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GO FISH! 12 FISH TACOS IN SAN DIEGO NOT TO MISS

[Erin Rose Belair August 21, 2014](#)

[@San Diego](#), [Eat/Drink](#), [Eat/Drink | San Diego](#), [Homepage Feature](#), [Locale Magazine Post](#)



Go Fish! 12 Fish Tacos in San Diego Not to Miss - The fish taco is to California as the po'boy is to the South, the hot dog to New York City, the hot dish to the Midwest: it is a staple. These days, you can find fish tacos on menus across town and served up in all sorts of fun and creative ways. Supposedly starting in Mexico and creeping its way up the coast, the infamous fish taco holds a special place in all our So Cal hearts. So, we set out for this issue's VS challenge to find out who was plating the prettiest, tastiest and most sought after tacos. And here ladies and gentleman are the final results...

Winner – Best Vibe

1. PB Fish Shop

1775 Garnet Ave

San Diego, CA 92109

858.483.4746

www.thefishshoppb.com

PB Fish Shop first opened their doors in 2010, and initially, worried they wouldn't be able to fill the parking lot. Now, they've got lines out the doors and people buying up their fish faster than they can catch it! The adorable spot has fabulous outdoor seating and a blue and white exterior that reminds us of an old school bait shop down by the water. They are indeed a fish market selling incredible cuts for you to take home. They've got an outside oyster bar, and on Thursdays, you can get seven different kinds of oysters for \$1 at 4 o'clock! Starting in April and through the summer, they will be hosting a crawfish cookout every other Tuesday where they are going to over-night the crawfish from Louisiana and fix it all up the traditional down south way. If you have never been to a crawfish boil, you must, must go. It's a delicious experience. They serve 52 local SD beers in both draft and bottle. They are dog friendly and have no corkage fee! So bring some wine, shuck some oysters and sit by their fire put while you enjoy your evening. I was so excited I almost forgot the tacos! This is the best part. PB Fish Shop won "best fish taco SD" in the Del Mar gourmet expo in 2011. That's a pretty big title, but they did not disappoint. The TKO Taco (which won them the award) is a prizefighter. Mahi Mahi in their special Fish Shop seasoning served with cabbage, cheese, cilantro white sauce and a tropical salsa made of papaya, mango and pineapple. I was blown away and delighted by their fruity incorporation, because we didn't taste anything else like it on our journey. Two thumbs up.

2. Norte

3003 Carlsbad Blvd

Carlsbad, CA 92008

760.729.0903

www.nortemexicanrestaurant.menutoeat.com



Norte has been open for over thirty years, and they told us the secret to their success: consistency. They consistently deliver exactly what their customers want – high quality, fresh food at affordable prices in a killer location with a great vibe. What more could you ask for? They are open seven days a week with happy hour daily in their Cantina. They are located right near the water, and the dining room has a gorgeous ocean view. This spot also has the best outdoor seating, a huge patio near the water with fountains and fire pits and sunshine to keep you happy and full all day or all night long. We devoured fried and grilled Mahi Mahi fish tacos served on a corn tortilla with cabbage and special sauce and a touch of fresh Pico de Gallo. They've got these bad boys on their menu all week but also host a taco bar every Taco Tuesday with \$2 tacos and \$2 beers! They've been doing right by the fish taco for a very long time, and we see no signs of Norte stopping soon!

3. Puesto

*1026 Wall Street
La Jolla, CA 92037
858.454.1260
www.eatpuesto.com*



This lovely little La Jolla eatery is nothing short of fab-u-lous! The spot pops with colors and invites you to come in and kick back for a while. It's an order-at-the-counter kind of place where you can watch/ help them dress your dish, then sit and enjoy. We love the casual nature, the open-air vibe and the great seating. Puesto uses all natural meats and sustainable seafood to make only the best tacos, bowls and salads. They serve organic sodas, delicious Micheladas (a Spanish beer concoction which you have to try) and a lovely collection of cocktails made with an agave wine base. Yum! We decided to try their salmon fish tacos, and I must admit, we chose right. The salmon was perfectly cooked and nestled inside a fresh made-to-order tortilla, then topped with a mango salsa, tinga (chipotle hibiscus) and sliced avocado. You can also order ahead by calling in or placing your order online and then pick it up. Keep your eyes peeled this summer for their food truck at local events!

Winner – Most Creative Taco

4. Hapi Fish

190 N Coast Hwy 101

Encinitas, CA 92024

760.452.7245

www.hapifish.com



For starters, this spot is fabulously branded (and I know we aren't here to talk about that, but it must be said.) It's adorable! We are, however, here to talk fish tacos, and this spot gets my award for most creative fish taco with their exceptional poke fish taco. Hapi has a modern sushi beach vibe to it. The dining area has a large tented roof and adorable lighting and is always filled with people enjoying themselves and their food. The whole place makes you feel like you were invited to a party that you never want to leave, and we love that. Hapi has seen a very successful two years since they opened their doors, and it seems to be in no small part due to their dedication to using only the freshest fish by receiving slim orders daily, because when they run out, they're out! They also pride themselves on using interesting and daring combinations with their fish tacos on Taco Tuesdays. The hot lobster, bbq tuna, fish (no chips), hippie taco and Gangnam Style taco are all crowd pleasers that will keep you coming back for more and more and more.

Winner – Best Locals Only Spot

5. Oscar's

*703 Turquoise St
San Diego, CA 92109
858.488.6392*

www.oscarsmexicanseafood.com



Oscar's...let me count the ways I love you. A dear friend led us to this location, and we feel as if we were given a secret to hold close in hearts. This tiny little spot has a line out the door at all hours. Locals know a good thing when they find it. We made our way in and ordered a surf and turf taco as well as spicy shrimp taco. Both blew our minds, and spicy really does mean spicy here! We watched as patron after patron walked away smiling ear-to-ear with a plate full of fresh and colorful seafood, salads, tacos and even stew. The fish stew is to die for. They've got Happy Hour Monday through Thursday from 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm with 99-cent fish tacos or a free fish taco with any purchase! This spot is walk-up and order, cash only. The seating is extremely limited with only a few stools inside and outside on their front patio. This, however, deters no one. The food is incredibly fresh and creative. Oscar's is quickly acquiring a cult-like following to locals and tourists alike (if they can find it)! You definitely get your money's worth here as their tacos are served plump full of fresh seafood and colorful toppings of diced red onion, tomatoes, fresh salsas and cabbage. We have to say the Surf and Turf Taco at this spot won our hearts.

Winner – Most Authentic

6. Casa Guadalajara

4105 Taylor Street

San Diego, CA 92110

619.295.5111

www.casaguadalajara.com



Casa Guadalajara is as authentic as it gets around here. Located in old town San Diego and built around a 250-year-old tree, this restaurant is a classic staple to the area. They have an incredibly extensive menu that offers something for everyone. The staff is wonderfully helpful and colorfully dressed and the whole atmosphere makes for a really great time. We recommend ordering up one of their “bird bath” margaritas (you can thank us later). We chowed down on an order of their grilled fish tacos served on a corn tortilla with cabbage, white sauce and Pico de Gallo. We also tried the “Ensenada Fish Taco,” which was served in a similar fashion but with a fried white fish. The breading was light and didn’t overpower the wonderfully flaky fish, and it really stole the show. Even the salsa they bring to the table when you sit down is top notch. They cut no corners here and are dedicated to bringing you only the tastiest and healthiest Mexican food around. Chef Jose D came out and greeted us while we enjoyed our lunch and told us of the many awards he has won over the years; and, how in one single year, he will make and serve over 8,000 Ensenada Fish Tacos! That’s a lot of tacos!

7. Fat Fish

4474 Mission Blvd

San Diego, CA 92109

858.490.2877

www.fatfishcantinagrill.com



The first thing we noticed about Fat Fish was their awesome wrap-around bar with a high wall of tequila that seemed to call our name as soon as we entered. This place has a great vibe, super laid back in the ever-busy Pacific Beach. However, in comparison to some of the other cohorts in the neighborhood of bar-meets-restaurant spots, the food here is leagues above everyone else. They have great outdoor seating, which we feel is crucial in the lovely city of San Diego, and the staff is incredibly helpful and sweet. They have specials every night of the week, including our favorite Taco Tuesday and \$5 lobster tail Mondays! No matter what they dish up, you will be coming back for more. On our visit, we sunk our teeth into an incredibly fresh cod taco that nearly melted in my mouth. The fish was so full of flavor and served inside a homemade flour tortilla, which took the dish to a whole new level. This was the best tortilla we had anywhere we went. Overall, we give Fat Fish two thumbs up or a ten out of ten or a gold star. They deserve it!

8. Fish 101

1468 N Coast Highway 101
Encinitas, CA 92011
760.943.6221
www.fish101restaurant.com



Fish 101 has a straight forward delivery of some damn fine fish tacos (among other kick ass dishes on their menu). This place has a clean and fresh but mellow vibe to it. The popping crowd seemed to all be on Hawaiian time as no one was in a hurry to get anywhere else, most parties hanging out long after their food was finished to chat the night away under magically stung lights on the patio. Fish 101 promises fresh, local and environmentally sustainable food, using only wild caught Pacific Coast seafood and collecting as much of their organic produce as possible from Suzy's Farm. They serve only local craft microbreweries (in their ever-popular mason jars) which go perfectly with their fresh fish. They prepare their tacos the "traditional Ensenada way." I tried both the Baja (battered and fried Mahi Mahi) and the Grilled Fish Taco. Both were out of this world fresh and left nothing to be desired. They hit the nail right on the head, and I think it's their house-made sauces that really sealed the deal for me. Fish 101 hosts Happy Hour Tuesday through Friday from 4 pm to 6 pm, and they are closed on Mondays, because hey, everyone needs a day off. This is a must-hit spot whether you live in the area or not.

Winner – Tastiest Fish Taco

9. South Beach

5059 Newport Ave #104

San Diego, CA 92107

619.226.4577 OR 619.226.1144

www.southbeachob.com



This spot screams summer time. Located right near the water in Ocean Beach you can smell summer in the air every step of the way. This spot is insanely popular for their fish tacos, and we had heard people raving about it for weeks before we arrived. “You have to try this,” or, “You have to try that.” They’ve got a great bar, killer Taco Tuesday specials, the best view ever, happy hour Monday through Friday and a late night happy hour from 10 pm to close. Their tacos are all made fresh to order, and this place fills up quick, so you best grab yourself a beer and hang out with the best of them while waiting for that fresh fish. I had their famous marinated Mahi Mahi taco served with homemade salsa fresca, shredded cabbage and white sauce in a flour tortilla. They serve local craft beers and just started taking credit cards. This spot is for 21+ only, so keep that in mind if you travel with youngins’ in your pack. South Beach is cocktails with Tom Cruise meets Cheers with incredible fish tacos.

10. Brigantine

2725 Shelter Island Dr

San Diego, CA 92106

619.224.2871

www.brigantine.com



With six locations and a reputation backing them up since 1969, it's no wonder Brigantine is one of the most popular seafood restaurants in San Diego. With an impressive Happy Hour taking place six days a week, this spot knows how to cater to every kind of audience. They have a killer oyster bar and great seating that makes you feel as if you've just boarded a liner to somewhere impressive. The menu here has an incredible range and will satisfy any steak lover and any seafood fanatic. While aboard Brigantine, we tried three of their tacos! Is that cheating? The fried Pollok taco was wonderful but nothing we hadn't seen before, but the grilled fish taco was impressive, because their cilantro aioli was pure heaven. Then, there was the blackened swordfish taco served with red cabbage, salsa fresca, cheddar and a light drizzle of ranch dressing. Bingo! The fish was perfectly seasoned and the toppings melted and matched so well it was pure genius. You must try one for yourself; and, while you are there, peruse the rest of their delightful menu.

Winner – Best Fish Taco Downtown

11. La Puerta

560 4th Ave
San Diego, CA 92101
619.696.3466
www.lapuertasd.com



La Puerta is the best fish taco downtown. Not only do we love their tacos, but we also love just hanging out in this spot, because it's that damn cool. Located on 4th avenue in the heart of downtown, La Puerta reminds us of the kind of place Don Quixote would hang out at if he ever came to San Diego. The dark leather booths, natural wood and exposed brick make it feel secretive and special while the long and lovely bar asks you to come in and stay awhile, worship at the altar of tequila. Their menu is straightforward and concentrated on quality ingredients and beautiful delivery. We had their Ranchero Shrimp Taco served with rice, beans and rajas con crema. The taco was piled high in a corn tortilla with shredded lettuce and grilled marinated shrimp, and then topped with a sour cream drizzle. To accompany my meal, I had a Purple Haze (a frozen margarita with Sangria swirled into it.) It was heavenly. They also serve a frozen mojito that just about stopped me in my tracks. And last, but certainly not least, they serve all this amazing food until 1 am!

12. Rudy's

7662 El Camino Real

Carlsbad, CA 92009

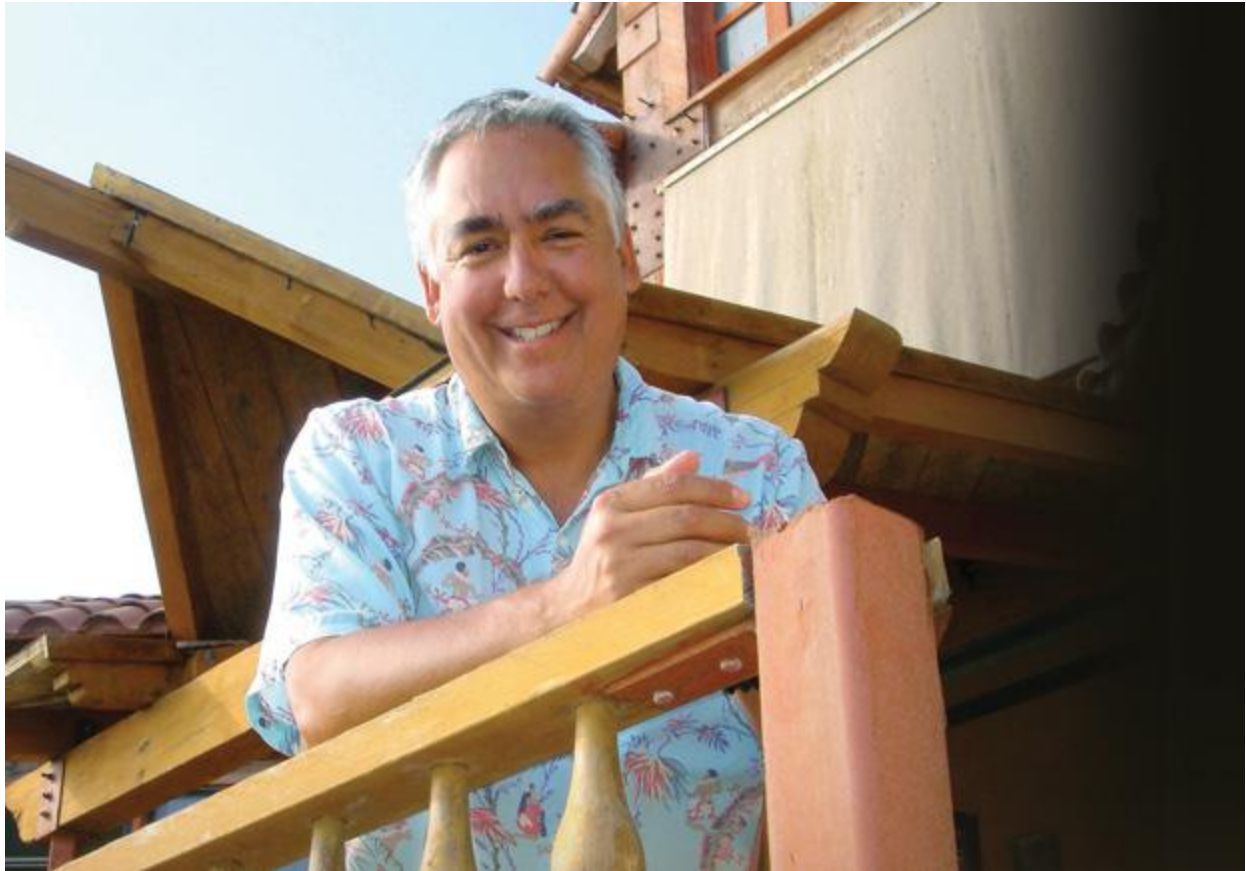
760.944.8226

www.rudystacoshop.com



Rudy's opened their doors five years ago and has never looked back. Creator and owner Dave Grimes grew up between Baja and San Diego and spent his life as an avid fisherman. To open Rudy's he traveled to all his favorite fish taco spots to collect recipes and inspiration to make the perfect Baja Fish Taco. Rudy's uses Alaskan Pollock in their tacos because of the high quality, texture, flavor and sustainability. He cooks his tacos the same way they do down in Mexico with a light hand batter and hand cook. He keeps it as traditional as he can, and then tops his fish with shredded cabbage, diced tomato and salsa Blanco. The flavors all ring perfectly true to one another and make you feel as if your sitting somewhere on the beaches of Mexico. Rudy's is open seven days a week from 8 am to 9 pm and 8 am to 8 pm on Sundays. When you head in, be sure to tell them Locale sent you!

Interview with San Diego's "Godfather of Fish Tacos," Mr. Ralph Rubio



Q: Who was your competition when you first started selling fish tacos?

Ralph Rubio: I started our first Rubio's in January of 1983. I was aware of two other restaurants serving fish tacos: Las Olas was one, and Saska's (which are both still around) was the other. They only offered fish tacos as a menu item though. Our entire menu was centered around the fish taco.

Q: What brought you to San Diego?

RR: I grew up in Carson, surfing Manhattan, Hermosa and Huntington. I was a South Bay guy. I moved to San Diego to attend SDSU. I had always thought San Diego was gorgeous, and I liked the fact that it was close to home.

Q: What's in Rubio's Original Fish Taco® recipe?

RR: I was never a foodie...especially back then. I did have an appreciation for tasty food, though. I was in San Felipe on the west side of the Sea of Cortez, about three hours from Mexicali. We were there on spring break when we fell in love with the crispy fish, corn tortillas, cabbage and sauces, and we wanted to make a replica. We found out the ingredients they used were flour, beer, water, salt, pepper, garlic, oregano and mustard. We made 50 versions of the fish batter to find one that was as good as the one in Mexico. We had to wing it. The secret is in the beer batter. In Mexico, the fish they use is whatever they catch, but usually Sea bass or Snapper. To make our tacos, we start with moist Alaskan Pollock, which is a mild white fish, inside our flaky beer batter, served inside a

stone ground corn tortilla, topped with our white sauce, salsa, fresh shredded cabbage and a lime squeeze.

Q: Do you have an idea how many fish tacos you have served?

RR: We have served over 160,000,000 fish tacos. With 200 restaurants in five states, we are the world leader in fish tacos.

Q: What do you order when you hit one of your Rubio's locations?

RR: I would order our Original fish taco, most likely. Part of my responsibility is heading up our culinary effort and test kitchen, which means I have to work my way around the menu. My favorite meal is still a two taco plate with a corn tortilla (not flour), add salsa picante from the salsa bar: choosing one of our Original fish tacos and one grilled gourmet shrimp taco with bacon, beans and chips.

Q: What are the plans for the future of Rubio's?

RR: We slowed down our growth when the economy slowed, but we are off to a great start in 2013. We may add locations in 2014. We really want to try other markets. I ask myself all of the time, "Why wouldn't this work in New York, Texas or even London?"

Q: How does it feel to be called San Diego's Godfather of the fish taco?

RR: I have been called worse (laughing). I think the title fits.

Q: When you started this whole thing, did you have any idea how successful it would be?

RR: I had a vision from the beginning. I took my cues from working at The Old Spaghetti Factory and at the Hungry Hunter. If you can build a prototype restaurant, you can scale it. You can replicate it. I didn't know if it meant 10, 20, 50 or 200 restaurants. I was in it for the long run. I just wanted to keep growing. I wanted it to be generational. My son may follow in my footsteps.

Go Fish! 12 Fish Tacos in San Diego Not to Miss

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Writer

Erin Rose Belair is a fiction writer who spends most of her time hitting the keys. In the rare moments when she isn't writing you can catch her getting upside down in a yoga class or hitting the road with her folk band. She studied creative writing at UC Irvine and has since spent her life's blood exploring an array of creative avenues. You can catch her collections, creations, and adventures on her blog roseblacque.com/. She also loves iced tea and her black cat Belladonna.