



My mountain times...

Hello, I'm Ethan Warner. I write about my experience in restaurants as a customer. I did not go to a culinary school, thus I write for the love of food. Over seven years I've cooked for small town diners and cafes, pitted my way through rooms of dirty dishes at country clubs, and learned from master chefs like Kevin Walker. I have been in both front and back of house positions, bars, worked a variety of catering scenes, and have developed a defined appreciation for unique dining experiences. I now work as a direct support individual and am an aspiring writer and musician.

The Tavern (Downtown West Jefferson, NC)

The Tavern, Two bars and 34 tables; Walking inside the 20th century brick building a warm atmosphere and some very nice, attentive staff greet you. On the outside patio, a wooden fence shelters you from the rush of traffic nearby and the talk of the sidewalk.

First impressions go a long way and theirs is cut short with a flimsy black and white menu. No pictures, no fancy fonts, no hard back, a mild gust could pick it up and send it across the way. A true shame, as the menu itself offers a unique, well balanced and fair priced display of options, perfected for the

bruncher, luncher, first dater, and affordable cuisine seeker. Affordability may outweigh authenticity however, as I try the homemade clam chowder, the thick mixture of shell fishy contents brings me back to the bags of frozen soup we served at my first restaurant job as a cook for a small cafe in Boone: No, I suspect it is not home made and for a four dollar bowl of soup I wonder why they would claim otherwise -words do have meaning- and a soup once frozen maintains a thicker consistency after thawing. Should you want to revive it, one needs to work the consistency away from sticky and starchy to a rich and creamy, and add fresh ingredients (herbs and fresh carrots, asparagus, spinach, mushrooms, or potatoes all work).

My company and I share an order of potachos and crab dip. Potachos are sliced potatoes, cooked and served with cheese, jalapenos, sour cream, hamburger meat and beans. They miss their mark in my opinion, as the hamburger and bean mix is too wet and soggs the chips. Bacon, lettuce and tomato would be a better choice. The crab dip however is a wonderful dish, served with fresh pieces of baked pita bread, it packs an ample amount of fresh seafood flavor in a suitably small appetizer.

For the main course we get a kids pizza, a hamburger, and a pastrami BLT, with sides of sweet potato fries. They knock all three of these out of the park, I am especially happy with the satisfying amount of meat on my pastrami BLT. If anything, it needed another few slices of tomato and lettuce. The burger is surely quality meat, it was not dripping with grease compared to the ones served at other places in town. The kids pizza passes inspection, plenty of cheese and pepperoni, on a tortilla or similar.

The restaurant was packed and it showed, as the appetizers took a solid 25 minutes to come out, and another 40 minutes to get our food. I expect they, like most, are short on experienced labor due to covid. Our server noticed we were missing more than a few sweet potato fries. Upon request she speedily brought us both more than a proper serving, a genuine reminder that wait staff is often willing to correct problems if brought to their attention. I wonder if she might have done so had I been a poor tipper from past.

The tavern gets a 8/10 for their food (taking a solid hit for their homemade clam chowder) 9.1/10 for their waitstaff service (I noticed their speakers were quiet, a soft background playlist can help a lot for those waiting on food) 8.3/10 for wait time on the food, and a 7/10 for their setup (In honesty, the tables are crammed on the patio, and each table has a large rack of condiments on them, which will undoubtedly intrude on an unlucky member of a party of four. Also the hanging lights used during evening hours seem to have a short, as they would flicker against the dark night sky).

While there is room for improvement in the overall experience at the Tavern, surely they should hold their head high as a respectable restaurant. I wish to come back for dinner and try more of their menu, I saw a group beside us get four of their salads, and they all looked mouthwatering.

