

# Food in Mexico — it's not necessarily hot

Mexican food is very popular in the United States today. However, there are still many people who think all Mexican food is hot and spicy.

I once thought the same thing and was totally unacquainted with anything but tacos, burritos and other Tex-Mex favorites until I visited Mexico a few years ago.

Then I learned that I had a lot of false beliefs about Mexico and the Mexican people, as well as the food they eat.

Until only a few days before we left home, we were planning a trip to the Bahamas. Mexico was the furthest thing from our minds. It was a place I didn't think I would like, and had no desire to visit.

**BUT THERE WAS** a last minute mix-up at the travel agency, and we ended up in Quintana Roo, on the Yucatan peninsula.

I have always believed that all things happen for a reason. Why fate chose to send me to Mexico, I don't know. But I do know that I shall be eternally grateful.

We were enchanted by crystal-clear waters, coral reefs, giant turtles and tropical fish that will eat from your hand as you swim among them.

We were warmed by 80-degree temperatures that were never uncomfortable because of the constant breezes scented by the perfumes of tropical flowers.

**WE WERE HAUNTED** by the ghosts of 10,000 Mayans that hovered about us as we explored the ruins of their homes and temples and gazed into their sacred cenotes (waterholes).

And we fell in love with the Mexican people who took the time to listen and try to understand our poor attempts to speak their beautiful language.

There was a blond, blue-eyed man who told me he knew all about snow because he had seen it once on a mountain top in Chihuahua; and the middle-aged couple who lived in a jungle hut with a dirt floor near Xcaret, who gave me the uncured skin of a seven-foot boa they had killed in the garden that morning (they kept the meat to eat).

There are mariachis in big sombreros, who serenade you wherever you go.

And, believe it or not, there was all the fantastic food, some of it mild



kitchen witch

Gundella

enough to please an Englishman with an ulcer.

**THE BREAKFAST** menu at the restaurant, where we ate every morning offered eggs with seafood sauce. These proved to be poached eggs on top of tortillas, smothered with creamed shrimp, lobster, crab and scallops.

Another item featured there was "bananas tabasco." It sounded horrible, but later we learned that it had nothing to do with the hot sauce.

Tabasco is a county in Mexico, just as is Quintana Roo. Tabasco sauce and bananas tabasco are both named for that county where they originated. They have nothing else in common.

On the little island of Isla Mujeres (Island of the Women), we were served a turtle soup that was so good I embarrassed my family by refusing to leave without seeking out the cook and begging for the recipe.

He was gracious enough to give it to me, through an interpreter, and even told me how to make it without turtle, if I need be.

We found we liked cactus, cooked with any kind of meat at all. And there wasn't a tomato or hot pepper in it.

We ate many dishes that featured goat's meat, and proved to be very delicious.

But our favorite food of all was the quesadilla, which in no way resembles those you get here at Taco Bell or Chi-Chi's. They are simple to make and are really nothing more than a Mexican version of a grilled cheese sandwich.

Here are a few of my favorite Mexican recipes. Please feel free to call me at 427-1072 if you need help with any of them.

## QUESADILLAS

(Pronounced Kay-sa-dee-a)

Place a slice of mild, meltable cheese on a flour tortilla. (Provolone, Monterey Jack or Muenster are all very good.) Fold the tortilla once (as you would an omelet). Fry in a

small amount of hot shortening or oil in a heavy skillet. Turn over once to brown both sides until the outside is crispy and golden brown and the cheese inside is melted.

These are delicious eaten plain, but they may be served with a salsa, mild or spicy hot, as your own tastes dictate. Here is the recipe I use:

## SALSA RAPIDA (Quick Sauce)

2 tomatoes peeled and chopped  
1 onion peeled and chopped  
1 clove of garlic, crushed  
3 sprigs of fresh parsley, finely chopped  
1/4 teaspoon ground coriander  
1 teaspoon salt  
a pinch of marjoram  
a pinch of ground cloves

Mix together and allow to sit at least 1 hour before serving.

## BANANAS TABASCO

These make a delightful dessert or company treat and are really just crepes filled with fried bananas and flamed with rum.

## CHIEPAS

Makes about 16 pancakes

4 eggs  
1 1/4 cups milk  
1 1/4 cups sifted flour  
1 teaspoon salt  
2 1/2 teaspoons melted butter

Beat eggs and add milk, flour, salt and butter and mix well (I use my blender), using a crepe pan or a small cast-iron frying pan (6-7 inches) which has been well buttered and heated. Add just enough batter to thinly coat the bottom of the pan (tip the pan to spread it evenly). When lightly brown on one side, turn and brown on the other. Repeat until all the batter is used.

Filling  
6 bananas, peeled and sliced  
1/4 pound butter  
10 tablespoons brown sugar

Melt butter in a skillet. Add sliced

bananas and cook for 1 minute, stirring carefully so as not to break the bananas, while sprinkling with the brown sugar.

Cook until butter and brown sugar make a syrup that coats the bananas well. Fill the crepes with the banana mixture and flame with rum. (Tip: Heat the rum to just warm before igniting it. If you have never flamed a dessert before, call me for more explicit directions.)  
Garnish with whipped cream and

chopped nuts/meats if desired.

## TURTLE SOUP

3 pounds turtle meat (you can substitute lean beef)  
1 1/2 quarts of water  
2 cups milk  
1/4 pound butter  
1 cup heavy cream  
1 tablespoon flour  
1/4 teaspoon mace  
1/4 teaspoon dry mustard  
Salt and pepper to taste

Boil meat in water until 1/2 of the liquid is gone. Add milk and butter. Remove the meat and allow it to cool. Grind it and return it to the stock. Let it cook a little more and stir in the flour dissolved in the heavy cream. Add mace, mustard, salt and pepper. Mix well, simmer a few more minutes and serve hot. If you like, you may garnish with parsley, chopped chives and/or croutons.

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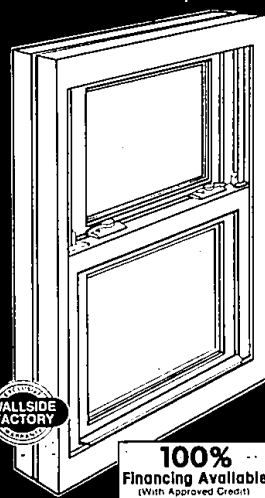
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