

ashlee eats

FILET MIGNON APPETITE. DOLLAR MENU BUDGET.

The \$10 Challenge: Bazo's Fresh Mexican Grill

September 28, 2012 by Ashlee Clark Thompson

Ever been to the [Qdoba Mexican Grill](#) on Fourth and Jefferson streets at noon on a weekday?

It's a mad house.

The line often snakes at least 20 people from the cash register to the door, a daunting prospect to a hungry corporate employee with only an hour to eat.

Yes, Qdoba offers up some tasty, Mexican-inspired grub — I have a rewards card to prove my appreciation. Lately, I've skipped the rush and gone with an even better, local option right around the corner, [Bazo's Fresh Mexican Grill](#).

I'd noticed Bazo's before on the corner of Market and Fifth streets, a lunch-friendly intersection (the restaurant's neighbors include [Dish on Market](#), [Chop Shop Salads](#) and [FireFresh BBQ](#)). But I usually bypassed Bazo's in favor of the familiar Qdoba.

A business lunch changed my ways.

My companions for that meal suggested Bazo's. That was about a month ago. Since then, I've been back three times.

Bazo's has a menu that will be familiar to folks accustomed to Qdoba, [Chipotle Mexican Grill](#) and other Mexican-style, fast-casual dining, but provides a wider selection at a comparable cost with a much shorter wait time.

There are no surprises in selections like the nachos (from \$5.79) or the assortment of burritos, such as the Fajita Burrito with meat, cheddar-jack cheese, grilled peppers and onions, rice, sour cream and salsa (from \$6.29). There's even a Tostada Salad, a taco salad in a flour tortilla bowl (\$6.59) that will look familiar to a Qdoba regular.

But Bazo's offers choices and menu items that the chains are missing. Let's start with dessert. Signs on the tables in Bazo's advertise \$1.59 [churros](#), a fried-dough dish popular in Spanish-speaking countries. There there is a salsa bar with four to five different salsa options and tiny cups for you to try as many as you want. Bazo's also has economical combination choices that start with one to three of tacos of your choice, a small side of chili-lime chips and a choice of sides depending on the combination you choose (starts at \$6.29).

And speaking of the tacos, the highlight of Bazo's menu is the variety of fillings you can choose for your tacos, which start at \$2.39. There's the usual chicken, carne asada (steak) and bean, but the restaurant also adds barbacoa (shredded beef), carnitas (pork), shrimp, and, my favorite, fish.

The fish made me a Bazo's convert. The first dish I tried with this ingredient was a fish burrito (\$6.99). The burrito was filled with a grilled fillet, black beans, salsa fresca, shredded cabbage, cheddar-jack cheese and baja sauce.

For the \$10 Challenge, however, I decided to change it up and order a combination with three fish tacos, a dish that was featured in several framed newspaper and magazine article near the register (\$8.49). It took about five minutes for my order to come up, the average wait time I've experienced at Bazo's. It's just enough time to fill your salsa cups and water cup.



Three Taco Combo at Bazo's.

When I picked up my plate, the mounds of white, crunchy cabbage on top of the tacos threw me for a loop. Don't get me wrong, I love cabbage, but not when I can't even see the dish it is supposed to accompany. I scooped about a cup of cabbage off to the side of my platter before I dug into my tacos.

The tortillas seemed delicate enough to be homemade. They were soft and not sturdy enough to hold the slices of fish in each taco. I'm not sure where Bazo's gets their fish (I hope not the Ohio River), but it tasted out-of-the-water fresh. The grilled fish was succulent and well-seasoned, but not too spicy. I'm curious to see if the taste of the fish holds up if it's battered and fried or blackened, two other options available.

After taco number two, I realized how much value I had gotten in my meal and how much I had overestimated my appetite. There is about half of a fish fillet in each taco, so I got really full really fast. I had also created a cabbage salad of sorts with a squirt of lime and a drizzle of the creamy baja sauce that dripped from my tacos. My impromptu side dish, the side of crunchy seasoned chips, and those little tacos packed an unexpected punch to the gut. Next time, I'll go with the Two Taco Combo that comes with rice and beans (from \$6.29).

I'm a bit ashamed that I had always passed up a little guy like Bazo's in favor of a Big Boy Chain. Now, it's good to know that I can get a good taco at a great price without the long wait.

Notes about Bazo's

- The price for the taco combos and some of the burritos increases depending on the type of meat you choose. Seafood is the most expensive option.

Bazo's Fresh Mexican Grill, 428 W. Market Street, Louisville (two other locations in Louisville)

- Three Taco Combo with fish: \$8.49
- Water: \$0
- Total (with tax): \$9.00

Mission: Accomplished