

UPTOWN DINING

C O M I D A

Boca Chica – a seafood gem surprises

by Kristen Bonardi Rapp

If it hadn't been raining, I would not have stepped into Boca Chica.

I had lured my husband and daughter out on a rainy Sunday afternoon with the promise of a late lunch somewhere new.

As we arrived, I stopped short, taking in the yellow sign on the door offering Atlantic City bus tour tickets. Could this really be the place I'd been asked to review?

Rather than turn around and walk 10 blocks back home in the rain, I smiled wanly and ushered my family in, out of the rain.

As I opened the door, knocking over several wet umbrellas in the process, the music was loud enough to require near-shouting.

It's a tiny restaurant, with a walk-up counter and only a half-dozen stools under a surreal wall mural: a strange, flat-faced woman swims; her



Boca Chica owner Chelo Ramirez with a try of fresh salmon.

Boca Chica es un pequeño restaurante, pero con un sabor muy grande. (foro Landa M. Towns

hair, a golden fishtail.

I opted for the only table, placed in the kitchen, literally – a dishwasher of some sort in front of me,

and behind, a sink with a tap running just enough to make me feel like I needed to go to the bathroom. (Boca Chica does mainly

take out.)

At the counter, the staff was kind and friendly as I placed my order for a fish filet in coconut (\$7) and

the Boca Chica Combo of shrimp and fish (\$10).

I snagged one of their business cards on the way back to my table, advertising Boca Chica restaurant on one side and Bocachica Bus Tours to Atlantic City on the reverse.

Then the food arrived from the kitchen: my fish filet in coconut, two filets surrounded by a golden-orange creamy sauce. I hesitantly took a bite. My eyes widened.

"Well," my husband dared to ask, "How is it?"

I paused for a moment, looking for just the right words.

"It's quite possibly the best fish I've ever eaten," I replied.

The two incredibly fresh fish filets were cooked to absolute perfection – firm, but still tender – but the real star was the coconut sauce surrounding the

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fish. A bright cantaloupe-like orange, the sauce was creamy and coconutty, but never cloying, thanks to a skilled counterbalance of peppers and spices. I cursed inwardly for acquiescing to my daughter's request for french fries when I now wanted a pile of rice to sop up this rich sauce.

Just as I thought things couldn't get much better, my husband's shrimp and fish combo came to the table; a big slab of fried fish with three fried shrimp. Neither too greasy nor too dry nor too over-battered the fried fish was sublime, as impressively fresh as mine had been,

and heightened with just a squeeze from a generous slice of juicy lime.

As it began to grow dark outside, Boca Chica started to feel less cramped and more cozy, especially as the space began to fill with the dinnertime crowd. The weather didn't appear to be letting up, but filled with a warm glow from this surprising good food, I walked out into the rain considerably happier than when I came in.

Boca Chica Seafood is located at 4235 Broadway near W. 180th Street.

Kristen Bonardi Rapp writes about food and more on her blog, Gezellig-Girl.com.