

## SOMETHING FISHY

Hungry and hopping aboard the HMS HBFS (Hermosa Beach Fish Shop)

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My dad still refuses to believe that tacos can be made with fish. He's a lover of the classic American ground beef taco, ideally with that crispy corn Ortega shell. I, on the other hand, have lived in California long enough to have become a full-on fish taco snob. Battered or not? Native fish or anything goes? Cabbage or lettuce? And finding the sauce most likely to singe my esophagus has become a special mission.

Hermosa Beach Fish Shop has a lot going for it, most especially in the taco department. It's also got a great location. While I'd prefer to eat said yummy tacos right on the beach, this restaurant is located at Pier and PCH in a shopping complex with loads of parking.

Have you tried parking around the pier lately? I vote tacos at HBFS and a stroll down Pier with your gear instead. The décor is kind of a mélange of various nautical themes, as is the menu.



I don't think you need to try to do real New England clam chowder—or Manhattan if you're keen for tomatoes—in California. Jason Neroni's version at the now-shuttered Catch & Release in the Marina was pretty amazing, but even so ... why eat deadly chowder unless you're in Nantucket shivering in the mist? Chowder feels heavy and out-of-place in sunny Hermosa, and it's not very bikini-friendly.

What I liked most about HBFS was what many folks do not, i.e., the DIY approach to ordering. When you arrive, you must make three crucial decisions: which fish, which marinade and which presentation.

The fish choices run the gamut and include a very nice ahi tartare that Mr. Sexton, a sushi junkie, wolfed down in two bites. Marinades include things like chipotle glaze, lemon butter and Cajun blackening. Presentation options include sandwich, salad, plated or rolled up in

taco form.

The folks in line in front of us just couldn't figure this out, despite whimsical and helpful blackboards plastered everywhere. They just wanted fish tacos, and wanted someone to decide for them. If this is you too, simply cut to the chase and order their signature "TKO Taco," which features mahi-mahi with cabbage and tropical salsa. I could have eaten 17 TKO tacos, but two is likely ample.

Other nice notes on Hermosa Beach Fish Shop include the dogfriendly patio. As we've recently rescued two pups, this is all of a sudden critical. Know thy dog, however. As much as I love our family canines, I think there was too much kid debris on the patio for them to have behaved. I was glad we didn't bring them, but if your dogs are more mellow than mine, it's lovely to have the option to bring them along.

Ditto on the excellent kids menu, which is far too often an afterthought. While my kids will eat fish, it's nice that they offer it here in smaller portions and without the spicy seasoning that Mommy adores. They really do want families to feel comfortable here.

If you're a beer drinker, you'll be especially pleased with the thoughtful draught and bottle selection. The Strand Brewery in Torrance represents with a Beach House amber ale, and there are excellent Temecula, Eureka and Coronado bottlings too. Nobody misses the Buds much these days, as Anheuser-Busch knows all too well—hence their rush to buy up as many trendy microbreweries as possible. (Alas, poor Yorick, we knew him well.)

Wines, however, are sadly corporate and totally boring, all massive production wines from a big distributor and available at the grocery store right around the corner. The glass of white I ordered was corked too, and neither the server nor the manager knew what to do about it. They kept offering to pour new wine onto the corked wine, as if this would make it taste better.

They also weren't very nice about replacing what was an el cheapo \$7 glass and a crappy one at that. Someone needs to do some training there. Next time I will take advantage of their minimal corkage fee and bring along a nice bottle of Mosel riesling to go with those fantastic TKO tacos.

HBFS is one of three outlets, and I think their food concept is fantastic. What's not to love about healthy, fresh fish served the way you like it? If Chipotle can modernize the burrito, E. coli hiccups notwithstanding, then these Fish Shop folks may well bring Baja to the masses too. The South Bay is lucky to already have this great restaurant right in our hood. λ

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