

The Eye

Beach, Village + Urban Living in Oaxaca

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Issue 110

FREE

The Food Issue





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Editor's Letter

“From my earliest memory, times of crisis seemed to end up with women in the kitchen preparing food for men.”

Barbara Kingsolver

To say that I regard food as important is an understatement. For me food is a religion and I try to make choices that reflect my values the same way we do when picking our sins.

Although throughout the past year, the world has been struggling with random closures and socially-distanced dining, I have had some very memorable food moments. Here are my top 5 in chronological order.

1. **Blue Corn Tortilla with Quesillo in San Jose del Pacifico**, after spending the morning participating in a mushroom ceremony led by a Shaman. Even without the drugs I'm pretty sure the tortilla made with heirloom corn, warm off the comal, would have been one of the year's food highlights.

2. **Sea Bream in Athens**. First off, it was wondrous to be in Athens sitting in a restaurant on a pedestrian street in what is known as the 'anarchist' neighbourhood. The fish was served with garlic potatoes, tzatziki and a glass of crisp white wine. Plus, I was sharing the meal with my Huatulco neighbor half-way around the world.

3. **Raclette with Chorizo and Pineapple**. Eating raclette with Mexicans in Switzerland is a different affair than how my German father prepared it. I was skeptical at first but was soon won over by the tanginess of the pineapple with the chorizo and cheese.

4. **Rabbit Biryani**. I made this dish using a mixture of different recipes- which is something I often do. I added slivered almonds, dried apricots and dates. The fragrant scents of cinnamon, ginger and turmeric that filled my kitchen were a delight.

5. **Chacales in Copalita**. The taste of home. Similar to crawfish, fried in garlic butter and served with crispy tostadas, black beans and a tangy mayonnaise onion dip. Absolutely finger licking!

We hope you enjoy our Food Issue.
Thanks for reading,

Jane

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On the Beaten Path in CDMX: Small Eateries with Big Flavors

By Carole Reedy

In a city of 20 million, not all restaurants receive the recognition they deserve, especially smaller venues without the funds for publicity. Reviewers try their best to visit the countless eating establishments in Mexico City, but they do have their limits.

Here I present small (sometimes tiny) eateries, a few of which may be short on ambience but big on flavor. I discovered them while *flâneuring* through the city or from friends who introduced me to them by enthusiastically declaring “You MUST try ...”

El Auténtico Pato Manila

This might be the best-kept secret in Mexico City. My downstairs, restaurant-going neighbor recommended this tiny venue on the spur of the moment one day as I climbed to my third-floor apartment in Roma Sur. Upon hearing my footsteps he opened his door and said, “Shall we pop out for a bite to eat? Feel like duck tacos?”

That was the start of many visits to Manila Tacos. What a find! The owner has created a small, eclectic menu, with just five items offered:

- Tacos Manila: four duck tacos on corn tortillas
- Tacos Kim: two duck tacos on flour tortillas
- A *torta* filled with duck (*carnitas* style) and avocado
- Won ton
- Spring rolls, filled with duck or without

Enjoy these delicacies while sitting at the counter in the wee locale. Take-out and delivery are available too. Each item is made to order and served piping hot with several sauces. A variety of beers is also available, as well as soft drinks. And that's it! Perhaps you, as I have, will make this a staple in your diet.

Location: I frequent the Manila in Condesa at Culiacán 91. There is also a Manila in Roma Norte on Álvaro Obregón, close to Casa Lamm.



La Selva (move over Starbucks)

Hooked on Starbucks? Mexico offers many high-quality alternatives at much cheaper prices. One of these is La Selva in Condesa, located conveniently a short block from Parque México. Here you will find organic coffee from the Lacandona jungle in Chiapas.



I buy a half-kilo of organic dark roast coffee for about \$7 US. There are small eating areas both inside and outside, on the tree-lined street at Iztaccihuatl 36. Unlike Starbucks, La Selva serves full breakfasts and lunches instead of sweetened pastries and expensive sandwiches.

People watching is a satisfying pastime at this location any day, but especially on Sundays when the park is most active.

Location: Iztaccihuatl 36, a short tree-lined street that runs between Parque México and Av. Insurgentes Sur.

Pastelería Alcazar

Good bakeries are a satisfying alternative to restaurants for breakfast or a snack. Alcazar is one of my favorites as they serve marvelous croissants and an English biscuit, a type of scone that my guests request during every visit.



There's also a selection of small cookies and rich, flavorful cakes, unlike the cardboard, elaborately decorated sugary cakes that adorn many party tables in Mexico. The chocolate truffle cake from Alcazar is especially decadent, with several types of chocolate precisely layered. There are pies too, from lemon-lime to the sweeter fruit pies with whipped cream. Candles and other adornments needed for your celebration are also available.

For lunch, Alcazar offers sandwiches, both vegetarian and meaty, as well as a few salads. In my neighborhood of Roma Sur, all the medical personnel from the hospitals stop at Alcazar for a coffee or lunch, which in my book is a great recommendation.

Need a quick gift? Pop in and buy a packet of chocolate-covered almonds or coffee beans. Coffee sold by the kilo and a variety of teas also make for thoughtful gifts. There's even a fun selection of coffee cups for sale.

Location: Pastelería Alcazar has many locations around the city ... fortunately for us!

Cafebrería El Péndulo

You may think yours truly is confusing her regular book column with this month's food article. Actually, not only is El Péndulo the most attractive and original bookstore in the city, its cafés offer surprisingly good food. There are seven locations throughout the city, and all have the same cozy ambience of rooms lined with books in Spanish, English, and other languages.



The coffee shops serve not just java but also light meals. The breakfasts are especially tasty. I was happily impressed that a simple goat cheese and spinach omelet could radiate such distinct flavors.

Location: The Polanco location is at Alejandro Dumas 81; in Condesa, it's at Nuevo León 115; in the Zona Rosa, it's at Hamburgo 126; and in Roma, Álvaro Obregón 86.

Mallorca

Believe it or not, this little-known restaurant, named for the large island off the coast of Spain in the Mediterranean Sea, is smack dab in the middle of Avenida Reforma, near the Ángel de la Independencia. It is indoor/outdoor, no better ambience for people watching.



Spanish and Mexican cuisine easily blend to give diners a variety of excellent choices and flavors. You'll find the traditional Spanish serrano ham, as well as our beloved Mexican chilaquiles. Entrees such as salmon a la plancha, risotto, and the traditional cream soup from Córdoba, *Salmorejo*, star on this appetizing menu.

There's also a magnificent pastry shop attached to the restaurant that's filled with scrumptious treats such as brownies, chocolates, scones, *chocolatins*, croissants, marmalades, and fine breads.

The hours shift daily, but most days the restaurant is open from 7-8 am until 9-11 pm.

Location: Avenida Paseo de la Reforma 365; there's another one in Lomas de Chapultepec, at Avenida Explanada 710.

Little Tokyo

Foreign influences abound in Mexico City. Most tourists understand the French and Spanish architectural and culinary fingerprints left all over the city, but there is a considerable Asian influence here as well, including that of the Japanese.

Many of you are aware that Mexico's landmark tree, the *jacaranda*, native to South America, was installed in Mexico City by Japanese imperial gardener Tatsugoro Matsumoto in the late 1800s. Ever since, these stately trees with purple blooms have adorned the avenues of the city, most notably in Coyoacán, Avenida Reforma in Cuauhtémoc, and colonia Roma, among many locales. If you visit from February through April you'll relish the blooms followed by the carpets of purple they drop on the streets. (For the tale of Matsumoto and the *jacaranda*, see "How the Jacaranda and Blue Hanami Came to Mexico – and the Japanese *Paisajista* Who Made It Happen," *The Eye*, July 2020.)

After World War II, with the many Japanese immigrants arriving on Mexican shores, the area around the Japanese embassy in the neighborhood known as Cuauhtémoc became a popular spot to gather. Here you'll see the beginning – and subsequent growth and success – of Little Tokyo, in the area north of Reforma around the Ángel of Independencia.

Of course, it began with small informal restaurants but has grown into a formidable Japanese cultural area. This includes the finest of Japanese cuisine and even a *ryokan*, or traditional Japanese inn, if you choose to spend a night or two in the area. The inn Ryo Kan boasts a blend of Japanese and Mexican culture, with four tubs on the roof of the inn for your viewing and relaxing pleasure.



Most of the restaurants, the Toki Doki Market with Japanese gourmet goods, and shops line the street of Río Pánuco. There is a Japanese contemporary art bookstore called EXIT La Librería at number 138. And at number 170 the popular Daikoku Restaurant serves all your favorite Japanese specialties.



A day exploring Avenida Reforma with a stop at Little Tokyo is a perfect way to ease yourself out of the isolation of the pandemic.

Wherever you roam, *Buen Provecho!*

Slow Food 2.0 in Huatulco

A worldwide movement has just arrived on the Pacific coast of Oaxaca.

By Alfonso Rocha

I'm pretty sure you're already familiar with the "slow" concept that's been tossed around for a few years in reference to sustainability, and maybe also you've already heard about a movement called "Slow Food," which usually goes along with a shiny red snail. But have you ever investigated it? Or formed part of the international network that represents this movement? Now you have the chance to do so from Huatulco or any other part of Mexico.

Even though I have been formally a part of the organization Slow Food International since 2012, headquartered in Italy, I am still amazed at how this philosophy can grow and adapt to any circumstances or themes that surround the food sustainability and justice movement worldwide.

The official textbook definition of Slow Food is "a global, grassroots organization, founded in 1989 to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from and how our food choices affect the world around us." Since its beginnings in Italy, Slow Food has grown into a global movement involving millions of people in over 160 countries, working to ensure everyone has access to good, clean and fair food.

Slow Food believes food is tied to many other aspects of life, including culture, politics, agriculture, and the environment. Through our food choices we can collectively influence how food is cultivated, produced, and distributed, and change the world as a result.

The Slow Food international headquarters are located in Bra, Italy – the town in the Piedmont region where the movement was born. It is from here that the association plans and promotes the development of the network and projects worldwide. In Mexico, the Slow Food network began around 1999 among the chefs of Mexico City, but it didn't expand much beyond that urban scenario of high-class kitchens and restaurants until 2012, when Slow Food's governing body decided to move away from the "old ways" of Slow Food 1.0, the main activities of which were dinner events around the table in an expensive restaurant, drinking fine wines accompanied, of course, by local and seasonal foods of high quality.



During the International Congress of Slow Food in 2012, the association promoted a shift into a new era, Slow Food 2.0, going outside the restaurant environment and involving farmers, indigenous communities, young members, and food justice/sustainability activists who are not involved in the restaurant or chef scenarios.

Slow Food 2.0 – a Good Fit for Mexico

Since then, Slow Food in Mexico has grown and is now present from Tijuana to Chiapas, with a very diverse network that includes academics, indigenous communities, chefs, students, and more people interested in promoting this philosophy in the country. It is an honor for me to have formed part of the great journey and growth of Slow Food in Mexico. As an International Councilor I have been lucky to have traveled to different countries like Italy, Colombia, Costa Rica, China, Kenya, Turkey and USA to learn about the diversity of the movement.

And now I am lucky enough to be in Huatulco where a new Slow Food Community has been founded with local actors. Soon you can join – and enjoy – activities that promote good, clean and fair local food in Oaxaca.

Alfonso Rocha is an International Councilor for Slow Food Mexico. To connect with the local Slow Food Huatulco community, contact him at alfonso.rocha@slowfood.mx or look for "Slow Food Huatulco" on Instagram.

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Fish farming in Mexico

By Jan Chaiken and Marcia Chaiken

Given the thousands of kilometers of coastline and the great quantity of fresh lake water in Mexico, it is not surprising that before the Spanish arrived, indigenous people were heavily involved in ocean and inland fishing. It is notable however, that the pre-Hispanic residents also engaged in farming of fish. For example, the extensive inland lake that once surrounded the Aztec capital (now Mexico City) was used to farm fish at that time. Today Lake Texcoco has mostly vanished, along with the pre-Hispanic fish farms.

The 16th-century Spanish *conquistadores* forbade the indigenous population to fish or raise fish for their own use, as they were trying to develop this market for European consumption. Although fishing as an individual occupation was gradually reintroduced in Mexico and later commercial fishing became a major industry, it was not until the 1970s that any perceptible amount of aquaculture re-appeared.

The term aquaculture (in Spanish *acuicultura* or *acuicultura*) refers to the rearing of aquatic animals and cultivating aquatic species for food, including not only fish but also crustaceans, mollusks, and seaweed. Fish and other aquaculture products are raised in floating tanks through which lake or ocean water flows naturally, and are fed controlled diets. The practice of aquaculture was in part prompted by potential financial reward, but also by environmental concerns. A controversial aspect of marine fishing is called “by-catch” – the unavoidable capture in fishing nets of animals and plants that are not used for human consumption. By-catch is not only fiscally wasteful but is responsible for wreaking havoc on marine environments. Aquaculture, on the contrary, results in close to 100% of production being sold for food or other uses. Eighty percent of aquaculture products are used for human consumption.

Mexico now ranks around 23rd in the world in the annual production of its aquaculture economic sector. Most countries ranking higher than Mexico are in Asia, especially island nations with extensive coastlines. Mexico ranks higher in annual aquaculture production than, for example, Canada, the United Kingdom, Russia, New Zealand, Peru, and Australia.

Mexico's lengthy coastline is a competitive advantage in two ways: first, tanks for commercial growing of marine animals are located close to shore in the Pacific Ocean, the Gulf of California, and the Gulf of Mexico; and, second, ports on the coast provide easy access for delivery of harvested product to the interior of Mexico or for export to the Americas and Asia. Mexico experienced an increase in aquaculture of 27% from 1986 (the first year statistics were collected) to 2010 but then suffered a three-year sharp decline because of a widespread virus infection in the types of food that are fed to fish.



In recent years the growth of aquaculture has exceeded its earlier vigor in Mexico, with a 34% increase in five years. Currently Mexico is one of only five countries showing sustained growth of inland aquaculture. Baja California and the states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Veracruz are the most important locations for offshore marine aquaculture in Mexico. Inland aquaculture (primarily trout) is found mainly in Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco, and Tamaulipas.

The aquaculture companies pride themselves on *crecimiento azul*, which is the watery version of a “green economy,” namely one that is sustainable, resource efficient, and environmentally sound. Around the world, the proportion of naturally occurring wild fish stocks that are

biologically sustainable decreased from 90% in 1974 to under two-thirds in recent years, which means that a third of the seafood produced by commercial fisheries comes from fishing locations that will not survive into the future. By contrast, seafood purchased from aquaculture will continue to be available or increase over time. Aquaculture also provides safe, well-paying jobs and is a boost to the local economy wherever it is installed.

The main types of seafood produced by aquaculture in Mexico are *mojarra* (the species varies, most likely a bream or tilapia), oysters, *huachinango* (red snapper), trout, and tilapia, with lesser amounts of *camarón* (shrimp), abalone, and tuna. (Worldwide, the most important aquacultural product is tilapia.) Shrimp account for under 10% of Mexico's aquaculture production, but the amount of shrimp production is increasing rapidly from year to year.

There is a debate about whether farmed fish are as nutritious and as tasty as fish that are wild. The commercial fisheries would have you believe that farmed fish are full of toxins and dangerous. The actual answer is based on local aquaculture practices. Farms that frequently test their water and fish food to be sure there is no toxic contamination are likely to produce wholesome fish and seafood. That is one reason fish farms are not promoted as tourist attractions and are off-limits for water sports – the companies want to avoid pollution. The only visitors likely to be found at a fish farm are scientists, technical consultants, potential investors, government inspectors, and participants in conferences of aquaculture organizations.

In addition, by being raised on feed that is high in omega oils, farmed fish actually are more likely to promote good health in humans than are wild-caught fish. But what about the taste? We have friends who swear they can distinguish farmed fish from wild fish by the taste. However, judging by the way they snarf down fish they do not know were farmed, we have our doubts.

For more information, check out the website of the Mexican government agency that supports aquaculture (among other things) – the Center for Studies in Sustainable Rural Development and Food Sovereignty (*Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Rural Sustentable y la Soberanía Alimentaria*, www.cedrrsa.gob.mx). And ¡buen provecho!

Lemons and Limes

By Brooke Gazer

North of the border, we assign a specific name to each of these tangy citrus fruits, but in Mexico they are all called *limones* (lee-MOH-ness), regardless of size, shape, or color.

There are several varieties of lemons, but in north America, the Eureka lemon is the most common. This bright yellow citrus fruit was propagated in California in the mid-nineteenth century. It is slightly oblong, with a pointed tip on one end. Lemons have a sour flavor, but are considered sweeter and less acidic than the citrus fruit we call limes. The “lemon” type of *limón* is occasionally sold in Mexico, but is more expensive than limes.

There are two common varieties of limes. Persian limes (*Citrus latifolia*) are shaped like lemons, with a slightly smaller nub on the end. The small round ones are key limes (*Citrus aurantifolia*). These are usually bright green, because it is easier to ship and store the hard unripe fruit. But when this tiny lime ripens, the skin turns yellow. It also becomes softer, juicier, sweeter, and less acidic. Mexicans tend to prefer them green, but if you have access to a tree, leave some to turn yellow – the ripe ones make the best lemonade.

In the sixteenth century, the Spaniards introduced this little citrus fruit from Malaysia into the USA and Mexico. It was a commercial crop in the Florida Keys, until a hurricane in the 1920's decimated the trees. After that, growers substituted the larger, hardier, Persian variety. Key limes still grow in Florida, but most small round limes in your grocery store originated from Mexico.



Mexico exports over \$500 million dollars' worth of limes annually. In the 1990s, NAFTA played a huge role in this economic windfall, as 90% of limes imported into the USA are from Mexico. These little green juice balls are beginning to be labeled “Mexican Limes”, and, were it not for the famous pie, the designation “key lime” might disappear altogether.

Regardless of its huge export potential, Mexico maintains a good portion of their limes for domestic use. This

country devours 1.9 million tons per year and is rated as the world's third largest consumer of limes. This citrus fruit, which is as indispensable as chilies in Mexican kitchens, plays an integral role in Mexican cuisine. Locals use both kind of limes but show a slight preference for the smaller round variety in savory dishes. These are slightly more acidic, which would be essential in a dish like ceviche.

Persian limes are seedless and, as they are larger, you can use a regular citrus juicer to make lime juice. The tiny ones require a hand-held apparatus resembling a garlic press. Key limes have a thin leathery rind, but Persian lime peel is closer in texture to a lemon. This makes it easier to grate and due to its size, it yields more zest. This is an important feature for baking because the zest packs a lot of flavor. For either lemon or lime, half a teaspoon of zest is equal to about a tablespoon of juice.

This may seem like sacrilege, but for the reasons mentioned above, I use Persian Limes to make Key Lime Pie. I'm including my recipe in this issue, adapted for the Huatulco grocery scene, along with a couple of simple alternatives.

Brooke Gazer operates Agua Azul la villa, an ocean-view B&B in Huatulco: www.bbaguaazul.com.

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Key Lime Pie

Crust

Traditionally this calls for a graham crust, which you could buy at Soriana; since graham crackers are rarely found in Huatulco, cornflakes are a good substitute.

- 1 cup crushed cornflakes
- ¼ cup sugar
- ¼ cup melted butter
- dash of cinnamon

1. Combine everything in a pie plate and spread it around.
2. Using the back of a spoon press it firmly into the plate, covering the bottom and sides evenly.
3. Bake for about 10 minutes at 350°F.

Custard Filling, Baking the Pie

- 4 eggs
- *1 can La Lechera (condensed milk)
- *½ small container plain yogurt
- ½ cup lime juice
- 3-4 tsp lime zest (2 medium Persian limes)

1. Lightly beat everything together except the lime zest.
2. Add that last and pour the custard into the cooled pie crust.
3. Bake for about 20-25 min at 350°F.

**North of Mexico, cans of condensed milk are 14 oz (about 445 ml), but in Mexico they are 290 ml. Unless you make a double recipe, what are you going to do with half a can? So, I tried substituting yogurt for the extra amount and voila ... it worked, plus it cut out a few calories.*

No matter how you make it, Key Lime Pie can be served warm or cold. You can also lighten up this dessert by just making the custard or making Lemon Chiffon.

Lemon Custard – skip the pie crust, thereby omitting extra calories.

1. Make the lemon custard and pour it into 6 custard cups.
2. Place them in a shallow pan of water and bake for about 20-25 Minutes.

Lemon Chiffon – this will settle as it cools but will still be a soft chiffon texture, with a bit less cholesterol.

1. Substitute 2 egg whites for 2 of the 4 eggs (or use ¼ cup of claros*), and beat until stiff.
2. Mix all the custard ingredients except the beaten egg whites; fold those in at the end.
3. Pour the custard into 6 custard cups.
4. Place them in a shallow pan of water and bake for about 25 minutes – it might take another 5 minutes, because if the whites are not totally set, the desert will fall.

** Claros are egg whites and are found in ½ liter cartons in the refrigerator case.*



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The Six Most Renowned Unique Foods in Oaxaca

By Alvin Starkman, M.A., J.D.

The state of Oaxaca is acclaimed for its gastronomic greatness, boasting some of the most distinct and delectable cuisine in all Mexico. In addition to the region's famed moles, food stuffs range from grasshoppers to *gusanos*, *tejate* to *tlayudas*, and Oaxaca's signature *quesillo*. While other parts of Mexico are noted for distinguishing dishes, Oaxaca stands apart from the rest for the sheer number of inimitable culinary innovations. The variety of inventive ingredients and their combinations produce unique flavors, and an opportunity to embrace the non-traditional.



Gusanos are actually larvae, an infestation of the maguey (agave) plant used to make mezcal. The gusano is best known as “the worm” that is at times encountered at the bottom of a bottle of mezcal, by design of course. However, like chapulines, they constitute an ingredient in some salsas, and are also used in other recipes. One purchases gusanos either dried or as live crawlers. In both cases they are usually crushed before use in recipes. Sal de gusano (worm salt) is used to rim glasses for cocktails, sprinkled on fresh fruit to bring out flavor and sweetness, and served alongside lime or orange wedges to chase shots of mezcal.

Mole Much More than Negro

The phrase “seven moles of Oaxaca” is a misnomer, though the initial suggestion of a fixed number undoubtedly did bring notoriety to the breadth of these thick sauces. Mole *negro* is the most renowned because of the unique combination of chiles and chocolate, the sheer number of ingredients used to make it (generally between 30 and 35), and the labor intensity of its preparation, taking at least a couple of days if made true to tradition. But there are innumerable other moles, varying in flavor depending on the region (ready availability of ingredients) and family tradition, though they are typically broadly categorized as one of the seven.

A key feature of Oaxacan moles is that in most cases they are made independent of the chicken, turkey, pork, seafood or beef; a contrast with stews. Some moles keep well refrigerated for a few days or even months if frozen (i.e., mole negro), while others are best eaten the day they are prepared so that the flavors of the herbs and spices maintain their individuality on the palate (i.e., mole *verde*). Still others lose their distinctiveness if prepared without a signature component (*chile chilhuacle* in the case of mole *chichilo*).

Oaxacan Chapulines and Gusanos del Maguey

Chapulines, or grasshoppers, are the best known Oaxacan food next to mole. They are sold on the street and in the markets. They are most frequently eaten as a snack food, just like a bag of potato chips. However, they are also served as part of a mixed appetizer plate, in addition to being incorporated into recipes for salsas and dips, adding a unique essence. While chapulines are available year-round, discerning Oaxacans, mainly in the villages and towns, will only eat them when they are fresh, meaning harvested throughout or at the end of the rainy season. Otherwise, most of these high hoppers are imported from outside of Oaxaca's central valleys, often from the state of Puebla. They're a uniquely flavored high protein snack worthy of at least sampling.

Tejate, Tlayudas and Quesillo

While technically a beverage rather than a food, tejate is worthy of comment because it's virtually always encountered in markets, both indoor markets in the city and nearby towns, and outdoor weekly marketplaces. Women dish out the drink from oversized green glazed clay basins to passersby electing to have it ladled into plastic drinking cups “to go,” or into large half gourds known as *jicaras*. The drink is usually beige in color with a foamy film, having the appearance of a sink of water with spent shaving cream floating atop. But don't let the look dissuade. Consider tejate a pre-Hispanic mocha frappe. The high-energy drink is made with corn, cacao, the flower of an aromatic plant, the seed of the tropical fruit *mamey*, yes, a bit of ash, and sometimes small amounts of a seasonal nut, with sugary water added for the asking. Its arduous preparation yields a truly distinguishing taste.

For Mexicans, tlayudas are synonymous with Oaxaca, and only Oaxaca. They're prepared and eaten both on street corners (usually at night) and in restaurants. A tlayuda is an oversized semi-crispy corn tortilla, served either open faced or



folded over into a half moon. The super-sized tortilla is filled with a thin layer of *asiento* (rendered pork fat), bean paste, lettuce, tomato, cheese, and either *tasajo* (thinly sliced beef), *cecina* (thinly sliced pork with a crushed chile mix dusting) or *chorizo* (Mexican sausage). The meat is sometimes served alongside the tlayuda rather than inside or on top. A unique feature of the tlayuda is that it's often grilled directly over hot coals. Snacking on a tlayuda with friends and family late at night is as ritualistic as it gets in Oaxaca. For the asking, eateries will prepare a vegetarian or even a vegan tlayuda.



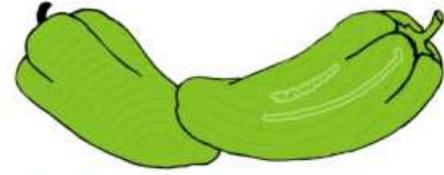
Queso is Spanish for cheese. But in Oaxaca *queso* connotes a fresh cheese much like cottage cheese (compacted dry as distinguished from the commercial loose curd product) or feta. But *quesillo* is totally different. It's string cheese, eaten most often by the small piece when a component of a mixed appetizer platter, or melted as an ingredient in another dish, after being thinly shredded. Hence it's the key ingredient in quesadillas and *queso fundido* (cheese fondue), and usually an integral part of a tlayuda.

Embrace the Opportunity to Sample It *All* When Visiting, Even If Only for a Day

Spending just 24 hours in the city of Oaxaca provides ample opportunity to pry loose an otherwise uninspired palate. Walk through any marketplace, certainly the famed Benito Juárez downtown market, nibbling on crunchy chapulines, then stop for a refreshing drink of tejate. After strolling, lunch at a local eatery, making sure to order the *comida corrida* (inexpensive complete meal with a selection of local cuisine from which to choose, served uncharacteristically fast), invariably including the restaurant's best mole. Consider starting the meal as Oaxacans often do, with a shot of house mezcal served with lime or orange, and yes, sal de gusano. After sightseeing, followed by a well-deserved rest for body, soul and culinary constitution, head out for a late night tlayuda laden with quesillo.

Whether in the city or a coastal town, imagine the breadth of deliciously different gastronomic delights awaiting you with a whole week (or lifetime) to spend indulging in Oaxaca's exquisite cuisine.

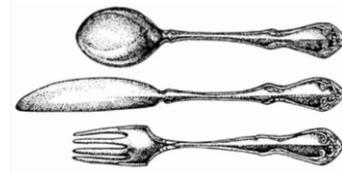
Alvin Starkman operates Mezcal Educational Excursions of Oaxaca (www.mezcaleducationaltours.com).



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Glocal Gastronomy: Growing Tourism in Mexico

By Deborah Van Hoewyk

The Stealth Food Tour

Almost 20 years ago, my husband and I left Orizaba, Veracruz, after visiting a friend, and set off down the Sierra Madre del Sur to see the Pacific Ocean. We stopped over in Tehuacán, where we wandered around the *zócalo* (main square) that evening, eyeing the brightly-lit taco carts with trepidation. We were intimidated by the rapid-fire system for ordering, paying, and getting plates of three tacos with bewilderingly different fillings. But the local eaters, perched on the plastic stools circling each cart, didn't let us go hungry. They gestured, they pointed, they chattered in Spanish we didn't yet understand – and we had a delicious dinner!

Further down the road was the state capital, Oaxaca de Juárez, where we ate more tacos, crunched on grasshoppers, and tried to figure out why the sauce on the chicken was redolent of chocolate. The food highlight, however, was the *La Noche de los Rábanos* (The Night of the Radishes), which takes place on December 23.

The *zócalo* was turned over to an elaborate network of boardwalks past tables displaying scenes largely made up of intricately carved radishes. These are not your namby-pamby Cherry Belles or French Breakfast radishes. They put Japanese daikon to shame, reaching a weight of up to 10 pounds and a length of up to 2 feet. Complemented with separate competitions in scenes made of cornhusk (*totomoxtle*) and dried flowers (*flores inmortales*), the radish displays compete for a large prize (\$21,000 pesos in 2018) in the traditional and free (*libre*) categories. Traditional includes religious and cultural scenes, while there's no limit to the imagination in free scenes. Unfortunately, the radishes wilt, so the whole thing – including the actual carving and competition – is over in one day.

Back on the road, at the end of the road, we discovered La Bocana, then a quiet paradise of palm trees and the Pacific Ocean (not so much, not no more). As it still is, however, Los Güeros was very much a family restaurant, and there we learned to love *camarones al mojo de ajo*.

While we were completely unaware that we had taken a food tour, we had. We had walked through a century-plus-old cultural event with the radishes, eaten traditional foods (those grasshoppers and that mole), and talked to (sort of) local people eating local street food. It was a harbinger of things to come.



Tourism Trend Alert – It's All about the Experience!

Although we see a lot of old-style tourism in Huatulco, aimed at relaxation and consumption – all-inclusive hotels with endless buffets, massages, and multiple pools, cruise ships with guided tours and careful activities – we also see that newer trends in tourism have arrived in Huatulco.

Sometime around 2015, tourism associations and researchers started commenting on “experience tourism.” Travel now offered the chance of “having a once-in-a-lifetime experience or gaining an emotional connection with cultures and nature.” By 2016, the Harris poll reported that 72% of millennials (25- to 40-year-olds) preferred spending their travel dollars on unique experiences than on souvenirs, embroidered blouses, or standardized hotels. The poll doesn't mention that experiences take a lot more travel dollars than, say, an *alebrije* carving that fits in your carry-on.

Journey Mexico (www.journeymexico.com), a guide-owned and -operated agency located in Mexico City, Puerto Vallarta, and Cancun, “specializes in crafting unique, authentic and unexpected travel experiences for the discerning and sophisticated traveler.” The words “luxury,” “adventure,” “culture,” “nature,” and “villas” appear on the photos scrolling across the home page.

According to Stephanie Schneiderman, of Tia Stephanie Tours in Ann Arbor, Michigan (www.tiastephanietours.com), “People are turning away from mindless consumerism and are realizing that what really fills the mind and soul are experiences, not things.”

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Experiencing Food

And, of course, what better way to experience a culture than with food? In 2010, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), designated traditional Mexican cuisine an “intangible cultural heritage of humanity” because it is “a comprehensive cultural model comprising farming, ritual practices, age-old skills, culinary techniques and ancestral community customs and manners. It is made possible by collective participation in the entire traditional food chain: from planting and harvesting to cooking and eating.”

There are many ways to experience food in Mexico – sampling the range of regional cuisines, learning to cook popular and/or specialized Mexican dishes, visiting the makers of tequila or mezcal – and the Mexican government has jumped on the food-culture bandwagon. Impelled by the UNESCO *Patrimonia Mundial de Humanidad* designation and building on the already established *Rutas Turísticas de México* (e.g., the Missions Route through Baja California, the Route of Silver in Aguascalientes, the Mezcal Route in Oaxaca), the Secretariat of Tourism has organized 18 *Rutas Gastronómicas de México*. The routes involve 155 destinations in 32 locations, more than 1,500 dishes and beverages, and over 500 chefs who have “created dishes that merge tradition and modernity.” There are routes about particular foods – cacao in Chiapas and Tabasco, coffee and vanilla in Veracruz, the “thousand flavors of mole” in Oaxaca. In Querétaro and Guanajuato you can order “dishes with history”; in Jalisco your experience is accompanied by the “sound of the mariachis.”

Like the *Rutas Turísticas*, the food routes are self-guided tours. The Secretariat of Tourism has put together a 96 page booklet that covers all the tours – download it from <https://cedovirtual.sectur.gob.mx/janium/Documentos/12282.pdf>.

Both Journey Mexico and Tia Stephanie offer experiences in Mexican cuisine, for example, an 8-day tour of “Food, Wine and Tequila in Colonial Mexico” and another 8-day tour, “Maíz, Mole & Mezcal: Traditions and Flavors of Oaxaca,” respectively. Eat Mexico Culinary Tours (www.eatmexico.com) will take you on a street food and market tour in Puebla; see “¡Salud! A Toast to the Vinyards of Mexico” in the May-June 2021 issue of *The Eye* to put together your own wine-tasting tour in Guanajuato, Querétaro, Baja California, or Coahuila. Intrepid Travel (www.intrepidtravel.com) provides a mega itinerary from Mexico City through Puebla and Oaxaca City right on down to Huatulco, where tour participants experience a Pacific Ocean boating expedition followed by a coastal cuisine masterclass on one of the area’s “stunning beaches.”



Not that the Huatulqueños don't have their own culinary experiences to offer – most take a half or whole day. Wahaca Cooking School in La Bocana offers a tour to the Monday market in San Pedro Pochutla (<https://wahacacooking.mx/>). Maxi Travel will take you to the Pochutla market en route to the El Pacifico Coffee Plantation high in the mountains of Sierra Madre del Sur (<https://www.maxitravel.mx/>). A number of local guides will take you to agave fields to explore the making of tequila and mezcal, or to coffee plantations.

Hagia Sofia is a fascinating place on the Magdalena River in the mountains between Santa Maria Huatulco and Pluma Hidalgo; proprietor Armando Canavati has created an eco-park with adventure activities and the largest collection of exotic heliconia flowers in the western hemisphere. Armando's underlying goal, however, is to cultivate exotic fruits from around the world that will grow in the lower Sierra Madre, with an eye to creating agricultural employment. Have you ever eaten the fruit that surrounds a single cashew? How about mangosteen? You can on a trip to Hagia Sofia! (<https://hagiasofia.mx/hagia-sofia-eco-park/>).

And we don't just write about the foods of Mexico at *The Eye*. Multi-entrepreneur Jane Bauer offers cooking classes at her Chiles&Chocolates school in the village of Zimatán, where she also hosts “Village to Table” dinners of 8 courses with wine pairings (<http://www.huatulcocookingclasses.com/>). The dean of mezcal education is *Eye* writer Alvin Starkman, who runs Mezcal Educational Tours in the rural areas around Oaxaca City. Alvin offers day tours to local *palenques* (mezcal-making operations), and multi-day tours (up to a week long), “Comprehensive Mezcal/Culinary/Cultural Expeditions.” Were it not for the pandemic, I would have been on one of Alvin's tours in March 2020 ... sigh. Tours have resumed, however: <https://www.mezcaleducationaltours.com/>.



www.HuatulcoCookingClasses.com

The Many *Quelites* de México

By Julie Etra

Do you ever wonder about the *romeritos* in the produce section of Super Che (the Chedraui supermarket in Huatulco), or wherever you shop for produce? How are they are cooked? Or served fresh? As an ingredient in a particular dish? They are one of many Mexican edible wild greens (think of young dandelion greens, which by the way, are not native to North America), known as *quelites*. The name is Nahuatl in origin, from *quilitl*, which means “tender edible herb.” They are vital in Mexican cuisine, their use predates the Conquest, and they are recognized for their high nutritional value.

These greens typically grow wild, like dandelions, and can be found in fields of other crops. Over a dozen plants, not all of which are native to Mexico, are considered *quelites*. Some of these plants are classed as weeds or pests in the United States, as we have not learned how to appreciate them. For *hispanoparlantes*, this video offers the best explanation and description of *quelites*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OSFM5dy_2Y (it is fun to watch even without knowing Spanish!).

The following is a list of some of the most popular *quelites*, and examples of their preparation.

Romeritos (*Suaeda torreyana*), known as sea-blight in English, grow in tidal wetlands and salt flats, and likes salty soils. It is known by many other names in the indigenous languages of different areas in Mexico (as are the other *quelites*). It is prepared as a traditional Christmas dish, or *Romeritos Navideños*, which includes mole paste, *nopales* (cactus paddles), potatoes, and garlic, but can be more simply simmered and served with *nopales* and shrimp.



Huazontle – the name is shortened from the Nahuatl *huauhzonitli* – is also known as *quelite cenizo* (*Chenopodium berlandieri*). It is frequently found in somewhat salty soils, and is considered a weed in the western United States. It is related to another “weed,” lambsquarters (*Chenopodium alba*), which is actually quite tasty as a leafy green when it is young. Although huazontle is bitter when eaten raw, it is highly nutritious and can be prepared in a variety of ways, including with battered eggs (*capeado*), fried, simmered, in soups, and stews; it is bitter when eaten raw. (See “Mexican Vegetables: How about Huazontle?” in *The Eye*, August 2014.)



Verdolaga, *Portulaca oleracea*, or common purslane in English, is another *quelite* that shows up in irrigated pastures and vegetable gardens, including mine, and is highly nutritious. A common recipe is to sauté it in oil with onion, garlic, tomatoes, and chilies, but it is also eaten raw and in salads and tacos.



Alache, Halache or Vilota (*Anoda cristata*) is *malva cimarrona* and is in the same family with the hibiscus, the source of the delicious *jamaica* tea, and hollyhocks. These greens grow rapidly, like a robust weed. The tender leaves are used in the preparation of soups and broths, in combination with garlic, onion, *pepicha* (*Porophyllum linaria*, in the sunflower family. another *quelite*) and served with serrano peppers. It is also prepared as a medicinal tea.



Chepil (*Crotalaria longirostrata*), also known as *chipilin*, is an attractive *quelite* in the pea family. Once you recognize this plant and its pretty yellow pea-like flowers, you will see it growing everywhere around Huatulco. The leaves are used in traditional Oaxacan tamales in the masa, or dough. They are also used in the Oaxacan soup called *espesado de chepil*, which includes squash blossoms, zucchini, corn, lime, and salt. In Chiapas they make a soup with corn dough balls mixed with chepil. Sometimes you can find the tamales de chepil in the Mercado Organico de Huatulco, and it is very popular in Oaxacan cuisine.



Hoja santa or **momo** (*Piper auritem*). *Hoja santa* means “holy leaf”; a favorite Mexican recipe, *quesadillas de hoja santa*, uses the leaf of this plant as a substitute for the tortilla, with *quesillo* (Oaxacan cheese), mushrooms, onion, garlic, *epazote* (another Mexican herb), salt and pepper. YUM. There are recipes for chicken in hoja santa, and aguas (beverages) made with hoja santa. This is a versatile plant, with the leaves used to wrap all sorts of ingredients, and is an essential component of the green mole of Oaxaca.



Pápalo (*Porophyllum ruderale*). This leafy green is said to taste somewhere between arugula, cilantro and rue, and is used in salsas (salsa verde, guacamole) and to season meat. It is also used in tacos, and soups, and should be served raw. Also known as *quilquina* and *papaloquelite*, the root of the word, so to speak, comes from *papalotl*, the Nahuatl word for butterfly.



Quintonil, also called *bledo* (*Amaranthus spp*). This *quelite* is well known from its seeds, but preparation of the greens varies, and it is used in several dishes. The leaves can be boiled with salt and combined in stews with chilis, onion and tomato. Sometimes they are also steamed and sauce is added. In the municipality of Naupan, Puebla, the greens are used in tamales with pork.



Hierba mora (*Solanum nigrescens*). This plant has good company as it is in the same family as potatoes, chilis, and tomatoes, all edible, and the nightshades, which are poisonous. It has medicinal value, for pain relief and for cleansing of the liver and kidney. The leaves, flowers, fruit and even the root are used. It is also used in stews and soups and is a vegetarian alternative for Catholics abstaining from meat on Fridays. The tender leaves are boiled; sautéed tomatoes, chilies, and onions are added. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpdFRAYVzqk>



Chaya (*Cnidioscolus aconitifolius*). I first learned about this plant in Merida, as it is very popular in the Yucatan, but I have also enjoyed delicious *agua de chaya* at the Saturday Huatulco Organic Market, which is especially tasty with cucumber (*pepino*). Chaya leavers make an excellent soup and a great torta with potatoes, like a potato pancake. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHE3XKWludM>



Flores de agave. Also known as *galumbo*, agave flowers can be simmered until tender, and with, guess what, sautéed tomatoes, chilies, and garlic. Add a pinch or two of salt and bicarbonate of soda, then add the drained flowers. Serve with tortillas de nopal. Although not directly related, yucca flowers (*Yucca spp.*) can be fleshy in texture, almost like endive, eaten raw and in salads.



Flores y cogollitos de Colorín (*Erythrina coralloides*). Flowers and flower buds of the colorin tree - yes, we do have a Calle Colorin in la Crucecita, where the streets are named for native trees. This beautiful tree attracts lots of hummingbirds. They can be prepared with beans to make pancakes. In the Nahuatl region of Mexico state, they are eaten cooked or fried; scrambled with eggs; mixed with a chili sauce, garlic, and epazote; served with beans and flavored with chili and cumin.



Lengua de vaca, or cow's tongue (*Rumex mexicanus*). This quelite is used as a condiment due to its sour and slightly bitter taste. It is related to dock and sorrel, both foraged and grown in the U.S. Its use varies with location, of course, as Mexican cuisine varies enormously by region. In central Mexico, ground stems and leaves of lengua de vaca is used to flavor the mole de olla broth; they are also used in salads and sauces, steamed or stewed in tomato sauce.



Malacate, Malacote (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) is an aquatic plant. Known as floating pennywort in English, the plant has naturalized to the point of being an invasive species in Europe. A relative of carrots, celery and parsley, the young leaves and stems of malacate are used in salads – the fresh flavor is reminiscent of celery. Older leaves are bitter, but can be cooked.



Okay *Eye* readers, you have enough to digest. ¡Buen provecho!



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Tortillas y Más ...

By Randy Jackson

As a bread lover, it's of little wonder that wherever or whenever I tried my first tortilla, I loved it at first taste. The Aztec (Nahuatl) word for tortillas is *tlaxcalli* (pronounced *PLUX-cal-a*). The Spanish name for this delightful flat bread is *tortilla* ("little round cake"). Maize tortillas emerged in early Mesoamerica and almost single-handedly enabled the flourishing of successive advanced civilizations in Mexico and Central America. The maize tortilla provided a stable source of calories and nutrients for millions of people across centuries.

Mexico remains the world's largest consumer of tortillas. The Mexican per-capita tortilla intake, mostly in the form of corn tortillas, is 85 kilos per year (a little more than 187 pounds). In some parts of Mexico, this consumption is as high as 120 kilos per person, per year (just over 264 pounds). Checking in our fridge, 1 pkg of 10 whole wheat tortillas is 340 grams, so doing the math; 120 kilos of tortillas per capita per year = 9.6 tortillas per person per day. Global sales of tortillas in 2012 was estimated at \$12 Billion USD, while tortilla chips and other corn snacks accounted for a further \$10 Billion USD. Eso es mucho!

As a tortilla consumer - I'm a flour tortilla guy. And, although I'm OK with the reasonably healthy tortilla wraps, there are other, some might say, less healthy tortilla options too. I'm referring to a category of tortilla recipes called "stuffed tortillas."

I would define stuffed tortillas as a baked or fried dish where some sort of filling is encased in tortillas. Enchiladas, chimichangas, and quesadillas are the most recognizable versions of stuffed tortillas. Of course, there are many more. One recipe I can speak to is something I call Mexican Deep Dish Tortillas. My version of this dish is made using an air fryer, and you can see my YouTube recipe video for it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJtCC9OSsiM>.

Of course, there is Tortilla Lasagna too, a dish that is right up my alley. Unfortunately, the current (July) heat wave in Western Canada has kept me from using the oven to make and report on this delectable stuffed tortilla dish.

Beyond food, for the real tortilla lovers the Internet has plenty of tortilla-themed items. In wearables I've found women's dresses and skirts that look like tortillas. Something that caught my eye was a tortilla-style baby blanket. This could allow young parents to wrap their newborn up like a burrito. There are tortilla/burrito blankets for adults too - as you might imagine, they are round. I'm putting one on my Christmas list. And what about tortilla car air fresheners to hang from your rearview mirror? Yup, that too is just a click away.



In 2003, the state of Texas, proclaimed tortilla chips and salsa to be the official state snack (who knew - Texas even has an official state cobbler - Peach). NASA has used tortillas for astronaut meals in space since the 1980's. Unlike bread, tortillas don't leave crumbs to float about the space station. Scientists at the University of Houston have been working on extending the shelf life of tortillas for long-duration space missions. Tortillas now remain fresh tasting for up to 18 months on the ISS (International Space Station).

In 1977, in southeast New Mexico, in the kitchen of Maria Rubio, the face of Jesus appeared on a tortilla. This event became known as the Tortilla Miracle. The apparition became an international curiosity. Over the years thousands of people came to see the tortilla. The Tortilla Miracle changed the lives of the Rubio family. There were several TV appearances for Maria, including one on the Phil Donahue show. A movie titled "Tortilla Heaven" was made (starring George Lopez) based on this tortilla story. Through it all, Maria Rubio remained a devout Catholic. She believed in the divine origin of the Jesus image on the tortilla. It arrived at a critical time for the Rubio family. They were facing severe poverty and Maria's husband was an alcoholic.

Unlike the Rubio family, few lives are changed by a tortilla. The virtue of tortillas is that they do represent an important food staple for the peoples of the Americas. And, I believe, eating a stuffed tortilla while wrapped in a tortilla blanket, can only be a good thing.

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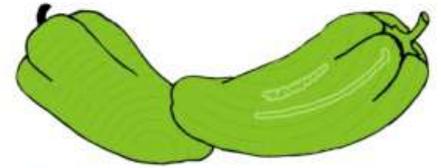
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Next clinic: Saturday, July 10, El Zapote
Stand-by: Sunday, July 11, Huatulco (Hotel Delphinus, Chahue)
Contact by FB Messenger:
<https://www.facebook.com/palmasunidasac>

Chiles & Chocolate

Cooking Classes

Huatulco, Oaxaca



The best way to learn about a culture is through its food.

www.HuatulcoCookingClasses.com



Morning Activities

TUESDAY- Seafood

- Ceviche
- Seafood Fritter with Chipotle
- Shrimp Tostadas
- Jicama Salad
- Baked Fish in Hoja Santa leaf
- Paloma Cocktail

WEDNESDAY- Mama's Kitchen

- Black Mole- This is the most exquisite and complicated Mexican sauce.
- Yellow Mole
- served with Rice and Chicken
- Handmade Tortillas
- Mezcal Margarita

THURSDAY- Pigs and Rum

- Cochinita Pibil
- Corn Cakes
- Pickled Onion and Habanero
- Avocado Salsa
- Nopal and Radish Salad
- Horchata

FRIDAY- Street Food

- Red and Green Salsas
- Pico de Gallo
- Handmade Tortillas and Sopes
- 2 types of Taco Fillings
- Tlayudas
- Jamaica Margaritas

Evening Activities

TUESDAY- Frida's Favorites- dishes inspired by Frida Kahlo

- Huauzontles in Green Sauce
- Corn Pudding with Chiles in Cream
- Chicken in Pipian
- Zucchini Salad
- Frida Cocktail

FRIDAY- Village to Table Dinner

Our 8-course dinner using local ingredients is a culinary experience not to be missed!

*This is not a cooking class

Chiles & Chocolate Cooking Classes offer delicious culinary and cultural experiences that explore Mexican cuisine. Our hands-on classes ensure you will leave prepared to recreate the dishes when you get home.

- Hands-on
- Instruction in English
- Recipe Manual
- Free Gift Bag
- Food and Drinks Included
- Transportation Included
- Morning pick-up is 9am
- Evening pick-up is 5pm

Cost: \$95 USD per person

Activities are 3-4 hours

Zimatán, Huatulco



Fodor's Travel

 [chileschocolatehuatulco](https://www.instagram.com/chileschocolatehuatulco)

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