

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review



Pollo a la Crema



Carne asada and chile relleno

EL COMPADRE RESTAURANT

Rating: ★★☆☆

119 S. Main Ave.
Warrenton, Ore. 97146

503-861-2906

Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Friday; 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Saturday; noon-9 p.m. Sunday

Price: \$ – most dishes in the teens

Service: Efficient, thoughtful

Vegetarian / Vegan Options:
Not much for vegans

Drinks: Syrupy margaritas, full bar, soda

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Poor
- ★★ Below average
- ★★★ Worth returning
- ★★★★ Very good
- ★★★★★ Excellent, best in region

Haven't I eaten this before? El Compadre inspires déjà vu

Review and photos by
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Where do you get déjà vu? Is it while making coffee in the morning?

Driving to work? When you catch yourself cursing out loud as someone with a full cart fumbles with self-checkout at Safeway?

Déjà vu isn't always bad. I get it sometimes when cresting the dunes on the way to the beach.

My déjà vu is also known to kick in on visits to many of the region's Mexican-American restaurants. (It flares up at plenty of pubs, too.)

When I cracked the four-page menu on my first visit to Warrenton's El Compadre Restaurant I felt like I'd been there before.

Of the 100-plus menu entries, you'll find maybe 90 percent overlap at joints like Plaza Jalisco, in Astoria, El Trio Loco in Gearhart or Mazatlan in Seaside.



Fish tacos

It's like a classic rock radio station that plays but a handful of familiar songs in rotation. Of these anointed hits (and B-sides), I sampled a handful.

In the Carne Asada & Mas (\$15.95), the top sirloin steaks were cut cardboard thin, charcoal-y, pumped with enough salt and pepper to overcome their

overcooking. Except in the Fajita Burrito (\$13.95), which was dominated by an abundance of too-sweet caramelized onions. Mine might have well have been called the Sweet Onion Burrito.

A lake of mostly sour cream, I happily slurped the Pollo a la Crema (\$14.95), embracing the leavening tang against lardy refried

beans and cheese.

Speaking of cheese: It spilled in slow motion like water bursting from a damn when I sliced open the Chile Relleno. The pepper's earthiness was a welcome addition to the plate — an earthiness I would've welcomed three or four times over.

The fish in the fish taco — dice-sized cubes of tilapia — were scant but aggressively well seasoned and nicely seared. The finely chopped pico de gallo — different from the complimentary house red salsa — also afforded a freshness that most other dishes longed for.

Despite a pasty, tomato-y sauce, the al pastor slid through almost unnoticed in the night.

El Compadre offers plenty of rote combos (like an enchilada and a taco, or a burrito and a chimichanga) that, for the most part, aren't worth your attention.

Indeed, they're mostly just padding to a menu that doesn't need more items but more variety.

While the 100-plus choices can at first appear overwhelming, when observed from a high enough vantage, nearly everything at El Compadre melts together into an almost singular dish: a melange of grilled proteins mixed with lardy beans, melted cheese, rice and maybe a tortilla and some veg.

An alternative name for the El Compadre — and the many restaurants like it — would be Rice & Beans. Of the many dishes, only the tostadas and appetizers come without them.

Which is not to say nothing rattled me from the Twilight Zone-y sameness. I dug the hot sauce. Not the complimentary stuff that appears on your table with the menu, but the habanero variety, which you have to ask for. A brownish mix of red tomatoes and green tomatillos, onions, cilantro and habaneros, it's watery like its complimentary cousin, but punchy, addictive and distinct.

The habanero salsa had not only a verve but a distinct personality, one that the rest of the menu, in this deluge of déjà vu, would welcome. **CW**