

Restaurant Review: Fish City Grill offers plenty of tasty fare for a reasonable price

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Deep-fried dill pickles and crab-stuffed mushrooms are surprisingly good when eaten together. Cleanse the palate with a swig of cold beer, try it again. Yup. Good.

Perhaps this is not your gourmet approach to seafood. But it works — and we happily can say the same for many of the dishes at Fish City Grill, the first San Antonio link in a Dallas-based chain of restaurants.

Near the confluence of U.S. 281 and Loop 1604, the restaurant serves plenty of dishes that didn't pass through the deep fry. It also pumps up its menu with ethnic tastes, from Thai Coconut Shrimp to Oyster Nachos to a robust Cajun gumbo.

Then, it lays on salads, sandwiches, pasta dishes and blackboard specials. There's also a burger and homemade pot roast for confirmed beef eaters.

The service was performed by an energetic group of friendly folks as well-trained and willing to please as any we've seen in town.



Fried Pickle Chips

On our first visit we decided to give the Oyster Nachos a nibble. They were good, each breaded oyster perched carefully on its own crisp chip in a bed of good chipotle sauce and then dressed with fresh-tasting pico de gallo.

A bowl of red beans and rice came next, prompting an argument between two of us as to the proper ratio of rice to beans. Since I'm doing the writing here, my assessment of the ratio as "just fine" goes. The bottom of the bowl made its appearance all too soon.

Gumbo, which we sampled a few days later, had good deep color and flavor, but wanted another slice or two of sausage.

Fried shrimp in a basket, snuggled up against crisp, waffle-cut fries, wouldn't have risen much above average but for a final, zingy dusting of seasoned salt. Blackened shrimp on a Cobb Salad was a good idea, though the shrimp were too oily. The prices were right, though, at \$5.99 and \$7.49 respectively.

Our waiter, challenged to recite the dessert list, did very well. We ordered a warmed berry crumble that was fiercely hot inside and dusty-dry in the crumble category. We fared better a few days later with a tart and creamy Key lime pie.

On a weekday at lunch we didn't find as big a crowd, but wait staff was still out in full force and treated us to extra dressings, sharp attention to water and tea glasses and good-natured



Fish City Grill serves Oyster Po' boys. Other oysters are served with nachos on a bed of chipotle sauce.

dashes to the kitchen for carry-out containers.

This was the meal where the pickle-crab-stuffed mushroom pairing took place. Another of our group enjoyed an excellent tomato-y Mexican shrimp cocktail, served properly in a tall chilly glass with avocado and onion.

A quibble with some menu terminology came up with the order of Serafin's Fish Tacos, described as "The Best Fish Taco in Town." Well, no, that it's not. First of all, the breaded, fried fish lacked flavor and was more mushy than crunchy in texture; plus, it all was rolled up in a flour tortilla.

We're all for innovation, but in this case we want our traditional doubled up corn tortillas, soft, steamy and fragrant, wrapped around crisply fried or grilled fish. The rice in the center of the plate was lukewarm and hum.

But praises were sung all around when we received our side dishes of

vegetables — freshly cooked carrot, zucchini and broccoli. I loved the pepper and butter on mine; another wanted hers steamed with no fat and was genuinely thrilled to get them exactly that way.

The diner who couldn't resist the siren call of pot roast was rewarded with a sprawling serving of very tender meat, cooked to shreds. A pool of beefy sauce, perfectly cooked baby potatoes and a little serving of horseradish pulled this comfort food entrée together.

The crab cakes were huge. The texture was a little squishy, but the flavor quite fresh and sweet and the surfaces attractively browned.

Fish City Grill has lots to offer on its menu and the front-of-the-house is top-notch. We'd predict a good haul of customers for this casual, North Side eatery.