

Mexican Food Glossary

Mayan and Yucatecan Specialties

- **Achiote** - Annatto, a brightly-colored orange seed used as a spice in many Yucatecan dishes
- **Chaya** - Leafy green much like spinach or chard. Good many ways, including with scrambled eggs.
- **Chile Habanero** - One of the spiciest chiles there is. Eaten, roasted, like candy for breakfast by children.
- **Chile Xcatic** - much like a yellow banana pepper. Flavorful and not very spicy.
- **Cochinita Pibil** - Suckling pig marinated in bitter orange juice and achiote, wrapped in banana leaves, and slow-cooked in a barbecue pit called a "pib": Mexican pulled pork!
- **Huevos Motuleños** - Fried eggs layered with ham on tortillas with salsa and, usually, peas.
- **Joloches** - Finger-sized tortillas filled with achiote-marinated meat
- **Lima** - not quite a limón, these are aromatic citrus fruits in the lime family
- **Naranja Agría** - Seville or bitter orange. Highly acidic with juice that's barely drinkable but a great marinade.
- **Panuchos** - Corn tortillas made with an internal layer of black beans and topped most traditionally with shredded turkey or chicken, pickled onions, avocado, and often lettuce.
- **Papadzules** - Corn tortillas dipped in pumpkin-seed sauce then rolled with chopped boiled eggs.
- **Poc-Chuc** - Achiote and citrus-marinated grilled pork cutlet
- **Queso Relleno** - Edam cheese hollowed out, stuffed with meat, fruit, and nuts, then steamed and served by the slice with some of the stuffing and a masa-based sauce
- **Relleno Negro** - "Black stuffing". A rich, black sauce, often with turkey and masa dumplings
- **Salbutes** - Little puffy tortillas topped like a panucho
- **Sopa de Lima** - Soup made with chicken broth cooked with lime slices, copious lime juice, and shredded chicken. Before serving, fried tortilla strips and avocado are added. And more lime.
- **Tikin-Xic** - Fish marinated in achiote and bitter orange juice, wrapped in a banana leaf, and baked
- **Xni-Pec** - Very spicy salsa made with habanero chiles. The name refers to runny dog noses, possibly because it induces rhinorrhea in those it doesn't kill outright.

Mexican Cuisine

Mexican food in Mexico can be nearly unrecognizable to Americans and Canadians accustomed to Tex-Mex food. Tacos are nearly always on soft corn tortillas, burritos are uncommon, and hardly anything comes smothered in orange cheese or piled with lettuce, tomatoes, or sour cream. Ground beef is not a common taco topping. Tortilla chips are thick and crunchy, made from actual corn tortillas. Flour tortillas are not traditional in this part of Mexico.

- **Al Ajillo** - Topped with thin strips of dried guajillo chiles (which are smoky rather than spicy), garlic, and butter.
- **Al Pastor** - "Shepherd-style". Refers to adobo-marinated pork stacked and vertically roasted then shaved to make bits for taco toppings. Very similar to shawarma from which it descends. Best with pineapple ("con piña") and finely-chopped onion and cilantro ("cebollacil"), known as "con todo".
- **Alambre** - Kebab
- **Alla Plancha** - Grilled
- **Albondingas** - Meatballs
- **Antojitos** - "Little cravings" or appetizers
- **Arrachera** - Similar to (beef) fajitas but more tender. "Outer skirt" cut.
- **Barbacoa** - Slow-cooked, smoked mutton or goat
- **Birria** - Stew, normally goat or lamb
- **Bistek** - Beef steak, typically sirloin
- **Bolillo** - Large pointy bread roll descended from the baguette
- **Buche** - Pork stomach taco topping
- **Burrito** - Southwestern US dish uncommon in Mexico, except where Americans abound.
- **Cabeza (de Vaca)** - "(Cow's) head". All the gnarly bits of a cow's head made into separate taco toppings or mixed.
- **Caldo** - Broth, usually chicken if not otherwise specified
- **Carnitas** - Pork slowly cooked in its own rendered fat until crispy on the outside and succulent inside
- **Cecina** - Thinly-sliced dried beef ("chipped beef", but not creamed)

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- **Cerdo** - Pork
- **Champiñones** - Mushrooms
- **Chayote** - Pale green squash
- **Chiles Rellenos** - Stuffed chiles, usually poblanos. Cheese is probably the most typical filling.
- **Chimichanga** - Deep-fried burrito, developed in Arizona and uncommon in Cozumel
- **Chorizo** - Wonderful spicy sausage used to flavor many dishes, particularly those with eggs or cheese
- **Chuleta** - Pork chop
- **Costillas** - Ribs
- **Crema de...** - Cream of (whatever) soup
- **Dorado** - "Golden", which in the case of food means deep-fried
- **Elote** - Sweet corn. Dried corn is called maíz.
- **Empanadas** - Disks of dough (usually corn masa) folded and filled with things then fried or baked
- **Empanizado** - Breaded. This implies that it's fried.
- **Enchiladas** - Corn tortillas dipped in chile salsa, fried a little, and then rolled with a filling. Enfrijoladas are similar but dipped in bean sauce, and entomatadas in a tomato sauce.
- **Epazote** - Herb used in nearly every bean recipe in Mexico as well as many other applications
- **Escabeche** - Pickled carrots, onions, and chiles or, in the case of fish, poached with vinegar
- **Fajitas** - Originally limited to beef inner skirt steak. Now means practically anything grilled and cut into strips.
- **Fideo** - Angel-hair pasta, typically served in caldo with chicken as Fideo con Pollo
- **Frijoles alla Charra** - Soupy pinto beans, "cowgirl-style"
- **Frijoles Negros** - Black beans, the most common type in the Yucatán
- **Frijoles Refritos** - "Refried" beans
- **Gringas** - Al Pastor meat on a flour tortilla with cheese (see Mestizas).
- **Guacamole** - "Avocado sauce" often used as a dip.
- **Guiso** - Topping, in the taco or pizza sense
- **Hamburguesa** - Hamburger
- **Hongos** - Mushrooms
- **Huaraches** - Mexico City specialty of an elongated corn tortilla topped like a taco usually with Oaxaca cheese
- **Lechón (al Horno)** - (roast) suckling pig. Like meat candy.
- **Lengua** - (Beef) tongue
- **Limón** - Lime. Mexican food couldn't exist without it. Lemon is essentially unknown in the region.
- **Maciza** - Shredded pork shoulder, used as a taco topping
- **Mamey** - A tropical fruit with no useful English name. They taste... tropical in the extreme.
- **Mariscos** - Seafood
- **Masa** - Dried corn that's been nixtamalized by treatment with lime and water, then ground to form a dough.
- **Mestizas** - Al pastor meat on a corn tortilla with cheese (see Gringas). "Mestiza" means "mixed race", so the corn tortilla makes it more Mexican than a Gringa.
- **Milanesa** - Breaded cutlet. If something else isn't specified ("milanesa de pollo", e.g.), usually beef.
- **(Al) Mojo de Ajo** - Garlic and butter sauce
- **Mole** - Many different types, the most famous being "mole poblano" from Puebla, which includes chocolate, chiles, dark toast, nuts, and many other ingredients.
- **Nachos** - Totopos topped with beans and cheese, without the beans, they're sometimes called "Panchos".
- **Papas Fritas (or Francesas)** - French fries if you're North American or chips if you're British
- **Picadillo** - Ground or chopped beef with chiles and other spices, and often fruits and nuts
- **Pierna** - Roasted pork leg
- **Piloncillo** - Cane juice boiled until it solidifies, ending up sort of like brown sugar
- **Plátano** - Banana (or plantain)
- **Plátano Macho** - Plantain (although the distinction from dessert bananas is cultural, not biological)
- **Pozole (or Posole)** - Stew of pork with hominy
- **Quesadilla** - Originally, a disk of raw masa filled with cheese then cooked.
- **Queso de Bola** - Edam cheese. Very traditional cheese in the region, domestic or from Holland.
- **Rajas** - Strips of roasted poblano pepper simmered in thick cream. Delicious on tacos or with eggs.
- **Res** - Beef

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- **Salsa** - "Sauce". There are countless types, not merely red stuff for dipping totopos.
- **Sincronizada** - Ham and cheese quesadilla
- **Sopa de...** - "Sopa" doesn't always mean "soup" - that "Mexican rice" is Sopa Seca! "Sope de", though, means "non-cream soup of" whatever goes in the soup
- **Sopa de Fideos** - Angel-hair pasta in a slightly tomatoey chicken broth
- **Suadero** - Brisket, pot-roasted and used as a taco topping
- **Tacos** - Small soft corn tortillas topped with something delicious. Cheese on tacos is fairly uncommon, as is lettuce, and you likely won't see olives. Crunchy tacos are "tacos dorados" and are usually rolled like a taquito and often filled with beef brains.
- **Tamales** - Masa filled with something (nearly anything), wrapped in something (corn husk, banana leaf, etc.) then steamed. Fillings can be sweet or savory. The singular is **not** "tamale" - it's "tamal".
- **Tinga** - Shredded, spiced, tomatoey meat (chicken, beef, pork)
- **Tortas** - Sandwiches made with bolillos
- **Tortillas** - Disks of dough (masa or flour dough) rolled or patted out thin then cooked on a griddle
- **Totopos** - Corn tortillas cut into triangles and fried. Thicker, crunchier, and more delicious than "tortilla chips".
- **Tuna** - the fruit of the prickly pear (nopal) cactus. The fish is "atún".
- (**Caldo**) **Xochitl** - ("Zo-SHEEL") Chicken broth with rice, shredded chicken, tortilla strips, avocado, and cheese

Beverages

- **Aguas de Sabor** - usually means a choice between jamaica, horchata, and possibly tamarindo
- **Agua Fresca** - cooler made with some sort of fruit, seed, or starch with sugar, and uncarbonated water
- **Atole** - Hot drink made with masa, sugar, and usually cinnamon and vanilla
- (**Licuada de**) **Avena** - Rolled oatmeal blended with milk and sugar, with or without flavorings such as cinnamon or, occasionally, fruit. Pretty filling for a beverage.
- **Café de Olla** - Coffee made by simmering coffee grounds with spices and piloncillo sugar in a clay pot. These days typically it just means drip coffee with cinnamon, but still very nice.
- (**Agua de**) **Cebada** - Barley water (with the whole softened barley), typically made with cinnamon
- **Champurrado** - Chocolate atole, rich and satisfying for breakfast
- **Chelada** - Beer with ice and lots of lime juice served in a salt-rimmed glass. Very refreshing.
- **Chocolate** - The original way chocolate was consumed. Mexican drinking chocolate usually contains cinnamon and chile. Can be made with water or milk. Pronounced "Cho-co-LAH-tay".
- (**Licuada de**) **Chocoplátano** - Chocolate milk blended with banana
- **Horchata** - Agua fresca made from finely-ground rice, sugar, cinnamon, and vanilla with either milk or water
- **Horchata de Coco** - Similar to regular horchata, but coconut replaces the ground rice. Yum.
- (**Agua de**) **Jamaica** - Iced sweetened hibiscus flower tea, reminiscent of cranberry but much less tart
- **Kermato** - Clamato.
- **Licuada** - Fruit or grain smoothie made with water (con agua) or milk (con leche), always made fresh
- **Limonada** - Limeade (*not* lemonade). Can be still or fizzy ("con gas" or "con agua mineral").
- **Margarita** - A margarita. Duh. Yes, it's less-popular than the Paloma in Mexico.
- **Michelada** - Like a chelada with the addition of Maggi or soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, and salsa (such as Valentina or Búfalo). Versions made with tomato or clam juice are an abomination. Recently popular are versions with mango, chamoy, or other fruit flavors, or even "blue bubblegum"(?!)
- **Paloma** - The most popular tequila cocktail in Mexico: "Squirt" grapefruit soda with tequila.
- **Piña Colada** - Literally, "strained pineapple". Pineapple juice with coconut cream and rum.
- **Refresco** - Any carbonated soft drink
- **Rompope** - Eggnog, usually alcoholic
- **Sangría** - Wine with brandy, fruit and fruit juices, served over ice
- **Sangriá** - Mixer or accompaniment to tequila made with bitter orange juice and chile.
- (**Agua de**) **Tamarindo** - Refreshing tamarind drink, tart and sweet.
- **Vampiro** - A Paloma with the addition of sangrita, usually served in a salt-rimmed glass

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Breakfast

Breakfast in Mexico is often considered incomplete without beans and corn tortillas. Chicken enchiladas and club sandwiches are very common breakfast fare.

- **Chilaquiles** - Totopos with salsa (red or green) and usually shredded chicken, sometimes topped with a fried egg. Often served on the side with your breakfast. Reputed hangover cure.
- **Crepas** - Crepes
- **Hotcakes** - Pancakes
- **Huevos a la Mexicana** - Eggs (usually scrambled) with onion, chiles, and tomato
- **Huevos al Gusto** - Eggs "your way"
- **Huevos Divorciados** - Two fried eggs, separated by a line of beans, one with red salsa and the other with green
- **Huevos Estrellados** - Eggs "sunny side up"
- **Huevos Jarochos** - Scrambled eggs with chorizo and onions rolled in corn tortillas and smothered in refried beans
- **Huevos Rancheros** - Eggs (scrambled or fried) with mildly spicy ranchera sauce
- **Huevos Revueltos** - Scrambled eggs
- **Huevos Volteados** - Eggs "over easy"
- **Migas** - Scrambled eggs with crispy totopos and possibly bacon mixed in
- **Molletes** - Bolillo or baguette sliced, spread with frijoles, topped with cheese, and broiled
- **Pan Dulce** - Sweet breads and pastries typically served in a basket with breakfast
- **Pan Francés** - French toast
- **Waffles** - waffles

Seafood

- **Atún** - Tuna
- **Barracuda** - Barracuda. Common in the area and delicious, but rarely appears on menus.
- **Boquilla** - Grunt
- **Boquinete** - Hogfish
- **Calamar** - Squid
- **Camarón** - Shrimp
- **Cangrejo** - Crab
- **Caracol** - Conch. Quite endangered, so avoid eating it.
- **Ceviche** - "Raw" seafood with lime or bitter orange juice, onion, and chiles "cooked" by the citrus
- **Escochin** - Triggerfish
- **Gambas** - Shrimps
- **Huachinango** - Red Snapper
- **Jaiba** - Crab
- **Langosta** - Spiny lobster (no claws).
- **Marlin** - Marlin
- **Mejillones** - Mussels
- **Mero** - Grouper
- **Pargo** - Snapper (other than red)
- **Pez Espada** - Swordfish
- **Pez León** - Lionfish
- **Pulpo** - Octopus

Snacks and Treats

- **Cacahuates** - Peanuts
- **Cacahuates Japonés** - ["Japanese" Peanuts](#) with a crunchy, savory coating.
- **Chamoy** - Fruity, spicy, sour, salty sauce often served with fruit
- **Choriqueso** - Queso fundido with chorizo
- **Churros** - Fried batter in a tube shape, filled with wonderfulness. Like a long, slightly crispy doughnut.

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- ***Coco Frío*** - Green "water" coconut. Drink the juice, then cut it open so you can eat the flesh with lime and chile.
- ***Crepas*** - Crêpes, popular as street food or from storefronts. Sweet or savory. All good.
- ***Esquites*** - Boiled corn kernels sauteed in butter with onion, chiles and epazote then served in a cup with lime juice, chile powder, and mayonnaise
- ***Helado*** - Ice cream.
- ***Marquesitas*** - Crispy, rolled waffle pastry similar to a sugar cone, with sweet or savory fillings
- ***Paletas*** - Popsicles, in an amazing variety of flavors such as elote or mango with chile
- ***Palomitas*** - Popcorn
- ***Queso Fundido*** (or, "Queso Flameado") - Melted cheese, like fondue
- ***Quesongo*** - Queso fundido with mushrooms
- ***Raspado*** - Shaved ice or snow cone
- ***Tamarindo*** - Tamarind, which provides a dark, sweet-and-sour pulp, is turned into a huge array of candies and sweets, typically with the addition of chiles. They are all delicious.