add cheese and lettuce and he was right to do so; so right the menu should be amended — the added freshness and gooey cheese is a no-brainer. "It's like a taco salad burger," he



**Above:** The Seaside burger features a bacon-wrapped Walla Walla onion and a vinegar-forward, almost mustard-y barbecue sauce.

**Left:** The Hombre Burger features refried beans, a beef patty, pico de gallo, sour cream, a dab of enchilada sauce and crunchy Frito chips. The Mouth liked the addition of lettuce and cheese.

said. Indeed.

The Hombre is not Ruby's version of a chili burger. The actual Chili Cheese burger (\$8.50) is served open face. The patty and buns are covered in a beefy, tomato, black-and-kidney bean chili, shredded cheese and onions. For \$1 more than the standard burger, it's a whole meal by itself — no sides needed. To be sure: Ruby's regular burgers mostly suffice by themselves for lunch, but they could be a little lonesome at dinner.

The House Fries (\$2.65 regular, \$3.95 large) are better than average. Not too machined, they're nicely crisp and still soft inside. Adding mozzarella is not just advised — I command you to do it! For a mere 30 cents more, the whole pile melts together gloriously. But there's no more filling bargain than the smashed potato — which is not mashed

potatoes. They're red potatoes that are baked then dunked in the deep fryer, mashed open and dusted with parmesan. The skin is crisp and the center whole. It's about as much food as you'll get anywhere for \$1.50, though if you're not able to moisten them with hot sauce (or, god forbid, ketchup) springing for the gravy is probably worth the extra dollar.

As well as Flash Fried Brussel Sprouts (\$5.95), Ruby's offers a trio of salads — a Caesar, Shrimp Louie and the Asian (\$7.95), which I tried. With a sesame oil-forward, ginger-tinged dressing, crunchy wontons, carrots, cabbage and sunflower seeds, it was about what you'd expect and want out of a nouveau fast-food salad: a lot of dressing pumping flavor above raw healthiness. But make no mistake: It's wholly responsible.

As one of my visits came in the midst of the World Series and

### RUBY'S ROADSIDE GRILL

Rating: ★ ★ ★

2323 S. Roosevelt Drive

U.S. Highway 101, Seaside

PHONE: 503-739-7333

HOURS: 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Sunday to Thursday; 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

PRICE: \$ – Burgers, served a la carte, range from \$7.50 to \$9.95.

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN

OPTIONS: Veggie patty and salads.

SERVICE: Jovial, accommodating counter service.

DRINKS: Beer, wine, coffee, soda.

#### KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

★ Poor

★★ Below average

★★★ Good

★★★★ Excellent

★★★★★ Best in region

the Cubs were playing, I couldn't resist Ruby's Chicago Dog (\$6.95). More than the burger, the Kosher, all-beef dog, with its charred skin, smacked of a backyard barbecue. (Ruby's grill sports open flames.) The quarter-pound dog was reasonably sized and dressed but lacked a certain punch. It was firmly mediocre, not more than the sum of its parts. I would've preferred another burger.

Which, indeed, Ruby's does well. Maybe not singularly well — the restaurant doesn't compete with slightly more expensive, bistro-style burgers found here and there. The easiest upgrade Ruby's could make would be improving the squishy, grocery store-esque buns. But the whole package — the easy ambiance, convenience and the mostly reasonable price — makes Ruby's a surprisingly welcome addition to a very crowded market.