



Mexican food and Drink

Mexican food is a rich mixture of indigenous and Spanish cuisines. Food is a typical example of the variety of Mexican culture.

When Hernán Cortés, the Spanish explorer, arrived in Mexico in 1519, he found types of food, fruit, vegetables and wild animals that Europeans had never seen before.



Cortés found that the people ate such things as mangoes, pineapples, avocados, tomatoes, coconuts and basic staples like maize, beans and hot chillies. Cortés and his followers brought with them Spanish tastes and dishes, such as garlic, cereals, rice, wine, meats and sausages flavoured with spices.



In the 19th century, the **French** also **influenced Mexican cooking**, especially in

bread, sauces and methods of preparing food. In bakers' shops today, the breads and cakes are a mixture of French and Mexican styles.

The basis of native Mexican cooking was, and still is, corn-made *tortillas*. **Tortillas** are small, flat, circular, savoury pancakes, which are made of corn or wheat flour. They are the most typical of all Mexican food.



There are over a hundred varieties of *chillies* commonly used in Mexican cooking, ranging in size, shape and flavour strength. They add colour and spice to many dishes. **Chillies** may be red, green, yellow, orange, or burgundy.

Frijoles are round or oval beans which come in many sizes and colours. They are used to accompany many dishes.



Markets



The **local market** is the best place to buy fresh produce and special foods that cannot be found in supermarkets. However, Mexican markets sell many things apart from food, such as traditional handicrafts, leather goods and cooking utensils. There is always a flower section.

Indoor markets are open every day of the week. Others are held outside in the streets, once a week (called *tianguis*). At these markets you find lots of little stalls, selling a great variety of fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, cheeses, clothes, shoes, bags, jewellery and children's toys. The delicious smell from the stalls selling hot snacks fills the market.



Mexican Drinks

Xocoatl - Chocolate

Many centuries before the discovery of the American continent in 1492, *cacao* (the cocoa bean) was cultivated in Mexico and Central America.



Cacao comes from a small tree, which grows in the tropical jungles of Mexico and Central America. The indigenous peoples of Mexico were the first people to ever make chocolate, using cocoa beans, which they also used as currency for buying and selling things.

The Spaniards were the first to send *cacao* to Europe, along with the recipe to make it into a

chocolate drink. The drink was prepared as follows: the beans were roasted and ground into a paste, which was then dissolved in water. The mixture was whipped with a whisk or passed several times from one bowl to another, then the liquid was poured out from one bowl high above another to create foam on top.

This was slightly different from the Aztec's recipe. They used to ground the roasted cocoa beans with corn and then add vanilla to the fine paste that was formed. With the paste and water they made a drink that could be drunk light or thick, warm or cold.

The Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés discovered chocolate when he ate with the Aztec Emperor Moctezuma II and had it for dessert. Cortés loved this drink and said that a soldier was able to walk all day on only one cup of chocolate. The legend goes that a cook in the court of King Charles I of Spain had the idea of mixing *cacao* with sugar, cinnamon and vanilla, and transformed the Aztec drink into something enjoyed by Europeans. That is how modern hot chocolate was born.



Tequila

Tequila is a strong, transparent, alcoholic drink that is considered to be Mexico's national drink. It is obtained from the plant called *maguey* that grows in and around the town of Tequila, in the state of Jalisco. Ancient people made alcoholic beverages using the *maguey* plant long before the Spaniards came to the New World. In order to refine the drink the Spaniards introduced the process of distillation.

It takes between 8 and 12 years for the *maguey* to mature. When it is ready to be harvested, the leaves and spikes of the *maguey* are stripped away, leaving only the heart, which looks like a pineapple.



The heart is roasted, pressed, and then shredded to extract the juice, to which sugar is added. The mixture is left to ferment for four days, and then it is distilled

twice. Afterwards the *tequila* is aged in wooden casks and the final product is a clear liquid.

Mexican food

Tortillas

Tortillas are made of corn or wheat flour mixed into a dough, shaped as a thin circle, and heated on a flat pan (called *comal*) for a few minutes. *Tortillas* can be used as starters, as part of soups, as an ingredient of main courses, or eaten on their own, either with chile sauces, meats or cheeses, or simply with salt. For Mexicans, *tortillas* are what bread is for Europeans.

In northern Mexico, *tortillas* are also made of wheat flour. These, besides being used just like corn *tortillas*, can also be used as a dessert. Butter can be spread on the warm *tortilla* before sprinkling it with sugar.



Tortillas are used in many typical Mexican dishes, in different forms, such as *tacos*, *tostadas*, *enchiladas*, and *quesadillas*.

- ***Tacos*** are rolled *tortillas* stuffed with either beef, pork or chicken.
- ***Enchiladas*** are slightly fried *tacos*, served with a red or green hot sauce.
- ***Tostadas*** are crispy fried *tortillas* spread with beans, chicken or beef and garnished with cheese, lettuce, sour cream and *salsa* (sauce).
- ***Quesadillas*** are *tortillas* filled with almost anything: cheese, mashed potato, or minced beef. Then they are folded over and fried or grilled. All of these are typical examples of *antojitos*, which means snacks.

Recipes

Here are some recipes for you to try out (with the help of an adult):

Guacamole

Ingredients:

2 large avocados
2 green chillies finely chopped
2 tbs. finely chopped fresh coriander
1 tbs. finely chopped onion
1 tbs. finely diced tomato
salt
lime juice



Cut the avocados in half. Remove the stone and scoop out the flesh. Mash with a fork. Put the avocado, chillies, onion, tomato and coriander in a bowl and mix thoroughly. Add drops of lime juice to stop the avocado turning black, and salt to taste. Serve immediately.

Chicken Tacos



Ingredients: (serve six)

12 tortillas
1 cup of corn oil
salt and pepper

For the filling:

1½ chicken breasts, cooked and finely shredded, or ¾ lb of string cheese or cheddar cheese

Garnish:

1 cup of shredded lettuce
1 cup of grated cheese
1 cup of sour cream

green or red *salsa* (sauce), or *guacamole*

Heat the tortillas before filling or they may break. Place one tablespoon of the filling listed above in the centre of each tortilla. Sprinkle with salt to taste. Roll up tightly and secure with a toothpick if necessary. Heat the oil in a pan and fry the tacos until golden, taking care with the hot oil. Drain well on absorbent paper towels. If preparing ahead of time, reheat in the oven for one minute. Arrange

the tacos on a serving dish. Pour some cream over them, top with lettuce and grated cheese. Accompany with any sauce. You may also serve them with rice and fried beans.

Quesadillas

Ingredients: (serve six)

12 tortillas
 2 cups of grated mozzarella, cheddar or string cheese

Garnish:

Guacamole,
 green or red sauce



Heat a frying pan. Place the grated cheese in the centre of each tortilla and fold over. Let the tortilla in the hot pan for one minute then turn over. Heat them until the cheese melts inside the tortilla. Serve with guacamole or salsa.

Enchiladas rojas



Ingredients for red sauce (serves 6):

3 cups of tomato puree
 1 small onion, finely chopped
 1 garlic clove, chopped
 2 green chillies
 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
 1 cup of sour cream
 Salt and pepper

Blend the onion, garlic, chillies and tomato puree, add salt and pepper. Heat the oil in a frying-pan and pour the mixture in it. Cook over moderate heat until the sauce is thick. Set aside.

Ingredients for enchiladas (serves 6):

12 corn tortillas
 2 cups of grated cheese or shredded chicken
 oil for frying

Heat the oil and fry the tortillas, for about 30 seconds on each side. Drain in paper towels. Dip the tortillas in the tomato sauce one by one. Fill each tortilla with cheese or shredded chicken and place them in an oven proof dish. Pour the remaining sauce over the rolled tortillas and add the cream in the top. Sprinkle with the remaining cheese. Heat in a pre-heated oven for about 10 minutes. Serve soon, as they go soggy if left to stand.