

Taco Trail includes more than 50 restaurants



Photo by Visit KC

By Fletcher Smith

The Kansas City, Kansas (KCK) Taco Trail, which opened Oct. 1, 2020, was created by Visit Kansas City Kansas (Visit KC) to draw attention to the taco scene in Kansas City, Kansas. The trail includes 52 restaurants, featuring street tacos, Tex-Mex style tacos, and more, ranging in location from the Legends Outlets to right across the Kansas River from downtown Kansas City, Missouri. Most of these restaurants allow patrons the option to either dine-in, carry-out, or even have meals delivered, depending on how close one lives to the restaurant.

“Many people are unaware of the concentration of authentic taquerias in KCK,” Alan Carr, executive director of Visit KC, said. “This is part of a broader initiative to highlight the culture and diversity of Kansas City, Kansas, and encourage more visitors to explore our neighborhoods.”

The KCK Taco Trail has been a huge success. “In

the first six months, more than 8,000 people have downloaded the online pass and nearly 8,000 have checked-in at restaurants,” Carr said. “We’ve already had 8 people complete the trail and visit all 52 restaurants. In addition, we are getting national publicity with a recent article on Forbes.com about our Taco Trail with the headline, ‘America’s Taco Capital Isn’t Where You Think.’”

To explore the KCK Taco Trail some more, I decided to travel to some of the restaurants on the trail and explore for myself the different taco styles and restaurants of Kansas City, Kansas.

Taco Republic: My first stop was at Taco Republic, a mainly-street taco restaurant on the corner of Mission Rd. and W. 47th Ave. Situated across the street from the original Joe’s KC, the small yet colorful building appears inviting, and has plenty of patio seating. There is not a lot of area to park if it is busy

(and, with its popularity, it is unsurprising if it is busy), but I was able to find a spot just before they were all taken.

With several tables inside, as well as a small bar, the inside felt cozy and welcoming. I ordered four S&P tacos, which contained shredded chicken, republic cheese, lettuce, and pico de gallo, but customers have the choice to order any combination of tacos they want, ranging from beef to veggie tacos, and flour tortillas can be requested on any taco in replacement of the usual corn tortillas.

With my first bite I knew why Taco Republic was so popular. All the elements within the taco felt perfectly balanced, and they all complemented each other extremely well. What surprised me the most, though, was that with each bite the balance remained, and I never grew tired of it, even after four tacos.

After I finished eating, I decided to order the sopapillas, expecting the usual four or six that are

usually provided at Mexican restaurants. The server came out with 12 freshly made sopapillas and a cup of warm dipping chocolate. After the shock wore off, I ate four incredibly soft and warm sopapillas before deciding that I had already had too much. Luckily, the server came back and offered me a bag for the sopapillas and a cup for the chocolate so that I could take them home and eat them later.

Amigos Grill and Cantina: My next stop was at Amigos Grill and Cantina, just off highway 635 by Shawnee Drive. I ordered carry-out for my whole family, and, despite the large order, it only took about 20 minutes to make every meal, so it was ready to grab by the time I got there.

When it came time to eat, I started with the chips and salsa. The chips were salted almost perfectly, and the salsa had a little bit of acidity, which I thought to be from lime, but it actually helped enhance the flavor a little more, and I might have ended up eating more chips than I needed.

For my tacos, I ordered the taco authenticos, which included three pork carnitas tacos mixed with cilantros and onions in soft shell corn tortillas. Since I had never had pork carnitas, I was a little nervous with my bold choice of meal, but knew after my first bite that my risk had paid off. The pork, onions, and cilantro combined together to create a taste I had never experienced, and I ate my first taco before deciding to be even more adventurous and put the salsa on my next taco. The small amount of acidity blended almost perfectly with everything else, and I finished my last taco the same way.

La Fuente Mexican Street Food: My last stop was at La Fuente Mexican Street Food, located in the Legends Outlets. I went at around 2:30 p.m., so there was not much of a wait. The inside was set up as a Chipotle-style restaurant, where you order the kind of meal you want, as well as the meats, and then put every other topping on it afterwards. The men at the counter were great at helping me figure out what I wanted, and were very generous with how much they put in my meal.

I ordered three chicken street tacos, and I decided to put shredded cheese, lettuce, pico de gallo, and their “medium” salsa on top of it. When I picked up my first taco, it was so stuffed that some of its components fell out onto my other tacos, and juice started to drip out as well. I took my first bite and quickly realized where all that juice was coming from. The chicken was very juicy, and it never dried up through all three tacos.

The juiciness combined with the warm taco shells and the salsa that was perfectly tuned for my taste buds. To keep this taste in my mouth, my brain must have decided to eat as continuously as possible, because, before I knew it, I had finished my first two tacos. I decided to slow down for my last taco so I could really taste every bite and enjoy it for as long as I could. That strategy only lasted for a couple bites, and I ended up eating the taco almost as fast as the other two, which left my mouth feeling sad and forced me to seriously consider going up to the counter and ordering three more tacos, but I

ultimately decided against it.

To sign up for the KCK Taco Trail, visit the KCK Taco Trail page on the Visit KC website. From there, a Taco Trail pass can be obtained for free. The pass is mobile exclusive and is instantly delivered by text and email. There is no app associated with the Trail that needs to be downloaded, although the Taco Trail pass can be bookmarked to make it easy to find.

Once trail-goers have the pass, they can check-in to whichever location they decide to go to. Prizes are offered to those who check-in to a certain number of restaurants, which is shown to the right of this article. The trail is open until Oct. 31, 2021, so, if you want to win some of the prizes listed above, explore the taco scene in KCK, or just find a great place to eat with your friends and family, you can sign up for the trail until then.

With the success of the KCK Taco Trail, there have been questions as to whether Visit KC will create more trails. Luckily, the KCK Taco Trail seems to be just the beginning.

“We are developing a series of themed trails, which can help us draw attention to small businesses and lesser-known sites in neighborhoods throughout KCK,” Carr said. “The KCK Taco Trail was the first trail to launch, but we have more planned... we hope to create 1-2 new themed trails per year that spotlight different aspects of Kansas City, Kansas. Our next trail will be a heritage trail telling the story of the journeys of the groups that have made their home here. We hope to launch that by the fall.”

PRIZES

Check into...

- 5: KCK Taco Trail decal
- 15: jar of Tradicion flavor from Spicin Foods
- 30: KCK Taco Trail Shirt
- ALL: KCK Taco Trail Championship Flag and your name on the Taco Trail Wall of Fame

