

VISIT OCEANSIDE FEATURE

TACOS

ON THE TACO TRAIL

Oceanside's must-try spots to add to your Taco Tuesday agenda.



WRITTEN BY

JORDAN YOUNIS



OCEANSIDE, CA

On the Taco Trail

Believe it or not, more than a few US cities and states compete for the title “taco capital”, but we think it’s safe to say that California takes the crown. After all, our state boasts the highest Hispanic population in the nation — some 15 million strong.

Down here in Oceanside, just a stone’s throw away from our Mexican neighbors, the taco scene is filled with variety, undoubtedly helped by the city’s steady transformation, or should we say, evolution. Over the last few years, swanky oceanfront hotels and chic fine dining restaurants have nestled in among long-time local institutions, bringing diners new cuisine options and, you guessed it, more tacos.

Every local has their favorites and most likely a list of recommendations to rattle off at the ready. Baja street-style, birria, modern, vegan, vegetarian, fish... The battle for the best is contentious, but there’s no need to choose just one. With a mix of casual local staples and trendy spots with spectacular views, Oceanside’s taco trail has something for every palate and preference.

Be sure to check out these restaurants and more to get a taste of authentic Mexican and innovative O’side flare.

San Diegans are blessed to be able to find just about any type of taco ever made right here in our city. While we all have our tried and true favorites, there are a few Oceanside standouts to add to your next tour de taco.



JORDAN YOUNIS
CONTRIBUTOR



MEXICAN-FRENCH FUSION

Carte Blanche

We love traditional tacos, but sometimes a little inventiveness can take classics to a whole new level. That's what you'll get at Carte Blanche. In the heart of downtown Oceanside just steps from the city's iconic pier, Carte Blanche puts a unique French twist on Mexican cuisine. The concept may seem unorthodox, but when brother-owner duo Ryan and Brandon Ross began studying Mexican cuisine, they discovered a rich history of French influence. With that in mind, Carte Blanche came to life.

The restaurant's sole taco dish is the Duck Mole Tacos. Combining a classic French protein with traditional Mexican mole sauce, these tacos are in a class all their own. They consist of warm corn tortillas brimming with tender mole-marinated duck, topped with tangy pickled onions and smoked cotija cheese. What's more, the dish employs a cooking technique where every part of the animal is used in some way: the duck skin and meat as the filling, the bones and carcass simmered in a savory stock that create flavor and tenderness.

Though this is technically the only straight taco item on the menu, diners have another option for getting their taco fix: the Mexican Hot Pot. An ideal plate for the table to share, the hot pot comes with a cauldron of chicken and forbidden rice stewed in a saucy adobada broth, and comes with a side of warm corn tortillas for assembling your own street tacos.

If you're looking for an unpretentious fine dining experience and a little departure from the tacos you're used to, head to Carte Blanche and prepare to have your palette expanded.

BAJA STYLE STREET TACOS ENJOYED SKY-HIGH

The Rooftop Bar

With year-round perfect weather and unbeatable views, how could we not recommend a stylish rooftop hotspot. Located on the top of the luxury Mission Pacific Hotel, The Rooftop Bar is bringing seaside swankiness to O'Side's downtown waterfront. Sweeping ocean views allow diners to watch dazzling evening sunsets and afternoon surf competitions while soaking up plenty of sun, boozy cocktails and, of course, tacos.

Famed Valle de Guadalupe chef Roberto Alcocer created the menu for this stylish seaside gem. It features the Baja-style street food San Diegans know and love, from tacos, to ceviche, to grilled elote, along with vibrant cocktails and craft beers.



For a sampling of tacos, order the Taco Trio, which, as the name suggests, comes with three tortillas that are nearly overflowing with fresh elements. Choose from fish, shrimp, carne asada, grilled octopus or avocado, and do pair them with a delicious signature cocktail. We recommend the creamsicle-hued Hora Dorado, which balances premium tequila and blood orange, or the refreshing cucumber-pineapple infused Pacific Time.

For casual daytime drinks, hard-earned happy hours, intimate date nights and everything in between, The Rooftop Bar is making a name for itself as an Oceanside highlight for vacationers and locals who want a taste of simple California luxury and beautiful Baja cuisine.





FAST CASUAL SOCIAL STAPLE

Sancho's Tacos

Sancho's is one of those places that'll stick in your mind long after you've finished your last taco or sip of beer. For one thing, its haunted circus decor is probably like nothing you've ever seen in a taqueria. But its quality and freshness leave even more of an impression (not to mention its famous Chubbie sauce, but we'll talk about that later).

Sancho's is a fast-casual California favorite. Aside from their Oceanside shop, four other locations are stationed throughout OC, so it's no wonder the local institution has somewhat of a cult following in SoCal. The menu is extensive, but not overwhelming, with nine taco options, plus burritos, nachos, quesadillas and beers on tap.

Each creatively named taco is a vehicle for made-to-order protein fillings. Choose from meat-filled options like the tri-tip "O.G.", slow-roasted carnitas "Federale" and grilled chicken "Yard Bird", or the seafood-forward "Skrimps", "Surf & Turf", "Skrimps Carnal" and "Pounder's Carnal". The "Flaco Taco" is also available as a vegetarian option. Whatever you do, don't skip the signature Chubbie sauce. Most Sancho's tacos come with it, but if your order doesn't, make sure to ask for some on the side. The chain's famous sauce is slightly sweet and tangy with citrusy notes, but we may never know how it's made. It's a closely held secret only known to a few in the Sancho's clan. Regardless, you'll be thankful they created this secret sauce to compliment whatever you order.

With every delicious, quality taco under \$6 and bursting with flavor, Sancho's Tacos is sure to become a staple in your OSide Mexican lineup.