

Mexican and Seafood Fusion Joint Holbox Brings Affordable Fresh Fish and Light Bites to South Central

Deemed as the *Los Angeles Times*' 2023 Restaurant of the Year, Holbox—a marisqueria located at the entrance of Mercado la Paloma just moments away from USC's campus—serves up fresh, local Mexican and seafood fusion dishes. In 2017, Chef-owner Gilbert Centina opened up Holbox in the same market as Chichén Itzá, a restaurant Centina helped his father launch 16 years prior. Now, with dishes such as grilled octopus tacos and kanpachi ceviche, Holbox has attracted Angelenos from near and far to indulge in the delectable cuisine that is here to stay.

I arrived at Mercado la Paloma on a Wednesday evening and found a single parking spot in the far right corner of the lot. I assumed it must be a consistently busy lot as I noted the cones and a few double-parked cars. I walked in through the bright blue and yellow building's sliding doors and was



immediately greeted with the scent of fresh tortillas and savory meats. To my left, I spotted the Holbox counter.

I walked up, grabbed a menu and proceeded to research the offerings. After what felt like an eternity, I finally settled on the Baja fish taco, Ceviche de Callo (raw Mexican bay scallop ceviche) and a large Mexican coke. I grabbed my call number and went off to find a seat in the market. There were plenty of seats available which made me wonder, why there was limited parking in the lot. Before I could fully settle into my seat, my Coke and complimentary side of chips and salsa arrived.

The salsa was the perfect consistency with light chunks of roasted tomato and cilantro. Shortly after, my taco arrived.

The Baja fish taco came with a crispy battered local rockfish, crema, mayo, salsa roja, and cherry tomatoes. I'm not a huge fan of cherry tomatoes but these were essential to the taco. I sat waiting for a few more minutes debating whether or not I should enjoy the dish now or wait until the ceviche came out. However, I couldn't wait any longer and took my first bite. The fish was extremely crispy on the outside and soft on the inside. The flavors from the crema, crunchiness of the purple cabbage, tartness from the lime and crispy fish made for a well-balanced bite that made me feel like I was levitating. I finished the taco in three more bites and sat waiting for the ceviche.



After five minutes of finishing my taco, the ceviche finally arrived. Wow. I was not expecting it to be this big of a serving. The ceviche was large enough to feed two or three individuals. It came with three tostadas for dipping and a half avocado on top. I gently moved the avocado to the side as my stomach doesn't handle it too well. I took a bite of the raw scallop with the tomatoes and was met with a cool and refreshing taste. The scallops were delicate and briny, with a hint of sweetness while the diced tomatoes were expertly seasoned with the right amount of salt. I took a few more bites of the ceviche itself before digging in with a tostada.



I wrapped up my meal with one-and-a-half servings left of the ceviche so I decided to take the rest home. After my visit, I fully understood the hype around Holbox and why it was voted as the restaurant of the year by the *Los Angeles Times*. Holbox is truly a restaurant that makes Los Angeles, Los Angeles.

