

DAILY NEWS

50¢

NEW YORK CITY TOWN NEWSPAPER

nydailynews.com

GOOD LIVING

Mercadito

179 Avenue B
(between 11th and 12th Sts.)
(212) 529-6490

must-haves

Appetizer: Guacamole sampler (\$13.50)
Entree: Estilo baja and camarón tacos (\$10.50 each)
Dessert: Pumpkin flan (\$7)



STEVEN SUNSHINE

NEW WAVE CUISINE Seafood tacos are a Mercadito specialty.

Tacos get fin-tastic

Q I love fish tacos and would like to try a new place — any suggestions in Manhattan?

A You'll find several versions of your favorite tacos — plus lots of other Mexican treats — at Mercadito, a cozy restaurant in Alphabet City. The cuisine theme here is sharing, although there are plenty of individual entrees on the menu. Of course, you can order as many bite-size tacos as you like just for yourself.

The space, named for the Mexican markets that chef/owner Patricio Sandoval frequented as a child, feels like a beach hut, with bamboo touches and coral-colored plates shaped like sand dollars. Try to grab a table in the back room, though you probably won't have that option on a busy night. (There's a second location at 100 Seventh Ave. South.)

I started off with the guacamole sampler (\$13.50), which featured all three house flavors: traditional, mango and pumpkin. All were chunky with avocado and surprisingly light and tasty — the mango with

Dining Dilemma

an unexpected smoky flavor. Before you move on to tacos, sample Mercadito's other fish specialty, ceviche. A sampler of three is \$24.50 and served with tasty homemade saltines. The tuna (\$10.50), with mango, red onion, chive, jicama and chili chipotle broth, was missing that signature ceviche zing, but there are five others to try, from octopus and shrimp to mahi-mahi and scallops, all mixed with vibrant citrusy dressings.

Tacos come four-to-a-plate and are meant to be mixed and matched (\$10.50 each). I started with the estilo baja, made up of beer-battered fish of the day, Mexican-style coleslaw and chipotle aioli. It's a must for a fish taco lover — just as the fish starts to melt in your mouth, spiciness kicks in from the coleslaw.

Also excellent is the camarón taco, with tiny shrimp slathered in a garlicky, buttery sauce, lightened by chunks of avocado. There's also pork, skirt steak, grilled chicken, cactus and a

mole chicken with a heavy chocolate-flavored sauce. Monday-Thursday from 10 p.m. to closing you can order the taquiza, or chef's choice. That's 10 tacos for \$20 or all you can eat for \$30, but it doesn't include fish, just chicken, steak, pork or cactus.

Wash it down with a fruity cocktail (\$8.50-\$12.50). The house mojito is made with tequila instead of rum and hoja santa, which tastes like licorice, instead of mint. Various margaritas and are also on the extensive menu.

I finished off with the pumpkin flan (\$7), rich and smoky and served with a bite of strawberry. Other choices include a chocolate torte, plantain fritters with caramel sauce and caramelized plantains with vanilla bean sauce.

But after so many of Mercadito's excellent bite-size tacos, you may not have room.

Chrissy Persico

If you have a dining dilemma, let the Daily News help! E-mail your question to dining@nydailynews.com or mail it to: Dining Dilemma, Daily News, 450 W. 33rd St., New York, NY 10001.