

Las Cazuelas - Mexican Food
Fireside Food Court in Parker Ranch Center

{written in July 2008}

I like Las Cazuelas and have been eating lunch there once a week for the past few months. I started with the burritos, but quickly moved on. I simply can't recommend the burritos at Las Cazuelas. Their nacho's are sort of iffy too. I couldn't tell you if they made their chips on site or bring them in bagged. It's not a compliment. But then, I'll own up to being a bit of a nacho snob. However, that's where the complaints stop.

What is good? The salsa bar! They have three or four types of salsa, hot, mild, red, and green, along with onions, jalapenos, cilantro, and a corn relish that if you scoop enough onto your plate is almost like getting a side dish for free in and of itself. Granted, the fiesta relish--as they call the corn--has been getting hotter and hotter as the months go by, so perhaps they are trying to discourage wholesale eating of the stuff, but as yet, it's not so hot as to dissuade me.

Of course, you can't recommend a Mexican place just for the salsa, it would be like saying a burger place was top notch because the catsup was good. So as to the actual dishes that I enjoy, I'll start with the quezadillas (chicken with lots of cheese on a flour tortilla served with sour cream for \$4.95), but it's not enough for a meal, so you might want to add the pork tostadas (fried corn tortilla, beans--straight out of a can--piled high with lettuce, a dribble of salsa, and a very generous portion of this nice crumbly white cheese sort of like ricotta for \$3.25, a bargain, pure and simple). The tostadas are big, like 1/2lb hamburger big, and if you're a light eater, you can make a meal (or at least a snack) out of just one.

My girlfriend always goes for the chiles rellenos (\$8.50 for a tamale like thing made with a sweet pepper and cheese) or the tamales (soft corn, chicken, potato, made spicy hot for the same

\$8.50) and if you ask they'll make a combination plate of the two (for \$11.50).

I've never gone for the cactus salad (\$6.50), but it's caught my eye, and if you like those fried flour shells, I can assure you that the taco salad is well worth the price of admission (\$8.95 with chicken, beans, lettuce, shredded cheese, sour cream, guacamole, and salsa, all piled satisfyingly high).

At Las Cazuelas they are good with special orders and are happy to put ingredients on the side. For instance, I don't like beans on my nachos, because they make the chips soggy, and when I asked for them on the side, they gave me this nice dish of frijoles with a dash of cheese and onions on top. Nice touch!

However, I must warn you. If your idea of Mexican is a burrito, you're better off going to Tako Taco (64-1066 Mamalahoa Hwy, just down the street toward Hilo *{now called something else, some sort of brewery, but just as good}*). And while I'm at it, let's be honest, Tako Taco's beans--seasoned as they are with cinnamon--are simply better, but even with that being said, the score for the past two months remains:

Las Cazuelas = 8

Tako Taco = 0

Someday I'm sure that will change, but not just yet.

Also, to be fair, I should point out that I live a mile closer to Las Cazuelas, and so getting to Tako Taco requires passing Las Cazuelas. If I lived on the other side of town, the score might well be reversed.

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