

Highland Parks' Villa's Tacos Pays Homage to Humble Beginnings, with More to Come

What was once a taquero side hustle from his very own backyard as a pop-up—Victor Villa's restaurant in Highland Park— Villa's Tacos, is now considered a regional hotspot with Angelenos from near and far taking day trips to visit and line up for hand-pressed blue corn masa tacos before the shop opens. I've found this to be true as a Long Beach resident visiting the shop on a scorching Autumn Saturday.

Villa's Tacos while known for its its queso tacos and blue corn masa, gained traction from its spotlight in Netflix's *Taco Chronicles* season 3; through winning championships of *L.A. Taco's* 2021 and 2022 Taco Madness Tournament; by earning a MICHELIN Bib Gourmand Award and much more. In addition, the restaurant placed number 58 on the *Los Angeles Times*' 101 Best Restaurants in L.A. list this past year. This fall, guests can expect the beloved taco outpost to open up in Downtown Los Angeles' iconic food hall, Grand Central Market. I'm sure those more central to the area would appreciate the convenience of proximity rather than waiting through an hour of traffic to get to the Highland Park restaurant.

I visited Villa's Tacos one Saturday afternoon in October which could easily be mistaken for an afternoon in July. I was expecting the line to appear longer when I approached the shop but it looks like it was just my luck and I had missed the lunch rush. To my left were three picnic tables with patrons waiting around for their names to be called while other patrons sat at the tables and munched away. I got in line quickly as a large group of people rushed before me. As I waited for the line to move up to the door, I could feel the sun beating down on the nape of my neck.



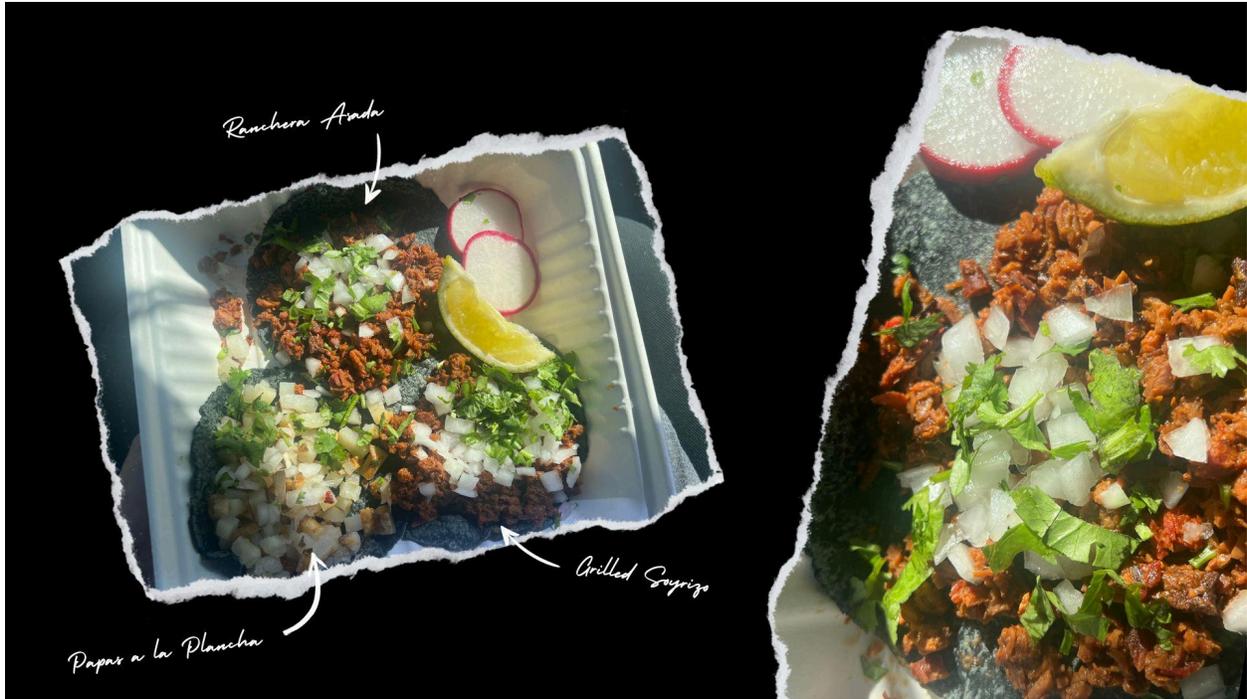
The line moved fairly quickly and by the time I was at the door, the line behind me grew even more. When I walked in, immediately to my left was a collection of photos of staff over the years that lined the entire kitchen counter all the way up to the register. Behind the stoves read a large sign that said "Keep on

going. You're a winner. You got this." The kitchen staff was in high spirits and everyone had a smile on their face. I could tell everyone was taken good care of here.



I grabbed a large Mexican coke from the side fridge to my right before I ordered my tacos. I ordered three regular tacos which came with a base of onion, cilantro and guacamole. However, I opted out of the guac as avocados wreak havoc on my sensitive stomach. For fillings, I opted for the ranchera asada (skirt steak), the grilled soyrizo (with pineapple and onion) and the papas a la plancha (lightly salted potatoes) which were all served on hand-made blue tortillas. After my turn at the register, I stood back outside waiting for my name to be called which took roughly 10 minutes.

When I grabbed my plate, I noticed the picnic tables were still packed so I decided to make my way back to my car and enjoy my tacos. By the time I sat down, I realized that I had forgotten to grab a few sauces. I read online that the salsas were not one to miss out on. However, at that point, I was exhausted from the heat and I was ready to get my grub on.



I decided to first take a bite of the steak taco. It was extremely savory and full of flavor on its own which made me feel better about not finding the strength to grab a few salsas. Next, I took a bite of the potato taco. This one made me wish I had grabbed the mango habanero salsa, nonetheless, it was still tasty. As for the last taco, I was absolutely blown away. It was as if I was transported to an island while indulging in a Korean BBQ pork bowl with pineapple. The mix of pineapple with the soyriso made for a tropical experience. A part of me wished I had ordered two more of the grilled soyriso tacos. I washed down the tacos with my coke and found myself to be extremely stuffed.

During the car ride home, I couldn't stop thinking about my next visit here, what I was going to order and which salsas I would grab to complete the meal. With that being said, Villa's Tacos is truly a restaurant that makes Los Angeles, Los Angeles.