

MEXICO CITY

A FOODIE'S CHECKLIST

Quesadillas

Quesadillas are very similar to tacos, consisting of a tortilla that is filled with meats, beans, vegetables and spices and then are seared. The primary differences between quesadillas and tacos are the shape and the fillings, though there are a lot of crossover ingredients. In some parts of the country, it is normal for quesadillas to be served with cheese, but in Mexico City you'll need to specify if you want it 'con queso' which often costs a little more – something that has caused some friendly debate between Mexico City's residents and citizens from the rest of the country. If you do need to pay extra for it, the combination of exotic spices and oozing cheese is well worth the small additional fee. As well as specifying cheese preferences, customers at quesadilla vendors may also be asked to choose between *rojo o verde* (red or green) salsa – don't worry about asking which one is spicier and, if in doubt, you can just ask for a *poquito* (small) amount as you can always add more.

Mexico takes its cultures and traditions seriously, be it the annual *Día de Muertos* (Day of the Dead) or celebratory *Día de la Independencia* (Independence Day), so it should come as no surprise that Mexican food is as diverse and intense any other aspect of life. Mexico's cuisine is one of the most famous components of the country and their food is continuing to gain popularity internationally, though nothing can quite compare to actually sampling freshly-prepared street food in the bustling streets of Mexico City. The city is a hub of markets and vendors, making it both easy and cheap to pick up a quick snack while sightseeing or to relax with a cocktail as the days draw to a close. The range of spices, fresh seasonal ingredients and cooking techniques ensures that Mexican food is fast, convenient and, most importantly, delicious. From a savoury chocolate sauce to the quintessentially Mexican taco, LTG has picked out the culinary highlights on offer across the capital.

Chiles en Nogada



Featuring the three main colours on the Mexican flag, *Chiles en Nogada* (chillies in walnut sauce) is a festive dish that is traditionally served in September to celebrate Mexico's Independence Day. On Independence Day, Mexicans celebrate the day in 1810 when Miguel Hidalgo gave a rallying speech for independence, which makes chiles en nogada a deeply patriotic dish. The recipe consists of a large, mild poblano chili stuffed with *picadillo* (a mixture containing ground meat, dried fruits and spices). The green chilli is complemented by a white walnut cream sauce and a sprinkling of red pomegranate seeds to create a dish that looks as spectacular as it tastes. Beef is the meat most often used in picadillo, though it can also be made with pork or chicken, and the dish is traditionally served at room temperature. The ingredients for this dish are in season in August and September in central Mexico, so Mexico City on *Día de la Independencia* is the perfect time and place to enjoy it.

Pambazos

A pambazo is a type of wet sandwich popular throughout Mexico, which is made by filling a *telera roll* (sourdough pitta bread) with *papas con chorizo* (potatoes with chorizo). The entire sandwich is then dipped in guajillo sauce. The top and bottom of the sandwich is lightly fried to give it a crispy exterior, and the dish is then garnished with shredded lettuce, salsa, sour cream and cheese. Like most of the foods on this list, pambazos differ slightly by region, as some include refried beans and guacamole in the recipe and others opt for chicken instead of chorizo. The one aspect of the sandwich found consistently throughout Mexico City and Mexico itself is its distinguishing orange-red hue, due to it being drenched in guajillo sauce which is made from guajillo peppers, garlic, oregano and peppercorns. Alongside the chorizo and potato mix, this sauce creates an incredible depth of flavour. This street food delicacy can get rather messy, so we'd recommend you use a napkin.



Tacos

Tacos have become synonymous with Mexico's bustling street food scene, and it's easy to see why they are now so popular around the world. The key components to an authentic Mexico City taco are: a soft corn tortilla shell; a main filling (choose one of many); guacamole, salsa, coriander and finely chopped white onion. That being said, within Mexico City alone there is an astonishingly diverse selection of ingredients and fillings to choose from, ranging from fried fish and marinated, grilled pork to delicious vegetarian options. The meat-free *taquerías* produce tacos that easily rival their non-veggie alternatives by using flavoursome homemade salsas, fresh guacamole, refried beans and even scrambled eggs. Because of their convenience (their soft tortilla shells make them far easier and less messy to eat than some street food alternatives) and their low price, tacos have become a staple part of the Mexican diet. This means there's no shortage of taco vendors, making them the perfect grab-and-go snack or meal for visitors to the city and locals alike.



Tlayudas



Sometimes referred to as the 'Mexican pizza', tlayudas are an Oaxacan delicacy that uses a large corn tortilla as a base. Like so many foods in Mexican cuisine, tlayudas are versatile and can be changed according to chefs, customers or regions, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly what an 'authentic' version of the dish should be. The recipe loosely consists of a large, seared tortilla being topped with a thin layer of asiento (unrefined pork lard), and a generous serving of boiled, crushed beans. From there, common additions include avocado, salsa, a choice of meats and queso fresco cheese. In Mexico City, tlayudas are more likely to be served with tomatoes, cabbage or radishes to produce a greater depth of flavour than the more minimalistic Oaxacan versions. They can also be presented open-faced or folded in half in the style of an Italian calzone. Whatever you may think of traditional Italian pizzas, Mexican tlayudas are a little-known but worthy rival.

Chocolate Mole

Don't let the name fool you; chocolate mole sauce is a savoury, rich Mexican sauce made from a combination of dried chillies, fruits and chocolate. It is also heavily garnished with fresh herbs and spices. It is normally served with pork, chicken or turkey, although it can also be poured over enchiladas. There are over 40 different types of mole and recipes for it differ across Mexico's regions, only some of which actually include chocolate at all. The most well-known variety of the sauce (and the most common variety of it in Mexico City) is mole poblano. This can contain more than 20 ingredients including dark unsweetened chocolate, which is used to balance the heat of the chillies and to give the sauce its distinctive deep brown colour. The base ingredients are crushed together to release the full depth of flavour and this powder is then simmered with water or broth until the sauce is thick (mole should never be served runny). The versatility of mole makes it incredibly popular – some even describe it as Mexico's national dish.



Enchiladas



Enchiladas are one of Mexico's most popular dishes and are another example of the versatility and individualism on offer in Mexican cooking. Like tacos, quesadillas and tlayudas, enchiladas use corn tortillas to contain a varied range of other ingredients including beef, chicken, seafood, beans, potatoes and vegetables (or any combination of these), as well as a range of spices and sauces. The cooking process in Mexico involved the tortilla being dipped in a spicy chilli sauce and then grilled or lightly fried and then filled. They often contain *queso fresco* (fresh cheese) as part of the filling and are then topped with an additional light sprinkling of cheese. Some varieties of the dish douse the tortilla-wrapped goodness in a rich chocolate mole sauce (most likely to be poblano mole in Mexico City), while others may be topped with salsa, guacamole and sour cream. Some restaurants in the city take full advantage of the interchangeable ingredients: at La Casa de Las Enchiladas, diners are encouraged to pick their own tortillas, fillings and sauces to personalise the dish.

Pozole

While many of the foods on this list follow a similar tortilla-based formula, pozole is an authentic, colourful soup from central Mexico that is believed to have its roots in the Aztec era. It is a healthy, light alternative to some of the denser, carbohydrate-heavy dishes described in this list. Its base ingredient is *hominy* (dried maize kernels), which is usually accompanied with pork and garnished with shredded lettuce or cabbage, chillis, radishes, onion, garlic and coriander. Vegetarian versions of the dishes substitute the meat for beans. Don't be surprised if you get served green, red or green varieties of the soup, as the recipe differs between restaurants and based on the seasonal ingredients available. It is popular all year-round in Mexico, but is traditionally eaten as a celebration dish on New Year's Eve. Travellers to Mexico can be easily enticed into Pozolerías, small independent eateries that serve this soup and virtually nothing else. This is no bad thing, however, as it means they've got the art of making pozole down to a tee.



Paloma Cocktail

It stands to reason that the margarita would be Mexico's most popular cocktail based on how far it has spread around the world, but alas that honour actually falls to the paloma (dove) cocktail. The cocktail is made from tequila, grapefruit, lime and soda and is instantly refreshing, making it the perfect antidote to the humidity of the Mexican capital. Traditionally, this light-pink cocktail is served on the rocks in a highball glass with salt on the rim, making it a rather sophisticated affair. The grapefruit juice makes this cocktail sweeter and a little less sour than a margarita, and it helps tone down the intense flavour of the alcohol. The tequila on offer in Mexico is made using 100% agave sugar, rendering it a far purer and smoother product than alternatives you might find in other countries, which may have been mixed with other ingredients such as grain or sugarcane. It also doesn't require any artificial colours to achieve its rich gold colour, ensuring a much more natural product.

Sullivan Tianguis

Sullivan Tianguis is a lively weekend market located in Colonia San Rafael, and is the perfect place in the city to find street food *puestos* (stalls) serving many of the dishes listed here and a wide variety of others. This roaming market is open from around nine in the morning every Saturday and Sunday on Avenida Sullivan and has lots to offer including books and clothing, though the food will always be the main appeal from a foodie's perspective. Tacos are the best-seller, though it's worth keeping an eye out for tlacoyos, which are masa corn tortillas filled with pork crackling, beans, and cheese and then toasted and served with salsa and coriander. The market is expansive and the food is cheap, so it presents the ideal opportunity for tourists to try something completely different and eat to their heart's content. A piece of advice that applies to any market is to buy from the vendors that are most popular with the locals – if they trust them, you should too.

