



A Vegetarian's Guide to Mexico City Street Food

Meat-free treats for hungry herbivores

By Megan Frye

Photo by [Michael Verhoef](#) via Flickr

Mexico City is known for its meat and its street food: chorizo, tacos al pastor, carne asada and the list goes on. But that's not to say there's not an abundance of vegetarian food to choose from, even in the city's famed street stalls. We've compiled a list of our favorite meat-free items that you can find along the calles of this magnificent city. A word to the wise: Lard is used widely in Mexico for prep and cooking. Brush up on your Spanish so you can ask a vendor/cook whether it's used.

Flor de Calabaza



Photo by [Remixto](#) via Flickr

What it is: Literally, squash flower. It's the yellow, tube-like flower from the Mexican zucchini.

How it's eaten: Usually sauteed, often in quesadillas.

Why you should love it: Flor de calabaza has a hearty texture and a balance of tanginess and freshness, which pairs perfectly with cheese (especially of the Oaxacan variety) and any number of salsas you'll be able to choose from.

Our favorite place to find it: On the street during the Sunday pop-up market (known as a tianguis) outside of Mercado de la Bola.

Huitlacoche

What it is: Fungus that can naturally occur on corn as it grows in the field.

How it's eaten: Served in tacos and quesadillas.

Why you should love it: If you like mushrooms, think of "corn smut" as taking things just a few steps further. The texture is often a bit thicker, and it has a nice, airy quality when biting in. Huitlacoche often soaks up the surrounding flavors, but on its own, it's a mild kind of delicacy.

Our favorite place to find it: In the food stalls at Desierto de los Leones, before or after your hike.

Tlacoyo



Photo by [Stacy](#) via Flickr

What it is: Oval-shaped corn, often blue corn, pockets, filled with cheese or beans and toasted over an open grill (comal); topped with nopales (cactus meat — see below), cheese and salsa.

How it's eaten: As a quick snack. If you see a small grill with people huddled around it, eating with their hands, you've likely found a tlacoyo spot.

Why you should love it: It's filling and savory, completing most of your day's dietary needs in just a few bites.

Our favorite place to find it: In the Sunday tianguis along Calle Filadelfia in Colonia Nاپoles.

Hongos

What they are: Mushrooms, usually sauteed with chipotle sauce.

How they're eaten: In tacos and quesadillas.

Why you should love them: Rarely served without having been marinated or sauteed with chilies, hongos are one of the most common vegetarian options to come across.

Our favorite place to find them: In any of the stands along Insurgentes Avenue, on the Roma side.

Nopales



Photo by [Dallas Krentzel](#) via Flickr

What it is: Cactus meat from the prickly pear cactus.

How it's eaten: Grilled, sauteed or marinated — typically served on top of tlacoyos, by itself as a main course or as a side salad.

Why you should love it: The slightly sour cactus meat is loaded with vitamin C and has the consistency of sauteed bell peppers. The taste balances nicely with the earthy flavors of fresh blue corn and spicy salsas.

Our favorite place to find it: Literally everywhere.

Tortita de Papa o Coliflor

What it is: Fried patty of either potato (papa) or cauliflower (coliflor).

How it's eaten: Often served with a tomato-based sauce and sometimes a side salad.

Why you should love it: While they're probably not the healthiest thing you could consume, being that they're fried, tortitas are a filling snack that deliver a dose of veggies and lots of flavor.

Our favorite place to find it: Wandering around the colorful and busy streets of Xochimilco, a neighborhood on the city's far south side.

Tlayuda



Photo by [Hija Del Caos](#) via Flickr

What it is: A fried sheet of blue corn tortilla topped with nopales, cheese, beans and salsa.

How it's eaten: Like a very sturdy, thin-crust pizza.

Why you should love it: It's filling, satisfyingly crunchy and usually costs around 25 pesos.

Our favorite place to find it: Outside of the National Museum of Anthropology, near the entrance to Bosque de Chapultepec.

Fried Quesadilla

What it is: Just as it sounds, a quesadilla deep-fried to a golden greatness. Expect them to be filled with cheese and one other item, which can always be vegetarian. We recommend rajas (sauteed bell peppers) or flor de calabaza.

How it's eaten: With lots of care — a fried quesadilla can get a little messy.

Why you should love it: If you've been in Mexico for any length of time, chances are you've had your fair share of quesadillas already. Take the experience up a notch with this street stall favorite and work it off later on the salsa floors.

Our favorite place to find it: At one of the food stalls along the intersection of Miguel Ángel de Quevedo and Universidad Avenues.

Elote



Photo by [Júbilo Haku](#) via Flickr

What it is: Corn on the cob, grilled in the open air and slathered with creamy chili sauce, fresh lime juice and cheese.

How it's eaten: On the street, usually while walking and enjoying an evening of paseando.

Why you should love it: It's flavorful and easy and one of the most beloved street foods in all of Mexico.

Our favorite place to find it: In the center of Coyoacán, where you can grab one to make your evening stroll a bit warmer.

Palanqueta

What it is: A traditional Mexican sweet treat consisting of peanuts baked with honey and molded into a bar that costs about 5 pesos.

How it's eaten: Just like a granola bar, you can grab one anywhere and nosh on the move.

Why you should love it: This tasty treat is loaded with protein and makes for a great pick-me-up during a day spent schlepping across town via public transport.

Our favorite place to find it: For the broadest variety of palanquetas, we recommend the bustling area outside of the La Merced market.

Esquites



Photo by [Angélica Portales](#) via Flickr

What it is: These "little corn cups" feature corn kernels steamed with chilies and loaded with lime juice, chili powder and mayonnaise.

How it's eaten: Served in a Styrofoam cup with a small spoon, it's a great on-the-go snack.

Why you should love it: This smoky treat carries as much punch from the chili as it does from the fresh lime juice it's been doused with. It's a Mexican version of creamed corn. As such, it has the appropriate amount of kick to it.

Our favorite place to find it: Outside the Mexico City Metropolitan Cathedral, for a quick jolt of energy during a long day of exploring the Historic Center.

Amaranto

What it is: Amaranth seeds, which carry amino acids, fiber and protein.

How it's eaten: Served baked into a bar, topped with peanuts and raisins, and occasionally mixed with other, slightly more vicy things, such as chocolate. Sometimes called alegría (happiness): a very apt name.

Why you should love it: Another quick protein bite, loaded with good-for-you things and costing around 5 pesos.

Our favorite place to find it: Within the Centro Médico metro station.

Mango with Lime and Chile



Photo by [Alex Lines](#) via Flickr

What it is: Fresh, peeled mangos chopped into bite-size pieces, then topped with chile powder, lime juice and (if you're really lucky) shaved coconut.

How it's eaten: Typically served in a 20-ounce plastic cup and eaten with a fork. It's like a fruit salad on steroids.

Why you should love it: The combination of sweet, sour and spicy — along with the fiber, vitamin A and folic acid found in mango — should be enough to get you searching for the “mango man” daily.

Our favorite place to find it: Mango carts are pretty much unavoidable in Mexico City. There's always one outside of the Frida Kahlo Museum. Pro tip: This makes for a great snack while you wait in the inevitable line.

Camote

What it is: Baked sweet potatoes, diced and served with a dollop of sweet cream and a healthy sprinkle of cinnamon.

How it's eaten: Like a dessert you buy at a carnival: on a styrofoam plate with a plastic fork.

Why you should love it: Mainly because of the contraption it comes from — a mobile stove, which is basically a cart with a fire in it. The steam from said fire causes a shrill sound to emit from its calliope-like whistle as the “camote man” wanders down the street advertising his goods.

Our favorite place to find it: Find yourself a seat in Parque de los Venados (Park of the Deer) and wait for the unmistakable screaming whistle to break the calm.



By Megan Frye

Megan Frye is a professional vagabond who swears she's danced with the dead at the pyramids. She can usually be found eating her way around Mexico City. Tweet her about the food that makes you squeal at [@fryechild](#), or see what she's up to on Instagram at [@gypsy_fire](#).

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