

# The Eye



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August 2019

Issue 90

FREE



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# Editor's Letter

**"The main facts in human life are five:  
birth, food, sleep, love and death."  
E.M. Forster**

It's our annual food issue! This month our writers explore lesser known ingredients and share their experiences of new food in new places. If you know me in person you know how important food is to me. I embrace the ethos that the best way to learn about a culture is through it's food. So when I want to learn about people I ask 'what are you eating?'

I just got back from a foodcation where I baked croissants in Paris and drank Pouilly Fume in the Loire Valley with a vintner whose family has been making wine for generations. I eased into long afternoon lunches of foie gras, leeks and red wine. Instead of post-meal siestas I took my cues from Paris' best flaneurs and sat by the fountain in the Tuileries Garden people watching and enjoying the spectacle that is Paris.



Next I went to Delhi, India, where the chaos could not have been more different from the refined precision of Paris. I made butter chicken with chef Neha Gupta ([www.saffronpalate.com](http://www.saffronpalate.com)) and while we made rotis we discussed what it is like to be women in business. This was especially interesting as very few women work in restaurants or hotels in India and the chance to interact with women was limited. Later in my journey, in Rishikesh, I was invited to join a home cook, Rashmi, while she prepared a feast of lentils and rice that was mouth-watering. It was an honor to be invited into her home and to participate in her everyday life.



There are many similarities between Indian and Mexican attitudes towards food as well a crossover of ingredients. Both cultures have a welcoming spirit and there is always enough to feed unexpected guests- the more the merrier. Ingredients seem to expand as you cook them and a small bag of groceries miraculously makes enough to feed a crowd.

While you may not be able to coordinate your own foodcation to Paris and India, you can have one right at home. Get together with friends, cook, explore new cuisines and new ingredients- invite the neighbors you never speak to over for paella or curry or tacos. Expand your palate and you will expand your circle of friends and knowledge of other cultures.

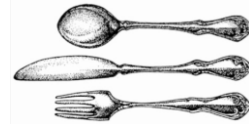
Happy eating and cooking!

**Jane**



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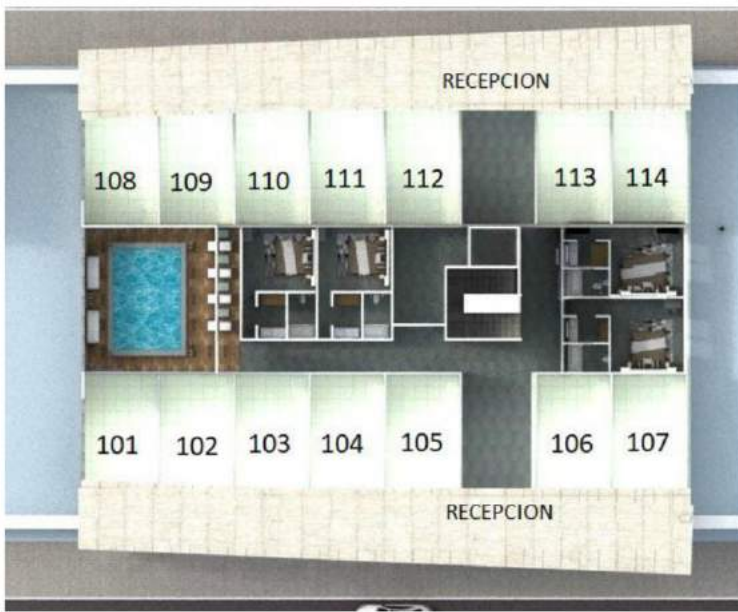
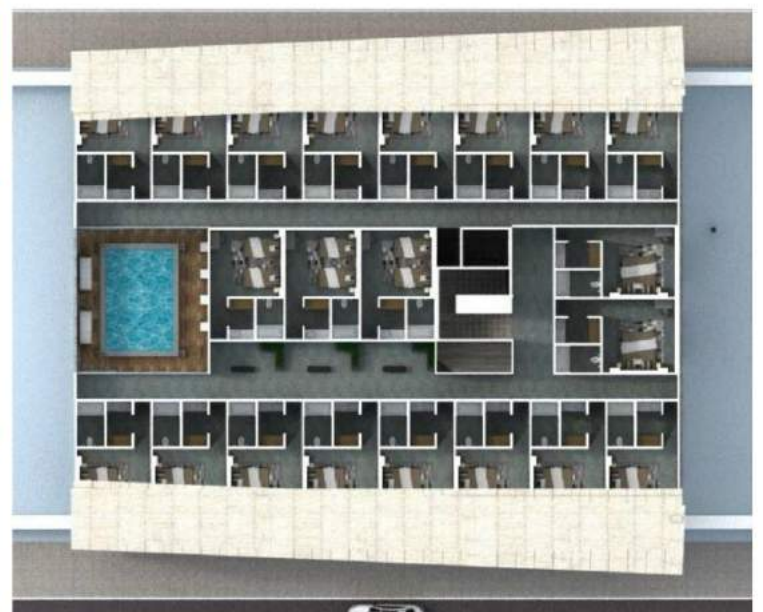
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# Got Pizza?

By Renee Biernacki

**W**hile living in Huatulco, I often hear people ask, "Where can I get the best pizza?" I then hear a reply such as, "Why would you want pizza when you're in Mexico? Ugh!"

Why not? A majority of the population has a craving for it when home or traveling, and sometimes the only thing that'll hit the spot is a yummy slice of pizza. No matter where you are, it's always a good choice. Pizza is arguably one of the world's most perfect foods, right up there with tacos. As a matter of fact, it's also one of Mexicans' most popular foods, after tacos. You will find that the unique style of Mexican pizza will please any gringo. Exploring pizza is like exploring tacos. Just about anywhere you go in Mexico, you can grab a pizza.

Pizza, Italian for "pie," is a staple of Italian cuisine and has become one of the most identifiable and popular dishes worldwide. The first pizza, which was also referred to as flatbread or focaccia, was said to be garnished with olive oil and spices. Eventually added were cheese, tomatoes, and garlic, and the rest is history! Mexico put their take on it with their own flair for flavors and zing, and today Mexico is #2 in the world for pizza consumption. The three factors in its success are price, speed, and versatility.

Mexican pizza-makers have taken on the challenge of creating the perfect pie, and just may have succeeded. Mexican pizza has a thin crust made with ingredients typical of Mexican cuisine such as *chorizo* (spicy sausage), *chapulines* (grasshoppers), *aguacate* (avocado), *carne al pastor* (pork cooked on a spit), *salami*, *atun* (tuna), *elote* (corn), mayonnaise, *frijoles* (beans), *jalapenos*, *chipotles*, and anything else hot and spicy. In addition, there are the usual suspects such as *queso* (cheese), *pepperoni*, *cebolla* (onion), *champiñones* (mushrooms), and *pimiento verde* (green pepper). Hawaiian pizza is a popular one that's topped with *jamon* (ham) and *piña* (pineapple).



Born and raised in Chicago, which I define as the pizza capital of the world and which is famous for its Italian sausage, it's hard not to be biased. But in Huatulco when I want pizza . . . I WANT PIZZA and I find it gratifying! So, if you are from out of the country, it will probably not be like home, but it will satisfy those taste buds.

If you are searching for pizza while in Huatulco, here are some places you will enjoy: Mamma Mia, La Crema Bar, Oro Negro, Teresina, Solo Pizza

and Lupi's Pizza. An added plus is that it can be delivered "a tu casa" (to your home), and don't forget the *propina* (tip)! Also, off the beaten path in Playa Zipolite is a gem of a place called Restaurante El Alquimista. Another is Pizzeria el Dragon in Barra de la Cruz. Internationally, pizza is a highly accessible food with many flavorful toppings of your choice, so experience it during your stay just as you would with any typical Mexican food.

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# GONE BANANAS

By Brooke Gazer

**T**here are good reasons why bananas are the most popular fruit on the planet. Bananas are the world's fourth richest dietary staple, after wheat, rice, and corn. Low in fat and rich in potassium and vitamins A, B, C and D, a medium banana has only 95 calories. This delicious fruit offers a quick, natural, and sustained energy boost with an added benefit; bananas have a type of protein that your body converts into serotonin. This is something commonly found in antidepressants, known to improve mood and promote relaxations. So if you are having a bad day, grab a banana.

Cuba first introduced bananas into the USA in the early 1800s. But the Boston Fruit Company had cornered the market by the latter part of that century, and more bananas were shipped from Jamaica. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1899), the Boston Fruit Company merged with another banana trading company to become The United Fruit Company.

## The Banana Republics of Latin America

United Fruit took the banana from luxury status to everyday household use, and its popularity was further increased in 1944, when the Chiquita banana jingle premiered in movie theaters. Using a little humor, it instructed people how to choose and use bananas. Chiquita owed much to the "Brazilian Bombshell" Carmen Miranda, the singer/dancer/actress who performed in turbans filled with fruit. To catch United Fruit's efforts to give bananas sex appeal, the original commercial appears on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFD0I24RRAE>).

The broader impact of the United Fruit Company on Latin America, however, is no laughing matter. Under the pretense of helping to develop third world countries, this corporation displaced hundreds of thousands of indigenous and peasant farmers. They indulged dictators, instigated coups d'états, and employed violence to control workers. This grand organization was responsible for the term "Banana Republic," before it became a brand name for trendy clothing.

For nearly a century, United Fruit had a monopoly on banana production and shipping, controlling nearly ninety percent of the market. In 1985 it became Chiquita Brands International with headquarters in both the USA and Switzerland. While it operates more ethically today, it is still plagued by problems that emerged early on – environmental destruction to provide for monoculture, use of carcinogenic pesticides, exploitation of workers, aiding and abetting political and economic corruption.



## Mexican Banana Production

Mexico currently holds tenth place in global banana production, and ranks thirteenth in banana exporting. The United States is among the world's largest banana importers, with 80% of its imports coming from Mexico. This simple fruit generates between \$140-\$190 million USD annually for Mexico, and sharing a border would make it a natural win-win for both countries. Let's hope the relationship continues.

Canada does not have the same proximity and most of their bananas originate in Central and South America, not Mexico. This is something that Mexico may want to address in an upcoming trade deal, since bananas represent 10% of Canada's total produce sales. That's not small potatoes!

Of about 1000 types of bananas grown in 150 countries, Mexico produces eight. Machos (plantains) are considered by some to be more of a vegetable than a fruit, as they are cooked and served as a side dish for lunch and dinner. The Cavendish banana is the most familiar variety, accounting for almost half of global imports. Tabascos are similar but the shape is slightly more curved. Dominicos are the tiny finger size bananas, sweeter and denser than Cavendish. Manzanas are the fat squat ones and are slightly more acidic. Morados have a reddish-purple skin and seem to have creamier texture.

## Cooking with Bananas

In many baked goods, you can make a healthier product by substituting mashed bananas for up to half the oil. Here in Huatulco, bananas ripen quickly, so when they become soft, I peel them, pop them into the freezer, and use them in muffins. When I have a lot, I use them in the following recipe; with the exception of machos, any combination of Mexican bananas (fresh or frozen) can be used.

**Brooke Gazer operates Agua Azul la Villa,  
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## Banana Flax Bread

**NOTES:** This is a big recipe that makes four loaves, but it freezes well and it is moist enough to keep a loaf in the fridge for a few days.

Mexican vanilla is not as strong as what you buy north of the border, so adjust accordingly. The same goes for Mexican baking powder, so if you use an American or Canadian brand, cut the amount in half.

I've also discovered that the cane sugar in Mexico is sweeter than Canadian beet sugar, so this recipe calls for a bit less sugar; if you use beet sugar, add about another quarter cup.

Equipment: food processor, blender, wire whisk, 4 greased and floured loaf pans, and a large and a medium mixing bowl.

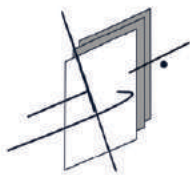
Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C).

### Ingredients

- 1½ cups softened butter
- 2¾ cups cane sugar
- 6 large eggs
- 5 cups flour
- 1½ cups ground flax
- 2 tsp salt
- 3 tsp baking soda
- 3 TBS baking powder
- 4½ cups ripe mashed bananas
- 1½ cups yogurt
- 2 TBS Mexican vanilla

### Directions:

1. Cream butter and sugar thoroughly in a food processor; add the eggs and blend until smooth.
2. Mix the dry ingredients together in the medium bowl.
3. Mash the bananas in a blender; add the yogurt and vanilla and blend until fully incorporated.
4. Pour the butter/egg mixture into a large bowl.
5. Add a third of the banana/yogurt mixture and combine the ingredients with a wire whisk – do not over mix. Then add a third of the flour mixture. Repeat adding the banana/yogurt and flour mixtures by thirds. Do not over mix.
6. Pour into 4 greased and floured loaf pans.
7. Bake at in preheated oven for 45-60 minutes, reducing heat to 325°F (160°C) heat after the first ½ hour. Test for doneness with a skewer or long tooth pick.



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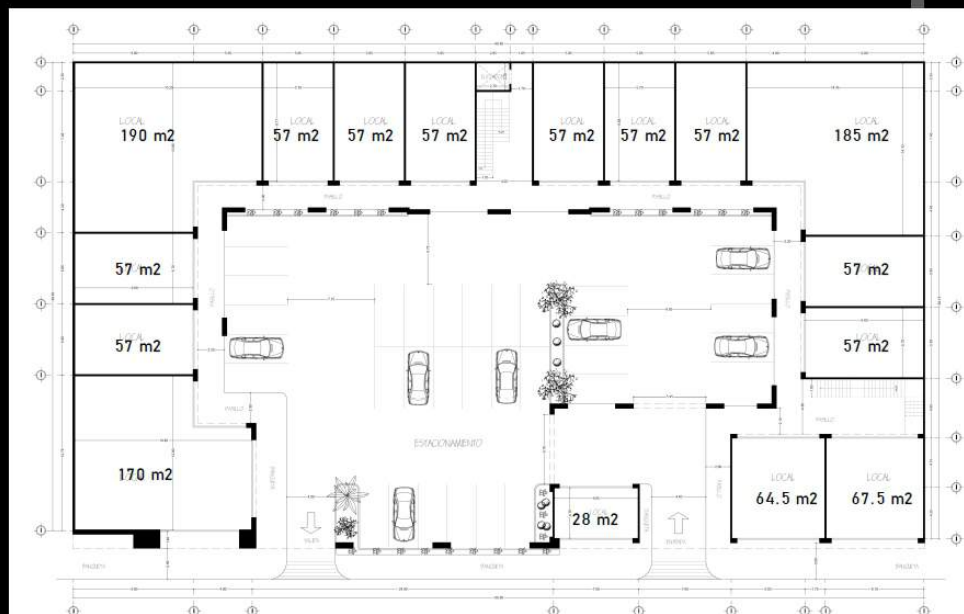


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# Moving Again? The Challenges of Learning About New Foods

By Susan Birkenshaw



In the last 25 years, I have completely moved house 3 different times, established long-term winter homes in 2 countries and have been blessed to be able to travel to 70-plus countries. I am a passionate traveller and I eat almost anything put on my dinner plate (well, maybe not parsnips or bananas, go figure). In my recent move to Huatulco, Mexico, from Cuenca, Ecuador, my local favourites had to be revised again! Here are some of the things I have learned as my life shifts again.

I had to forget the notion that all Latin Americans love spicy foods. In Mexico and Ecuador, the level of "hot" is often very moderate. In Mexico it is common to see a variety of bottled hot sauces on the table in the local restaurants and on food carts. In Ecuador, there is always a bowl of *aji* (garlic sauce), which is homemade and includes common elements but is made to whatever original recipe the restaurateur received as it was passed down through at least two generations. Don't ask - the recipes are NOT shared! You might be able to sweet-talk a small portion in a to-go cup. Even the dried red peppers are not readily available. In my 9 years in Ecuador, I never saw the mounds of peppers that we see in Huatulco. Also, in Ecuador, mortars and pestles were an exceedingly rare sight, so it was obvious that creating personal recipes for salsas and grinding small portions of spices were not common activities.

It seems that there are three common (and yet very different) things that arrive at each home table on a regular basis – soup, hot sauces and salads. Each of these is made to the matriarch's specific recipe and rarely changes unless a couple brings their family recipes to a new union. Then things could be blended, experimented with and a new recipe created but I also have learned that often when family is involved, 3 different versions of soup or *aji* hot sauce could be on the table.

My first experience with *aji* was when we were at a local restaurant where we had made friends with the owner's son. When we finally built up the courage to ask him about the *aji* he served, we learned that we could purchase some in a to-go cup but "No, we can't give the recipe out because only Mama Maria knows the recipe!" With that he went on to explain that Maria is a 35+ year employee and all she does is make *aji* – the restaurant always hates when she takes vacation. "Nothing is ever the same!"

Unless prepared by a talented chef, Ecuadorean meals were mostly bland and uninspired. Hardly a fabulous cook, even I have learned how to create interest with unique flavours. Another difference between the foods of Ecuador and Mexico is how entrees are served. The side dishes in Ecuador are almost exactly the same every time; when ordering, you must clarify the options first or your plate will arrive with heaps of rice, fries (yes both!), cold mixed vegetable salad, possibly a small green salad. Then add your meat choice and the gravy that goes with it. Completely different from Huatulco – where it seems that separate steps are the way to assemble your meal in local restaurants, but don't take this for granted – I am learning that lots of food appears to be a good thing at every meal. In my investigation of local cuisines, I have often fallen into the trap of trying to eat all the food that is presented to me. I know that it is a true shame to waste food, so I learned quickly to ask for half portions or to split any servings with my co-adventurer, Michael.

There is at least one exception to the uninspired character of Ecuadorean cuisine. I still swoon at the memory of the first *locro de papas* (potato soup) I ever tried. There are more the 2000 varieties of potatoes available throughout the Andes, and 50+ varieties of potato are cultivated and grown in this tiny country. It is hardly surprising that this soup is common throughout the country, and like the *aji*, every family and every family restaurant will serve you their version! It is really important to know that we may not like one version as much as another. The one I have included here is as close as I could get to my favourite.

For me, the real surprise came when I discovered how differently the locals in both countries treat greens and salads. What I have learned is that a salad could be anything from a mix of lettuce and leafy stuff to a chunky salsa type meal that includes tomatoes, onions, cheese, large kernels of corn (*elotes* in Mexico) and often handfuls of cilantro! Either way – add a small bit of good olive oil, lemon juice and call this a meal! Pico de Gallo quickly became my favourite "salad" with not one bit of boring lettuce in sight!

I am thrilled to read about new restaurants opening in Huatulco – seemingly on a daily basis – so many places to experience and so many new tastes to experiment with.

**Ají de tomate de árbol**  
**(Tamarillo (tree tomato) ají hot sauce)**

**Yield:** about ½ cup

*Note: It has been legal to import tree tomato fruit into the U.S. since June of 2018. Try Whole Foods or a Latin grocery store; the Latin grocery store might also have frozen tamarillos or pulp. If you still can't find the fruit, consider using mangos, which will make a sweeter sauce.*

**Ingredients**

- 4-5 tamarillos, fresh or frozen
- 2-3 ajís or hot peppers (serranos or chiles de árbol are good options, habaneros if you are very brave)
- 2 TBS finely chopped white onion
- 1 TBS finely chopped cilantro
- 1 TBS lime or lemon juice
- ¼ cup reserved cooking or plain water
- Salt to taste

**Instructions**

1. Prepare the tamarillos. **FRESH:** Boil them for about 5 minutes, or until the skins split, to make it easier to peel them; remove tamarillos with a slotted spoon and set aside to cool. Reserve cooking water. Scoop out pulp. **FROZEN:** Defrost overnight in the fridge, then cut them in half and scoop out all the pulp. **FROZEN PULP:** Defrost; do not use the microwave.
2. Prepare the peppers: If you are boiling the tamarillos, add the peppers; otherwise, boil the peppers until soft; remove with a slotted spoon and set aside to cool. Reserve cooking water. Seed and devein the peppers if you want a mild ají. Save a few seeds if you want to change the heat when you're done.
3. Put tamarillos and peppers in a small food processor or blender and mix until smooth.
4. Transfer the mixture to a small saucepan, add water (you can add more than ¼ cup if you prefer a more liquid sauce) and cook on medium heat, stirring until the consistency is a purée (5-8 minutes). Remove from heat.
5. Stir in the onion, lime juice, cilantro, and salt to taste.
6. Serve warm or cold.

Some recipes produce a creamier ají by substituting oil for the water. In Step 4, only use enough water to keep the purée from burning. After you remove the pan from the heat, add up to ¼ cup oil (avocado works well); you can blend it again to emulsify the oil (optional). Proceed to step 5.

Tomatillos have a lot of pectin, so if you refrigerate the hot sauce, it will turn to gel. Just drop it back in the processor/blender and add a little water or oil. Blend until the consistency is what you want.

You can also add *chochos* (lupini beans, or any large white bean) to give the sauce some protein.

**Ecuadorian potato and cheese soup**  
**(Locro de papa)**

**Yield:** 10 servings

**Ingredients**

- 10 medium potatoes, mix of red and yellow, peeled and roughly chopped
- 2 TBS extra virgin olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, diced in ½ inch pieces
- 3 cloves of garlic, coarsely chopped
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp achiote powder (ground annatto seeds) powder (substitute: ¼ tsp turmeric, ½ tsp sweet paprika, pinch of nutmeg)
- 7 cups of water
- 1 cup of milk or more
- 1 cup grated or crumbled cheese (quesillo, queso fresco, mozzarella or Monterey jack)



Salt to taste

**To serve:**

- Crumbled queso fresco or feta cheese, or shredded mozzarella
- Chopped cilantro and green onions
- Avocados, sliced or diced
- Ají hot sauce

**Instructions**

1. In a Dutch oven or large heavy pot, heat the oil over medium heat and add the onions, garlic, cumin, and achiote powder. Cook, stirring frequently, until the onions are just brown along the edges, about 5-7 minutes.
2. Add the potatoes, stir until they are coated with the onion-spice mixture, and cook for about 5 minutes, stirring every couple of minutes.
3. Add the water and bring to boil. Reduce heat and cook until the potatoes are very tender (15-20 minutes).
4. Use a potato masher to mash the potatoes in the pot until most of the potatoes are incorporated in the creamy soup but some small chunks remain.
5. Turn the heat down to low, stir in the milk and let cook for about 5 more minutes. You can add more milk if the soup is too thick.
6. Add the grated cheese and cilantro, mix well, and remove from the heat.
7. Add salt to taste and serve warm with avocados, scallions, cheese and hot sauce.



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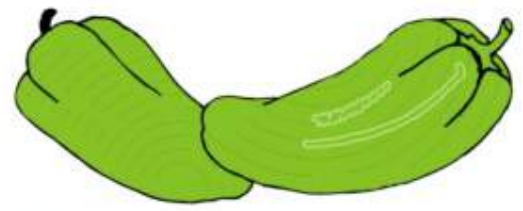
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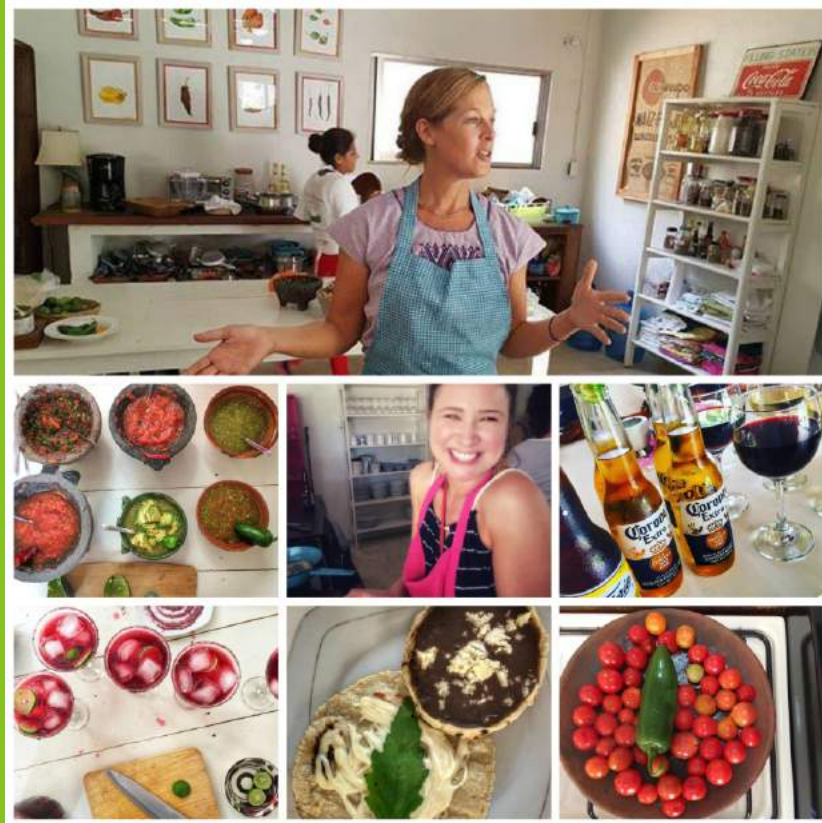
# Chiles & Chocolate

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- Black Mole- This is the most exquisite and complicated Mexican salsa.
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##### THURSDAY-Fiesta- Perfect recipes for your next party!

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- Beef Tamales in Corn Husk
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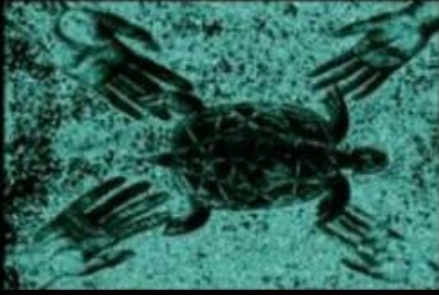
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# The Commission Conundrum

By Alvin Starkman, M.A., J.D.

**C**raftspeople in the villages, even the odd restaurant owner and urban retailer, sometimes pay a commission, or a “thank you” sum of money, to tour companies or guides, drivers and cabbies who bring visitors to their establishments. It's a fact of business internationally, not just in the state of Oaxaca. Although you might expect that a commission paid to your guide will predetermine what you see and where you stop, and you might not even be aware that it's going on, it's not always a bad thing that visitors should shun. Here in southern Mexico, the amount can be anywhere from 10 to 35 percent, perhaps even more. In some cases, it's on top of a payment made simply for bringing a tour bus to a particular craft workshop, or in Oaxaca, say, a roadside mezcal factory.

In a typical Oaxacan scenario, a tourist decides upon a number of sights of interest along a particular route with a diversity of different options: craft demonstrations, historical sites such as Zapotec ruins, colonial churches, and/or ecotourism visits such as to Hierve el Agua near the state capital. It's within the context of visits to the first, i.e., handicraft villages where tourists often make purchases, that commissions are sometimes paid.

## Commissions Are Not Always Paid

But there are at least three main reasons why some craftspeople do not pay a commission to tour guides and drivers:

-The workshop may have a set policy from which it rarely if ever deviates, knowing that it will make sufficient sales without the help of intermediaries, or believing that tour companies will nevertheless patronize the retailer for one or more of a variety of reasons.

-A craftspeople may wish to keep prices as low as possible, believing that guides will gravitate to his or her shop based on the reputation of rock bottom prices; this assumes the guide wants to provide clients with the value-added service of locating bargains.

-A weaver, potter, sculptor or wood carver may have a reputation for producing the highest quality in a class of *artesanias*, or manufacturing something that no one else does (i.e. making miniatures, or items of recycled glass, metal or wood), and thus believe that quality and uniqueness will drive business without the need for paying a percentage.



## Payment of Commissions May Serve Tourists' Interests

A guide on a small, personalized tour may in fact end up acting as an interior designer or consultant when visiting craft workshops, and provide valuable advice. The guide might be working on a flat-fee day rate, and spend an inordinate amount of time with clients, above and beyond the call of duty. Since some tourists don't tip, having established a rate for the day or by the hour, a modest commission is perhaps in order if the client gets what he wants, in spades. On the other hand, who should bear the responsibility of paying something? I would

suggest that a generous gratuity is in order, and the craftspeople should keep whatever the client pays, leaving the guide out of that part of the equation.

Reasonable commissions paid to a driver or guide are often indicative of a healthy symbiotic relationship between service provider and craftspeople, which in the end benefits the client. A modest sum should not take the ultimate sale price of the clay figure, wool rug or alebrije, out of the appropriate price range. On the other hand, with a “cheap” large group tour, often drivers change, and they never establish that kind of relationship, and it's strictly business; that scenario, I would suggest, should be approached with caution.

## Is the Tour Guide Motivated by Commission?

There are ways to determine whether your service provider is working for you or strictly for him- or herself, that is, the primary motivation is making more than his or her salary or fee for service:

-Find out in advance approximately how much time will be spent at each stop. If in India and the itinerary calls for 15 minutes at the Taj Mahal, and 1.5 hours at a rug workshop, that should give you an idea.

-Ask for itinerary details in terms of particular workshops, and inquire why weaver A versus weaver B. This means doing one's due diligence in advance, typically by reading. But remember that journalists and travel guide writers also at times fall prey to monetary incentives, so don't rely entirely on the literature.

-If you've read about the trip and are using a private guide, suggest visiting alternate workshops to those pre-planned, and if there is any resistance, probe further. But remember that your service provider is in theory a professional who knows his business and the vendors better than you do.

-Ask your hotel clerk/concierge for more than one recommendation, and the pros and cons of each, and try to get feedback from others at the lodging who have used that company/driver.

-Before committing, ask the tour company or guide for testimonials, although often tourists are very satisfied without knowing the guide's modus operandi.

-Consider arranging your touring days before you start your vacation so you can do your homework from a position of strength, calmly, without feeling pressure to do a particular touring route on the last full day of your visit. Use the Internet.

### **The Key to a Fulfilling, Enjoyable, Educational Touring Day**

You may not be back in Oaxaca for a long time, if ever. It's therefore important to get the most out of each and every vacation day, tours included. Assess the pros and cons of each touring option. Remember that commissions are often a part of the touring experience, not always to be shunned. Do your due diligence, and trust your instincts.

*Alvin Starkman operates Mezcal Educational Excursions of Oaxaca ([www.mezcaleducationaltours.com](http://www.mezcaleducationaltours.com)). He believes in ethical tourism, which for him means never accepting anything from any mezcal distiller. On the contrary, his lifestyle is often more comfortable than theirs, a significant consideration.*

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# Upcoming Events

## Huatulco Recurring Events:

### English AA, Huatulco

Thursdays 11:30am

Calle Flamboyant 310, 2nd floor, La Crucecita,

Info: Becky Wiles, [b\\_wiles@yahoo.com](mailto:b_wiles@yahoo.com)

### Weekly Markets

Pochutla Market- Every Monday

### Huatulco's Organic Market

Santa Cruz 8am - 2pm

First and third Saturdays of the month.

Encuentro de Cocineros - Local cooks gather with sample dishes to raise money for local charities.

Santa Cruz Park, 2pm, 150 pesos

Last Sunday of the month

## Oaxaca City Recurring Events:

### Open AA Meetings (English)

Members of all 12-step programs welcome

Mondays and Thursdays, 7 pm

Saturdays, 9 am

303B Rayon near corner of Fiallo

### Al-Anon (English)

Tuesdays, 10:30 am

303B Rayon near corner of Fiallo

### Religious Services

Holy Trinity Anglican Episcopal Church

Sundays 10:30 am

Crespo 211 (between Morelos and Matamoros)

Liturgy followed by coffee hour. Information 951-514-3799

### Oaxaca Quaker Friends

Saturdays, 10 am, Free. All are welcome.

For more information and location, contact [janynelyons@hotmail.com](mailto:janynelyons@hotmail.com).

### Weekly Markets

Zaachila Market, Every Thursday

Ocotlán Market, Every Friday

Etla Market, Every Wednesday

Tlacolula Market, Every Sunday

# Favorite Foods from Afar and Where to Find Them in Mexico City

By Carole Reedy



Our own Mexican cuisine always places high on favorite-foods lists. The world craves tacos, enchiladas, tortilla soup, and a refreshing Mexican beer. Most recently, Mexican wines have gained favor among sommeliers. But with variety the spice of life, we who live in or visit Mexico City occasionally enjoy a change of pace.

Here are some of the best places in the megapolis to satisfy your cravings for other popular world cuisines.

## ASIAN

The cuisine of the East can be enjoyed in one of two ways: in a restaurant that offers the delights of several Asian regions or in one that focus on the cuisine of one specific country. Two casual eateries offer the first option in the trendy Roma neighborhood.

**Sesame (Colima 183, Roma Norte).** Specializes in the dishes of Thailand, India, China, and Vietnam. Among my favorites are the tasty lamb samosas, the *suave* baby back ribs, any of the curry choices, and the pad Thai. Although Sesame is famous for its creative, wildly colored exotic drinks, it also serves a good glass of wine and a variety of beers. There are a few outdoor tables, but the interior is comfy with an eclectic decor.

**Mog (Frontera 168, Roma Norte).** This very popular Japanese/Thai restaurant is a hit with the young crowd, so you may have to wait before being seated in the open-air, informal setting. Be aware the service is often slow, so give yourself plenty of time to peruse and choose from the large menu selection, including a large variety of ramen, rolls, and brochettes. Despite the inconveniences, the Japanese food here is among the best in the city, according to its loyal customers who ignore the idiosyncrasies. Whatever you fancy to eat, do order a Sapporo beer to accompany it.



**Little Tokio (a few little gems on the Río streets in Colonia Cuauhtémoc).**

The streets running on the north side of the landmark Angel de Independencia are all named for rivers, and it is here you will find Little Tokio, a few streets sporting small Japanese restaurants, stores, and even a ten-room *ryokan*. The Japanese embassy is right there on Reforma, so the area is easily definable, the main streets of activity being Río Pánuco and Río Ebro.

Here you will find **Rokai (Río Ebro 87)**, a tiny space (reservations recommended) with a sushi bar serving sashimi, hand rolls, and appetizers. The chef's special is recommended.

Looking for ramen? **Rokai Ramen (Río Ebro 89)** offers 12 noodle-and-broth combos, a rice bowl, chicken, and spring rolls.

On Río Pánuco, find **Hiyoko (Río Pánuco 132)**, another miniature locale serving skewers of meat and fish. Right next door is **Le Tachinomi Desu/Enomoto Coffee**, a coffee bar (8 am to 3 pm) during the day and at night a spirits bar serving wines, sake, and Japanese whiskey.

If you're looking for a sit-down restaurant, **Tori Tori (Amsterdam 219, Condesa)** is a good choice, though it serves the usual Japanese fare, nothing experimental or original such as you'll find at the places above.

## ITALIAN

The first two recommendations in this section come from the owners of **Partimar**, the Italian *bodega* in Colonia San Rafael that imports and sells products from Italy. If you prefer to cook at home or in your Airbnb instead of dining out, shop for your ingredients, including wines and spirits, at Partimar.

**L'osteria del Becco (Goldsmith 103, Polanco).** To say del Becco serves food with a flair is truly descriptive of the menu. You'll find all the authentic Italian items on the menu, but prepared with a unique blend of spices and technique for wonderful new tastes. For example, tagliatelle with duck ragout and mint-perfumed ricotta or lemon zest tagliolini with mascarpone. Or how about rigatoni with a lamb ragout? Yes, truffles are offered also, including a bruschetta of goat cheese and black truffles. The wine list is filled to the brim with fine Italian selections. Located in one of the most exquisite neighborhoods in the city, the prices reflect the locale.

**Quattro (Avenida Santa Fe 160, Santa Fe, inside the J W Marriott Hotel).**

Andrew Knowlton of Bon Appetit says it best: "Celebrities flock to the black and brown dining room that glows with crystal chandeliers and wine bottles. The atmosphere is typically South Beach, but the food is all essence, thanks to the thirty-somethings Fabrizio and Nicola Carro. The 'Marvelous Twin Chefs' grew up in the Piedmont region of Italy, a heritage that is evident in their traditional and rustic menu of northern Italy."



A majority of the Carros' ingredients come straight from Italy, and their wine selection is in "constant evolution." Quattro is a 5-star restaurant and although pricey by Mexican standards, it might not be so for visitors from Europe or the US. The only disadvantage for most visitors, and those of us centrally located in DF, is the location in Santa Fe, which is very far west (at least an hour, depending on traffic) from the center of Mexico City.

If you're looking for something more reasonably priced, a long-time favorite of mine is **Mezzo Mezzo (Río Neva 30, Colonia Cuauhtémoc, not far from Little Tokio)**. The specialty here is various thin-crust pizzas, my favorite being the gypsy pizza, topped with figs and brie (I have never seen it anywhere else!). The ambience of outdoor dining on this tree-lined street just three blocks from Reforma is most enjoyable, as this area teems with just enough activity to be interesting, but not so much as to make it oppressive. Another advantage is the long hours of service: 9 am to midnight, except Saturday and Sundays which are 1:15 pm to midnight. If you have to wait, ask the waiter for a beer or a glass of wine, stand or sit on the curb, and watch the world go by.

**MIDDLE EASTERN**

**Al Andalus (Mesones 171, Centro Histórico).**

The most reliable recommendation for this eatery is its status as a favorite among Mexico's citizens of Lebanese descent. When I dine with these families, we always share several dishes, the best way to sample the large menu. Favorites include Arab tacos, hummus, filled grape leaves, tacos de falafel, all topped off with a strong Lebanese coffee and typical very sweet dessert! Try the traditional *arak*, an anise liqueur with added water. Or if you prefer wines, Al Andalus has its own Lebanese wine, made from a variety of grapes. Al Andalus also has a branch in the Colonia Nápoles (Calle Nueva York 91).



**ARGENTINE**

**El Diez (various locations throughout the city).**

Restaurants serving the famous beef from Argentina abound in every nook and cranny in Mexico City, the arrachera cut being the most popular. One may not think a chain restaurant would have the best food, but here the El Diez restaurants (named for the famed soccer player Diego Armando Maradona) never fail to satisfy an urge for a good steak, salad, and beans. In addition, they have their own hearty and inexpensive red wine.



Many Argentine restaurants also serve excellent pizza, which is unsurprising given the influx of Italians to the country starting in 1857. Citizens of Italian descent account for 25 of the 40 million people in Argentina. With a broad menu from which to choose, don't hesitate to invite your vegetarian friends to join you. As an aside: If you visit San Miguel de Allende be sure to dine at Restaurant Buenos Aires on Mesones for excellent beef, fabulous polenta dishes, and, a friend's favorite, the octopus salad.

**CREPES AND QUICHES**

When you find yourself in Coyoacán for a visit to Frida Kahlo's house or perusing the *artesanía* stalls at the *Bazar Sábado* in nearby San Angel (two perfect excursions for a Saturday) stop for lunch at **Cluny's (Avenida de La Paz y Revolución, San Angel)**. It is not a French restaurant per se, but it serves four or five luscious quiches and a variety of ten or so crepes. Some of the best are the *huiltacoche* (corn fungus) with *epazote* and cheese crepe, as well as the Bombay crepe, bursting with the scent and flavor of curry. Wine prices are reasonable. A Spanish Albariño or a Portuguese vinho verde is a perfect accompaniment to lunch.



**BAKERY ITEMS**

If you're looking for a European-style bakery with croissants, scones, donuts, chocolate truffle cakes, tarts, brownies, or cookies, try any of the **Pastelerías Alcazar** located in various areas of the city. Although this is a 100% Mexican-owned and operated bakery, you will not find the traditional Mexican sweets here (which to me are too sugary and taste like cardboard no matter how much colored fluffy icing tops them). Interestingly, the original owners named their bakery *Alcazar* in honor of a Spanish cake made from marzipan, almonds, and raspberries that they loved. Most of the bakeries have seating areas where you can enjoy a cappuccino and one of their sandwiches, presented on an excellent variety of breads.

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think, love, sleep well

IF ONE HAS NOT  
**DINED WELL**

-Virginia Woolf

# Protecting the Environment with Veganism

By Leigh Morrow

Today at my local farmers market, a woman walked by carrying a burlap produce bag that said, "Eat the change you wish to see in the world" – a new twist on "Be the change you wish to see in the world." If you haven't noticed, veganism has gone mainstream.

## Choosing Your Diet

What we eat, or choose not to eat, is the new badge of our environmental consciousness. The food we buy and consume has changed from a choice about personal health to a more altruistic decision to help our planet's health. This is how people are demonstrating their deep concern over global warming and, even more importantly, making a difference in the seemingly insurmountable fight to arrest climate change.

If you thought owning a Tesla was a positive effort for the planet, many of us are realizing that changing our diet can do far more good than changing our use of trains, planes and automobiles combined.

## Animal Agriculture

Right now, there are about three times as many animals being raised for meat than all the humans in the world. Livestock production is responsible for between 14 and 18.5% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions as animals burp and pass gas, particularly ruminants like cows, buffalo, sheep, and goats. Cows alone are responsible for the majority of methane release, which is 23 times more powerful than carbon dioxide in heating the atmosphere.

As our population increases and our love affair with meat continues, climate change will occur at a faster and faster rate – make no mistake about this. Industrial scale agriculture – especially animal-based agriculture – is one of the leading causes of deforestation leading to species extinction, waterway pollution and fish kills, and ocean dead zones. Global animal agriculture is responsible for 57% of water pollution and 56% of air pollution, and uses a third of our fresh water.

Deforestation is a massive problem. We are destroying countless acres to grow soy and corn for livestock food or to create grazing land for cattle, often in very sensitive ecosystems like the Amazon rainforest. Pesticides and fertilizers, most of which are made from fossil fuels, are often used in growing cattle feed. In addition, the deforestation leads to excess mineralization of streams and rivers flowing out of the Amazon basin, which scientists now believe that, combined with other factors, has resulted in the growth of sargassum – a foul rotten-egg smelling mass of yellow seaweed that is now suffocating the Mexican shoreline from Tulum north to Belize, and strangling tourism dollars all across the Caribbean as people opt for cleaner beaches away from the sargassum flows.



On a very practical level, growing animals for food is inefficient, as it takes 5-7 kilograms of grain to produce a single kilo of beef, not to mention the water and energy to produce, process and transport those cows to slaughter and the meat racks. With grazing and growing livestock feed combined, livestock production uses about 80% of arable land worldwide, yet livestock provides only 18% of calories and 37% of protein.

## More Vegan/Vegetarian Options

As a long-time vegetarian who has had few menu options, it's surprisingly to now see plant-based burgers and patties jumping off the billboards of major fast-food restaurants like McDonald's, Tim Horton's and Wendy's. They didn't start including the plant alternatives for all us vegetarians, but rather the tsunami of customers who are demanding plant alternatives to help wean themselves off meat as they choose environmentally beneficial foods. (We also need to switch from milk, cheese and butter if we are to keep reducing our carbon footprint.) The new vegan choices are staggering to someone who is pretty well versed on what has typically been missing in mainstream grocery stores.

Food manufacturers are scrambling to get new products on the shelf in an effort to recoup lost revenue from traditional streams and gain new loyalty from consumers eager to buy these new vegan items. As consumers we do vote with our wallets every time we push our carts down the aisle. We would do well to spend less time buying food that has travelled vast distances for food produced locally. Buying and eating food that is less travelled helps the planet and begins to support a sustainable food supply system closer to home.

## Grow Your Own

We also need to start feeding ourselves, something we have forgotten in our daily rat race. We need to learn or relearn to grow vegetables during our zone's prime growing seasons, which could well be shifting with new weather patterns. We need to grow our produce organically, and achieve maximum results relying on natural insecticides like companion planting and natural fertilizers like fermented borage leaves, eggshells or coffee grounds. Not to mention composting! We need to resuscitate the arts of food preservation – freezing, canning, pickling and drying – so when we grow plenty, none will be wasted. A plant-based diet, or at least a good attempt at one, will give our planet a better chance to slow the acceleration towards climate catastrophe.

As the current situation of life on earth clearly shows, we need to be thinking about the future of the planet, and how we can live in harmony with that future. Growing our own food will give us important skills for survival. We are what we eat, but the correlation doesn't stop there. The fate of the planet depends on what we choose to consume.

*Leigh Morrow is a Vancouver writer who owns and operates Casa Mihale, a vacation rental in the coastal village of San Agustinillo, Mexico. Her house can be rented at [www.gosanagustinillo.com](http://www.gosanagustinillo.com)*

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# THE THREE SISTER PLOT

A few years ago it became fashionable to plant the 'Three Sisters', a method of inter cropping developed by the Mayan's to produce all three of their staple crops on one plot of land.

During pre-Columbian times Native Americans, mainly tribes from North America and Mexico, grew corn with beans and squash as companion plants which became known as the Three Sisters. Corn provides a natural pole for bean vines to climb. Beans fix the nitrogen with their roots, which improves the overall fertility of the plot by providing nitrogen to the following years of corn. Bean vines also help to physically stabilize the corn plants, making them less vulnerable to blowing over in the wind. Shallow-rooted squash vines become a living mulch, shading emerging weeds and preventing soil moisture from evaporating, thereby improving the overall crops chances of survival in dry years. The spiny squash plants also help discourage predators from approaching the corn and beans. The large amount of crop residue from this planting combination can be incorporated back into the soil at the end of the season, to build up the organic matter and improve its structure. Corn, beans, and squash also complement each other nutritionally.

## NUTRITION BENEFIT

Corn provides carbohydrates and the dried beans are rich in protein, balancing the lack of necessary amino acids found in corn. Squash yields both vitamins from the fruit and healthy, delicious oil from the seeds.

## WHEN TO PLANT

Sow seeds any time after spring night temperatures are in the 50 degree range, up through June.

## WHAT TO PLANT

Corn must be planted in several rows rather than one long row to ensure adequate pollination. Choose pole beans or runner beans and a squash or pumpkin variety with trailing vines, rather than a compact bush.

The three sisters plot is also known as Kionhekwa in the Iroquois language. The Iroquois' creation myth recounts how the Three Sisters, an inseparable trio, grew on the grave of Mother Earth, who had died after giving birth to twins. These plants nourished the twins and enabled the Iroquois people to survive. The three sister spirits were named De-o-ha-ko - Our Sustainers - this is the origin of the name, "three sisters plot." Corn is native to western Sierra Madre in Mexico. Known as maize in South America, corn has been a staple to many Latin American cultures throughout history. In Mayan culture, representations of their sun god were depicted to the god of maize, linked through the life cycle: birth, life, death, and rebirth. Huichol people in Mexico use blood from the sacred deer to feed maize. The deer is a spirit said to guide shamans. Hopi people in America still perform ritual dances to the corn spirits today.

Reprinted from The Heritage Garden

<http://heritagegarden.uic.edu/the-three-sister-plot/>

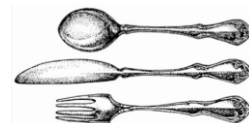


Mayan depiction of Huichol Maize Mother and her Five Daughters



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# The Many Uses of Annatto/Achiote

By Julie Etra

**B**ixa orellana is the scientific name of a small tree or large shrub originally native to the state of Amazonas in Brazil, but which thrives in most tropical and semi-tropical climates. It is considered 'native' to Mexico and is found in suitable climates elsewhere in Central and South America. It is also known as achiote, or *achiotl* ("grain" or "seed" in Nahuatl, the native tongue of the Mexica, also known as the Aztecs).

The "orellana" part of the scientific name comes from Francisco de Orellana, a Spanish conquistador who is credited with the first complete navigation of the Amazon River. "Bixa" is apparently a Taino word – the Taino or Arawak were the indigenous people of the Caribbean (although decimated by disease, survivors intermarried and there are remaining descendants, particularly in Puerto Rico). Annatto is also known in Brazil as *colorau*, *urucum* or *colorífico*. It is a tough tree and can grow in somewhat marginal soils. It can withstand strong winds, is fire, drought and pest resistant, but will not tolerate cold or excessive rain.

The flower of this indigenous tree is gorgeous, with five bright pink petals. The multiple red fruits occur in clusters and are covered in soft spines; inside reside numerous hard seeds. A bright orange-red dye commonly known as annatto is obtained from the waxy seed coating.

The pigment in annatto is a carotenoid, a compound that is also responsible for the orange color in carrots, pumpkins, daffodils, and canaries. This dye has been in use for centuries, pre-dating the Spanish conquest. The Mexica used it as a body dye, particularly for lips (hence another common name is lipstick tree), and to dye textiles. The Maya used it as a spice and for coloring, as in body paint for religious rites, particularly those associated with rain, and as a symbolic substitute for blood. It was used as a ceramic colorant and in building materials, and as ink in Mayan culture. Its use as a food dye is also ancient, as the Mexica used it to color a corn beverage. The seeds had monetary value and were used in trade and as a female aphrodisiac.

Other parts of the tree, such as the leaves, have medicinal value and have been used to treat cancer and fevers. Its current use as a food dye is ubiquitous; it is often the orange in cheddar cheese, margarine, custards, and even meat, particularly in Central America. Non-food items include soap, shoe polishes, furniture oils and waxes.



How many readers have heard of achiote paste? *Cochinita pibil*? *Cochinita* refers to pork, and *pibil* is Mayan for earthen oven. This is a traditional Mayan dish flavored with a paste made of ground achiote seeds and other spices. It is typically made with marinated pork slow-cooked in banana leaves, but other meat can be used. The Mayans most likely used jungle fowl such as quail or domesticated turkey (the Spanish brought chicken), and slow cooked in soil pits. When in Mexico I cook it in clay pots, and in the US in cast iron; banana leaves are in short supply here in Reno, NV.

Although you can buy this condiment pre-made in many Mexican groceries, it is NOT EVEN CLOSE to the homemade version from scratch. Buy the seeds, add the other spices, and grind away (there are lots of recipes out there - here's one from *Bon Appetit*: <https://www.bonappetit.com/recipe/achiot-e-paste>). You won't go back. Super yummy with corn tortillas and salsas, pickled onion (*escabeche*) and avocado.

## Achiote Paste from *Bon Appetit*

### Ingredients:

- 3 whole cloves
- 1 bay leaf
- ¼ cup annatto seeds
- 2 teaspoons coriander seeds
- 2 teaspoons cumin seeds
- 2 teaspoons dried Mexican or Italian oregano
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 4 garlic cloves
- ¼ cup distilled white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon finely grated lime zest
- 1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest

### Recipe Preparation

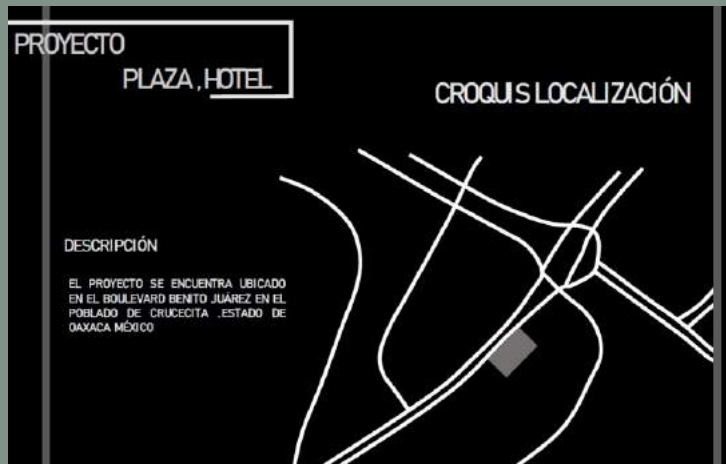
Blend cloves, bay leaf, annatto seeds, coriander seeds, cumin seeds, oregano, peppercorns, and salt in a blender on low speed, increasing to high, until finely ground.

Add garlic, vinegar, lime zest, and orange zest and continue blending until a coarse paste forms.

Transfer to a small airtight container and chill.

Do Ahead: Paste can be made 1 month ahead. Store in an airtight container and chill.

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