



By A.J. Fox

I have a not-so-secret desire to compete on *Survivor*. But one of the biggest deterrents (second only to not wanting to see my back fat on television) was my fear that I'd be done in by being challenged to eat chicken fetuses or live bugs. Perhaps I was testing the waters, then, by dining at Toloache: home of the dried-grasshopper taco.

My grasshopper plan was to distract myself with some tasty nibbles and margaritas before diving into my insect taco. To that end, the Toloache margarita (\$12)—blending blueberries and hibiscus—was a tart, floral treat. The Toronjada (\$12), made with muddled grapefruit and Jarritos soda, was crisp and light, though my friend deemed it “too girly” for him.

The guacamole (\$11, \$20 for trio) came in three variations. While the mild traditional was assuredly good, the medium frutas, a playful take that substituted tomato for assorted fruits, and cilantro for Thai basil, had us excitedly discussing it between mouthfuls. The roja, a smoky chipotle version, was billed as spicy—spicy yes, but hot it is not. Ceviche wasn't the strong suit here, as the seafood became overpowered by the (albeit tasty) marinades: The salmon belly (\$10) was no match for the tangy green apple, and the hamachi (\$13) tasted mostly of lemon. Malpeque oyster shooters (\$10) fared best; their brinness was not overpowered by the spicy kick of the Huichol salsa.

Knowing the tacos were next, I remembered that Bjork had eaten the grasshopper tacos here and enjoyed them. If some Icelandic pixie could do it, certainly I could man up, too. Each taco order consisted of two small, Baja-sized tortillas filled with your desired ingredients. To my horror, my friend dived right in to the grasshopper taco (\$9). Not wanting to be outdone, I steeled myself and took a wary first bite. The texture was chewy with a slight crunch, how I imagine an overly sautéed raisin would feel. A larger, second bite revealed a nutty taste, with definite hints of raisin and prune. I wouldn't think nuts and raisins would play well with lime, onions and jalapeno, but the whole is better than its parts. It was tasty, if not perhaps “delicious,” as our server promised they would be. In fact, it ended up being our favorite of the tacos. The greasy foie gras taco (\$14), with a mismatched mango salsa, wasn't a hit for us, and the pork and pineapple (\$9) was fine, but way overpriced. Rewarding myself with a big gulp of liquid courage, I even did the previously unthinkable and picked up two or three of the fallen tiny monsters dotting my plate and popped them into my mouth.

A slightly overcooked salmon (\$24), served with fava beans and maitake and huitlacoche mushrooms, the fungus that grows in infected corn, was a lovely mix of earth and sea. I didn't mind the delicate line the dish straddled: It threatened to be almost overpowered by the woody, sweet mushrooms. It was a healthy dish that tasted rich and decadent; the Carnitas de Lechon (\$25), on the other hand, tasted rich and decadent because it is. The mound of shredded roasted suckling pig doused with a tangy habanero-orange salsa was succulent, though I expected more heat from a dish advertising one of the spiciest peppers out there.

If you have room for dessert (\$8), definitely partake. Flan was perfect (and I have little love for flan) while the banana chocolate bread pudding was large enough for three—though your spoons may fight over the jalapeno chocolate gelato that accompanied it.

With huitlacoche on my mind, I went back to Toloache a few days later for lunch. I found the namesake margarita not as potent as I recalled, though just as refreshing. My little grasshopper friends were just as peculiar, though being less foreign I could definitely see how they would make chocolate-covered treats. The Quesadilla de Hongos (\$13), small enough to be shared as an appetizer, was topped with black truffle and those dreamy corn fungi; but there wasn't enough of the latter to satisfy my craving. The taco (\$12), on the other hand, had me in huitlacoche heaven. You may find me at Toloache on Cinco de Mayo. I'll be the one with four huitlacoche tacos in front of him—but not for long.