

Dine / The Taco Stand



Clockwise, from top left: nopal (left) and pollo asado tacos with an al pastor volcan (back); grilled corn on the cob, chips with guacamole and bottles of Coca-Cola; carne asada fries (foreground); the dining area inside The Taco Stand

From Scratch

ENJOY TAQUERIA FAVORITES AT THE TACO STAND, WHERE EVERYTHING IS MADE BY HAND.

By ASHLEY RYAN

With the catchphrase “hecho a mano,” or made by hand, it’s no wonder the food at The Taco Stand tastes so good.

The eatery—which opened in Laguna Beach in January but has been a popular place to grab tacos, burritos and other Mexican fare in San Diego since the original La Jolla location opened in 2013, with lines often snaking out the door—is already attracting local attention. It’s in the remodeled South Coast Highway space previously

occupied by one of the oldest Taco Bell restaurants. Grab a spot in the dining room, where you can watch as the chefs prepare your meal in the open kitchen, or warm up near the fire pit on the patio.

Inside, a refrigerator holds bottled Coca-Cola, tea, Topo Chico mineral water, imported beer and bottled sangria while a salsa bar presents seven different options, from more mild options like the fresh pico de gallo and cilantro salsas to spicy chipotle and habanero varieties.

With a somewhat simplistic menu, it’s easy to pick out what you want to try, and there are still plenty of options for customizing your meal. Start with the “extras,” like the chips with house-made guacamole or the grilled corn on the cob, made with Parmesan cheese, mayo and chile powder. Another favorite, the carne asada fries, features 100% Angus beef scattered over crisp fries then topped with that same guac, sour cream and a thick layer of gooey cheese. (Don’t forget to return to this menu at the end of your meal for churros, also made fresh in-house and served with sweetened condensed milk for dipping.)

The bulk of the menu showcases the brand’s tacos and burritos, which are plentiful. Meat lovers will rejoice over the flame-grilled carne asada or pollo asado tacos, served simply with cilantro, onions, salsa and guacamole, while those who prefer seafood can choose from the grilled pescado, battered Baja or spicy camaron (shrimp).

But there are veggie-friendly taco options as well, including fillings like the sauteed mushroom or the nopal, which combines cactus, melted cheese, cilantro salsa, tomato and avocado for a unique bite. And, of course, the corn tortillas for all are made right there in The Taco Stand kitchen.

Many of the same proteins are offered in the burritos, though the Mar y Tierra, made with Angus steak and grilled shrimp, is the Laguna location’s bestseller. The California burrito, another steak variety that contains fries, is also popular.

But don’t skip over the secret menu items: tostadas, called volcanos, available with either al pastor or carne asada. While both have cheese baked onto the tortilla, and are topped with onions, cilantro and salsa (a cilantro one for the al pastor and mild version for the carne asada), the al pastor is cooked rotisserie-style and also has a touch of sweetness from slices of juicy pineapple.

The menu at The Taco Stand may not be vast, but the eatery has perfected the art of simple Mexican cuisine—and done it all from scratch. ■

THE TACO STAND: 699 S. Coast Highway; 949-210-9001; letstaco.com

HOURS: 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day