

Mexico, the country of contrasts.

“Wenn man nur ein Fleckchen dieser Erde als Paradies bezeichnen dürfte, es müsste Mexiko sein” (Alexander von Humboldt) “If you would only call a place of this earth a paradise, it would be Mexico”

The country of Mexico is located in North and Middle America. It is situated between Belize, Guatemala and the United States, and is bordered to the east by the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico, and to the west by the North Pacific Ocean. The geographic positioning results in Mexico having a wide variety of terrain from high, rugged mountains in the southeast area of the country; low coastal plains and high plateaus in the center; desert in the north to jungles and swamps in the south (CIA 2011).

The income distribution in Mexico is highly unequal ranging from the billionaire, Carlos Slim Helú, the richest person in the world with 74 billion dollars (Forbes 2011), to extreme poverty, from mansions to houses constructed from small logs, carton and plastic. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2008 more than 35% of the total wealth in Mexico could be contributed to only 10% of its citizens while the majority of the country held only 17% of the wealth (Gonzalez 2008).

Due to the complexity of Mexican history Mexico has a lot of traditions. Mexicans celebrate everything; sometimes they have huge parties, gifts or festivals. Mexico celebrates the international holidays like Christmas, Valentine’s Day, Epiphany and Carnival as well as their own national holidays including:

- Independence Day (September 16th)
- Revolution Day (November 20th)
- Constitution Day (February 5th)

The most popular holiday is Independence Day where every year the people congregate at the Town Hall to wait for the President to ring the bell and shout the names of the people who fought for independence followed by “Viva Mexico!” (3 times).

Mexicans also have festivals to honor everyone who has a title such as:

- Mother's Day (May 10th)
- Teacher's Day (May 15th)
- Children's Day (April 30th)

But more interesting are the traditions like the:

- "Quinceañera"
- The Day of the Dead
- "Las Posadas"

"Quinceañera" means one who is fifteen years old; which is a celebration for all Mexican girls that are turning 15 years old. This birthday is celebrated differently from all the other birthdays because it is the transition from childhood to womanhood. This event traditionally begins with a religious ceremony followed by a reception and banquet or party. Some of the traditional families still take part in the traditions of "The First Heeled Shoes" and "The Last Doll" which represents the girl passage into maturity.

As mentioned above, Mexico also celebrates every year "The Day of the Dead" which falls on the 1st and 2nd of November. It is believed that during this time the dead come back to earth and live together with the living. Families will go to the cemetery to visit their relatives and bring flowers. This tradition is not limited to just the cemetery, Mexicans also honor their dead relatives by making an altar decorated with flowers, pictures, food and things such as a football ball or other things that they liked or were significant to them when they were alive and sugar skulls. In this day people also write the "Cavaleras literarias" which are poems written for the Day of the Dead but with humor criticizing the living people and have fun and laugh.

Another significant holiday for Mexicans is The Posadas. The name Posadas stems from "posada" meaning lodging and commemorates the Biblical story of Joseph and Mary's

search for shelter in Bethlehem. It is a 9-day celebration starting on December 16th and lasting till the 24th December that represents the nine months of pregnancy. During these days families will schedule a night for the Posada to be in their house, when neighbors, family and friends are the pilgrims that request lodging singing and carrying small candles in their hands. Sometimes kids or adults are dressed as Mary and Joseph. After the Posada the children break “Piñatas” in celebration. A Piñata is a type of container that is decorated in the exterior and filled with candy.

Mexico has more traditions that are all different because Mexicans like to celebrate. Each state and city has also own holidays and traditions, that’s why Mexico has different images like the ‘Jarocho’ (the typical clothing from Veracruz), ‘Mariachi’ and (the clothing from Jalisco) ‘Charro’ (horsemen), Mexicans with a poncho and sombrero, the Aztecs and the Mayans. These are all different images associated with Mexico, however they highlight the differences found within the Mexican culture and the land itself. They show the diversity of the country and its strong cultural and religious ties.

Table 2.1: Mexican typical clothing

Jarocho	Mariachi	Charro
		
Mexican with Poncho and guitar	Aztec	Maya
		

Jarocho, source: <http://sota-benv.blogspot.com/>

Mariachi, source:

http://mariachiconnection.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=443

Charro, source: <http://www.sastreria-escamilla.com.mx/>

Mexican with poncho and guitar, source:

http://www.carnavalsland.nl/contents/nl/d405_Carnavalskleding-heren-mexicaanse-poncho.html

Aztec, source: <http://raulchavezc.wordpress.com/>

Maya, source: http://tripwow.tripadvisor.com/slideshow-photo/mayan-people-mexico-city-mexico.html?sid=11361312&fid=upload_12878731679-tpfil02aw-21732

Made in Mexico. Mexican Products

Mexico exports different kinds of products including fruit (watermelon, pineapple, papaya, tomato, etc.) grains (coffee, corn, wheat) textiles (denim), petroleum and cars. As Mexico is a neighbor of the USA they are very attractive to foreign investors, which, results in Mexico being the center of production for many well-known international and multinational corporations, who produce in Mexico to supply to the countries that are members of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Middle American countries, therefore reducing their export costs.

From the Auto industry Nissan, General Motors, Volkswagen, Toyota, Chrysler and Ford assemble cars in Mexico. These car manufacturers sell to both national and international markets, as a large majority of the manufactures use Mexican parts to produce their cars such as the new Beetle from VW that is sold all around the world but is only produced in Mexico.

The fashion industry also produces in Mexico as a lot of the textiles such as denim, cotton and leather are produced in Mexico. Despite the fact that the textiles are produced in Mexico the brands are not involved in this process, therefore Mexico produces the product and exports to the brands such as Ermenegildo Zegna or Levis.

Like Champagne in France; Tequila, the national beverage, can be only produced in Mexico. This alcoholic beverage is produced in only one region of Mexico; Jalisco. However sometimes the beverage is exported to other countries and there is branded, like Sierra Tequila in Germany.

What is the difference? Real Mexican vs. Tex-Mex

In terms of food according to Dave Emery (2008) the most popular cuisines (not in order) are French, Italian, Indian, Chinese, Thai, Greek, Lebanese, Spanish, Japanese and Mexican. However it is often not possible to recreate exactly the same dish in another country, such as authentic Mexican dishes, which are vastly different outside of Mexico due to inhibiting factors such as a lack of original ingredients. This had lead to a feeling of losing their national culture as global companies and restaurants outside Mexico create dishes such as chimichangas, fajitas and other dishes and pass them off as Mexican food. In 2007 the Mexican government flew in 50 Mexican restaurant owners from the U.S. and Canada to teach them what's authentic and what is not (Rodriguez 2007).

The traditional Mexican cuisine dates back thousands of years to ancient cultures like the Mayans and Aztecs. "Most Americans confuse Tex-Mex specialties such as chili, chimichangas, nachos and hard-shell tacos, often filled with processed cheese and sour cream, with real Mexican food" (Rodriguez 2007). Today not only the Americans confuse this but also Germans, French, Italians, Russians and many other countries around the world as Mexican cuisine becomes more popular. Only a few Mexicans have ever heard of or even seen these dishes. "Without a doubt, these foods have helped people in the U.S. and around the world pay attention to Mexico" says Fernando Olea, president of the United States Association of Mexican Restaurants Association, cited by Rodriguez (2007). Nevertheless even if the attention is on Mexico, this backfires creating a diluted image of Mexico.

In November 2010 "after 10 years of failed attempts, Mexican cuisine has finally attained status as one of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Thanks to

the untiring efforts of the INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia) and Conservatorio de la Cultura Gastronomía Mexicana (CCGM)” (Claudia A 2010). This status would help the country to stop the misunderstanding that the world has about Mexican cuisine.

Real Mexican

From a first world point of view and without previous nutritional knowledge, people used to say that the Mexican popular diet is based on tortillas (corn), beans and chili, “the Mexican trilogy” (Iturriaga 2000). These products are commonly recognizing by being Mexican products.

Corn is harvested in all of Mexico from north to south and from east to west. This product has been the basic food of the inhabitants of Mexico for years. Corn in the pre-Hispanic world was believed to be both sustenance of the body and the spirit. Outside the New World, corn was initially only for feeding animals, then it became only an extra ingredient in the production of different foods. (Iturriaga 2000).

Among the various aspects that unite Mexicans stands the habit of consumption of corn. It is the only food that Mexicans consume without any discrimination. Indeed regardless social, cultural, intellectual or regional level, all Mexicans eats corn, above all tortillas (Iturriaga 2000). After the meeting of the two continents, Europa and America, in 1492, 500 hundred years later, in which rice and wheat was added to the indigenous diet, the consumption of corn still remains high even thought the per capita consumption is inverse proportional to the socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, there is no member of the economic upper class able to reject a hand-made tortilla that just came out from the griddle.

The tortilla is not the only way to eat corn for the Mexicans. Corn is transformed into a very wide range of regional variations. Mexicans eat 23 times more corn than rice and 9 times more than beans. According to Eusebio Dávalos Hurtado in Mexico there are no less than 700 ways to eat corn (Iturriaga 2000). Some of these are:

- Tamales
- Panuchos.
- Atoles
- Pozoles
- Chilatoles
- Memelas
- Huaraches
- Chalupas
- Picadas
- Gorditas
- Molotes
- Sopes
- Dobladas
- Tlacoyos
- Garnachas
- Enchiladas
- Tostadas
- Quesadillas

Although the typical tortilla is made of white corn; yellow, blue, purple, black and red corn are used more widely because Mexico has a deficit in the production of corn. A lot of Mexican cities used yellow corn or they mixed white corn to make tortillas because the yellow corn is dominant in international markets and Mexico buys corn (Mexican Business Web 2011). The price of white corn in international markets is usually from 30% to 50% more expensive than the yellow corn because there is not enough supply (Iturriaga 2000).

Nowadays Mexico consumes over 50 different varieties of beans. Consumption of the color or kind of bean depends on the region; in Veracruz white “Alubias” and black beans “Jamapa” are consumed, whereas in Mexico City red or brown like “Pinto” or “Bayo” beans are consumed. This legume appears every day on Mexican tables and like corn the consumption per person increases in inverse relation to the socioeconomic status of the consumer. Beans are present in the 31 states of Mexico. From the northwest state that is Sonora to the southeast state that is Yucatan. However, it is important to mention that not all Mexican dishes have beans but a lot of them have like:

- Enfrijoladas
- Panuchos
- Frijoles charros
- Bollos
- Picaditas
- Gorditas

Sauces in Mexico are not condiments; they are the essence of the flavors similar to dishes in France. Without the existence of chili maybe the Mexican cuisine would not exist. The chili has its origins in the continent of America especially Mexico, from the sweetest one to the hottest one (Iturriaga 2000). Some examples are:

- Habanero
- Jalapeño
- De árbol
- Poblano

- Comapeño
- Serrano
- Piquin
- Ancho, etc.

Nowadays the consumption of chili extends to the entire world, about 90% of the worldwide-consumed chili has its origins in Mexico. The rest of the current varieties have their origins in Central America, the Caribbean and South America. Even some chilies that are very popular in China or Philippines, or the famous Hungarian paprika, are a variety of the Mexican capsicum. Some eating habits in Europe or in Asia that contain as an ingredient the chili aren't even a thousand years old; they only have been around for a couple of centuries (Iturriaga 2000)

Tex-Mex

“Tex-Mex. A combination of the words "Texan" and "Mexican," first printed in 1945”
In terms of food “refers to an adaptation of Mexican dishes by Texas cooks.” (John F. Mariani 1999 p325 cited in Olver 1999).

Mexican restaurants popularity coincided with the arrival of large numbers of immigrants after 1950 in the USA and in those days:

Texans went to "Mexican restaurants" and ate "Mexican food." Then in 1972, The Cuisines of Mexico, an influential cookbook by food authority Diana Kennedy, drew the line between authentic interior Mexican food and the "mixed plates" we ate at "so-called Mexican restaurants" in the United States. Kennedy and her friends in the food community began referring to Americanized Mexican food as "Tex-Mex," a term previously used to describe anything that was half-Texan and half-Mexican. (Walsh 2000).

Nowadays burritos and chili con carne are now well known around the world but people still refer to them as Mexican dishes and not Tex-Mex. The most popular Tex-Mex dishes, that are in the menu of all “Mexican” and Tex-Mex restaurants are:

- Burritos
- Chimichanga
- Chili con Carne
- Fajitas

- Quesadillas (Tex-Mex style)
- Taco (in Taco Shells)

Burrito means little donkey. It is “a tortilla rolled and cooked on a griddle, then filled with a variety of condiments” (John F. Mariani 1999 p4 cited in Olver 1999).

The chimichanga is just a fried burrito. It is “a deep-fried wheat tortilla stuffed with minced beef, potatoes, and seasonings. The name is a nonsense Spanish word and there are a lot of theories how the dish got that name. One theory is that “The first chimichanga being created when a burro was accidentally knocked into a deep-fat fryer, and the cook exclaimed "Chimichanga!" (John F. Mariani 1999 p78 cited in Olver 1999).

Chili con carne is normally unknown by Mexicans. “Con carne” means with meat but actually Chili con carne is beans served in a spicy tomato sauce with very few small pieces of beef. “The Spanish name could have been explained by a Mexican origin, but the only persons who deny that provenance more vehemently than the Texans, who claim credit for it, are the Mexicans, who deny paternity with something like indignation” (Waverly Root and Richard De Rochemont 1976 p277-8 cited in Olver 1999).

“Chili con carne is one of the most famous dishes of Texas, although wide variations are known throughout the United States...According to Dave DeWitt and Nancy Gerlach in The Whole Chile Pepper Book (1990), a dish that sounded identical to what came to be called chili was described by J.C. Clopper, who visited San Antonio in 1828, and commented on how poor people would cut the little meat they could afford "into a kind of hash with nearly as many peppers as there are pieces of meat--this is all stewed together." (John F. Mariani 1999 p76 cited in Olver 1999)

The Fajitas “is a Tex-Mex dish made from marinated, grilled skirt steak served in a wheat tortilla .The word derives from the Spanish faja, for "girdle" or "strip" and describes the cut of meat itself. “(John F. Mariani 1999 p125 cited in Olver 1999)

The origin of a Quesadilla cannot be traced. The Mexican Quesadilla “is a 'turnover' made by folding a fresh corn tortilla in half around a simple filling such with cheese” (Davidson p803 cited in Olver 1999). It is the Mexican favorite simple snack. Mexicans

eat them differently depending on the region.

In many parts of Mexico they are filled with strips of Chihuahua cheese, which melts and "strings" nicely (a Mexican requirement) however, the farther south one goes the more complicated they become. For instance, in central Mexico the simplest ones are filled with some of the braided Oaxaca cheese, a few fresh leaves of epazote and strips of peeled chile poblano, squash blossoms (flor de calabaza) or the ambrosial fungus that grows on the corn blossoms (huitlachoche) (Kennedy 1975 p106 cited in Olver 1999).

The Tex-Mex Quesadilla uses a large flour tortilla and it is filled with small pieces of beef or chicken and sometimes beans, onion, lettuce and more.

The Mexican taco is a stuffed and folded tortilla. There are lots of different types of Tacos that Mexicans like to consume such as:

- Tacos al pastor (shepherd style)
- Tacos de cabeza (Head Tacos)
- Tacos de lengua (tongue Tacos), etc.

However in the USA a Taco is a crisp fried tortilla shaped into a U and filled with meat, lettuce, tomato, onion and cheese.

The “Brand” Mexico (Mexican brands)

Mexico has powerful brands that are known in an international level even if the people don't know that they originate in Mexico. The most popular brands according to Rush (2003) are:

- CEMEX
- Corona
- Bimbo
- Aeromexico

CEMEX is a global building materials company founded in Mexico in 1906 now present in America, Europe, Africa, Middle East and Asia. They “produce, distribute and

sell cement, ready-mix concrete, aggregates and related building materials in more than 50 countries”. (CEMEX 2011)

Corona is a brand of beer from Grupo Modelo. The company was founded in 1925 in Mexico. Now it is a leader in beer production, distribution and Marketing in Mexico. The company exports 6 brands and it is present in more than 170 countries. Corona Extra is the most popular Mexican beer worldwide. It is the number one imported beer in the USA and it is the fourth most valuable brand in the world. It is sold in five continents. (Grupo Modelo 2011). This brand appears in a lot of movies such as ‘The Fast and The Furious’ in 2001, American series like ‘Two and a Half Men’ and cartoons such as South Park.

Grupo Bimbo was founded in 1945. Today is one of the most important bakeries in the world. The group has more than 5 thousand products and it is present in all Latin America, USA, Spain and China (Grupo Bimbo 2011).

Aeromexico is the most important airline in Mexico. It was founded in 1934. Now it is a member of Skyteam and it is recognized by the logo of the Eagle knight. Apart from the national destinations the airline also flies to nineteen different international countries. Aeromexico flies to Spain and France in Europe, to Japan and China in Asia and to almost all the countries in America (Aeromexico 2011).

Other popular Mexican brands with international presence are:

- La Sierra (Food products)
- La Costeña (Food Products)
- Jose Cuervo (Alcoholic beverages)