



Best Tacos

Taco Bamba

164 Maple Ave. W., Vienna, [703] 436-6339, tacobamba.com

“MOST TAQUERIAS JUST have cilantro, onion, and radishes for garnishes,” says Chef Victor Albisu as he shows off his sprawling garnish station at his rock ‘n’ rolled vibed Taco Bamba in Vienna, Virginia. (The original location is in Falls Church, and a Springfield outlet is on the way later this year.) There are roughly 30 toppers, including ground chicharrones, candied chilies, spicy cojita cheese, shishito peppers, sesame seeds, and crispy fried shallots. Obviously, Taco Bamba is not your average taqueria. But that’s the point.

The menu of two dozen or so ever-evolving tacos features “tradicional” flavors like carne asada, barbacoa, and tinga (\$3 each) as well as more creative options, which Albisu calls “nuestros” (ours).

The crunch-packed Bulgogi Bullfight (\$4) dresses up Korean-style pork with deep-fried Brussels sprouts tossed in kimchi vinaigrette, gochujang-peanut-Romesco, and crushed peanuts. The Arabe (\$4) offers a Mexican interpretation of chicken souvlaki with spicy yogurt and cucumber pico de gallo. Meanwhile, El Gringo (\$4) is a shameless and utterly delicious high-end take on Taco Bell. Subbing in a cheese quesadilla for the usual doubled-up tortillas, it comes jammed full of ground beef, shredded iceberg lettuce, bacon bits, and house-made ranch dressing.

Albisu has several cardinal rules for crafting a memorable taco. “The textures have to be interesting,” he says. “It can’t just be soft on soft on soft,” he says. “The flavor has to blow your face off. And our tacos are a little more generous, a little heartier, a little bigger.”

Ultimately, Albisu’s inventive tacos are bolder, brassier, and highly memorable, making them worth the drive out to the suburbs.

—Nevin Martell