

top picks

- El Cardenal (p135)
- El Bajío (p147)
- María del Alma (p148)
- Contramar (p151)
- Tierra de Vinos (p151)
- Águila y Sol (p144)
- Fonda El Refugio (p140)
- Taberna de León (p154)
- Lampuga (p148)
- Los Girasoles (p136)

What's your recommendation? www.lonelyplanet.com/mexico-city

EATING

These days, Mexico City is a whole lot more than tacos and enchiladas. As internationally acclaimed chefs continually refine the art of fusing European and Asian styles with Mexican ingredients, the capital has become a significant port of call on the food and travel trail. Visitors can now choose from any number of fusion-fare restaurants, where auteur chefs forge exciting new recipes. Add to this a growing appreciation on the part of *defeños* (people native to DF) for foreign cuisines, and you've got a truly impressive panorama. In the Condesa neighborhood in particular, there's been a remarkable proliferation of exciting eateries of all styles, and on any given evening intrepid eaters can choose from fine French bistros, Argentine steakhouses, Mediterranean seafood purveyors, sushi houses and British pub grub. Not to mention those tacos and enchiladas.

Fusion and global cuisines aside, it's the traditional favorites that keep many coming back. What's prepared in the humblest *taquerías* (taco stalls), markets and lunch halls is often just as thrilling, minus the price tag or pretensions. *Taquerías*, both upscale (El Califa, p150) and down (El Borrego Viudo, p157), season their meaty morsels with the ziestiest salsas imaginable. Tamales, the best of which are found inside markets or on the street (Tamales Chiapanecos María Geraldine, p153), are a unique delicacy – slowly simmered packages of cornmeal blended with savory sauces, pork or chicken, nuts and fruit and so on, invariably accompanied by a piping hot cup of the corn-based beverage called *atole*. Other traditional places specialize in *pozole*, a wonderful pork-and-hominy broth served with a table full of garnishes (La Casa de Toño, p157).

In addition, thousands of holes-in-the-wall put together traditional multicourse lunches (*comida corrida*) just like *abuelita* used to (Restaurant Dzib, p138). Market buildings are good places to look for these while *tianguis* (weekly street markets) customarily have an eating section offering tacos, *barbacoa* (Mexican-style barbecue) and *quesadillas* (cheese folded between tortillas and fried or grilled).

Good opportunities also exist for authentic international cuisine, with restaurants catering to the capital's sizeable Lebanese, Jewish, Japanese and Cuban communities. Restaurants in the Zona Rosa's growing Korean community are only just beginning to attract a wider audience, so the food remains avowedly Korean (U Rae Ok, p142).

Despite this extraordinary culinary bounty, many Chilangos prefer to spend their time in modern chain restaurants, where predictable menus make a sound, if unexciting, fallback. Branches of VIPS, Sanborns, Wings and California restaurants serve US-style coffee-shop fare and Mexican standards. International chains, from KFC to Starbucks are also well represented.

HISTORY & CULTURE

The first Spaniards to enter Moctezuma's grand city of Tenochtitlán found markets overflowing with many previously unseen foodstuffs, such as beans, squash, peanuts, vanilla, sweet potato, and of course, the maize that we call corn – the staple of the indigenous diet.

Half a millennium later, it's in the corn-based dishes that we see the vestiges of the pre-Hispanic diet and cooking methods. Corn was – and is – ground and made into tortillas, then cooked on a fired-clay platter known as a *comal* (these days, it's more likely to be made of metal). These edible utensils delivered bits of cooked foods into Mexican mouths. Corn was also made into tamales and filled with

beans, fish, flowers, fruits and vegetables then wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves. It was even used to make drinks, such as the *atole* found on Mexico City street corners early each morning.

While Mexican ingredients certainly changed the way the rest of the world ate, in return the new settlers brought along their own fare. Before their arrival, the primary sources of protein in Mexico had been insects and small animals such as rabbits, the indigenous dogs, armadillos, possums, and a wide variety of fowl. The Spanish contributed cows, pigs, goats and sheep, adding both the animal's meat and their lard, milk and cheese. The result was an early fusion cuisine that resulted in the Mexican food we typically think of today.

HOW DEFEÑOS EAT

Following the centuries-old fascination with European culture, many Mexico City inhabitants wake up with a pastry and coffee or just dash off to work. For the millions who ride public transit, breakfast awaits outside the metro entrances and on nearly every street corner. Especially in the office zones of Colonia Cuauhtémoc and the Zona Rosa, it's hard to walk more than a block without some irresistible item popping up en route. Tamales filled with chicken or pork and red, green or *mole* sauce, then wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves, are hearty enough to keep you going for a few hours; stuffed into a large *bolillo* (bread roll), it's a super carb charge. Fresh-squeezed orange or carrot juices are never far away.

Although the lunch break isn't until much later, by mid-morning cafeterias like the ubiquitous Los Bisquets Obregón (p152), VIPS and Sanborns team with people noisily chatting over *huevos a la mexicana* (eggs scrambled with finely minced tomato, onion and chili) and glasses of *café con leche* (coffee with milk).

Around 3pm, throngs of office workers step out for a cheap *comida corrida* – the modern substitute for the multicourse meals traditionally served at home when businesses shut down in the afternoon. At neighborhood *fondas* (small, often family-run eateries) an inexpensive *comida corrida* includes a choice of soups, followed by rice or pasta, then a selection of three or four mains (sometimes one of them is vegetarian). Finally, there's a small dessert that could be as ordinary as a lone marshmallow or a simple piece of cake. The cheapest meals frequently include a pitcher of *agua de fruta*, a blend of watered-down seasonal fruit juice and sugar. For executives who linger over their midday meal, traditional places like Café de Tacuba (p136) or El Cardenal (p135) in the Centro Histórico are popular. A tequila or two might even accompany these meals.

Back home in the evening, average Josés and Josefinas relax with a cup of coffee or chocolate and some rolls or pastries (often delivered by bicycle) before bed. Meanwhile, a more energetic, well-heeled bunch fill the trendy *café*s and bistros of Colonia Roma or Condesa, or enjoy fine dining in Polanco.

After an evening on the town, rich and poor alike belly up to late-night taco stands like El Tizoncito (p150) or El Borrego Viudo (p157) for a half-dozen *taquitos al pastor* (tiny

tacos topped with shavings of grilled roasted pork from a big skewered cone) before finally crawling home.

ALTA COCINA MEXICANA

Highly innovative and deeply pleasing to the eye and palate, Mexico's haute cuisine is causing a stir in international gastronomic circles. A new generation of chefs are boldly blending the world's great cuisines with the flavors and textures of both indigenous and post-conquest Mexico. Their philosophy of food, cooking and eating yields a plethora of dishes old and new.

Affluent Polanco is perhaps the foremost destination for the best of these exciting hybrids. At places like Pujol (p145), Izote (p146) and Águila y Sol (p144), fresh local ingredients such as avocado, cilantro, cactus paddle, squash blossom and *huitlacoche* (a mushroom that grows on corn) find their way into inventive versions of pastas, pesto, tempura and desserts. Another breed of chef prefers to refine the classics of the masses, much as modern composers borrow folk melodies for their symphonies. Classically updated versions of such common fare as *barbacoa*, *carnitas*, *mole* and enchiladas are best enjoyed at El Bajío (p147) or El Cardenal. Another innovation adds flair to the seminal dishes of a particular region, as at La Sabia Virtud (p149), whose Puebla-inspired dishes reflect centuries-old Spanish and indigenous blends, and Maria del Alma (p148), where uniquely Tabascan seafood and tamale recipes are perfected for the contemporary diner.

Mexico has recently come into its own in wine production as well, and most of these places maintain an extensive cellar of the best Mexican and international vintages to highlight their signature dishes.

STREET EATS

In Mexico City, the term 'eating out' can often be taken literally. Instead of going to restaurants, many Chilangos prefer to dine on the street, often standing up – and not just because it's invariably quicker and cheaper than eating in a restaurant. Some of the city's thousands of street stalls offer superior fare, and the most popular ones go on to become restaurants (though faithful fans might complain they lose something in translation!).

Besides the stationary vendors reviewed here, certain items can be found all over

CULINARY COURSES

There is no more excuse for producing blimp-sized burritos stuffed with anything that happens to be in the fridge. Just as Mexico City is fast gaining a reputation as an exciting culinary capital, so several reputable cooking schools and courses have been established where you can hone your tortilla and tamale-making skills and learn how to make traditional and more sophisticated Mexican dishes. Check the respective websites for current schedule and prices.

Centro Culinario Ambrosia (Map pp42–3; ☎ 5550-7843; www.ambrosia.com.mx; Av San Jerónimo 243) Cooking courses are held in a grand historic building, both for professional and amateur chefs and cooks. Courses in English were introduced in April 2008. There is also a restaurant on site where you can sample the service and dishes first-hand.

Cocinar Mexicano (off Map pp42–3; ☎ 739-395-0433; www.cocinarmexicano.com; Tepoztlán) One-week master classes in traditional and contemporary Mexican cuisine, with hands-on classes taught by Mexico's top chefs and village women. Run by a native New Yorker, Magda Bogin, who also incorporates cultural trips into the week and runs separate writing workshops.

Mexico Soul & Essence (Map p88; ☎ 5564-8457; www.mexicosoul&essence.com; Amsterdam 269) Can organize your culinary tour, including restaurant bookings and cooking courses.

Pujol (Map p84; ☎ 5545-4111; www.pujol.com.mx; Petrarca 254) This top restaurant offers regular cooking courses, usually covering five once-weekly sessions, with a total of 15 hours.

town. In the evening, tamales are delivered by bicycle, their arrival heralded by an eerie moan through a cheap speaker. You'll know the *camote* (sweet potato) man is coming by the ear-splitting steam whistle emitting from his cart, heard for blocks around. The same vendor offers delicious baked plantains, laced with cream on request.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Mexico City is probably the best place in Mexico for vegetarians, and even serious vegans need not dismay. The capital's *mercados* (markets), *tianguis* (weekly street markets) and even supermarkets abound with some of the freshest and widest choices of fruits and vegetables anywhere. Aside from a few good vegetarian and organic restaurants (p155), the popular fusion places prepare some interesting salads and pastas. Vegetarians might also browse the appetizer lists for items like braised eggplant and mushrooms or steamed artichokes.

PRACTICALITIES

Opening Hours

There's always something to eat somewhere in Mexico City. In the Centro and Zona Rosa, a few cafeteria-type places stay open 24 hours. The most popular taco stands are open until 2am or 3am, closing barely long enough to wash everything down and start again by 10am or 11am the next morning. Even some

of the more upscale taco places in Condesa and Coyoacán feed the after-bar crowd.

Breakfast is served from 7am or 8am until 11am or noon. In Mexico City, the afternoon lunch, known as *comida*, is still one of the most important events in the day, and extends over a two- to three-hour period in the late afternoon. Anyone looking for a lunch menu before 2pm may have a hard time.

Business at the restaurants along the shady streets and plazas of Coyoacán, Condesa, Roma or Polanco ebbs and flows throughout the day. Some open for breakfast around 8am. Otherwise, service begins around 1pm. There's a slowdown about 5pm, but by 8pm or 9pm a reservation or an extended wait is necessary.

How Much?

It's easy to spend a fortune on eating in Mexico City, and sometimes it's worth it, but even Mexico's wealthiest residents realize that some of the best stuff can be consumed at inexpensive taco stands or at quesadilla grills in the street markets.

Two people savoring the latest Alta Cocina Mexicana or the better international dishes with wine and a couple of margaritas to start will easily spend M\$500 or more per person.

At the better hotels and restaurants, expect to spend M\$70 to M\$120 for breakfast. Lunch with a set menu will run M\$90 to M\$200. In the small restaurants at the lower end, you can get by for M\$30 for a plate of eggs, beans and tortillas, or M\$35 to M\$40 for a budget three-course *comida corrida*.

PRICE GUIDE

\$\$\$ mains over M\$130
\$\$ mains M\$70-130
\$ mains under M\$70

Among the popular places of Condesa, pastas and salads go for M\$70 to M\$100, and a decent steak runs from M\$180 to M\$200. Late-night tacos will set you back M\$15 to M\$40 each, depending on the setting.

Drinks always take a bite out of the budget. A glass of wine will cost M\$45 to M\$80. By the bottle might be a better deal, with some starting at M\$180 to M\$200, but the better quality wines, both Mexican and imported, will rival the prices at any fine restaurant in the US or Europe.

CENTRO HISTÓRICO

The historic center is a great place to enjoy traditional Mexican dishes in elegant surroundings. In general, though, it's more of a daytime than evening destination, with many places only open for breakfast and lunch. Restaurant options tend to be sparse after dark, though a few places stay open till midnight and one, Café El Popular, around the clock.

Contrary to expectations, the recent restoration of the zone west of the Zócalo has not been accompanied by a wave of trendy restaurants, though many of the older establishments continue to flourish. You'll find some Mexican chains here as well, serving up reliable (if bland) variations on traditional fare. Working Chilangos tend to head for the set lunch and *torta* (Mexican-style sandwich in a bread roll tostada) places on Calle 5 de Mayo and República de Uruguay, as well as along pedestrian thoroughfares Motolinía and Gante.

Perhaps the quintessential Mexico City experience is dining or sipping cocktails overlooking the vast Zócalo with the Mexican *tricolor* waving proudly over the scene. The three upscale hotels overlooking the plaza offer abundant buffet breakfasts most days, and two new Zócalo restaurants – Puro Corazón and La Terraza – serve classic Mexican cuisine with the views.

EL CARDENAL Map pp48–9 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5521-8815; Palma 23; dishes M\$90-280;
☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 7pm Sun; M Zócalo

Possibly the finest place in town for traditional Mexican fare, El Cardenal is a family-run institution frequented by politicians and businessfolk – former Mayor López Obrador used to hold breakfast meetings here. The restaurant occupies three floors of a Parisian-style mansion with a pianist playing sweetly in the background. Breakfast is a must: a tray of just-baked sweet rolls and a pitcher of frothy, semi-sweet chocolate are a prelude to eggs, scrambled with *chilorio* (Sinaloa-spiced minced pork) or Puebla Hacienda style (garnished with *poblano* chili strips). For lunch, go for the oven-roasted veal breast, Oaxaca-style *chiles rellenos*, or in summer, *escamoles* (ant larvae, a much coveted specialty). Another branch is inside the Sheraton Centro Histórico.

RESTAURANTE CHON

Map pp48–9 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5542-0873; Regina 160; dishes M\$180; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat; M Pino Suárez

Pre-Hispanic fare is the specialty of this cantina-style restaurant. Sample maguety worms (in season), grasshoppers, wild boar, and other items that have gone from being customary fare on Mexican tables to gourmet delicacies. Fortino Rojas, Chon's adventurous chef, incorporates these primordial ingredients into dishes Motezuma could never have imagined. How about deer meatballs in *huitlacoche* sauce, chrysanthemums filled with ant larvae, crocodile steaks laced with pumpkin seed sauce? (Note: armadillo, in danger of extinction, has been taken off the menu.)

LA CASA DE LAS SIRENAS

Map pp48–9 Contemporary Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5704-3345; República de Guatemala 32; mains M\$160; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat, to 7pm Sun; M Zócalo

Housed in a 17th-century relic, this restaurant has a series of atmospheric salons on three floors connected by creaky staircases. However, the only real place to dine is the top-floor terrace overlooking the Plaza del Templo Mayor. It's an ideal perch to nibble on mushrooms simmered with chipotle chilies, stuffed chilies laced with walnut sauce, or other Oaxaca-influenced fare – along with a shot of tequila from the downstairs cantina's extensive selection. Service is spotty.

HOSTERÍA DE SANTO DOMINGO

Map pp48-9 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5526-5276; Belisario Domínguez 72; mains M\$70-180; ☎ 9am-10pm; M Allende

Whipping up classic Mexican fare since 1860, this hugely popular (though not touristy) restaurant has a festive atmosphere enhanced by chamber music. It's famous for its enormous *chiles en nogada* (M\$180; large green chilies stuffed with meat and fruit, covered with a creamy white walnut sauce and sprinkled with red pomegranate seeds – representing the colors of the Mexican flag), an Independence Day favorite, served here year-round. Other recipes handed down through the generations include the *pechuga ranchera con nata* (chicken breast in cream laced with *chile pasilla*) and *frijoladas* (bean puree served over lightly fried tortillas). Formerly part of the Santo Domingo monastery, the ancient building features two floors of dining rooms, seasonally festooned with *papel picado* (dolilies).

LOS GIRASOLES

Map pp48-9 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5510-0630; Plaza Manuel Tolsá; dishes M\$120-150; ☎ 1pm-midnight Tue-Sat, to 9pm Sun & Mon; M Allende

Beside the Museo Nacional de Arte, this fine restaurant specializes in *alta cocina mexicana*, with recipes contributed by some of the stars of the genre. The menu boasts an encyclopedic range of Mexican fare, from pre-Hispanic (grasshoppers), to colonial (turkey in tamarind *mole*), to contemporary (snapper fillet in rosehip salsa). Cozy salons, done up colonial style, tend to fill up with foreign tourists in the evening, while at lunchtime they may be occupied by legislators from the nearby Senate building. Try to get a table overlooking the Plaza Tolsá, or on the terrace adjacent to it.

CAFÉ DE TACUBA

Map pp48-9 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5518-4950; Tacuba 28; mains M\$70-150; ☎ 8am-11:30pm; M Allende

Before the band there was the restaurant. A fantasy of colored tiles, brass lamps and oil paintings, this mainstay has served *antojitos* (traditional Mexican snacks or light dishes – literally 'little whims') since 1912. The food is overrated, but the atmosphere is just right for *pambazos* (filled rolls fried in chili sauce) or tamales with hot chocolate.

CASINO ESPAÑOL

Map pp48-9 Spanish & Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5510-2967; Isabel La Católica 29; 4-course lunch M\$93; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri; M Allende

The old Spanish social center, housed in a fabulous Porfirio-era building, has a popular cantina-style eatery downstairs and an elegant restaurant upstairs. Stolid execs loosen their ties in the former for a long leisurely lunch, and the courses keep coming. Spanish fare, naturally, highlights the menu (Thursday there's *cocido madrileño*, a stew of chick peas and sausage), though *tacos dorados* (chicken tacos, rolled and deep fried) and *chiles en nogada* are equally well-prepared.

PURO CORAZÓN

Map pp48-9 Contemporary Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5518-0300; Monte de Piedad 11; breakfasts M\$65-95; ☎ 8am-9pm; M Zócalo

This new Zócalo option has heart-thumping views of the cathedral from its 6th-floor perch, as well as a less stodgy vibe than its hotel counterparts. There's a novel spin on home-grown ingredients like *pulque* (fermented maguey beverage) and *flor de calabaza* (squash blossoms). Watch the flag being raised as you dig into a *huiltlacoche* omelet, or lowered while savoring a shrimp cocktail laced with tequila.

AL-ANDALUS Map pp48-9 Middle Eastern \$\$

☎ 5522-2528; Mesones 171; dishes M\$90-125; ☎ 8am-6pm; M Pino Suárez

Al-Andalus caters to the capital's substantial Lebanese community, serving shawarma, kebabs, kibbe (spiced lamb fritters), felafel and so on in a superb colonial mansion in the Merced market district. Dine in one of the wood-beamed halls or on a terrace overlooking the courtyard. After lunch, choose from a tempting array of baklavas and other syrupy pastries, then kick back with a hookah.

LA TERRAZA DEL ZÓCALO

Map pp48-9 Regional Mexican \$\$

☎ 5521-7934; Plaza de la Constitución 13, 6th fl; mains M\$110-150; ☎ 1-8pm Sun-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat; M Zócalo

With dining on a broad balcony overlooking the Zócalo toward the national palace, La Terraza makes a promising new alternative to the ho-hum hotel restaurants on

DRINKS (& GREAT FOOD!) IN THE CANTINA

Mauricio Velázquez de León

When it comes to food, our city has no match. It is said that *capitalinos* (as we are called) can eat breakfast, lunch and dinner in a different place in Mexico City for a year without ever repeating the venue. Urban myth? Maybe. But think about it. There are more than 20 million hungry souls in this city, so we munch day and night, enjoying our vibrant street-food culture, our endless collection of eateries (*loncherías*, *taquerías*, *torterías*) and our restaurants. But even this is hardly enough! We also eat in bars, especially our cantinas. And we eat very well, if I may say.

Cantinas have a long history in Mexico. They were once at the centre of every Mexican man's social life, a monument of machismo with a more than shady reputation. Legendary signs at the door of cantinas read 'No minors, no women, and no military staff.' Patrons drank on bare-wood tables with glass holders attached to its legs, in order to leave the surfaces clean to play dominoes. Tequila, *mezcal* and whiskey flowed freely, and food, when available, was terrible.

Today, these century-old cantinas retain their long wooden bars, bare-wood tables and extended stained mirrors. Most of their patrons are still male, but if there were a sign at the door it would read 'No Smoking.' Best of all, while a reputation for rough edges is maintained, cantinas are completely women friendly and have given tequila and beer an ideal companion: great food.

Most cantinas will offer free meals in return for drinks purchased. Food is served in small portions, called *botanas*, but it will keep coming as long as you keep ordering drinks. You can also order from the menu and eat as though you're in a traditional restaurant.

Here is a totally subjective list of cantinas worth a visit, thanks to their food, sense of history, or both.

- **La Ópera** (☎ 5512-8959; Av 5 de Mayo 10; ☎ 1pm-midnight Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun; M Allende) Many *capitalinos* will tell you to visit this elegant cantina (founded in 1870) to see the hole in the ceiling shot by Pancho Villa. But you may want to go to check out the delicious escargots in *chipotle*. The setting is atypically stylish for a cantina; gazing at the elegant chandeliers and velvet drapes you can travel back to a time when Mexico was in love with all things French.
- **El Mirador de Chapultepec** (☎ 5286-2165; Chapultepec 606, San Miguel Chapultepec; ☎ 1:30-10pm Mon-Fri, to 7pm Sat) Another cantina with a great legend. It is said that Mexican dictator, Porfirio Díaz, used a tunnel that connected the cantina to Chapultepec Castle. If true, he may have journeyed frequently to try *huachinango a la veracruzana* (red snapper Veracruz-style) or even the *criadillas* (mountain oysters).
- **Covadonga** (☎ 5533-2922; Puebla 121, Colonia Roma; ☎ 1pm-3am Mon-Fri; M Insurgentes) Nicknamed 'Covita,' and the place to see journalists, celebrities and government officials, this is the trendiest cantina in the city. A better reason to visit is the *tortilla española*.
- **Bar Montejo** (☎ 5516-5851; Benjamin Franklin 261, Colonia Condesa; ☎ 1pm-1am Mon-Sat; M Chilpancingo) A paradise for office workers, Bar Montejo is always jam-packed. Come early and leave late. The constant stream of *botanas* is one of the best in the city, starting with shrimp soup, continuing with tacos fritos and peaking with paella. But the real treat is *cochinilla pibil* (pork marinated in chilies, wrapped in banana leaves, and pit-cooked or baked). It also has two floors that serve food in a traditional restaurant setting. If you are in the city when el Tri (Mexico's national football team) is playing a game, get a table next to one of the large plasma screens and be ready to cheer and scream. Bar Montejo also has two floors that serve food in a traditional restaurant setting.
- **La Guadalupeana** (☎ 5554-6253; Higuera 2, Coyoacán; ☎ noon-12:30am Mon-Sat; M Viveros) In the heart of Coyoacán, next to what once was Hernán Cortés' home, this cantina is a meeting place for writers, revolutionaries and other intellectuals. It serves a fantastic *lengua a la veracruzana* (tongue Veracruz-style). For some reason the kitchen closes at 6pm, but don't worry; you can order *quesadillas* and *tortas* from the mercado down the block.
- **La Puerta del Sol** (☎ 5512 7244, Av 5 de Mayo 54; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Wed, to midnight Fri-Sat; M Zócalo) This quintessential cantina, founded in 1887, still has the double-leaf doors that machos like to push with brio when entering the watering hole. It serves an array of *botanas* and is famous for its *chamorros* (marinated pork shank).

the same side of the plaza. Oaxaca-style enchiladas and *cecina de Yecapixtla* (thinly sliced salted meat from a town in the state of Morelos) highlight a menu of regional classics. Enter at ground level through the jewelry arcade (there are various foreign flags above the entryway) and look for the elevator.

SANBORNS CASA DE AZULEJOS

Map pp48-9 Café \$\$

☎ 5512-9820; Madero 4; dishes M\$60-80; ☎ 7am-1am; M Allende

The original branch of the citywide chain of coffee shops is worth visiting mainly to admire its main dining hall within a magnificently preserved baroque courtyard.

It's a perennially popular meeting place for Chilangos and tourists alike, with rows of tables between octagonal pillars, roof beams alternating with strips of French tile, and a lovely Moorish fountain behind an ornately carved archway. The former marquis' palace was converted to a soda fountain in 1925 by Ohioan Frank Sanborn, who added the peacock murals. Despite the fabulous setting, the food is unremarkable coffee shop fare, with bland versions of Mexican standards.

CAFÉ LA BLANCA Map pp48-9 Café \$\$

☎ 5510-9260; Av 5 de Mayo 40; antojitos M\$40-65, set lunch M\$76; ☎ 8am-midnight; (M) Allende White-coated waiters and orange upholstery set the tone for this 1960s relic offering hearty breakfasts and daily lunch specials. Sit at the U-shaped counter or grab a table by the window for people-watching over a cappuccino.

CAFÉ EL POPULAR Map pp48-9 Café \$

☎ 5518-6081; Av 5 de Mayo 52; dishes M\$40-60; ☎ 24hr; (M) Allende

So popular was this tiny round-the-clock café that they opened another more amply proportioned branch next door to catch the considerable overflow. Fresh pastries and good combination breakfasts (fruit, eggs, *frijoles* – beans – and coffee) are the main attractions. *Café con leche* (M\$1) is served *chino* style (ie you specify the strength).

VEGETARIANO MADERO

Map pp48-9 Vegetarian \$

☎ 5521-6880; Madero 56, 1st fl; set lunch from M\$63; ☎ 8am-7pm; (M) Allende; (V)

Despite the austere entrance, there's a lively restaurant upstairs where a pianist plinks out old favorites. The meatless menu includes tasty variations on Mexican standards. Balcony seating lets you observe the street activity. A nearby street-level branch, *Restaurante Vegetariano* (☎ 5510-0113; Filomena Mata 13), displays the day's offerings out front.

COOX HANAL Map pp48-9 Regional Mexican \$

☎ 5709-3613; Isabel La Católica 83, 2nd fl; dishes M\$40-60; ☎ 10:30am-7pm; (M) Isabel La Católica Founded in 1953 by boxer Raúl Salazar from Mérida, this establishment, situated

over a billiard hall, prepares Yucatecan fare just as it's done in Don Raúl's hometown. The *poc chuc* (grilled pork marinated in sour orange juice), *papadzules* (tacos stuffed with chopped hard-boiled egg and laced with pumpkin seed sauce) and *cochinita pibil* (pork marinated in chilies, wrapped in banana leaves, and pit-cooked or baked) are of a high standard, and tables are set with the obligatory marinated red onions and four-alarm *habanero* (a fiery chili) salsa. Yucatecan troubadours perform on the central stage come lunchtime.

EL CHARCO DE LAS RANAS

Map pp48-9 Taquería \$

☎ 1054-4567; República de Uruguay 43; tacos M\$35-45; ☎ 8am-6pm; (M) San Juan de Letrán Men in white bonnets work the big, gleaming grill at 'the frog pond,' a modern branch of the renowned *taquería* located in the southern DF. Aside from the well-crammed tacos *al pastor* and huge *alambres* (kebabs of beef, peppers, onions and bacon) – best washed down with an ice-cold *horchata* – you might try the *chicharrón de queso* (rolled sheets of crispy fried cheese).

CHURRERÍA EL MORO Map pp48-9 Café \$

☎ 5512-0896; Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas 42; hot chocolate with 4 churros M\$25; ☎ 24hr; (M) San Juan de Letrán

A fine respite from the shopping hordes of the Eje Central, El Moro manufactures long, slender deep-fried *churros* (doughnut-like fritters), just made to be dipped in thick hot chocolate. It's a popular late-night spot as well, perfect for winding down after hours.

RESTAURANTE DZIB

Map pp48-9 Comida Corrida \$

☎ 5709-9402; Regina 54; set lunch M\$23; ☎ lunch; (M) Isabel La Católica This deceptively large dining hall must be the ultimate *comida corrida* joint, serving toothsome three-course lunches. Start with a hearty *caldo de habas* (bean soup), followed by a plate of rice or spaghetti, then choose from an extensive selection of mains, which change daily (Friday is seafood day). TVs showing the afternoon soap opera are conveniently placed at the front of each room.

TAQUERÍA LOS PAISÁS

Map pp48-9 Taquería \$

☎ 5542-8139; Jesús María 131; tacos M\$10;

☎ 8am-midnight; (M) Pino Suárez

There's always a crowd spilling out of this corner taco stand amidst the wholesale paper district east of the Zócalo, and that's reason enough to join them. Run by three goateed brothers, the place offers overstuffed steak, sausage and *pastor* tacos – or *campechano*, all mixed up. Help yourself from the heaving trays of garnishes: mashed potatoes, *pico de gallo*, cactus paddles and *habanero*-spiked onions, among others. As there's just one narrow steel table, most patrons have a stand-up chomp.

TACOS DE CANASTA CHUCHO

Map pp48-9 Taquería \$

☎ 5521-0280; Av 5 de Mayo 17A; tacos M\$5;

☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat; (M) Allende

These bite-sized tacos are stuffed with fillings such as refried beans, *chicharrón* (fried pork skin) and *mole* (just the sauce), and arranged in a big basket. A couple of pails contain the garnishes: spicy guacamole and marinated carrot chunks and chilies.

PASTELERÍA IDEAL Map pp48-9 Bakery \$

Calle 16 de Septiembre 18; pastries M\$8-15;

☎ 6:30am-9:45pm; (M) San Juan de Letrán

Mexico's most glorious array of wedding cakes is on offer at this old-fashioned bakery: this is the place if you need a 70kg, multistory *gâteau* for your nuptials. Otherwise, there's a huge variety of breads and pastries with odd names like 'railroads' and 'dark rocks', whose allusions can only be guessed at. Grab a pair of tongs and stack up your steel tray, then get rung up by one of the scores of girls in blue aprons.

JUGOS CANADÁ Map pp48-9 Juice Bar \$

Av 5 de Mayo 47; dishes M\$1.75-\$3.25; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-9pm Sun; (M) Allende

A veritable juice-squeezing factory, with oranges, pineapples, watermelons and so on temptingly displayed on shelves. Choose from juices and *licuados* (milkshakes). Check the board for a menu of fantastic permutations. Ever tried a guavamamey cocktail? Fruit salads and big fat *tortas* are also prepared.

ALAMEDA CENTRAL & AROUND

Owing to the recent renovations performed around this iconic city park, eating options reflect the schizophrenic nature of the zone. Places on the immediate perimeter of the Alameda cater to an upscale clientele, and the Plaza Alameda mall, next door to the Sheraton, has plenty of global franchises. But head down Luis Moya or along Ayuntamiento, south of the Alameda, for pockets of the neighborhood's rustic heritage in the form of *torta* stands and chicken-soup vendors. Mexico City's modest Chinatown covers a single paper-lantern-strung block of Dolores, a couple blocks south of the park.

EL REGIOMONTANO

Map p64 Regional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5518-0196; Luis Moya 115; grilled goat M\$187;

☎ 11am-10pm; (M) Balderas

Lettered on the window is the message 'BABY GOATS VERY YOUNG KIDS,' and there they are, splayed on stakes and grilling over a circle of coals, just as they're done in Monterrey or Saltillo. A single platter serves two.

CUATRO MARES Map p64 Chinese \$\$

☎ 5510-4675; Dolores 27; chow mein M\$85, mains M\$120; ☎ 11am-10pm; (M) San Juan de Letrán

If you're looking for authentically prepared Chinese food, you won't find it in the capital's diminutive Chinatown, which serves up a generally bland Chinese-Mexican hybrid that's heavy on the sweet-and-sour sauce. Of the half-dozen restaurants along Dolores, this one has the best Peking duck and shrimps in lobster sauce. Dine outdoors on the plaza or inside with the Chinese dragons.

CAFETERÍA DEL CLAUSTRO

Map p64 Café \$

☎ 5518-2266; Hidalgo 45; salads & baguettes M\$35-45; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun; (M) Bellas Artes

If you're touring the Alameda museums, put this self-service café, inside the tranquil courtyard of the Museo Franz Mayer (p65), on your itinerary. The light fare includes Italian cold cuts on *chapata* rolls, ample green salads, quiches and excellent cakes, with seating at marble tables and baroque music to set the mood.

top picks

LATE NIGHT EATS

- Café El Popular (p138)
- El Tizoncito (p150)
- Mercado San Camilito (p156)
- Barracuda Diner (p152)
- Churrería El Moro (p138)

EL CUADRILÁTERO Map p64 Tortería \$

☎ 5521-3060; Luis Moya 73; tortas M\$35-70;
🕒 7am-8pm Mon-Sat; 📍 Juárez

Owned by *luchador* (wrestler) Super Astro, this shrine to *lucha libre* features a wall of wrestlers' masks, many donated by his ring pals and enemies. Not just wrestlers, but also ordinary denizens of the Centro frequent the joint for its gigantic tortas, versions of which are displayed at the entrance. If you manage to consume a 1.3kg cholesterol-packed Torta Gladiador in 15 minutes, it's free.

CAFÉ COLÓN Map p64 Café \$

☎ 5521-6343; Colón 1; breakfasts M\$30-49,
4-course lunch M\$40; 📍 Hidalgo

Dishing out traditional fare from this location for almost half a century, Café Colón remains popular with local office workers who pour in mid-morning for coffee or mid-afternoon for the filling *comida*. The café's two neatly renovated rooms retain old maps of the Alameda and vintage light fixtures.

TACOS XOTEPINGO Map p64 Taquería \$

☎ 5709-4548; Marquez Sterling 42; tacos M\$13-35;
🕒 11am-11pm; 📍 Balderas

With seating inside the big dining hall, on the sun-dappled patio or alongside the formidable grill, this taco temple makes a great pit-stop after shopping at the Ciudadela crafts market, opposite.

MI FONDA Map p64 Café \$

☎ 5521-0002; López 101; paella M\$37; 🕒 noon-5pm; 📍 San Juan de Letrán

Working-class Chilangos line up here for their share of *paella valenciana*, made fresh daily and patiently ladled out by women in white bonnets. Jesús from Cantabria oversees the proceedings. Space is limited but you can share a table.

PLAZA DE LA REPÚBLICA & SAN RAFAEL

Though not considered a culinary destination by any means, this mixed hotel and residential zone has several small, homey, neighborhood restaurants and *taquerías*.

BOCA DEL RÍO Map p71 Seafood \$\$

☎ 5535-0128; Ribera de San Cosme 42; fish from M\$95; 🕒 9am-11pm; 📍 San Cosme

This large, old-fashioned dining hall has its fish delivered daily from the coast. Take a seat at the long stainless-steel counter and enjoy shrimp, oyster or octopus cocktails (from M\$50, or eat all three in one serve, *campechano*-style), served with a lemon squeezer, a bottle of *habanero* salsa and a package of Saltines.

LA LONA VERDE Map p71 Seafood \$\$

☎ 5546-5781; Pedro Baranda 4; fish fillets M\$60,
comida corrida M\$85; 🕒 noon-7pm Mon-Sat;
📍 Revolución

This humble and friendly establishment does some very tasty seafood dishes. Start off with fried shrimp quesadillas or *mixiote de mariscos* (a flavorful shellfish broth), then have a fish fillet *al ajillo* (laced with a garlic and chili sauce). Being an Oaxacan-run establishment, they also make *tlayudas*, those great big crispy tortillas with a variety of toppings.

EL CALIFA DE LEÓN Map p71 Taquería \$

Ribera San Cosme 56B; tacos from M\$22; 🕒 11am-2am; 📍 San Cosme

Practically hidden amid the surrounding *ambulante* activity, this standing-room-only joint is sought out by taco mavens from all over. Unlike at thousands of similar places, the twist here is that the beef is not chopped up but grilled in thin slices. The salsas – chipotle and *salsa verde* – are exceptional.

ZONA ROSA, CUAUHTÉMOC & JUÁREZ

The Zona Rosa's main pedestrian thoroughfare, Génova, can seem an edgy chaos of food vendors, bemused tourists, gay couples, panhandlers and people on the move – mainly towards the Insurgentes metro station, which lies four blocks south of Paseo de la Reforma.

Watch this street theater from one of Génova's terrace cafés or sidestep off to a quieter restaurant in Cuauhtémoc or Juárez.

TEZKA Map pp74-5 Spanish \$\$\$

☎ 5228-9918; Amberes 78; dishes M\$195-275;
📍 Insurgentes

This restaurant showcases contemporary Basque cuisine created by Master Chef Juan Mari Arzak, a native of San Sebastián. Seafood is the specialty, with dishes like sea bass and red snapper in a green chili sauce or codfish in a garlic and red pepper marinade. Desserts include a truly decadent warm chocolate torte with fresh berries. The dining room is one of the most stylish in town, accentuated by dramatic copper metalwork.

LES MOUSTACHES Map pp74-5 French \$\$\$

☎ 5533-3390; Río Sena 88; dishes M\$160-200; 🕒 11:30pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun; 📍 Insurgentes; 📍

An old-school traditional French restaurant, with tables in an elegant patio surrounded by ivy-clad walls. Start off with *pâté de foie gras*, then choose from duck in Grand Marnier sauce, beef Wellington or lobster Thermidor. For dessert, there are tempting crepes and soufflés.

ANGUS Map pp74-5 Argentine \$\$\$

☎ 5511-8633; Copenhagen 31; steaks M\$80-150;
📍 Insurgentes

This steak place attracts a slick business crowd, here for the excellent prime cuts and, possibly, the scantily-dressed waitresses in cowgirl gear. The vast closed-in terrace is the place to be; the interior dining room has stuffy burgundy upholstery and a private men's-club look. The meaty choices include rib-eye and T-bone steaks, plus surf-and-turf steak or lobster and shrimp. Seriously homesick Yanks can kick-start their appetite with a bowl of clam chowder.

RAFFAELLO Map pp74-5 Italian \$\$\$

☎ 5525-6585; Londres 165; pizzas M\$95, pasta M\$125-145; 📍 Insurgentes

Elderly bow-tied waiters provide attentive service at this charming Italian restaurant with its cosmopolitan-style enclosed sidewalk terrace and elegant dining room. There's an upper-crust pizza choice, plus all the pasta favorites and a few rogue dishes, such as shrimp curry and goulash.

top picks

ETHNIC EATING

- French: Les Moustaches (left)
- Italian: Il Postino (p151)
- Japanese: Sushi Shalala (p149)
- Korean: U Rae Ok (opposite)
- Lebanese: Al-Andalus (p136)
- Russian: Kolobok (p157)
- Spanish: Tierra de Vinos (p151)

FONDA EL REFUGIO Traditional Mexican \$\$

Map pp74-5
☎ 5525-8128; Liverpool 166; dishes M\$110;
📍 Insurgentes

The Fonda was founded 50 years ago by the late Judith Martínez Ortega, whose folkloric collection of copper pots, colorful paintings and whimsical ceramic ornaments still decorate the dining rooms. Fortunately, she also collected recipes, which her family continues to create flawlessly today. Favorites include *mole poblano* (breast of chicken drenched in a rich chocolate-based sauce) and *albondigas chipotle* (meatballs laced with spicy chili).

BLAH BLAH Map pp74-5 Argentine \$\$

☎ 5514-6753; Florencia 44; mixed grill for two M\$230; 📍 Insurgentes

Mysteriously described as a progressive bar in their advertising, this Argentinean *parilla* (grill) is, indeed, run by an enthusiastic young team and the decor is modern(ish), with stone-clad walls and earth colors, but the food is meaty and traditional, with gut-busting grills like sausage, gizzard, beef and ribs. There are dishes that don't require finger bowls, such as chicken breast with orange sauce and apple and, for the truly faint-hearted, Greek salad.

KONDITORI Map pp74-5 Scandinavian \$\$

☎ 5511-0722; Génova 61; salads, sandwiches & dishes M\$65-110; 📍 Insurgentes

This Scandinavian café attracts well-heeled regulars to see and be seen on this, the Pink Zone's main pedestrian thoroughfare. The salads, Danish sandwiches and cakes are good bets; some people make a special trip here for the weekend brunch (M\$120) accompanied by live jazz.

CHALET SUIZO Map pp74-5 Swiss \$\$
☎ 5511-7529; Niza 37; fondues M\$65-75, meat & fish dishes M\$80-95; **M Insurgentes**
Dating from 1950, this Alpine-feel restaurant is gingerbread cute, with beamed ceilings and Swiss ornaments and photos spread throughout five small dining rooms. Fondues include chocolate and Chinese, aside from the more conventional cheese or meat *bourguignon*. Other menu choices include veal goulash, trout in a white wine sauce and a creamy broccoli soup starter.

SANBORNS Map pp74-5 Traditional Mexican \$\$
☎ 5525-4039; Londres 130; breakfast M\$65-90; ☎ 7am-1am; **M Insurgentes**
Although not as splendid as the Sanborns original in the historic district, the interior here is still magnificent with ivy-twined columns, looming stained glass windows and a lofty vaulted ceiling. The food is, sadly, only average – aside from the breakfast, order *chilaquiles* (crushed soft corn tortillas covered in green chili sauce and topped with cheese).

CAFEBRERÍA EL PÉNDULO
Map pp74-5 Contemporary Mexican \$\$
☎ 5208-2327; Hamburgo 126; omelets M\$59, dishes M\$85-120; **M Insurgentes**
An elegant café within a classy bookshop. Come here for a breakfast *omelette Juliette* with spinach, tomato and goat cheese, surrounded by books and cosseted by classical music, (live on Sunday mornings). More substantial fare includes pasta and fish dishes, plus there's a cut-price children's menu.

LA TERRAZA DEL QUETZAL
Map pp74-5 Contemporary Mexican \$\$
☎ 5511-1464; Río Tiber 104; dishes M\$80-90; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat; **M Sevilla**
La Terraza opened in late 2007. Sit on the upstairs terrace or in one of the cute dining rooms with primary-color tablecloths and giant prints of fruit and veg. Dishes include a recommended tortilla soup topped with cheese and avocado, tacos with various fillings and a specialty pasta *quetzal* with cheese, broccoli, mushrooms and chicken.

RESTAURANTE VEGETARIANO YUG
Map pp74-5 Vegetarian \$\$
☎ 5553-3872; Varsovia 3; buffet M\$75, dishes M\$60-75; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-8pm Sat & Sun; **M Insurgentes**; **V**

The menu is gastro-heaven for vegetarians and vast enough for most carnivore folk to find something they fancy – even if it is a soy-substitute burger. Go the buffet route for ample choice or choose from specialties like squash flower crepes and chop suey with brown rice. The wine is nonalcoholic but the desserts are un-piously sweet and delicious; think cheese cake with fresh berries. The green-painted furnishings are rustically appropriate.

LA POLAR Map pp74-5 Regional Mexican \$\$
☎ 5546-5066; Guillermo Prieto 129, San Rafael; birria M\$85; ☎ 8am-1am; **M San Cosme**; **P**
Run by a family from Ocotlán, Jalisco, this boisterous beer hall has essentially one menu item: *birria*, a soulfully spiced goat stew. Their version of this Guadalajara favorite is considered the best in town. Spirits are also raised further by mariachis and *norteño* combos, who work the salons here.

BLU Map pp74-5 Seafood \$\$
☎ 5525-7598; Río Lerma 156; 6 oysters M\$60, dishes M\$75-80; **M Sevilla**
A rare oyster bar among this energetic stretch of restaurants on Río Lerma between Río Tiber and Río Guadalquivir. There are just a handful of tables, plus the adjacent bar, which is bathed with dated '60s blue neon light. Dishes include an oyster starter, salmon grill, grilled meats and salads.

U RAE OK Map pp74-5 Korean \$\$
☎ 5511-1233; Hamburgo 232; dishes M\$60-85; ☎ Mon-Sat; **M Insurgentes**
The core of the Korean community, the Zona Rosa has several authentic restaurants catering to this discerning and traditional local crowd. This simple upstairs locale has the finest *bul-go-gi* (grilled marinated beef) and *chigae* (hearty soup), at the best prices.

CAFÉ MANGIA Map pp74-5 International \$
☎ 5533-4503; Río Sena 85; paninis M\$65, salads M\$65, breakfast M\$40; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri; **M Insurgentes**
Enjoy an uncomplicated menu of panini with fillings such as pesto and smoked cheese, roast beef, cheese and herbs and smoked salmon with cream cheese. There's a healthy salad and breakfast choice, plus fresh juices and seriously good coffee. The atmosphere is boho-art with white-painted brick walls, challenging artwork

MEXICAN COOKBOOKS

The high priestess of Mexican cookbooks, in English, is Diana Kennedy. British by birth, she moved to Mexico in 1957 after marrying the foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*. Diana began teaching Mexican cooking classes and in 1972 published her first of numerous cookbooks. She has been decorated with the Order of the Aztec Eagle, the highest honor bestowed on foreigners by the Mexican government and lives much of the year in her ecological adobe house in Michoacán, Mexico. Her latest book, *The Art of Mexican Cooking*, published by Random House in April 2008, includes more than 200 recipes, ranging from the ultra sophisticated to traditional, pure and simple.

Other books for inclusion on your Mexican-food-to-impress bookshelf include *Larousse de la Cocina Mexicana* by Alicia Gironella and Giorgio de'Angeli (republished in 2006), which has more than 500 recipes for starters, soups, mains, sauces, breads and sweets, as well as traditional methods of preparation of fruits, vegetables, meat and fish. Each recipe explains the origin of the plate, preparation time, grade of difficulty and even the approximate cost of the ingredients.

For vegetarians, Kippy Nigh's *A Taste of Mexico* (1996; Book Publishing Company) features meatless recipes from all over Mexico and includes the background to each dish as well as a breakdown of calories, protein, fat and carbohydrates. Kippy has lived in Mexico since the early 1980s and opened her first bakery (La Casa del Pan) in Mexico City in 1989, followed in 1993 by a second bakery, plus a vegetarian restaurant in her subsequent home, San Cristóbal de Las Casas in Chiapas.

and an outside terrace. All the vegetables are organically grown.

LA CASA DE LAS ENCHILADAS
Map pp74-5 Traditional Mexican \$

☎ 5211-2247; Tokio 110; dishes M\$60; **M Chalpultepec**
Indecisive Librans should avoid this place; five choices of tortilla, 11 of filling, 10 of sauces, and seven of topping, including cilantro, cheese and sour cream. You can't go far wrong (or leave hungry), whatever three-enchilada *plato* you choose. The look is scrubbed pine, bright lights and pastel walls. There is a second restaurant at Liverpool 169 in Zona Rosa, complete with a children's play area; a definite family favorite.

V ZONA ROSA Map pp74-5 Traditional Mexican \$

☎ 5514-8079; Varsovia 14; tacos M\$8, 3-course menu M\$42; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri; **M Insurgentes**
This justifiably popular restaurant is fronted by a taco stand with freshly prepared fillings. Inside, the decor is of the Formica-style school with three TVs, efficient (elderly) service, a congenial English-speaking manager and a great-value three-course lunch menu. Enchiladas, *tortas*, soups, chicken *chilaquiles* and fresh fruit salads are a taster of what's on offer.

KING FELAFEL Map pp74-5 Middle Eastern \$

☎ 5514-9030; Londres 178; sandwiches M\$22, salads M\$35; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat; **M Insurgentes**
This Middle-Eastern fast-food place serves traditional dishes like falafel, hummus and

tabouleh, and is run by a Syrian Jew who knows all the family recipes and is suitably spirited with the spices.

BOSQUE DE CHAPULTEPEC

The *primera* (1a) *sección* of the park has a convenient strip of snack and drink stalls overlooking the southern tip of the Lago de Chapultepec. To get here cross the underpass from Paseo de la Reforma and turn right just past the Monumento a los Niños Héroes. Look for the colorful menus and signs off the main drag to the right; there will probably be a few punters handing out leaflets, as well.

There are around 10 cafés here, with not much to choose between them. Most have outside seating overlooking the lake, complete with fountain. The approximate price for a taco or *torta* is M\$10 – this is probably your best bet. There is also a fairly ordinary cafeteria inside the Museo Nacional de Antropología. For better quality head for the more formal and pricier restaurants in the *segunda* (2ª) *sección* of Chapultepec and the Lago Menor and Lago Mayor lakes, or double back to Reforma via the underpass, where several good restaurants cater to the discerning office workers in Torre Mayor, across from the entrance.

DEL BOSQUE Map p78 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5273-2918; Margen Oriente 2a; buffet breakfast & lunch M\$189-249; ☎ 7am-1am; **M Constituyentes**; **P**

Part of a lakeside trio, Del Bosque overlooks the smaller, more tranquil (ie no *pedalos*) Lago Menor. Brilliant blue wine-and-water glasses on the tables catch any sun rays, brightening up an otherwise somewhat stuffy dining room. The weekend buffets are your best value, with an expansive breakfast and lunch spread available. Afterwards you can waddle round the lake for exercise.

JARDÍN DEL CORREGIDOR

Map p78 Spanish \$\$\$
☎ 5271-1956; General Cano 22; dishes M\$200-235; M Constituyentes

Just across from one of the southern exits of the park, this Spanish-owned restaurant (part of the Park Villa hotel) has a magnificent lion and lioness in a large back garden pen; apparently bought on the street and brought home by the owner's son when they were cubs (a step up from the usual abandoned kitten!). The food is traditionally Spanish; try the garlic mushrooms, followed by *pulpo a la gallega* (octopus Galician style) and chocolate fondue with fruit.

MERIDIEM Map p78 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5273-3599; Lago Mayor, 2a sección; dishes M\$89-170, buffet M\$170; M Constituyentes; P At the northern end of the lake, the Merid-
iem has soothing lake and fountain views and a bumper daily buffet (1:30pm to 5pm) with plenty of hot and cold choices; the latter generally including dishes like *pescado de ajillo* (fish with garlic). Lesser appetites can eat relatively inexpensively here by ordering the tacos, which are well prepared and filling.

EL LAGO Map p78 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5515-9586; Lago Mayor, 2a sección; dishes M\$150-170; M Constituyentes; P This restaurant is more famous for its fabulous views and who's who clientele than (of late) for its food, which is good, rather than exceptional. Push the boat out with a seafood dish like grilled sardines with a arugula salad and grab a pew next to the picture window overlooking the lake. The dining room is seriously grand and the service predictably efficient.

LA LANTERNA Map p78 Italian \$\$\$

☎ 5207-9969; Paseo de la Reforma 458; pasta & pizza M\$115, steak M\$160; ☎ 1pm-10:30pm Mon-Sat; M Chalpultepc

This smart Italian restaurant has an intimate feel with its low ceilings, dark wood-and-tile decor and shelves lined with fine wines. Businessmen from the nearby Four Seasons Hotel can forge deals over a fiery dish of *penne all'arrabiata* (spicy chili and tomato sauce) or get heavy with a fillet of steak with all the trimmings.

BOLUDO Map p78 Argentine \$\$

☎ 5286-0179; Río Lerma 303; steaks M\$130, dishes M\$75; M Chalpultepc

A slick modern interior combined with hearty cuts of imported Argentinean steak makes this a favorite with the briefcase brigade. Those with a lighter appetite can opt for enchiladas, sandwiches or a vegetable grill.

POLANCO

Polanco is the Beverly Hills of Mexico City so, together with designer shops and miniature poodles, you can expect to find some fine dining among the inevitable rip-off establishments. Note that it is wise to reserve ahead at all the top-end restaurants located here.

ÁGUILA Y SOL

Map p84 Contemporary Mexican \$\$\$
☎ 5281-8354; Emilio Castelar 127; dishes M\$250-375; ☎ 1-11pm Mon-Sat; M Polanco; P

A modern temple of somewhat stark decor coupled with exciting updated Mexican flavors, Martha Ortiz is something of a culinary goddess in these parts. Start in style by sipping a *bandera mexicana*, so named because it features the colors in the

top picks
REGIONAL EATING

- Chiapas: Tamales Chiapanecos María Geraldine (p133)
- Guerrero: Pozolería Tixtla (p157)
- Jalisco: La Polar (p142)
- Norteño: El Regiomontano (p139)
- Oaxaca: La Lona Verde (p140)
- Puebla: La Sbia Virtud (p149)
- Tabasco: María del Alma (p148)
- Veracruz: El Bajío (p147)
- Yucatán: Coox Hanal (p138)

CELEBRITY CHEFS

Mexico City is fast becoming Central America's gourmet capital, with a wave of *nueva cocina* restaurants that challenge and express traditional Mexican ingredients, recipes and culinary conventions in new and exciting ways.

Martha Ortiz Chapa is the chef behind the highly acclaimed *Águila y Sol* (opposite) and one of several female chefs to attract international recognition for her visionary take on Mexican food. 'My recipes reflect the pre-Columbian and European roots of Mexican cuisine, as well as being very sensual and feminine.'

'I am continuing a tradition here; women have always done the cooking in Mexico and consider their mealtime to be something sacred; we leave the men to be the politicians! Mexican women have inherent strength and passion, which are motivating forces behind culinary creativity.'

'I think great cooks are like artists. I read a lot, love music, poetry and painting; my food is all about texture and colors, as well as taste.'

Martha's menu changes regularly and is typically based on a central theme: for example, the color black was unsurprisingly chosen in early November for the *Día de los Muertos*; the meal kicking off in style with black margaritas.

Mónica Patiño has four children, three restaurants, two TV cooking shows, part-owns a gourmet delicatessen and has written three cookbooks. Like Martha Ortiz, she is passionate about Mexican cuisine. 'When I traveled to India I saw that the top hotels served Indian cuisine, they were proud of their culinary heritage whereas, for years, the hotel restaurants here would be Italian or French. Fortunately this is gradually changing.'

Mónica has grown her own organic vegetables for 30 years and also believes in offering diners the option of a lighter cuisine. In her *MP Bistro* (☎ 5280-2506; Andrés Bello 10; dishes M\$150-250; ☎ 1.30-11.30pm Mon-Wed, to 12.30am Thu-Sat; M Polanco), for example, she blends Eastern and Western flavors with remarkable success: 'I think the combination of a little acid and chili works very well.' In her flagship *La Taberna de León* (p154), the focus is a similar combo of local and international, like salmon with soy sauce and teppanyaki vegetables. Again, like Martha, she believes that women's sensitivity is an advantage over men in the kitchen. 'My food is infused with emotions. I knead corn dough like a caress.'

Sonia Arias who, with her American partner, executive chef (and a man!) Jared Reardon runs *Jaso* (p146), learnt to cook from her grandmother. 'Mexican women have always played an important culinary role here.' However, Sonia describes her menu as American contemporary 'with touches of Mexican'.

'Essentially our cuisine is dictated by the availability of what is fresh in the market. We change our menu constantly, printing it ourselves for that reason. For example, if Jared finds excellent red snapper in the fish market, he will prepare a dish around it for that evening.'

'Presentation is also very important, we are extremely picky with the little details: the fresh flowers, welcome canapé and even the music, which is provided for us by the DJ from New York's Buddha Bar.'

Looks good, tastes good, sounds good: these restaurants all have something special to offer; exercise your taste-buds (ok, and your wallet) and check them out.

Mexican flag (green, white and red): three shot glasses filled with oak-barrel aged tequila *reposada*, *sangrita* — a tomato citrus drink — and lime juice. The menu includes traditional dishes given the dynamic taste sensation treatment, like the succulent pork loin in yellow mole with gingered mango.

HACIENDA DE LOS MORALES

Map p84 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$
☎ 5096-3054; Vázquez de Mella 525; dishes M\$270-350; M Polanco; P

Often the setting for banquets and receptions, the 400-year-old former silk-producing hacienda serves sumptuous variations on Mexican and Spanish classics in its regally luxurious dining room, surrounded by lush gardens. Recommended

dishes include *chiles en nogada* and the mango flambé. Reservations are essential and the dress is bib-and-tucker formal.

PUJOL Map p84 Contemporary Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5545-4111; Petrarca 254; dishes M\$250-350; ☎ 1-11pm Mon-Sat; M Polanco; P

This smartly minimalist dining room with black-and-white decor is punctuated by the brilliant crimson of red carnations on the tables. The menu reflects a creative approach to classic Mexican and Spanish recipes with a *soupcón* of French influence — and a sense of humor, as evident in the starter of what looks like a quail egg (topped with caviar) in a Chinese soup spoon, actually created from mango and cauliflower. Signature dishes include zucchini-blossom cappuccino

(more of a soup served in a highball glass) and duck carpaccio with *pipian* (pumpkin seed) vinaigrette and *mezcal* foam. If you fancy gleaning a little Pujol culinary flair, consider enrolling in one of the cooking courses (see p134).

BIKO Map p84 Contemporary Mexican & Spanish \$\$\$

☎ 5282-2064; Presidente Mazaryk 407; dishes M\$220-350; ☎ 1:30-11pm Tue-Sat, to 6pm Sun; **M Polanco**

Co-owned by San Sebastián chef Bruno Oteiza, the menu is based on traditional Basque recipes that have been given the *nouvelle* treatment, such as tuna steaks served with ham and dried fruits. The dining room is unostentatiously chic and less bleakly minimalist than some top-end restaurants in these parts. There is an adjacent bar with bucket seats, intimate lighting and rooftops views.

IZOTE Map p84 Contemporary Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5280-1671; Presidente Mazaryk 513; dishes M\$230-300; ☎ 1-11pm Mon-Sat; **M Polanco**; **P** Patricia Quintana is the celebrated owner of this fashionable upbeat restaurant with its innovative menu and uncluttered dining room highlighted by a traditional-style mural. The presentation is superb, minus the tendency to overdose on towering stacks decorated with drizzle, and the relatively simple dishes include chopped cactus and tomato salad, lamb barbecued in a banana leaf and red mullet with crushed pistachios in a *mole* sauce. The restaurant is named after the exquisite white flower that adorns the yucca plant.

JASO Map p84 Contemporary American \$\$\$

☎ 5545-7476; Newton 88; dishes M\$200-250; **M Polanco**

Smoothly run by husband-and-wife team, Jared Reardon and Sonia Arias, who met at the New York-based Culinary Institute of America, progressive palates can dine on dishes such as red snapper with giant asparagus or roast pepper porcini with citrus sauce, all relying on impeccably sourced ingredients. The homemade ice cream choice includes irresistible flavors like blueberry with triple cream cheese and raspberry with hazelnuts and chocolate. There's plenty of swagger on the interior front, with seductive small spaces and stylish decor touches.

PAMPANO Map p84 Contemporary Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5281-2010; www.modernmexican.com; Moliere 42; dishes M\$195-225; ☎ 1:30-11pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun; **M Polanco**

Opened in November 2008 by opera legend (and part owner) Plácido Domingo, Pampano is one of the latest gourmet restaurants in Polanco (the original is in New York). High ceilings, a magnificent central candelabra and icy white walls with a sculpted, rippled effect create a minimalist dining space. The dishes include black bean soup with fresh cheese, plantains, avocado and strips of tortilla; and seafood specialties like tacos de *langosta* (lobster) and the exemplary *pescado de azteca* with *huiltlacoche* in a chili sauce.

CAMBALACHE

Map p84 Contemporary Argentine \$\$\$

☎ 5280-2080; Arquímedes 86; steak M\$310, fondues M\$85; ☎ 1pm-1am; **M Polanco**

You can expect a good grilling at this, one of the better steak houses in town. The front window provides a taste of what's to come, with steaks roasting on the spit. During the week, the low-ceiling dark wood dining room gets packed with local businessmen dining on a menu that, aside from the steaks, includes suckling pig, mixed grill, veal sweetbreads, fondues and (would you believe) a blessedly digestible watercress salad with a choice of Roquefort or bacon dressing.

SAINT HONORÉ Map p84 French \$\$\$

☎ 5281-1065; Presidente Mazaryk 341; dishes M\$150-220; **M Polanco**

This restaurant is especially famous for its vast choice of excellent local and imported wines, having won a place on the *Wine Spectator's* 'Outstanding Wines' list for four consecutive years. The romantic dining room has dreamy Mediterranean seascape murals and a menu that includes innovative French dishes like *escalopes de foie gras de canard chaud aux framboises* (slices of warm duck foie gras pâté with raspberries).

ENTREVINOS

Map p84 Contemporary European \$\$\$

☎ 5582-1066; Oscar Wilde 9; dishes M\$160-180; **M Polanco**

Unostentatiously chic restaurant where Spanish and French dishes are made with salutary (and salivatory) attention to detail.

There are just a few tables, where diners can enjoy French classics such as coq au vin or Spanish paella; the latter is good value if you are a gaggle, at M\$320 for six.

VILLA MARÍA Map p84 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5203-0306; Homero 704; dishes M\$95-\$180; ☎ 1:30pm-midnight Mon-Sat, to 7pm Sun; **M Polanco**; **P**

A large spread with an invariably celebratory atmosphere, the Villa María makes a good choice for that special meal *a la mexicana*. Original recipes like *inflatitas* (mini quesadillas) and *sopa capilla* (with local cheese, squash flowers and corn) incorporate regional styles from around the Republic. Megamargaritas come in 10 flavors.

EL BAJÍO Map p84 Traditional Mexican \$\$

☎ 5281-8246; Alejandro Dumas 7; dishes M\$70-120; **M Auditorio**

Owner Carmen Titita Hernandez Oropeza (better known as Titita) is one of the best-known and best-loved culinary figures in the city. She has written several cookbooks and built a reputation on producing down-home Veracruz-style food. One of five restaurants in the city, this branch has striking folkloric-inspired decor, with one entire wall decorated with colorful woven baskets, another with framed hand-woven fabrics. For starters try the *sopa de fideo seco* (pasta soup with tomato, avocado, cilantro and cream) followed by sea bass in banana leaves or chicken with *mole*.

CREPERIE DE LA PAIX Map p84 French \$\$

☎ 5280-5859; France 79; crepes M\$70-90, salads M\$75; **M Polanco**

There's a Parisian feel to this *creperie*, with its Toulouse Lautrec posters, bustling corner location and attractive outside terrace. The menu includes savory and sweet crepes, a few pasta choices and small or large salads, including goat cheese with walnuts.

OTTO Map p84 Contemporary European \$\$\$

☎ 5282-3861; www.otto-bistro.com; Julio Verne 89; dishes M\$50-80; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Wed, to 12:30pm Thu-Sat; **M Polanco**

The duck-egg blue and burgundy two-tone paintwork equals a fashionable look at this bistro-style restaurant where white-smocked waiters serve up dishes like risotto

top picks

TAQUERÍAS

- El Califa (p150)
- El Borrego Viudo (p157)
- Supertacos Chupacabras (p153)
- Taquería Hola (p150)
- Taquería Los Paísés (p139)
- Tacos de Canasta Chucho (p139)
- El Farolito (below)
- El Tizoncito (p150 & p153)

with fish and mushrooms, salmon with couscous and pineapple, and *crema de flor de calabaza con coco* (soup of squash flowers with coconut). Breakfast goodies include bagels with salmon and cream cheese.

BREADHAUS Map p84 International \$

☎ 5281-0173; Presidente Mazaryk 350; sandwiches & salads M\$59; **M Polanco** Everything costs M\$59 on this menu, including baguettes, *paninis*, *ciabatta* and fat *focaccias* stuffed with a nine-filling choice like serrano ham, roast beef and salmon. If you want to lay off the dough, go for one of their mixed-leaf salads. The space is inside-outside and attracts local business types with limited lunch breaks and expansive appetites.

EL FAROLITO Map p84 Traditional Mexican \$

☎ 5250-2322; Newton 130; tacos M\$28-34, salads M\$48-70; **M Polanco**

An old-fashioned place with smiley service, a vast outside terrace and a menu including tacos, quesadillas and salads (such as Cesar and Greek) plus, astutely reflecting current cholesterol-obesity concerns, a list of taco 'light' choices, such as chicken breast.

KLEIN'S Map p84 Traditional Mexican \$

☎ 5281-0862; Presidente Mazaryk 360; dishes M\$59; **M Polanco**

More New York diner than the swanky Polanco norm, Klein's is a popular hang-out for the local Jewish community, although most of the fare is typically Mexican – *enchiladas*, *pollo y frijoles* (chicken with beans), *sopa de fideos* (soup with noodle-style pasta). You can also get bagels or a plate of kosher salami and eggs.

CONDESA

Condesa (or more cheekily, Condechi) has become the hub of the eating-out scene, and dozens of informal bistros and cafés, many with sidewalk tables, compete for space along key streets. Most of the restaurants are clustered near the convergence of Calles Michoacán, Vicente Suárez and Tamaulipas, while other pockets are found along Montes de Oca, Nuevo León and Mazatlán. Another area to investigate is along the streets that ring the Parque México, with some particularly inviting options opening on that oval of greenery.

It must be added, however, that style often triumphs over substance here, and popularity does not necessarily correlate with quality. Condesa's culinary renaissance is a recent phenomenon, and some places make it on the neighborhood's trendy image rather than their kitchen skills. We've listed some of the more reliable options below.

Most higher-end Condesa restaurants offer valet parking for around M\$25 (though you may wonder how they manage it!).

HIP KITCHEN Map p88 Café \$\$\$

☎ 5212-2110; México 188; mains M\$165-270; ☎ 1pm-midnight Mon-Sat; 🚗 Metrobus Sonora; 📍
At the stylish bistro of Roma's new Hipodrome Hotel (see p210), star chefs fuse Mexican and Asian ingredients in exciting ways: miso-glazed salmon gets brushed with *chipotle*, and *pico de gallo* is served alongside your saku tuna. Dining is in a narrow, romantic space with a wall-length sofa and Art Deco fixtures. Reservations are highly recommended.

LAMPUGA Map p88 Seafood \$\$\$

☎ 5286-1525; Ometusco 1; mains M\$135-160; ☎ 2pm-midnight Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun; 📍
Fresh seafood is the focus of this French-bistro-style restaurant, where a blackboard over the bar announces the daily specials and brown paper tablecloths enable sloppy eaters. Tuna tostadas make great starters, as does the Greek-style octopus; for a main course, have the catch of the day grilled over coals. It may be hard to find a table at lunchtime.

EL ZORZAL Map p88 Argentine \$\$\$

☎ 5273-6023; Alfonso Reyes 139; steaks M\$130-250; ☎ 1-11pm; 📍 Patriotismo; 📍

Run by Buenos Aires expats, this is the best of many options for Argentine fare, with imported cuts, as well as fresh pasta and generous salads. The *parrillada* (M\$460), a mixed grill served on a chopping board, feeds at least two. The small, unpretentious dining room is adorned with photos of Argentine songbird Carlos 'El Zorzal' Gardel.

FONDA GARUFA Map p88 Argentine \$\$\$

☎ 5286-8295; Michoacán 93; pasta M\$85, steaks M\$140-200; ☎ 2pm-midnight Mon, 8am-midnight Tue & Wed, 8am-1am Thu-Sat, 8am-11pm Sun; 📍 Patriotismo; 📍

One of the first in the zone to put tables on the sidewalk and fire up a grill, La Garufa is amidst Condesa's liveliest corridor – expect to be serenaded by street musicians and asked for change. The place owes its longevity to the quality of its Argentine cuts and better-than-average pastas, as well as a romantic candlelit ambience.

CAFÉ LA GLORIA Map p88 French \$\$

☎ 5211-4180; Vicente Suárez 41; dishes M\$85-100; ☎ 1pm-midnight Mon-Sat, to 11pm Sun; 📍 Patriotismo; 📍

A hip bistro in the heart of the zone, La Gloria remains a popular meeting place for both Chilangos and foreigners, thanks to their generous salads, zesty pastas and surprising blackboard specials, not to mention the quirky art on display.

BISTROT MOSAICO Map p88 French \$\$\$

☎ 5584-2932; Michoacán 10; mains M\$80-170; ☎ 1-11:30pm Mon-Sat, to 5:30pm Sun; 📍 Chilpancingo; 📍

A slice of Paris just west of Av Insurgentes, this unpretentious bistro is the successful creation of French restaurateur François Avrenin. It's trendy for a reason: the service is stellar, the salads fresh and varied, and the wines well chosen. Picnickers can stock up on pâté and escargots at the deli counter.

MARÍA DEL ALMA Map p88 Regional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5553-0403; Cuernavaca 68; mains \$100-165; ☎ 1:30-11pm Mon-Fri, to 1:30am Sat, to 6pm Sun; 📍 Patriotismo; 📍

A culinary escape to the Mexican state of Tabasco, María del Alma is a bit removed from the Condesa hubbub. Dining is in a leafy patio among singing birds and

a romantically inclined pianist. Enjoy a *guanabana* margarita as *tabasqueño* owners Jorge and Fernando describe such regional items as tamales *de chipilín*. For a main dish, try sea bass steamed in aromatic herbs. The mind-blowing desserts, say, *dulce de coco con almendra* (a scoop of sweet, shredded coconut spiked with chocolate) are excellent.

PHOTO BISTRO Map p88 French \$\$\$

☎ 5286-5945; Citlaltépetl 23; mains M\$100-170; 📍 Metrobus Campeche

A French bistro cum photo gallery – how could it miss in Condesa? Indeed on any given evening, a smart set fills the intimate Photo Bistro, one of several fine eateries facing the fountain of tiny Plaza Citlaltépetl. Mexican ingredients enliven some of the artistically presented French fare here: slices of jicama add crunch to the spinach salad, and the salmon carpaccio rests on a bed of honeyed amaranth.

ROJO BISTROT Map p88 French \$\$\$

☎ 5211-3705; Amsterdam 71; mains M\$90-150; ☎ 2pm-midnight Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun; 📍 Metrobus Sonora

On a leafy corner near Parque México, this eatery is popular as much for its vibrant social scene as the French-inspired cuisine. The ambience is pure Condesa: loud chatter competing with thumping music, sexy wait-staff, and sidewalk seating behind a plastic curtain. Regulars recommend the duck in passion fruit sauce, or the octopus risotto.

LA SÁBIA VIRTUD Map p88 Regional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5286-6480; Tamaulipas 134B; mains M\$100; 📍 Patriotismo; 📍

Nouvelle cuisine from Puebla is lovingly presented at this cozy spot. *Mole* is the main thing, prepared in the classic Santa Clara convent style or the restaurant's own *verde* version. It laces enchiladas, various kinds of stuffed chilies, and *champandongo*, a sort of tortilla lasagna, which readers of the novel *Like Water for Chocolate* may recall as a dish the protagonist, Tita, prepares for one of her suitors.

EL DIEZ Map p88 Argentine \$\$

☎ 5276-2616; Benjamin Hill 187; steaks M\$88; ☎ 1pm-midnight Sun-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat; 📍 Patriotismo; 📍

The overwhelming popularity of this unpretentious steak place might be attributed to its prices. Quality Argentine cuts, served on a cutting board with zestily dressed salad alongside, average under M\$100, and Malbec wines are similarly reasonable. Those with less carnivorous appetites can order pizza by the square meter.

SUSHI SHALALA Map p88 Japanese \$\$

☎ 5286-5406; Tamaulipas 9; sushi from M\$20, noodle & rice dishes M\$90; ☎ 1-11pm Mon-Sat, to 8pm Sun; 📍 Patriotismo; 📍
This long-standing Japanese deli is noted for its authenticity (owner Hiroshi is from Tokyo) and casual atmosphere. Standouts include the tempura and *negitoro don* (fresh tuna with sesame oil served on a bed of rice).

LA RAUXA Map p88 Comida Corrida \$

☎ 5211-2927; Parras 15; 4-course lunch M\$70; ☎ 1-6pm Mon-Sat; 📍 Metrobus Sonora; 📍
Here's an interesting twist on the *comida corrida* concept, featuring uniquely created Catalan-influenced fare by chef/owner Quim Jardí. Instead of a printed menu, Quim describes what's being served, with at least one vegetarian main course option daily. Pleasant terrace seating under a big tree is usually filled by 2:30pm.

ORÍGENES ORGÁNICOS Map p88 Café \$\$

☎ 5208-6678; Plaza Popocatepetl 41A; salads M\$40-85, 3-course lunch M\$120; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun; 📍 Metrobus Sonora; 📍
More than just a place to buy soy milk, granola bars and certified-organic produce, this store-café facing one of Condesa's cutest plazas prepares tasty meals with an emphasis on fresh, seasonal, organic ingredients. Besides the veggie crepes, tofu fajitas and so on, there are a dozen salads to choose from.

FRUTOS PROHIBIDOS Map p88 Café \$

☎ 5264-5808; Amsterdam 244; sandwiches & wraps M\$45-60; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun; 📍 Metrobus Campeche; 📍
When you need a break from *bistek*, Forbidden Fruits puts together healthy salads, wraps and fruit-juice combos. Consider taking out for a picnic in nearby Parque México.

DON KESO Map p88

Tortería \$

☎ 5211-3806; Amsterdam 73; baguettes & salads M\$40-50; 🕒 10am-midnight Mon-Wed, to 2am Thu-Sat, 1-10pm Sun; 🚏 Metrobus Sonora This casual, reasonably priced hangout near Parque México has great baguettes and salads, plus an exciting cocktail selection. Crowds rush in for the good-value *comida corrida* (M\$65).

EL CALIFA Map p88

Taquería \$

☎ 5271-7666; Altata 22; tacos M\$30; 🕒 1:30pm-3:30am; 🚏 Chilpancingo; 📍

This very popular *taquería* on Condesa's southern edge puts its own spin on the classic Mexican snack, grilling thin slices of beef and tossing them on handmade tortillas. Tables are set with a palette of savory salsas in sturdy clay bowls. Often jammed well past midnight, the place attracts after-hours prowlers in the mood for comfort food.

EL TIZONCITO Map p88

Taquería \$

☎ 5286-7321; Tamaulipas 122; tacos from M\$8.50; 🕒 noon-3:30am Sun-Thu, to 4:30pm Fri & Sat; 🚏 Patriotismo

The original branch of the city-wide chain has been going for nearly 40 years. It claims to have invented *tacos al pastor* (ie cooked on a spit, shepherd style), and half the fun is watching the grillmen deftly put them together. If there are no seats, try the bigger location two blocks east on Campeche.

NEVERÍA ROXY Map p88

Ice Cream Parlor \$

☎ 5286-1258; Mazatlán 81; scoop M\$12, banana split M\$45; 🕒 11am-8:30pm; 🚏 Chapultepec A throwback to a less-franchised era, the old-fashioned Roxy makes its own ice cream and sherbet onsite, including such tropical flavors as *zapote* (sapodilla) and guava. Another branch is at Tamaulipas 161, close to metro Patriotismo.

EL FIGONERO Map p88

Comida Corrida \$

☎ 5211-9951; www.elfigonero.com; Campeche 429-C; set lunch M\$40; 🕒 8:30am-4pm Mon-Sat; 🚏 Patriotismo

In the midst of all the trendiness is this little neighborhood place, offering a three-course *comida corrida* that's a bit more creative than usual. Show up before 3pm to avoid the lunchtime rush. There's sidewalk seating or you can squeeze into the crowded little *comedor*.

TAQUERÍA HOLA Map p88

Taquería \$

☎ 5286-4495; Amsterdam 135; tacos M\$11; 🕒 9am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat; 🚏 Campeche Midmorning, locals crowd this friendly hole-in-the-wall for a stand-up snack. Choose from a remarkable array of fillings, including sardines, green sausage, stuffed chilies and *quelites* (a seasonal green), all temptingly displayed in clay dishes. Tacos are served on two tortillas, the second to catch the overflow, and garnished on request with guacamole or crumbly white cheese.

ROMA

Bohemian Colonia Roma has traditionally been known for its café society rather than its restaurants. Several longstanding coffee shops along Avenida Álvaro Obregón reinforce that image. But Roma has increasingly become the place to go for an evening glass of wine and quiet conversation accompanied by pasta or salad, particularly at some of the sidewalk bistros along Calle Orizaba and around the delightful Parque Luis Cabrera. Another area to investigate is the Plaza Villa de Madrid (aka Plaza de Cibeles) which has recently flourished as a culinary point of reference with some of the neighborhood's finest eateries.

Roma is also a great destination for fans of street food. Besides the numerous street corner vendors of tamales, quesadillas and hamburgers, several weekly *tianguis* (markets) contain popular food sections, with a bewildering array of cheap and tasty snacks.

IXCHEL Map pp92-3

Contemporary Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 3096-5010; Medellín 65; mains M\$120-280; 🕒 8pm-3:30am Mon-Sat; 🚏 Metrobus Durango; 📍 'Fusion' is an overused term among Condesa and Roma bistros, but this late-night supper club takes it seriously. Ixchel's innovative chef deftly fuses Mexican elements (grasshoppers, squash blossoms) with Mediterranean and Asian fare (risotto and tempura). The upstairs club, Love (p170), adds another dimension (Wednesday to Saturday nights), with DJs supplying the appropriately chilled ambience.

LAMM Map pp92-3

Contemporary Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5514-8501; www.lamm.com.mx; Álvaro Obregón 99; mains M\$150-180; 🕒 8am-2am Mon-Fri, 9am-2am Sat, 9am-6pm Sun; 🚏 Insurgentes The restaurant of Colonia Roma's Casa Lamm cultural complex occupies a multi-

LITTLE WHIMS

Antojitos – literally, 'little whims', are traditional Mexican snacks or light dishes. On some menus they're listed as *especialidades mexicanas* or *platos mexicanos*. Some *antojitos* are actually small meals in themselves. They can be eaten any time, and either on their own or as part of a larger meal. There are many, many varieties, but here are some of the more common ones:

burrito – flour tortilla folded over a filling of ham and cheese, heated a little to make the cheese melt

burrito – any combination of beans, cheese, meat, chicken or seafood seasoned with salsa or chili and wrapped in a flour tortilla

chilaquiles – fried tortilla strips cooked with a red or green chili sauce, and sometimes meat and eggs

chiles rellenos – chilies stuffed with cheese, meat or other foods, deep fried and baked in sauce

empanada – small pastry with savory or sweet filling

enchilada – ingredients similar to those used in burritos and tacos, rolled up in a tortilla, dipped in sauce and then baked or partly fried; *enchiladas Suizas* (Swiss *enchiladas*) come smothered in a blanket of creamy sauce

enfrijolada – soft tortilla in a frijole sauce with cheese and onion on top

entomatada – soft tortilla in a tomato sauce with cheese and onion on top

gordita – fried maize dough filled with refried beans and topped with cream, cheese and lettuce

guacamole – mashed avocados mixed with onion, chili, lemon, tomato and other ingredients

quesadilla – flour tortilla topped or filled with cheese and occasionally other ingredients, then heated

queso fundido – melted cheese served with tortillas

sincronizada – a lightly grilled or fried flour-tortilla 'sandwich,' usually with a ham and cheese filling

sope – thick patty of corn dough lightly grilled then served with *salsa verde* or *salsa roja* and frijoles, onion and cheese

taco – the número uno Mexican snack: soft corn tortilla wrapped or folded around the same fillings as a burrito

tamal – corn dough stuffed with meat, beans, chilies or nothing at all, wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves and then steamed

torta – Mexican-style sandwich in a bread roll

tostada – thin tortilla fried until crisp that may be eaten as a nibble while you're waiting for the rest of a meal, or can be topped with meat or cheese, tomatoes, beans and lettuce

level glass-walled pavilion opening on the center's enclosed gardens. It's an appealingly serene setting for fusion fare *a la mexicana*, such as tamarind tuna and *esmoredgal* (cobia, a prized game fish) in tequila cream sauce. After hours, the restaurant morphs into the city's toniest *antro* (p170).

TIERRA DE VINOS Map pp92-3

Spanish \$\$\$

☎ 5208-5133; Durango 197; dishes M\$120-240; 🕒 1-8pm Mon & Tue, to midnight Wed-Sat; 🚏 Metrobus Durango; 📍

The focus is on the wine, with hundreds of vintages lining the cellar-like walls, but there's fine Spanish cuisine to complement your chosen tittle. The mood is smart but not snooty: waiters gladly suggest what to have with, say, a plate of paprika-laced *patatas bravas* (shiraz), or sea bream over black rice (a barrel-aged tempranillo).

IL POSTINO Map pp92-3

Italian \$\$\$

☎ 5208-3644; Plaza Villa de Madrid 6; dishes M\$100-165; 🚏 Metrobus Durango Run by a pair of chefs from Rome and Milan, this superior restaurant features sidewalk terrace dining on an arc of the Plaza Cibeles (aka Villa de Madrid). You might start off with an octopus carpaccio, followed by sea bass wrapped in calzone on a bed of capellini pasta. Otherwise, ask chef Claudio for his inspiration of the day. Don't pass on dessert – the profiteroles with homemade ice cream merit applause.

CONTRAMAR Map pp92-3

Seafood \$\$\$

☎ 5514-9217; Durango 200; mains M\$130-150; 🕒 1:30-6:30pm; 🚏 Metrobus Durango; 📍 Fresh seafood, artfully prepared, is the star attraction at this stylish dining hall with

a seaside ambience. The specialty is tuna fillet Contramar style – split, swabbed with red chili and parsley sauces, and grilled to perfection.

BARRACUDA DINER Map p88 Café \$\$
☎ 5211-9480; Av Nuevo León 4A; burgers M\$70-90; ☎ 1pm-2am Sun-Wed, to 3am Thu-Sat; **M** Sevilla

This retro-style diner does a fine facsimile of gringo comfort food, including cheese-burgers, onion rings, and macaroni and cheese. The late-night hangout also sets up some pretty far-out milkshakes (mmm, mamey).

NON SOLO PANINO Map pp92-3 Italian \$
☎ 3096-5128; Plaza Luis Cabrera 10; sandwiches M\$50-70; **M** Insurgentes; **P**

The plaza's dancing fountains make a lovely backdrop for Italian sandwiches, with things like mozzarella, pesto and smoked salmon stuffed into fresh baked *chapatas* – Mexico's version of baguettes. More than just a snack center, 'Non Solo' is a cozy haunt for Roma's artistic set.

EL 91 Map pp92-3 Comida Corrida \$
☎ 5208-1666; Valladolid 91; mains M\$50-60; ☎ 1-7pm Sun-Fri; **M** Sevilla

Lunch is served to piano accompaniment at this triple-decker restaurant-bar – dumbwaiters deliver the food to the top terrace. It offers a different menu daily, with a long list of homemade soups and mains.

LOS BISQUETS OBREGÓN Map pp92-3 Café \$
☎ 5584-2802; Álvaro Obregón 60; breakfast M\$45, antojitos M\$50; **M** Insurgentes; **P** ☎

The flagship branch of this nationwide chain overflows most mornings; fortunately there are a couple more nearby. Chilangos flock here for the *pan chino* (Chinese pastries) and *café con leche*, dispensed from two pitchers, Veracruz style.

TAQUITOS FRONTERA Map pp92-3 Taquería \$
☎ 5207-4546; Frontera 120; tacos M\$19; ☎ 1:30pm-4am Mon-Thu, to 6am Fri & Sat; **M** Insurgentes

One of a few late-night *taquerías* along Roma's main drag, this is a humble alternative with cheerful staff, a smoky open grill and leather tables and chairs. In addition to the main attraction, there are great sides like

frijoles charros (cowboy beans) and *cebollitas* (grilled green onions).

COYOACÁN

More like a small town than part of the city, the center colorfully fills up with local families at weekends, which means a shortage of chairs on the square at the terrace restaurants. In the unlikely event you are in a rush (or just feel like a mid-morning snack) head for the Mercado de Antojitos just round the corner on Higuera, where a huddle of stalls sell tacos, *gorditas* (thick, fried tortillas, split apart and stuffed with a variety of fillings), tostadas and *pozole*. Brave souls can seek out Don Fello, in the far corner, who stuffs his tacos with pork or beef *lengua* (tongue), *sesos* (brains) or *ojo* (eyes) – a snip (ouch!) at just M\$12 apiece.

LOS DANZANTES

Map p95 Contemporary Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5658-6054; Jardín del Centenario 12; breakfast M\$80, dishes M\$75-M\$150; **M** Viveros
Located on the plaza, the restaurant is an indoor-outdoor space with a slick modern bar backed with cobalt-blue glass in the main dining room and an elegant outdoor terrace. The Swiss-trained chef prepares innovative dishes like squid in beet sauce on creamy rice, surrounded by *cabuches* (the fruit of the *viznaga* cactus). Relax your belt a notch further with the chocolate truffle pie. You'll also find *mezcal* (an alcoholic drink similar to tequila) cocktails available upstairs in the bar; Danzantes now has its own tequila label.

ENTRE VERO Map p95 Uruguayan \$\$\$

☎ 5659-0066; Jardín del Centenario 14C; pizza M\$80, dishes M\$80-150; **M** Viveros
Enjoying a fabulous location overlooking the park, this restaurant has maintained a high reputation. Palate-pleasing touches include starter strips of warm pita bread with a tangy chili-based sauce and the excellent Mexican and international wines available by the glass. Try dishes like the tuna steaks, grilled vegetable platter or Neapolitan style thin-crust pizzas.

LA PAUSE Map p95 Contemporary Mexican \$\$

☎ 5658-6780; Francisco Sosa 287; salads & pasta M\$80; 8am-8pm Sun-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat; **M** Viveros

An effortlessly cool bookshop, art gallery and restaurant, with plenty of vegetarian options; the salads are excellent, especially the La Pause special with spinach, lettuce, serrano ham and goat cheese. Kick back and peruse the art books over a cup of chai, or join the squirrels and birds in the courtyard garden.

EL CARACOL DE ORO

Map p95 International \$\$

☎ 5658-9489; Higuera B16; dishes M\$65-80; **M** Viveros

Oozes cosmo kitsch with jazzily designed painted tables (chessboards, faces, flowers – get the picture?) and equally flamboyant paintings on the walls. Pretend-to-be-art types can tuck into interesting flavors like apple curry with chicken and goat cheese, or *chiles rellenos* stuffed with mango.

EL JARDÍN DEL PULPO Map p95 Seafood \$\$

Mercado Coyoacán; fish dishes M\$75; ☎ 11am-5pm; **M** Viveros

At weekends this timeless classic gets packed out as locals descend on the long shared tables to devour shrimp tacos, fried whole fish, shrimp and oyster cocktails, *caldos* (broths) and the namesake *pulpo en su tinta* (octopus cooked in its own ink).

CAFÉ PARNASO Map p95 Traditional Mexican \$

☎ 5554-2225; Carrillo Puerto 2, Plaza Jardín del Centenario; dishes M\$65; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, to 11pm Sat & Sun; **M** Viveros

The place to linger, not only over countless cappuccinos, but also a groaning *plato combinado* with Spanish tortilla, cheeses, ham, empanadas (small pastry with savory or sweet filling) and sweet pastries. Tip the scales with a *chocolatine*, gooey layers of chocolate cream between sticky filo pastry.

MÉSON DE LOS LEONES

Map p95 Traditional Mexican \$

☎ 5554-5916; Allende 161; dishes M\$55-65; ☎ 11am-6pm Sun-Fri; **M** Viveros

This family-run restaurant has been attracting punters for decades with its unwaveringly authentic menu and genial atmosphere. The half-tiled dining room has a photo display of happy diners enjoying specialty dishes like *carne asada estilode León con mole, rajas poblana, guacamole y frijoles* (roasted meat with mole sauce, roasted peppers, guacamole and beans).

EL TIZONCO Map p95 Traditional Mexican \$

☎ 5554-7712; Aguayo 3; tacos & quesadillas M\$25; **M** Viveros

This is a branch of the popular chain that originated in Condesa. The atmosphere is, well, nil – unless you like bright lights and modern diner-style decor, but the place is spotless, the quesadillas and tacos are particularly good (try the *taco al pastor* filled with spiced slivered pork) and the creamy *horchata* is heaven in a glass.

TAMALES CHIAPANECOS MARÍA

GERALDINE Map p95 Regional Mexican \$

☎ 5608-8993; Plaza Hidalgo; tamales M\$24; ☎ noon-9pm Sat, 8am-9pm Sun

At the passageway next to the arched wing of San Juan Bautista church, look for these incredible tamales by native *chiapaneca* doña María Geraldine. Wrapped in banana leaves, stuffed with ingredients like olives, prunes and almonds, and laced with sublime salsas, they're a meal in themselves.

SUPERTACOS CHUPACABRAS

Map p95 Taquería \$

cnr Avs Río Churubusco & México; tacos M\$8; ☎ 7am-3am; **M** Coyoacán

Named after the mythical 'goat sucker' (something like the Loch Ness monster), this mega taco stall has a new home beneath a freeway overpass, but true mavens should not be deterred. The beef and sausage tacos (with 'a secret ingredient of 127 spices') can be enhanced by availing yourself of the fried onions, *nopales* (prickly pear) and other tasty toppings that fill half a dozen huge clay casseroles in front.

SAN ÁNGEL

This attractive pueblo-style neighborhood is a favorite haunt for tourists on Saturdays, here for the shopping at the art markets in the squares and sophisticated Bazaar Sabado (see p129). During the week, San Ángel slumbers in preparation for the weekly onslaught and is a far quieter place, so pick your restaurant day carefully, depending on whether you fancy an atmosphere of calm or of clamor and crowds.

SAN ÁNGEL INN

Map p101 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5616-1402; Diego Rivera 50; dishes M\$200-350; ☎ 1pm-1am Mon-Sat, to 10pm Sun; **P**

top picks

VEGETARIAN EATS

- **Restaurante Vegetariano Yug** (p142)
- **Saks** (opposite)
- **Restaurante Vegetariano** (p138)
- **Vegetariano Madero** (p138)
- **Orígenes Orgánicos** (p149)
- **Frutos Prohibidos** (p149)

Tlalpan is fast competing with San Ángel as a favorite for leisurely weekend brunches. The best restaurants here overlook a bustling central plaza, surrounded by the faded grandeur of colorful colonial-era buildings. There is also a daily market behind the town hall with food for sale (and to eat), which is inexpensive and, judging by the turnover, reliably fresh and good.

ANTIGUA HACIENDA DE TLALPAN

Map p109 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5655-7315; Calz de Tlalpan 4610, Tlalpan; dishes M\$200-220; ☎ 1pm-1am Mon-Sat, to 7pm Sun; 🚗 Metrobus Dr Gálvez, pesero 'Villa Coapa' The setting is sublime; an 18th-century hacienda tastefully resurrected into one of the city's quintessential colonial-style restaurants. The dining rooms are set around lovely gardens, complete with showy peacocks and a small pond with swans. The menu reads like a novel, with a vast choice including some delectable soups: pumpkin flower, cold avocado, lobster bisque and black bean. Follow this with a fish or spicy meat dish like roast pork loin in a chili sauce.

EL JARDÍN DE SAN AGUSTÍN

Map p109 Traditional Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5485-3409; www.eljardindesanagustin.com; Plaza de la Constitución 9, Tlalpan; dishes M\$75; 🚗 Tasqueña The cuisine here is authentic Yucatecan, with dishes like *sopa de lima* (chicken soup with limes, coriander, onions and garlic), *arroz con platan* (rice with plantains), and *la milanese con papas* (steak baked or fried in egg and breadcrumbs with roasted potatoes) on the menu. The dining room is large and cheerful with brightly painted tables and chairs overlooking the plaza. There is live music at weekends.

An elegant Japanese restaurant with a feng shui minimalist look and lots of white, beige and tubular steel furniture. The food is Asian-authentic, with a vast menu that includes deep-fried noodles, sashimi, sushi, noodles, tempura and various imaginative tofu dishes. Wind up with a shot of cold sake.

CRÊPERIE DU SOLEIL

Map p101 Crepes \$

☎ 5550-2585; Madero 4; crepes M\$65; 🚗 Miguel Ángel de Quevedo A long-time classic on the Plaza del Carmen, this tiny crêperie has a handful of tables and a steady stream of regulars, here for the reliably-good sweet and savory crepes, *chapatas* and coffee.

EL SECRET GOURMET

Map p101 International \$

☎ 5616-4511; Av de la Paz 58; dishes M\$45; 🚗 Miguel Ángel de Quevedo A rare combination of gourmet restaurant and TV dinners; if you are renting an apartment, the frozen or refrigerated selection of dishes available here may appeal. They include various mousses, like salmon, Roquefort and olive, Middle Eastern choices, such as hummus and tabouleh, plus pastas, stuffed tacos, chicken and vegetarian dishes. There is also a deli section selling organic produce, including jams, chutneys and sauces.

CAPICUA

Map p101 Spanish \$

☎ 5616-5211; Av de la Paz 14B; tapas & raciones M\$40-65; 🚗 Miguel Ángel de Quevedo One of several restaurants in a little mall off Av de la Paz, Capicua is a lot smarter than your average Spanish tapas bar, but offers familiar favorites like *pulpos a la gallega*, *tortilla de patatas* (potato omelet), *boquerones alinadas* (anchovies in a vinaigrette dressing), and slices of crumbly Manchego cheese. There's an excellent wine list with riojas.

CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA & TLALPAN

The university city mainly caters to students living on a shoestring so, if your budget is similarly restricted, you can find plenty of inexpensive, fairly standard, places to eat, with the exception of the excellent Azul y Oro. Cuicuilco is famed for its circular temple, rather than its culinary appeal, while

to the ample brunch, with all kinds of egg dishes, pastries and fresh-squeezed juices, plus great quesadillas. The menu includes some unusual dishes like chicken filled with goat cheese. There's a fine Mexican wine list varying from M\$175 to M\$630 a bottle.

BISTROT LA BOURGOGNE

Map p101 French \$\$

☎ 5616-8685; Av de la Paz 32; dishes M\$90; 🚗 Miguel Ángel de Quevedo There's a real inside-outside feel to the dining room here, with its glass ceiling and ivy-draped rafters. Wicker furniture and red geraniums complete the sunny Mediterranean look, while the menu is of the bistro rather than blue-ribbon variety, with classic dishes like snails, terrines, moist tuna steaks and creamy foie gras. Chef Fernand Gutiérrez is used to the discerning bourgeoisie, having worked in the Ritz Carlton and Four Seasons hotels.

SAKS

Map p101 Contemporary Mexican \$\$

☎ 5616-1601; Plaza San Jacinto 9; dishes M\$75-120; ☎ 7:30am-6pm Sun-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat; 🚗 Miguel Ángel de Quevedo; 🚗 Sitting here on the terrace, bathed in sunshine with live music, a cosmopolitan clientele and a view through the leaves to the art stalls, you could be in Montmartre – except the food and weather here are arguably better. Choose from meatless specialties like *poblano* chilies stuffed with *huitlacoche*, Camembert soufflé, huge salads and squash-blossom crepes. The dining room is reminiscent of a monastery cellar, with its arched windows and vaulted ceilings but, thankfully, more cheerful given the good-humored staff and bright artwork on the walls.

CLUNY

Map p101 French \$\$

☎ 5550-7350; Av de la Paz 57; dishes M\$75; 🚗 Miguel Ángel de Quevedo This place has history, dating back to 1974 when it was one of a rare breed of French restaurants in the city. Cluny continues to hit the spot for unpretentious French cuisine, but don't expect much that is nouvelle. Quiche, salad, crepes, decadently delicious desserts and happily generous portions are the order of the day.

SUMO

Map p101 Japanese \$\$

☎ 5550-8355; Av de la Paz 47; dishes M\$65-75; 🚗 Miguel Ángel de Quevedo

This famous inn is located in a magnificent former Carmelite monastery so opulent that the Emperor Maximilian lived here for a while, as well as several Spanish Viceroy. Dine in one of a series of elegant dining rooms filled with antiques and evocative old oil paintings. The food is fittingly classical, start with *crepas de huitlacoche*, followed by the classic *pollo en mole poblano* or *chiles en nogada*. Even if you don't splurge for dinner, have one of its renowned margaritas in the garden. Walk or take a taxi 1km north-west from San Ángel's Plaza San Jacinto.

TABERNA DE LEÓN

Map p101 Contemporary Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5616-2110; Plaza Loreto 173; dishes M\$155-270; 🚗 Miguel Ángel de Quevedo Chef Monica Patiño is one of the new breed of female Mexican chefs who are stirring up traditional cuisine in the most delightful and innovative ways (p145). This is her original restaurant and it remains the most popular, especially at weekends when it is packed out with elegant local families with their well-behaved (and fashionably dressed) children. Seafood is the specialty, with highlights including Baja California stone crab and corn blinis with Norwegian salmon and caviar. Those nostalgic for Venice should choose the carpaccio Harry's Bar-style. The desserts are a work of art and taste pretty good as well.

PAXIA

Map p101 Contemporary Mexican \$\$\$

☎ 5550-8355; Av de la Paz 47; dishes M\$130-285; ☎ 1pm-midnight Mon-Thur, to 1am Fri-Sat; 🚗 Miguel Ángel de Quevedo The achingly cool reception area here has a giant plasma screen where you can watch the food being prepared. The *menú de degustación verde* costs M\$430 but is a real banquet if you are a serious (very hungry) gourmet, with seven courses, including *sopa de alcachofa y pistache pulverizado* (creamed artichoke and pistachio soup) and *raviolis rellenos de huitlacoche en salsa de tres quesos* (ravioli stuffed with truffle-like corn fungus in a three-cheese sauce).

FONDA SAN ÁNGEL

Map p101 Traditional Mexican \$\$

☎ 5550-1641; Plaza San Jacinto 3; dishes M\$90; 🚗 Miguel Ángel de Quevedo; 🚗 On weekends you can sit under the sun brollies on the vast terrace and multitrip

MARKET FARE

Some of the best eating in Mexico City is not found in any restaurant but in the big covered *mercados* and *tianquis*. Fortunately, these long-standing favorites remain impervious to trends.

- **Mercado San Camilito** (Map pp48–9; Plaza Garibaldi; pozole M\$44; ☎ 24hr; 🚶 Garibaldi) The block-long building contains over 70 kitchens serving Jalisco-style *pozole* (specify *maciza* if pig noses and ears fail to excite you). Also served are *birria* and *tepache*.
- **Mercado Medellín** (Map pp92–3; Coahuila; 🚶 Metrobus Campeche) Features an extensive eating area with cheap and filling *comidas corridas*, as well as several excellent seafood restaurants.
- **Parillada Bariloche** (Map pp92–3; Bazar de Oro, Calle de Oro; ☎ Wed, Sat & Sun; 🚶 Metrobus Durango) This stall along the southern aisle of an upscale street market grills some of the least-expensive Uruguayan-style steaks and sausages in town, along with excellent side salads.
- **Tianquis de Pachuca** (Map p88; Melgar; ☎ 10am–4pm Tue; 🚶 Chapultepec) The food section at the north end of the weekly Condesa street market offers many tempting options, but none so mouthwatering as the *mixiotes*, steamed packets of seasoned mutton, whose contents may be rolled into thick tortillas and garnished with fiery *chiles de manzana* (very hot, yellow chili peppers).
- **Mercado de Antojitos** (Map p95; Higuera; 🚶 Coyoacán) Near Coyoacán's Plaza Hidalgo, this busy spot has all kinds of snacks, including deep-fried *quesadillas*, *pozole*, *esquites* (boiled corn kernels served with a dollop of mayo), *tamales* and *flautas* (chicken tacos, rolled long and thin then deep-fried; garnished with lettuce and cream).
- **Tostadas Coyoacán** (Map p95; ☎ 5659-8774; Allende; tostadas M\$20-30; ☎ noon-6pm 🚶 Viveros) Inside Coyoacán's main market (between Malitzin and Xicoténcatl) an attractive array of platters here will stop hungry visitors in their tracks. Tostadas are piled high with things like seviche, marinated octopus and pig's trotters, mushrooms and shredded chicken.

AZUL Y ORO Map p105 Contemporary Mexican \$

☎ 5623-3500; Centro Cultural Universitario; set menu M\$50, dishes M\$65; ☎ 10am–6pm Sun–Tue, to 8pm Wed–Sat

Ricardo Muñoz Zurita famously travels throughout the country searching out traditional Mexican dishes which he then re-creates in the kitchen here with delicious results. There are four seasonal menus, special dishes that change monthly, and a daily three-course menu, made affordable for students on a budget, at just M\$50. The antithesis of the fast-food campus norm, dishes on the Autumn menu include *crema de cilantro con almendras* (cream of coriander soup with almonds) and *tamalitos de acelga* (starter-size tacos stuffed with chard). A second restaurant opened in 2007 in the Faculty of Engineering building in the north end of the campus and yet another is planned for the Centro Histórico. No alcohol.

RAYUELA Map p109 Contemporary European \$

☎ 5655-8456; Plaza de la Constitución s/n, Tlalpan; breakfast & dishes M\$65; ☎ 9am–12:30pm Tue & Wed, to 11:30pm Thu–Sat, to 8pm Sun; 🚶 Tasqueña

Join the line for breakfast on Sunday mornings. Chef Raul's fluffy herb, cheese or

mushroom omelets with a fresh tomato sauce are legendary. His mother, charming Socorro, runs the show, and her interest in art is reflected in the decor and paintings (for sale). Eat inside or under the archways on simple tasty dishes like spaghetti with pesto, fondue, crepes and *chilaquiles rojos* (fried strips of tortilla in a tomato and chili-based sauce, sprinkled with cheese).

LA CASA DE JUAN

Map p109 Traditional Mexican \$

☎ 5655-9444; Plaza de la Constitución 5, Tlalpan; dishes M\$50; ☎ 10am–9pm; 🚶 Tasqueña

This is a place where you want to hang around a while; it has a more European café than restaurant feel, with its small beamed rooms, challenging artwork, board games and wrought-iron balconies overlooking the square. Aside from breakfast, the daily menu changes and will usually include *enchiladas*, or similar, at a very reasonable price.

LOS BIGOTES DE CARRANZA

Map p109 Traditional Mexican \$

☎ 5134-4241; Francisco Madero 16, Tlalpan; dishes M\$40-48; ☎ 8am–8pm; 🚶 Tasqueña

There are just a few tables here upstairs and down, plus a spotless, open-plan kitchen and a reassuringly brief menu of

traditional favorites like *chiles rellenos*, tacos, chicken dishes and steak. Proudly unpretentious, the decor is as dated as the menu, but has plenty of charm.

OTHER NEIGHBORHOODS

KOLOBOK Map pp42–3 Russian \$

☎ 5541-7085; Díaz Mirón 87, Santa María La Ribera; salads M\$30, mains M\$35; ☎ 10am–8pm Tue–Sun; 🚶 Buenavista

Run by a family from Kazan, Russia, this humble place facing the charming Alameda of the Santa María La Ribera neighborhood has excellent layered salads, tasty 'Russian empanadas' and borscht, of course.

LA CASA DE TOÑO

Map p71 Regional Mexican \$

☎ 2630-1084; Sabino 166; pozole M\$34; ☎ 9am–11pm; 🚶 Buenavista

A major destination for families in Santa María la Ribera, this classic dining hall occupies one of the neighborhood's typical old houses, with tables in a series of salons connected by arched passageways and colorful murals of historic figures chowing down. The main attraction is Toño's hearty *pozole*, served with big sides of crispy *chicharrón* (pork rinds) and limes, but most patrons order a platter of fried *quesadillas* or *tostadas* to start. For dessert, Grandma's special flan is the utmost indulgence.

FONDA MARGARITA

Map pp42–3 Traditional Mexican \$

Adolfo Prieto 1364; mains half/full portion M\$21/32; ☎ 5:30-11:30am Mon–Sat; 🚶 Metrobus Parque Hundido

Possibly the capital's premier hangover-recovery spot – witness the line down the street on Saturday mornings – the humble eatery under a tin roof whips up big batches of comfort food for the day ahead. Soulful fare like pork back in *chile guajillo* sauce is doled out of giant clay dishes. Don't miss the *huevos reritos* (eggs scrambled with fried black beans). The *fonda* is beside Plaza Tlacoquemécatl, six blocks east of Av Insurgentes.

EL BORREGO VIUDO Map pp42–3 Taquería \$

Revolución 241, Tacubaya; tacos M\$5-8; ☎ noon-3am; 🚶 San Ángel-M Barranca del Muerto
More than a dozen white-capped men labor over a steaming grill at this busy neighborhood *taquería* just below the Viaducto freeway. The menu announces the taco variations in sparkly type: *suadero* (beef), *longaniza* (sausage), tender tongue, and their specialty, *pastor*, sliced off a huge cone by the entrance. The tacos are small but substantial, bathed in a potent *salsa verde*, and are best washed down with a mug of *tepache*, a pineapple drink fermented in a wood barrel.

POZOLERÍA TIXTLA

Map pp42–3 Regional Mexican \$

☎ 5538-8120; Hernández y Dávalos 35; pozole M\$50; ☎ 11am–9pm; 🚶 Lázaro Cárdenas

East of Roma, in working-class Colonia Algrín, this old-fashioned dining hall attracts plenty of families with hefty appetites. The specialty (they've been perfecting it for almost 40 years) is Guerrero-style green *pozole*, a soulful variation on the classic pork and hominy broth, garnished with crackling *chicharrón* and creamy avocado slices.

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