



## Pillbox Tavern (Solana Beach)

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We were invited up to Pillbox Tavern & Grill a few weeks ago in Solana Beach. They opened their doors late last year with Chef Shelly Velez heading up the kitchen. It was a new experience for us since we rarely find ourselves up in Solana Beach. I really dig the beachy vibe I got near Pillbox Tavern. They got their name from the famous beach break down below.

Once everyone cleared out I pounced and took a picture of the bar. It isn't a huge place, but I kind of like it that way. There are high tables on the left side of the restaurant you can sit in too.



Right away after speaking with three different people who worked there (including partner Leigh Gibson), we could tell they really are passionate about the food they serve. In fact, while there were overlapping recommendations, they managed to cover almost the entire menu with their suggestions. As someone who loves food, hearing other people excited about the food you are about to consume is like music to my ears. Our first appetizer was the Queso Fundido with Spicy Beef (melted Mexican cheese with salsa fresca, spiced ground beef served with house chips). I wish I got a picture of how cheesily gooey this was. When you start this strong out the gate you have to control your kneejerk reaction to stuff yourself silly. Stomach space is a commodity.





The Marinated Steak Tips (sirloin soaked in a soy garlic marinade, served with a Cajun aioli, sautéed mushrooms and onions, and served with garlic bread triangles) was a strong recommendation. Yum. With the meat being cooked just right and the marinade having a great balance of savory and slightly sweet, I may have implemented the five second rule when a few pieces made their way onto our table with my frantic motions. My favorite bite of the day.



I guess we needed to get something healthy so we could continue with a clear conscious. Here we got the Mahi Salad (grilled mahi with sautéed vegetables on a bed of mixed greens tossed in a wasabi vinaigrette). The fish was prepared nicely and I enjoyed the little tidbits of mushrooms, snow peas, and mango. The wasabi is strong, especially once you get to the bottom. If I were to order this again I would ask for the dressing on the side. I've never sniffed wasabi before like my

old college buddy Aaron, but the nasal burn I felt here made me feel like I stepped into his body momentarily.



With thirteen different wing sauces, there would be no way we could try them all in one visit (and be able to move afterwards). But we did have to get a at least a few to see how they stack up. We ended up trying Shelly's BBQ and Sweet Chili. Originally I wanted to try the Sriracha Ranch but I don't think our waitress heard me. My mouth was still tingling from the wasabi so maybe it was better this way. They pack a ton of flavor in these wings! And they are juicy as heck. I can't really choose a favorite because both of them were equally enjoyable. Typically I dip my wings in ranch but these had so much flavor it isn't really necessary.



Our last appetizer of the day were the Homemade Chicken Egg Rolls (served with wasabi vinaigrette). Dang it wasabi, stop following me. For whatever reason the wasabi didn't seem as strong here, but then again I was controlling the amount. The filling actually had a lot of flavor and again, I don't know if the sauce was needed. It is nice to have options though.



They have burger specials that rotate, so of course we had to get the special they were running. If I recall correctly this one had bacon, lettuce, onions, tomato, cream cheese, and another cheese I am blanking on. I do however recall the choice you get of fries or tots. Reaching back into our childhood, we opted for the tots. Crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside, there's nothing quite like holding a tot between your thumb and index finger and popping it into your mouth. Their burgers are fairly large. Michael and I barely ate our halves. It was moist and messy, just how I like them. And the bacon! No skipping going on here at Pillbox Tavern.

The food kind of surprised us. We liked everything we were served. So I can safely say now that the staff wasn't just randomly naming things off the menu. They actually stand by their food! Your dollar goes a long way as well. The specials I see on Instagram Chef Velez runs each week makes me want to head back up to Solana Beach more often. I would suggest coming with a bunch of friends and ordering several things to share. That's always the best way to do it.





**Pillbox Tavern**

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**Darren**

Food! I love it if you can't tell already. I love everything about it. The taste, the smell, the look, the feel, the satisfaction, the gratification, and ultimately: the fun! I've been in San Diego for about 7 years now and it amazes me that there are still places to uncover.

Traveling, eating, and taking pictures of food has always been a hobby of mine. So naturally Michael and I thought it made sense to share what we found with all of you. I tend to side with the savory but never shy away from a knock out dessert. If you have a place you think we haven't tried let us know! We're always on the lookout...