

MEXICO

The staples of Mexican cuisine are typically [corn](#) and [beans](#). Corn, traditionally Mexico's staple grain, is eaten fresh, [on the cob](#), and as a component of a number of dishes. Most corn, however, is used to make [masa](#), a dough for [tamales](#), [tortillas](#), [gorditas](#), and many other corn-based foods. Squash and peppers also play important roles in Mexican cuisine.

The most important and frequently used spices in Mexican cuisine are [chili powder](#), [cumin](#), [oregano](#), [cilantro](#), [epazote](#), [cinnamon](#), and [cocoa](#). [Chipotle](#), a smoke-dried jalapeño chili, is also common in Mexican cuisine. Many Mexican dishes also contain [garlic](#) and [onions](#).

Next to corn, rice is the most common grain in Mexican cuisine. According to food writer Karen Hursh Graber, the initial introduction of rice to Spain from North Africa in the 4th Century led to the Spanish introduction of rice into Mexico at the port of [Veracruz](#) in the 1520s. This, Graber says, created one of the earliest instances of the world's greatest [fusion cuisines](#).^[1]

History



The word "[chocolate](#)" originates in Mexico's [Aztec](#) cuisine, derived from the [Nahuatl](#) word [xocolatl](#). Chocolate was first drunk rather than eaten.

When [conquistadores](#) arrived in the [Aztec](#) capital [Tenochtitlan](#) (now [Mexico City](#)), they found that the people's diet consisted largely of [corn-based](#) dishes with [chiles](#) and [herbs](#), usually complemented with [beans](#) and [tomatoes](#) or [nopales](#).^[2] The diet of the indigenous peoples of [Pre-Columbian](#) Mexico also included [chocolate](#), [tomatillos](#), [huitlacoche](#), [vanilla](#), [avocado](#), [guava](#), [papaya](#), [sapote](#), [mamey](#), [pineapple](#), [soursoy](#), [jicama](#), [squash](#), [sweet potato](#), [peanuts](#), [achiote](#), [turkey](#) and [fish](#). In the 1520s, while Spanish conquistadors were [invading Mexico](#), they introduced a variety of animals, including [cattle](#), [chickens](#), [goats](#), [sheep](#), and [pigs](#). [Rice](#), [wheat](#), and [barley](#) were also introduced as were [olive oil](#), [almonds](#), wine, parsley, and many spices. The imported Spanish cuisine was eventually incorporated into the indigenous cuisine.

Chocolate

Chocolate played an important part in the history of Mexican cuisine. In the past, the Maya civilization grew cacao trees^[3] and used the cacao seeds it produced to make a frothy, bitter drink.^[4] The drink, called *xocoatl*, and was often flavored with [vanilla](#), [chili pepper](#), and [achiote](#) (also known as [annatto](#)).^[5] Chocolate was also an important luxury good throughout [pre-Columbian](#) Mesoamerica, and cacao beans were often used as [currency](#).^[6] For example, the Aztecs used a system in which one turkey cost one hundred cacao beans and one fresh [avocado](#) was worth three beans;^[7] and all of the areas that were conquered by the Aztecs that grew cacao beans were ordered to pay them as a [tax](#), or as the Aztecs called it, a "[tribute](#)".^[8] Today chocolate is used in a wide array of Mexican foods, from [savory](#) dishes such as [chicken mole](#) to traditional Mexican style hot chocolate and [champurrados](#), both of which are prepared with a [molinillo](#).^[9]

Regional cuisine

See [List of Mexican cuisine dishes](#).



Two large jars of [aguas frescas](#). On the left is a jar of [jamaica](#) and on the right is a jar of [horchata](#).

Mexican food varies by region, because of local climate and geography and ethnic differences among the indigenous inhabitants and because these different populations were influenced by the Spaniards in varying degrees. The north of Mexico is known for its [beef](#), [goat](#) and [ostrich](#) production and [meat](#) dishes, in particular the well-known [arrachera](#) cut.

The six regions of Mexico differ greatly in their cuisines. In the Yucatan, for instance, a unique, natural sweetness (instead of spiciness) exists in the widely used local produce along with an unusual love for [achiote](#) seasoning. In contrast, the Oaxacan region is known for its savory tamales and celebratory moles, while the mountainous regions of the West (Jalisco, etc) are known for goat [birria](#) (goat in a spicy tomato-based sauce).

Central Mexico's cuisine is largely influenced by the rest of the country, but has unique dishes such as [barbacoa](#), [pozole](#), [menudo](#) and [carnitas](#).



 Chapulines, or roasted grasshoppers, for sale in a [Oaxacan](#) market.

Southeastern Mexico, on the other hand, is known for its spicy [vegetable](#) and [chicken](#)-based dishes. The cuisine of Southeastern Mexico has a considerable [Caribbean](#) influence due to its location. Seafood is commonly prepared in states that border the [Pacific Ocean](#) or the [Gulf of Mexico](#), the latter having a famous reputation for its fish dishes, *à la veracruzana*.

In the [Yucatán](#), the Mayan people have practiced beekeeping for thousands of years. Honey is an important ingredient in many Mexican dishes, such as the *rosca de miel*, a bundt-like cake, and in beverages such as [balché](#).

In *Pueblos* or villages, there are also more exotic dishes, cooked in the Aztec or Mayan style (known as *comida prehispánica*) with ingredients ranging from [iguana](#) to [rattlesnake](#), [deer](#), [spider monkey](#), [chapulines](#), [ant](#) eggs, and other kinds of [insects](#).

Recently other cuisines of the world have acquired popularity in Mexico, thus adopting a Mexican fusion. For example, sushi in Mexico is often made with a variety of sauces based on [mango](#) or [tamarind](#), and very often served with [serrano](#)-chili-blended soy sauce, or complimented with [habanero](#) and [chipotle](#) peppers.