



## FOOD

BY TODD SOUTH



Carnitas, lengua and al pastor tacos can be ordered from El Original Tacos Tijuana.  
PHOTO/ALLISON YOUNG

## Taco 'bout it

**El Original Tacos Tijuana has a pretty short menu**, so I was half expecting a taco stand. Instead I found a dining area with booth and table seating and a drive through window for take-out. The salsa bar includes the usual garnishes and four housemade salsas ranging from medium and fruity to “let’s get this party rolling” hot. You’ll have to go elsewhere for a beer, but with fresh, handmade corn tortillas, I had eyes only for the food.

Tacos (\$2.25-\$2.50 each) are available with a choice of 10 meats. They come standard with onion, cilantro and medium salsa, with optional toppings of *nopal* (cactus, 50 cents extra), guacamole, sour cream, etc. I stuck with the basics and ordered one each of *cabeza*, *lengua*, *carnitas*, *buche*, *al pastor*, *asada*, *tripa*, *pollo* and *Azteca*.

Each taco was loaded with meat. The *Azteca* is a mix of *carne asada* (marinated, grilled steak) and *nopal*. The steak had a ton of flavor and plenty of smoky char from the grill, a great contrast with the slightly citrusy, tart cactus. Some folks don’t care for *nopal* because it can be a little slimy, but I really enjoyed it.

The *cabeza* (beef head) was soft, fatty and mildly seasoned. The *lengua* (beef tongue) was smooth and tender. The *carnitas* (slow cooked pork) was tender, moist and pulled apart with ease. Although the *buche*’s (beef stomach) flavor was quite good, it was a little on the squishy side. *Al pastor* (spit-roasted pork with pineapple) was a little crispy and spicy, with a perfect balance of pineapple. When done right, *tripa* (intestine) has just a hint of livery gaminess that reminds you you’re eating offal. Though a tad chewy, this example tasted great. Last was a better than

average grilled *pollo* (chicken) taco that was well seasoned, moist and smoky.

Out of curiosity, I ordered a guacamole *chorizo* (sausage) *vampiro* (\$4) and flour tortilla *mula* with *saudero* (brisket) and *nopal* (\$4). A *mula* is essentially the contents of two (or three?) tacos, stuffed between a pair of five-inch tortillas. There was nothing wrong with the flour discs, but they paled by comparison. The brisket was fattier than the *cabeza* and could have used more seasoning, but a healthy dose of salsa helped out. The *vampiro* was stuffed and then grilled on both sides, to the point of seriously charring the corn tortillas. The oil from the *chorizo* drenched the whole thing, and it was delicious—a little crunchy, a tad chewy and supremely spicy. The guacamole got a little lost in the mix, but I hardly noticed.

I’ve had mixed results with the popular combination of French fries and *carne asada*, but an order of *campechana* fries (\$10) was absolutely fabulous. The mix of grilled steak and *adobada* (marinated pork) was killer, and there was plenty of it. I had to dig to find the cheese fries under all that meat, guac and sour cream. The fries could have been a little crispier, but I really didn’t care. That combination and contrast of flavors is now on my list of favorite things. I had to force myself to stop uttering wordless sounds of contentment, lest I embarrass the family name in public—nom nom nom. □

## El Original Tacos Tijuana

2201 Prater Way, Sparks, 358-0843

El Original Tacos Tijuana is open Sunday to Thursday from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., and Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 a.m. Learn more at [www.eloriginaltacostijuana.com/location-2](http://www.eloriginaltacostijuana.com/location-2).