

# Mexican Cuisine

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# Mexican cuisine

Part of a series on the
<b>Culture of Mexico</b>

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**Mexican cuisine** is primarily a fusion of indigenous Mesoamerican cooking with European, especially Spanish, elements added after the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire in the 16th century. The basic staples remain native foods such as corn, beans and chili peppers, but the Europeans introduced a large number of other foods, the most important of which were meat from domesticated animals (beef, pork, chicken, goat and sheep), dairy products (especially cheese) and various herbs and lots of spices.

While the Spanish initially tried to impose their own diet on the country, this was not possible and eventually the foods and cooking techniques began to be mixed, especially in colonial era convents. Over the centuries, this resulted in various regional cuisines, based on local conditions such as those in Oaxaca, Veracruz and the Yucatán Peninsula. Mexican cuisine is closely tied to the culture, social structure and popular traditions of the country. The most important example of this connection is the use of mole for special occasions and holidays, particularly in the South and Center regions of the country. For this reason and others, Mexican cuisine was added by UNESCO to its list of the world's "intangible cultural heritage".

## Basic elements



Molcajete and tejolote, traditional mortar and pestle of Mexico



Various ingredients at a market in Mexico City including huiltlacoche, quintoniles and squash flowers

Mexican cuisine is as complex as any of the great cuisines in the world, such as those of China, France, Italy and Turkey. It is created mostly with ingredients native to Mexico as well as those brought over by the Spanish conquistadors, with some new influences since then.<sup>[2]</sup>

In addition to staples such as corn and chili peppers, native ingredients include tomatoes, squashes, avocados, cocoa and vanilla, as well as ingredients not generally used in other cuisines such as edible flowers, vegetables such as huauzontle and papaloquelite or small criollo avocados, whose skin is edible.<sup>[3]</sup> European contributions include pork, chicken, beef, cheese, herbs and spices and some fruits. Tropical fruits such as guava, prickly pear, sapote, mangoes, bananas, pineapple and cherimoya (custard apple) are popular, especially in the center and south of the country.<sup>[4]</sup> It has been debated how much Mexican food is still indigenous and how much is European.<sup>[5]</sup> However, the basis of the diet is still corn and beans with chili pepper as a seasoning as they are complementary foods.<sup>[6]</sup>

### Corn

Despite the introduction of wheat and rice to Mexico, the basic starch remains corn in almost all areas of the country. While it is eaten fresh, most corn is dried, treated with lime and ground into a dough.<sup>[7]</sup> This dough is used both fresh and fermented to make a wide variety of dishes from drinks (atole, pozol, etc.) to tamales, to sopes and much

more. However, the most common way to eat corn in Mexico is in the form of a tortilla, which accompanies almost every dish. Tortillas are made of corn in most of the country, but other versions exist, such as wheat in the north or plantain, yuca and wild greens in Oaxaca.

### Chili peppers

The other basic ingredient in all parts of Mexico is the chili pepper.<sup>[8]</sup> Mexican food has a reputation for being very spicy, but its seasoning can be better described as strong. Many dishes also have subtle flavors. Chili peppers are used for their flavors and not just their heat, with Mexico using the widest variety of chili peppers. If a savory dish or snack does not contain chili pepper, hot sauce is usually added, and chili pepper is often added to fresh fruit and sweets. The importance of the chili pepper goes back to the Mesoamerican period, where it was considered to be as much of a staple as corn and beans. In the 16th century, Bartolomé de las Casas wrote that without chili peppers, the indigenous people did not think they were eating. Even today, most Mexicans believe that their national identity would be at a loss without it.



Cheese counter at a market at Coyoacán

Many dishes in Mexico are defined by their sauces and the chili peppers those sauces contain, rather than the meat or vegetable that the sauce covers. These dishes include entomatada (in tomato sauce), adobo or adobados, pipians and moles. A hominy soup called pozole is defined as white, green or red depending on the chili pepper sauce used or omitted. Tamales are differentiated by the filling which is again defined by the sauce (red, green, chili pepper strips or mole). Dishes without a sauce are rarely eaten without a salsa or without fresh or pickled chili peppers. This includes street foods such as tacos, tortas, soups, sopes, tlacoyos, tlayudas, gorditas and sincronizadas.<sup>[9]</sup> For most dishes, it is the type of chili used that gives it its main flavor.



Dried chili peppers, cinnamon and other goods at the La Merced Market, Mexico City

## Spanish contributions

The main contributions of the Spanish were meat and cheese, as the Mesoamerican diet contained very little meat besides domesticated turkey, and dairy products were completely unknown. The Spanish also introduced the technique of frying in pork fat. Today, the main meats found in Mexico are pork, chicken, beef, goat, and sheep. Native seafood remains popular especially along the coasts.<sup>[10]</sup> Cheesemaking in Mexico has evolved its own specialties. It is an important economic activity, especially in the north, and is frequently done at home. The main cheese making areas are Chihuahua, Oaxaca, Querétaro, and Chiapas. Goat cheese is still made, but it is not as popular and is harder to find in stores.

## Food and society

### Home cooking

In most of Mexico, especially in rural areas, much of the food is still consumed in the home with the most traditional Mexican cooking still done domestically, based on local ingredients.<sup>[11]</sup> Cooking for family is considered to be women's work, and this includes cooking for celebrations as well.<sup>[12]</sup> Traditionally, girls have been considered ready to marry when they can cook, and cooking is considered a main talent for housewives.<sup>[13]</sup>

The main meal of the day in Mexico is the "comida" meaning meal in Spanish. This refers to dinner or supper. It begins with soup, often chicken broth with pasta or a "dry soup", which is pasta or rice flavored with onions, garlic and/or vegetables. The main course is a meat served in a cooked sauce with salsa on the side, accompanied with beans and tortillas and often with a fruit drink. In the evening, it is common to eat leftovers from the comida or sweet bread accompanied by coffee or chocolate. Breakfast is generally heartier than in other countries and can consist of leftovers, meat in broth (such as pancita), tacos, enchiladas or meat with eggs. This is usually served with beans, white bread and/or tortillas and coffee and/or juice.<sup>[14]</sup>



An 1836 lithograph after a painting by Carl Nebel of Mexican women grinding corn and making tortillas in Mexico

## Food and festivals

Mexican cuisine is elaborate and often tied to symbolism and festivals, one reason it was named as an example of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. Many of the foods of Mexico are complicated because of their relation to the social structure of the country. Food preparation, especially for family and social events, is considered to be an “investment” in order to maintain social relationships.<sup>[15]</sup> Even the idea of flavor is considered to be social, with meals prepared for certain diners and certain occasions when they are considered the most tasty.<sup>[16]</sup> The ability to cook well, called “sazón” (lit. seasoning) is considered to be a gift generally gained from experience and a sense of commitment to the diners.<sup>[17]</sup> For the Day of the Dead festival, foods such as tamales and mole are set out on altars and it is believed that the visiting dead relatives “eat” the “essence” of the food. If eaten afterwards by the living it is considered to be tasteless. In central Mexico, the main festival foods are mole, barbacoa, carnitas and mixiotes. They are often prepared to feed around five hundred guests, requiring groups of cooks. The cooking is part of the social custom meant to bind families and communities.<sup>[18]</sup>



Traditional ofrenda altar for Day of the Dead which includes mole, tamale and other foods.

Mexican regional home cooking is completely different from the food served in most Mexican restaurants outside Mexico, which is usually some variety of Tex-Mex. Some of Mexico’s traditional foods involved complex and/or long cooking processes. Before industrialization, traditional women spent several hours a day boiling dried corn then grinding them on a metate to make the dough for tortillas, cooking them one-by-one on a comal griddle. In some areas, tortillas are still made this way. Sauces and salsas were also ground in a mortar called a molcajete. Today, blenders are more often used although the texture is a bit different. Most people in Mexico would say that those made with a molcajete taste better but few can do this now.<sup>[19]</sup>

The most important food for festivals and other special occasions is mole, especially mole poblano in the center of the country.<sup>[20]</sup> Mole is served at Christmas, Easter, Day of the Dead and at birthdays, baptisms, weddings and funerals, and tends to be eaten only for special occasions because it is such a complex and time-consuming dish.<sup>[21]</sup> While still dominant in this way, other foods have become acceptable for these occasions such as barbacoa, carnitas and mixiotes, especially since the 1980s. This may have been because of economic crises at that time, allowing for the substitution of these cheaper foods, or the fact that they can be bought ready-made or may already be made as part of the family business.<sup>[22]</sup>

Another important festive food is the tamal or "tamale", as it is known in English. This is a filled cornmeal dumpling, steamed in a wrapping (usually corn husk or banana leaf) and one of the basic staples in most regions of Mexico. It has its origins in the pre-Hispanic era and today is found in many varieties in all of Mexico. Like mole it is complicated to prepare, and best done in large amounts. Tamales are associated with certain celebrations such as Candlemas.<sup>[23]</sup> They are wrapped in corn husks in the highlands and desert areas of Mexico and in banana leaves in the tropics.<sup>[24]</sup>



## Street food

Mexican street food is one of the most varied parts of the cuisine. It can include tacos, quesadillas, pambazos, tamales, huaraches, alambres and food not suitable to cook at home including barbacoa, carnitas and, since many homes in Mexico do not have or make use of ovens, roasted chicken.<sup>[25]</sup> One attraction of street food in Mexico is the satisfaction of hunger or craving without all the social and emotional connotation of eating at home, although longtime customers can have something of a friendship/familial relationship with a chosen vendor.<sup>[26]</sup>

The best known of Mexico's street foods is the taco, whose origin is based on the pre-Hispanic custom of picking up other foods with tortillas as utensils were not used. The origin of the word is in dispute, with some saying it is derived from Nahuatl and others from various Spanish phrases.<sup>[27]</sup> Tacos are not eaten as the main meal; they are generally eaten before midday or late in the evening. Just about any other foodstuff can be wrapped in a tortilla and in Mexico it varies from rice, to meat (plain or in sauce) to cream, to vegetables and cheese, or simply with plain chili peppers or fresh salsa. Preferred fillings vary from region to region with pork generally found more often in the center and south, beef in the north, seafood along the coasts, and chicken and lamb in most of the country.<sup>[28]</sup>



View of a taco stand in the Tacubaya neighborhood of Mexico City



Chicken being grilled in Oaxaca



Tortas being prepared in Oaxaca

Another popular street food, especially in Mexico City and the surrounding area is the torta. It consists of a roll of some type, stuffed with several ingredients. This has its origins in the 19th century, when the French introduced a number of new kinds of bread. The torta began by splitting the roll and adding beans. Today, refried beans can still be found on many kinds of tortas. In Mexico City, the most common roll used for tortas is called telera, a relatively flat roll with two splits on the upper surface. In Puebla, the preferred bread is called a cemita, as is the sandwich. In both areas, the bread is stuffed with various fillings, especially if it is a hot sandwich, with beans, cream (mayonnaise is

rare) and some kind of hot chili pepper.<sup>[29]</sup>

In the late 20th century, US fast-food influence has increased. One example of this is the craving of the hot dog, but prepared Mexican style. They are usually boiled then wrapped in bacon and fried together. They are served in the usual bun, but the condiments are typically a combination of diced tomatoes, onions and jalapeño peppers.

Besides food, street vendors also sell many kinds of drinks and treats. Popular drinks include aguas frescas, tejuino, tepache and many more. Common treats include bionicos, tostilocos, raspados and more. Most tamale stands will sell atole as a standard accompaniment.

## History

### Pre-Hispanic period

Around 7000 BCE, the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America hunted game and gathered plants, including wild chili peppers. Corn was not yet cultivated, so one main source of calories was roasted agave hearts. By 1200 BCE corn was domesticated and a process called Nixtamalization, or treatment with lye, was developed to soften corn for grinding and improve its nutritional value. This allowed the creation of tortillas and other kinds of flat breads. The indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica had numerous stories about the origin of corn, usually related to being a gift of one or more gods such as Quetzalcoatl [30]

The other staple was beans, eaten with corn as a complimentary protein. Despite this, studies of bones have shown problems with the lack of protein in the indigenous diet, as meat was difficult to obtain. Other protein sources included amaranth, domesticated turkey, insects such as grasshoppers and ant larvae, iguanas, and turtle eggs on the coastlines. [31] Vegetables included squash and their seeds; chilacayote; jicama, a kind of sweet potato; and edible flowers, especially those of squash. The chili pepper was used as food, ritual and as medicine.

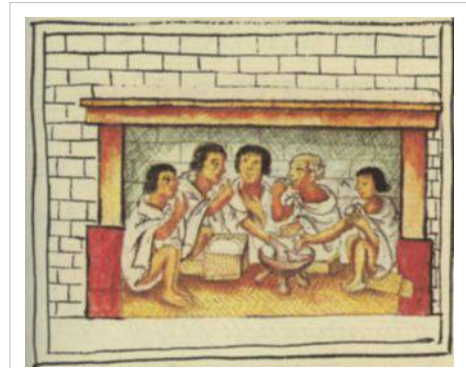
When the Spanish arrived, the Aztecs had sophisticated agricultural techniques and an abundance of food, which was the base of their economy. It allowed them to expand an empire, bringing in tribute which consisted mostly of foods the Aztecs could not grow themselves. According to Bernardino de Sahagún, the Nahuatl peoples of central Mexico ate corn, beans, turkey, fish, small game, insects and a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, pulses, seeds, tubers, wild mushrooms, plants and herbs that they collected or cultivated. [32]

### Post conquest

Mexican educator Justo Sierra said that "the grocer, not the conquistador, is the real Spanish father of Mexican society."

After the Conquest, the Spanish introduced a variety of foodstuffs and cooking techniques from Europe. Spanish cooking at that time was already a mixture of ingredients because of eight centuries of Arab influence. The original aim of the introduction was to reproduce their home cuisine, but over time, it was incorporated with native ingredients and cooking techniques. Introduced foods included olive oil, rice, onions, garlic, oregano, coriander, cinnamon, cloves and many other herbs and spices. More importantly, they introduced domesticated animals such as pigs, cows, chickens, goats and sheep for meat and milk, raising the consumption of protein. Cheese became the most important dairy product. The most important cooking technique introduced by the Spanish was frying.

Despite the domination of Spanish culture, Mexican cuisine has maintained its base of corn, beans and chili peppers. One reason for this was the overwhelming population of indigenous people in the



Aztec men sharing a meal from the Florentine Codex



Colonial era kitchen display at the Museo Nacional del Virreinato in Tepozotlán.



earlier colonial period, and the fact that many ingredients for Spanish cooking were not available or very expensive in Mexico. One of the main avenues for the mixing of the two cuisines was in convents. For example, the Spanish brought rice to Mexico and it has since grown well in Veracruz. However, New World tomatoes eventually replaced the use of expensive Spanish saffron as well as other local ingredients. Sugar cane was brought to the country and grew as well, leading to the creation of many kinds of sweets, especially local fruits in syrup. A sugar-based candy craft called *alfeñique* was adapted, but often with indigenous themes, especially today for Day of the Dead.<sup>[33]</sup>



Reconstructed kitchen at the former monastery of San Miguel, Huejotzingo, Puebla

During the 19th century Mexico experienced an influx of various immigrants including French, Lebanese, German, Mennonite and Italian, which have had some effect on the food. During the French intervention in Mexico, French food became popular with the upper classes. One lasting evidence of this is the variety of breads and sweet breads such as *bolillos*, *conchas* and more which can be found in Mexican bakeries.<sup>[34]</sup> The Germans brought beer brewing techniques and the Chinese added their cuisine to certain areas of the country. This led to Mexico characterizing its cuisine more by its relation to popular traditions rather than on particular cooking techniques.<sup>[35]</sup>



Students from the Universidad Superior de Gastronomía at the Por Siempre Mexico event at the El Palacio de Hierro in Polanco, Mexico City

Since the 20th century, there has been an interchange of food influences between Mexico and the United States. Mexican cooking was of course still practiced in what is now the Southwest United States after the Mexican–American War, but Diana Kennedy, in her book *The Cuisines of Mexico* (published in 1972), drew a sharp distinction between Mexican food and Tex-Mex. Tex-Mex food was developed from Mexican and Anglo influences, and was traced to the late 19th century in Texas. It still continues to develop with flour tortillas becoming popular north of the border only in the latter 20th century. From north to south, much of the influence has been related to food industrialization, as well as the greater availability overall of food, especially after the Mexican Revolution. One other very visible sign of influence from the United States is the appearance of fast foods such as hamburgers, hot dogs and pizza.<sup>[36]</sup>

In the latter 20th century, international influence in Mexico has led to interest and development of haute cuisine. In Mexico, many professional chefs are trained in French and/or international cuisine but the use of Mexican staples and flavors is still favored, including the “simple” foods of traditional markets. It is not unusual to see some quesadillas or small tacos among the other hors d'oeuvres at fancy dinner parties in the country. Professional cookery in the country is growing but it still includes an emphasis on traditional methods and ingredients. In the cities, there is interest in publishing and preserving what is “authentic” Mexican food. This movement is traceable to 1982 with the Mexican Culinary Circle of Mexico City. It was created by a group of women chefs and other culinary experts as a reaction to the fear of traditions being lost with the increasing introduction of foreign techniques and foods. In 2010, Mexico’s cuisine was recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

## Beverages

Corn in Mexico is not only eaten but also drunk. Corn is the base of the hot drink called atole, which is then flavored with fruit, chocolate, rice and other flavors. Fermented corn is the base of a cold drink as well which goes by different names and varieties such as tejuino, pozol and others. Aguas frescas are flavored drinks usually made of fruit, water and sugar. Beverages also include hibiscus iced tea, one made from tamarind and one from rice called "horchata." One variant of coffee is café de olla, which is coffee brewed with cinnamon and raw sugar.<sup>[37]</sup> Many of the most popular beverages can be found sold by street vendors and juice bars in Mexico.



Pulque mixed with tomato and pineapple

Chocolate played an important part in the history of Mexican cuisine. The word "chocolate" originated from Mexico's Aztec cuisine, derived from the Nahuatl word *xocolatl*. Chocolate was first drunk rather than eaten. It was also used for religious rituals. The Maya civilization grew cacao trees and used the cacao seeds it produced to make a frothy, bitter drink. The drink, called *xocoatl*, was often flavored with vanilla, chili pepper, and *achiote*

Alcoholic beverages from Mexico include tequila, pulque, aguardiente and mezcal, with brandy, wine, beer and rum also produced.<sup>[38]</sup> The most common alcoholic beverage consumed with food in Mexico is beer, followed by tequila.

## Regional cuisines

### Northern

The foods eaten in what is now the north of Mexico have differed from those in the south since the pre-Hispanic era. Here, the indigenous people were hunter-gatherers with limited agriculture and settlements because of the arid land.

When the Europeans arrived, they found much of the land in this area suitable for raising cattle, goats and sheep. This led to the dominance of meat, especially beef, in the region, and some of the most popular dishes include machaca, arrachera and cabrito. The region's distinctive cooking technique is grilling, as ranch culture has promoted outdoor cooking done by men. The ranch culture has also prompted cheese production and the north produces the widest varieties of cheese in Mexico. These include queso fresco (fresh farmer's cheese), ranchero (similar to Monterey Jack), cuajada (a mildly sweet, creamy curd of fresh milk), requesón (similar to cottage cheese or ricotta), Chihuahua's creamy semi-soft queso menonita and fifty-six varieties of asadero (smoked cheese).



A very large flour tortilla

Another important aspect of northern cuisine is the presence of wheat, especially in the use of flour tortillas. The area has at least forty different types of flour tortillas. The main reason for this is that much of the land supports wheat production, introduced by the Spanish. These large tortillas allowed for the creation of burritos, usually filled



Cabrito (goat) on a spit

with machaca in Sonora, which eventually gained popularity in the Southwest United States.

The variety of foodstuffs in the north is not as varied as in the south of Mexico because of the mostly desert climate. Much of the cuisine of this area is dependent on food preservation techniques, namely dehydration and canning. Dried foods include meat, chili peppers, squash, peas, corn, lentils, beans and dried fruit. A number of these are also canned. Preservation techniques change the flavor of foods; for example, many chili peppers are less hot after drying.

In northeastern Mexico, during the Spanish colonial period, Nuevo León was founded and settled by Spanish families of Jewish origin (Crypto-Jews). They contributed significantly to the regional cuisine, and introduced dishes like Pan de Semita or Semitic Bread (a type of bread without leavening), the capirotada dessert and Cabrito or baby goat, which is the typical food of Monterrey and the state of Nuevo León, as well as some regions of Coahuila.<sup>[39]</sup>

The north has seen waves of immigration by Chinese, Mormons, and Mennonites, who have influenced the cuisines in areas such as Chihuahua and Baja California. Most recently, Baja Med cuisine has emerged in Tijuana and elsewhere in Baja California, combining Mexican and Mediterranean flavors.

## Oaxaca



White beans and shrimp on mole coloradito served at the 20 de Noviembre market at Oaxaca City

The cooking of Oaxaca remained more intact after the Conquest, as the Spanish took the area with less fighting and less disruption of the economy and food production systems. However, it was the first area to experience the mixing of foods and cooking styles, while central Mexico was still recuperating. Despite its size, the state has a wide variety of ecosystems and a wide variety of native foods. Vegetables are grown in the central valley, seafood is abundant on the coast and the area bordering Veracruz grows tropical fruits.

Much of the state's cooking is influenced by that of the Mixtec and, to a lesser extent, the Zapotec. Later in the colonial period, Oaxaca lost its position as a major food

supplier and the area's cooking returned to a more indigenous style, keeping only a small number of foodstuffs such as chicken and pork. It also adapted mozzarella, brought by the Spanish, and modified it to what is known now as Oaxaca cheese.



One major feature of Oaxacan cuisine is its seven moles, second only to mole poblano in importance. The seven are Negro (black), Amarillo (yellow), Coloradito (little red), Mancha Manteles (table cloth stainer), Chichilo (smoky stew), Rojo (red), and Verde (green).

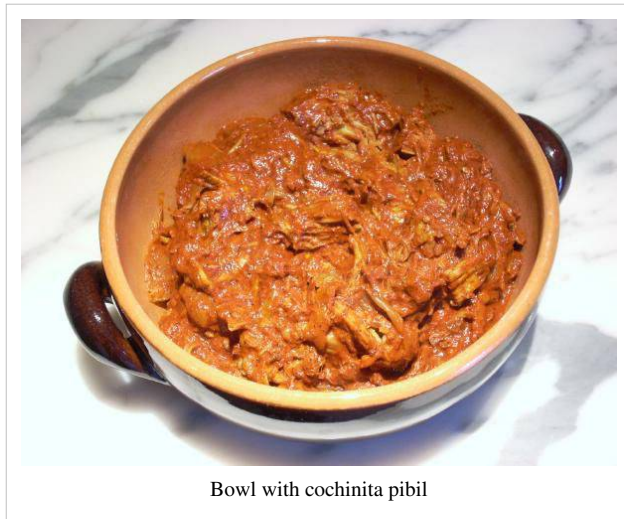
Corn is the staple food in the region. Tortillas are called blandas and part of every meal. Corn is also used to make empanadas, tamales and more. Black beans are favored, often served in soup and as a sauce for enfrijoladas. Oaxaca's regional chili peppers include pasilla oaxaqueña (red, hot and smoky), along with amarillos (yellow), chilhuacles, chilcostles and costeños. These, along with herbs such as hoja santa, give the food its unique taste.

Another important aspect to Oaxacan cuisine is chocolate, generally consumed as a beverage. It is frequently hand ground and combined with almonds, cinnamon and other ingredients.

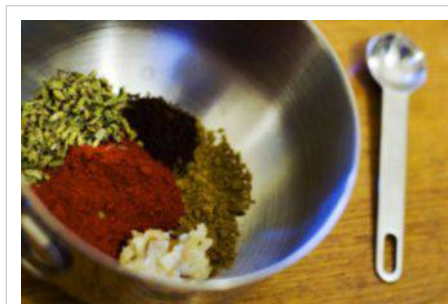


Woman pouring *tejate* at a market at Villa de Etla, Oaxaca

## Yucatan



Bowl with cochinita pibil



Achiote paste ingredients

The food of the Yucatán peninsula is distinct from the rest of the country. It is based primarily on Mayan food with influences from the Caribbean, central Mexico, European (especially French) and Middle Eastern cultures. As in other areas of Mexico, corn is the basic staple, as both a liquid and a solid food. One common way of consuming corn, especially by the poor, is a thin drink or gruel of white corn called by such names as pozol or Keyem.

One of the main spices in the region is the annatto seed, called achiote in Spanish. It gives food a reddish color and a slightly peppery smell with a hint of nutmeg. Recados are a seasoning paste based on achiote and used on chicken and pork. Recado rojo is used for the area's best-known dish, cochinita pibil. Pibil refers to the cooking method (from the mayan word p'ib, meaning "buried") in which foods are wrapped, generally in banana leaves, and cooked in a pit oven. Various meats are cooked this way. Habanero chilis are another distinctive ingredient, but they are generally served as (or part of) condiments on the side rather than integrated into the dishes.

One prominent feature of Yucatan cooking is tropical fruits such as tamarind, plums, mamey, avocados and bitter oranges, the last often used in the region's distinctive salsas. Honey was used long before the arrival of the Spanish to sweeten foods and to make a ritual alcoholic drink called balché. Today a honey liquor called xtabentun is still made and consumed in the region. The coastal areas feature seafood, especially esmedregal, a type of fish, which is fried and served with a spicy salsa based on the x'catic pepper. Other fish dishes include spicy chili pepper sauces as well as those in achiote paste .

Traditionally, some dishes are served as entrées, such as the brazo de reina (a type of tamale made from chaya) and papadzules (egg tacos seasoned in a pumpkin seed gravy).

Street food in the area usually consists of Cochinita Pibil Tacos, Lebanese-based Kibbeh, snacks made of hardened corn dough called piedras and fruit-flavored ices.

## Mexico City

The main feature of Mexico City cooking is that it has been influenced that those of the other regions of Mexico as well as a number of foreign influences. This is because Mexico City has been a center for migration of people from all over Mexico since pre-Hispanic times. Many of the ingredients of this area's cooking are not grown here, such as tropical fruits.

Street cuisine is very popular, with taco stands, torta (sandwich) shops, and lunch counters on every street. Popular foods in the city include barbacoa (a specialty of the central highlands), birria (from western Mexico), cabrito (from the north), carnitas (originally from Michoacán), moles (from Puebla and central Mexico), tacos with many different fillings and large sub-like sandwiches called tortas. There are eateries that specialize in pre-Hispanic food including dishes with insects. This is also the area where most of Mexico's haute cuisine can be found.



Chinese-Mexican cafe on Rep de Argentina Street in the historic center of Mexico City.

## Western Mexico



Plate of birria with condiments

West of Mexico City are the states of Michoacán, Jalisco and Colima as well as the Pacific coast. The cuisine of Michoacan is based on the Purepecha culture, which still dominates most of the state. The area has a large network of rivers and lakes which provide fish. Its use of corn is perhaps the most varied. While atole is drunk in most parts of Mexico, it is made with more different flavors in Michoacán, including blackberry, cascabel chili and more. Tamales come in different shapes, wrapped in corn husks. These include those folded into polyhedrons called corundas and can vary in name if the filling is different. In the Bajío area, tamales are often served with a meat stew called churipo, which is flavored with cactus fruit.

The main Spanish contributions to Michoacán cuisine are rice, pork and spices. One of the best-known dishes from the state is morisquesta, which is a sausage and rice dish, closely followed by carnitas, which is deep-fried pork. The latter can be found in many parts of Mexico, often claimed to be authentically Michoacán. Other important ingredients in the cuisine include wheat (where bread symbolizes fertility) found in breads and pastries. Another is sugar, giving rise to a wide variety of desserts and sweets such as fruit jellies and ice cream, mostly associated with the town of Tocuamba. The town of Cotija has a cheese named after it. The local alcoholic beverage is charanda, with is made with fermented corn.

The cuisine of the states of Jalisco and Colima is noted for dishes such as birria, chilayo, menudo and pork dishes. Jalisco's cuisine is known

for tequila with the liquor produced only in certain areas allowed to use the name. The cultural and gastronomic center of the area is Guadalajara, an area where both agriculture and cattle raising have thrived. The best-known dish from the area is birria, a stew of beef, mutton or pork with chili peppers and spices. One important street food is tortas ahogadas, where the torta (sandwich) is “drowned” in a chile sauce. Near Guadalajara is the town of Tonalá, known for its pozole, a hominy stew said to have been originally created with human flesh. The area which makes tequila surrounds the city. A popular local drink is tejuino, made from fermented corn. Bionico is also a popular dessert in the Guadalajara area.



A tamale variant called corundas of Michoacán

On the Pacific coast seafood is common, generally cooked with European spices along with chili peppers, and is often served with a spicy salsa. Favored fish varieties include marlin, swordfish, snapper, tuna, shrimp and octopus. Tropical fruits are also important. The cuisine of the Baja California peninsula is especially heavy on seafood, with the widest variety. It also features a mild green chili pepper as well as dates, especially in sweets.

## Veracruz

The cuisine of Veracruz is a mix of indigenous, Afro-Cuban and Spanish. The indigenous contribution is in the use of corn as a staple as well as vanilla (native to the state), and herbs called acuyo and hoja santa. It is also supplemented by a wide variety of tropical fruits such as papaya, mamey and zapote along with the introduction of citrus and pineapple by the Spanish. The Spanish also introduced European herbs such as parsley, thyme, marjoram, bay laurel, cilantro and others which characterize much of the state's cooking. They are found in the best known dish of the region Huachinango a la veracruzana, a red snapper dish.



Huachinango a la veracruzana

The Afro-Cuban influence is from the importation of slaves through the Caribbean, who brought the peanut with them, which had earlier been introduced to Africa by the Portuguese. This influence can be seen in dishes such as pollo encacahuatado or chicken in peanut sauce. Other African ingredients often found in the state include plantains, yucca and sweet potatoes. As it borders the Gulf coast, seafood figures prominently in most of the state. The state's role as a gateway to Mexico has meant that the dietary staple of corn is less evident than in other parts of Mexico, with rice a heavy favorite. However corn dishes such as garnachas, a kind of corn cake, are readily available, especially in the mountain areas where indigenous influence is strongest.



## Chiapas

Like elsewhere in Mexico, corn is the dietary staple and indigenous elements are still strong in the cuisine. Along with a chili pepper called simojovel, used nowhere else in the country, the cuisine is also distinguished by the use of herbs such as chipilín and hierba santa. Like in Oaxaca, tamales are usually wrapped in banana leaves (or sometimes with the leaves of hoja santa), but often chipilín is incorporated into the dough. As in the Yucatán, fermented corn is drunk as a beverage called pozol, but here it is usually flavored with chocolate. The favored meats are beef, pork and chicken (introduced by the Spanish), especially in the highlands, which favors the raising of

livestock. The livestock industry has also prompted the making of cheese, mostly done on ranches and in small cooperatives, with the best known from Ocosingo, Rayón, Chiapas and Pijijiapan. Meat and cheese dishes are frequently accompanied by vegetables such as squash, chayote and carrots.



Pepita con tasajo

## Mexican food outside of Mexico

Most Mexican food found outside of Mexico is limited, generally based on the food of far northern Mexico and the Southwest US. Nachos, burritos, fajitas, chili con carne and chimichangas are examples of Mexican-origin food in the US. However, with the growing ethnic Mexican population in the United States, more authentic Mexican food is appearing slowly in the US. One reason is that Mexican immigrants use food as a means of combating homesickness, and for their descendants, it is a symbol of ethnicity. Alternatively, with more Americans experiencing Mexican food in Mexico, there is a growing demand for more authentic flavors.

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## External links

- (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00400>) from UNESCO

# List of Mexican dishes

The following is a **list of dishes found in Mexico**.

## Main courses

- Ancas de Rana al Mojo de Ajo
- Alambres
- Albóndigas, Mexican meatballs
- Arroz con camarones
- Arroz con pollo
- Barbacoa
- Birria
- Bistec a la Mexicana
- Bistec picado
- Burrito
- Cabrito
- *Caldo*, broth, (generally considered an entree rather than an appetizer) which has many variations, such as:
  - *caldo de pollo*, chicken soup
  - *caldo de res*, beef soup
  - *caldo de queso*, cheese soup
  - *caldo de camaron* shrimp soup, typically made from dried shrimp
  - *carne en su jugo*, meat and beans in a meat broth
  - *caldo de mariscos*, seafood soup, similar to the Italian dish *zuppa di pesce*. Popularly known as an aphrodisiacWikipedia:Disputed statement
  - *caldo tlalpeño*, chicken and vegetable soup with chickpeas, carrot, green beans, chopped avocado, white cheese, and a chipotle chile pepper
    - Also see Menudo and Pozole
- Camarones al Mojo de Ajo
- Carne asada, grilled beef
- Carne guisada, stewed beef in spiced gravy
- Carne Tampiqueña, Tampico-style of carne asada that is usually accompanied by a small portion of enchiladas (or chilaquiles), refried beans, and a vegetable (often rajás; grilled slices of Poblano peppers).
- Carnitas
- Cecina
- Cemitas sandwiches
- Chalupa
- Chapulines and escamoles
- Charales, small fish, basically a type of smelt
- Chicharrón and chicharrones
- Chilaquiles
- Chile relleno
- Chiltomate
- Chilorio
- Chilpachole de jaiba
- Chimichangas (Tex-Mex mostly)



Chiles en nogada



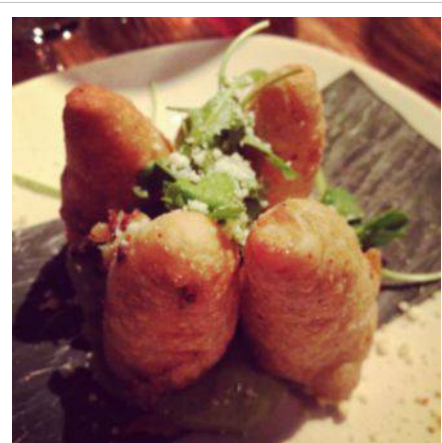
Mole poblano

- Choriqueso
- Chorizo
- Churipo
- Coachala
- Cochinita pibil
- Cocido
- Codzito



Cemita with milanesa

- Cola de res con frijoles
- Corunda
- Cóctel de camarón and other seafood cocktails
- Huaunzontles
- Empanadas
- Empanada Mexicana
- Entomatadas
- Enchilada (red or green)
- Flautas
- Fritadas de camaron
- Gorditas
- Glorias
- Gringas
- Huaraches
- Huevos divorciados
- Huevos motuleños
- Huevos rancheros
- Huachinango a la Veracruzana
- Lengua
- Longaniza
- Machaca
- Mancha manteles
- Memela
- Menudo



Molotes

- Mixiotes
- Mole
- Molletes
- Molotes
- Moronga
- Mulitas
- Panucho
- Papadzules
- Parilladas
- Pastel Azteca
- Pasties, a speciality of Cornwall, adopted as *comida típica* of Pachuca, Mexico
- Pejelagarto asado

- 
- Picadillo
  - Poc chuc
  - Pollo asado
  - Pollo Encacahuatado
  - Pollo motuleños
  - Pollo picado
  - Pollo rostizado
  - Pozole
  - Pulpo (octopus)
  - Quesadillas
  - Rajas con crema
  - Romeritos
  - Salbutes
  - Sincronizadas
  - Sopes
  - Sopa Azteca
  - Sopa de pescado siete mares, a seven-fished bouillabaisse popular in the Gulf of California and Pacific areas
  - Sopa de pollo (chicken soup)
  - Sopa de tortilla (tortilla soup)
  - Sonoran hot dog (regional to Sonora)
  - Sopa tarasca
  - Tacos
    - *Taco al pastor*
  - Tamales
  - Tamales
  - Taquitos
  - Tortillas
  - Tortas (sandwiches)
    - *Tortas de....*, Small omelettes similar to egg foo yung patties. See also romeritos.
  - Tostadas
  - Tlacoyos
  - Tlayudas
  - Tripas
  - Venado (venison), particularly in the Yucatan.
-

## Snacks (*botanas*) and side dishes

- Arroz amarillo (yellow rice)
- Arroz con lima (rice with lemon)
- Arroz Español (Spanish rice)
- Arroz verde (green rice)
- Atepecate
- Bolillos (salty bread)
- Calabaza (squash)
- Camote (Mexican sweet potato)
- Caviar de Carpa
- Ceviche, a seafood dish commonly served in the Gulf of California areas
- Chapulines, toasted grasshoppers seasoned with salt and lime.
- Sopa, typically pasta flavored with meat or tomato consomme
- Consomme (broth), either made from drippings of meat roasted for barbacoa, or dry bouillon cubes and powder. Usually known by its most common brand name, Knorr-Suiza.
- Cuitlacoche, a fungus that grows on corn plants, often served in soups
- Curtido
- Elote
- Ensalada de fruta (fruit salad)
- Fideos (noodles)
- Frijoles
- Frijoles pintos (pinto beans)
- Frijoles negros (black beans)
- Frijoles charros
- Frijoles refritos (refried beans)
- Guacamole
- Jicama
- Jocoque
- Lentil soup (lentil beans)
- Nachos
- Nopalitos
- Pambazos
- Papas (potatoes)
- Pancakes
- Pico de gallo
- Queso de cuajo
- Queso flameado
- Salsa
- Sopa de albondiga (meatball soup)
- Sopapilla (not typical in Mexico, but common in New Mexico)
- Tortillas
- Totopo
- Yuca Cassava



Guacamole



Green salsa, salsa



nopales



Chapulines



## Drinks

- Agua De Horchata
- Aguas frescas
- Atole
- Bacanora
- Barrilitos
- Café de olla Coffee with cinnamon
- Champurrado
- Chia Fresca
- Chocolate Generally known better as a drink rather than a candy or sweet
- Colonche
- Jamaica (drink)
- Jarritos
- Lechuguilla (drink)
- Mexican beer and soft drinks are very popular and are major export products.
- Mezcal
- Michelada
- Ponche
- Pulque, a popular drink of the Aztecs
- Tejate
- Tejuino
- Tepache
- Tequila
- Tuba (drink)



Tequilas of various styles



Hot bowl of champurrado as served at a Mexican breakfast

## Desserts and sweets

Mexico's candy and bakery sweets industry, centered in Michoacán and Mexico City, produces a wide array of products.

- Alegrías
- Arroz con leche, rice with milk and sugar
- Bionico, a type of fruit salad with cream
- Buñuelos
- Cajeta
- Capirotada
- Carlota de limón
- Champurrado
- Chongos zamoranos, a milk candy named for its place of origin, Zamora, Michoacán.
- Churros
- Coyotas
- Dulce de leche

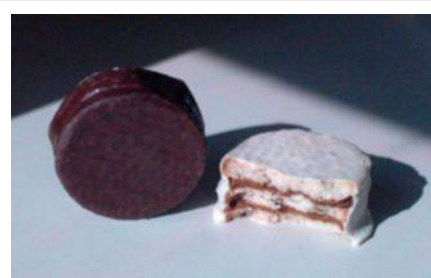


Homemade flan

- Empanadas
- Flan
- Glorias
- Ice cream. Pancho Villa was noted as a devotee of ice cream. The Mexican ice cream industry is centered in the state of Michoacán; most ice cream stands in Mexico are dubbed *La Michoacana* as a tribute to Michoacán's acknowledged leadership in the production of this product.
- Jamoncillos
- Jarritos (spicy tamarindo candy in a tiny pot), as well as a brand of soda
- Leche Quemada
- Obleas
- *Pan de Acambaro* (Acambaro bread), named for its town of origin, Acambaro, Guanajuato. Very similar to Jewish Challah bread, which may have inspired its creation.
- *Pan dulce*, sweet pastries in many shapes and sizes that are very popular for breakfast. Nearly every Mexican town has a bakery (*panaderia*) where these can purchased.



A piece of sugary pan de muerto.



Different types of Alfajor candies

- *Pan de muerto*, sugar covered pieces of bread traditionally eaten at the Día de muertos festivity.
- *Paletas*, popsicles (or *ice lollies*), the street popsicle vendor is a noted fixture of Mexico's urban landscape.
- Pastel de queso, cheesecake
- Pastel de tres leches (Three Milk Cake)
- Pepitorias
- Platano
- Polvorón
- Rosca de reyes,
- Gorditas de azucar
- Tacuarines, Biscochos, or Coricos

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## External links

- Mexican Recipes (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/cuisines/mexican>)

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