

FOOD

SEVEN DAYS

Vermont Restaurants Turn to Taco Nights

By Alice Levitt — Nov 11, 2014

The Hyde Away

1428 Millbrook Road, Waitsfield, 496-2322

HYDE AWAY



There's nothing new about Taco Tuesday at the Hyde Away Inn. According to co-owner Margaret DeFoor, the inn introduced its south-of-the-border nights 15 years ago, when the choices were hard shells filled with either beef or chicken.

But when chef Ryan Mayo took over the kitchen last year, she brought with her a new taco concept. The \$2 basic tacos remain (with a suggested pairing of PBR), with the addition of soft-shell and black-bean options. But each Tuesday, diners eagerly call in to find out what locavore Mexican specials Mayo is cooking up that night.

Last Tuesday, the bar was still packed with taco lovers at 9:30 p.m., half an hour after the dining room officially closed. My other half and I sat at a high table beneath the message "Tacos are my friend ... They never lie to me," handwritten on the wall. This must be depressing on nights when no tacos are served.

Our meal started with an order of chips and salsa. The latter arrived in a standard smooth, tangy red version and — for an additional 50 cents — in a roasted tomatillo version, sharp with acid and a pair of chopped chiles.

Apps included nachos and PEI mussels flavored with sweet corn, tomatillos and house Misty Knoll Farms chicken chorizo. We dined on a different chorizo, made from "pig face" that originated at nearby Gaylord Farm. The spicy ground meat came underneath a pair of over-easy eggs, each in a soft green-chile-and-corn tortilla. It was more of a knife-and-fork taco than something I dared to pick up. Grafton Village Cheese cheddar and avocado made each bite creamy, while cilantro and pickled onion brightened it up. On the side, a hash of butternut squash, potatoes, black beans, red peppers and jalapeños added a Vermont-plus-Mexico touch to the uncommon huevos rancheros.

Mayo's tuna tostadas contained too many ethnic nods to enumerate. Best to say that she made them her own. Lightly grilled ahi tuna was served over a big, crispy wonton, sort of like giant versions of those fried noodles you get with Chinese fast food. Avocado and shaved cabbage with the fish made for an alluring mix of textures. The cilantro-lime vinaigrette drizzled on top was addictive on its own, made more so with squiggles of sweet guava aioli and tiny cubes of grilled pineapple.

Before we ordered our entrées, we reserved the last vanilla Choco Taco of the night. The only Taco Tuesday dessert I've spotted anywhere, Mayo's Choco Taco has little to do with the packaged Klondike version. Hers features a fried flour tortilla dressed in cinnamon sugar and filled with ice cream. To my disappointment, the only chocolate in the dish was a sauce drizzled on top. But Choco Taco beggars can't be Choco Taco choosers. It was still worth a return engagement.

Next time I make the trek to the Mad River Valley, it might be for Tacky Taco Tuesday, an occasional special night devoted to replacing local cheese with Velveeta in chef-honed takes on gorditas — a pastry that means "little fat one" — and Taco Bell Crunchwraps. Either way, I expect to head south of the (Chittenden County) border back to Waitsfield sooner rather than later.