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## FOOD

BY TODD SOUTH



Aloha Shack's Loco Moco Bowl is a hand-shaped and seasoned burger over rice, with fried egg, gravy and chopped scallions.  
PHOTO/ALLISON YOUNG

## Island style

**My first delicious taste of varied and intriguing Hawaiian food** was on a visit to Oahu, but my first Reno Hawaiian “plate lunch” was at a chain restaurant sometimes known as the “Hawaiian McDonald’s.” It wasn’t amazing, and I haven’t been back.

From acclaimed food truck and catering origins, Aloha Shack set up shop in the North Valleys a few months ago. My friend, her twin boys and I recently headed up 395 North to check it out. The service counter sports a varietal pyramid of canned Spam, including the infamous “pumpkin spice” edition. However, you won’t be able to sample this rarity, as it was purchased on eBay at above-market cost for the purpose of display.

Speaking of Spam, warm sushi-ish grilled *musubi* (\$3 each) were enjoyed by the new-to-Spam boys. House-rolled Filipino *lumpia* (\$8, four pieces) was similarly well received, with pork, cabbage and mixed veggies fried in a thin spring roll wrapper and served with a housemade ginger and shoyu sauce. Continuing the Filipino influence, a bowl of rice noodle, spicy sausage, teriyaki chicken, cabbage and egg *pancit* (\$10) was exactly what I wanted from this chow mein-inspired dish.

One kid chose a mac and cheese bowl (\$6), and tater tots with “Island” barbecue sauce (\$5). The mac’s combination of cheese sauce and melty, stretchy cheese made me wish for more than my sample bite. The tots were hot and crispy, with a sweet sauce. His brother went for the *loco moco* (\$11.50), a seasoned burger patty with brown gravy over rice, topped with a fried egg and chopped scallion. Without exaggeration, it was beyond expectations. The burger was tender, flavorful and perfect. The runny egg was similarly well executed, and the savory gravy sealed the deal.

Combo plates come with a pair of meats, a choice of macaroni salad or Asian slaw and white rice. The crisp cabbage salad’s ginger/soy/vinegar/sesame dressing was excellent with the smoky *kalua* pork, and the Korean-style *kalbi* short rib (\$17) was sweet, spicy and tender. Another combo (\$18) with thin-sliced, marinated steak and breaded, fried chicken chunks tossed in spicy/sweet *ono* sauce was also terrific. The mac salad was well-seasoned and included black olive and onion—a step above some of the gloppier, bland versions served with lesser Hawaiian plates.

*Lau lau* (\$7 à la carte, \$16 combo plate with another meat and side) is available as a Friday dinner special, and Saturdays if they don’t sell-out on Friday. Hand-wrapped packages of salmon and *kalua* pork in taro leaf are steamed for hours, a mashup of the best cooked greens and meat you’ve ever had. It came out just as we were about to leave—and already stuffed—but there was no way we weren’t sampling this delicacy.

Despite having had more than enough food, the boys desired desserts of banana *lumpia* and *malasadas* (\$6, four pieces each). The *lumpia* with their mixture of cinnamon, sugar and banana were fried and topped with whipped cream and caramel sauce. The heavily sugared Portuguese donuts were reminiscent of beignets, though a whole lot sweeter.

The menu includes poke bowls, grilled sandwiches, nachos, tacos, wings and other specials. There are plans to open a second location in south Reno, which I’m both anticipating and frankly apprehensive about. I could happily ruin my diet and eat these goodies every week. □

## Aloha Shack

8798 N. Red Rock Road, 622-8825

Aloha Shack is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Learn more at [alohashackreno.com](http://alohashackreno.com).