



Culinary Institute
of America

Mexican Cuisine

Day Two: Oaxaca



Learning Objectives

- Identify the cultural influences that have shaped Oaxacan cuisine.
- List the key ingredients characteristic of Oaxacan cuisine.
- Understand the flavor principles of Oaxacan cuisine.
- Learn the importance of *masa* and its various uses
- Prepare a variety Oaxacan dishes following standardized recipes.

Oaxaca (waa·haa·kuh)

- Geographically isolated by mountains
- Originally settled by Zapotec and Mixtec cultures.
- Sixteen distinct indigenous languages
- Eight geo-cultural areas, ranging from arid desert to tropical cloud forests



Mountains



- Sierra Madre del Sur: Range that runs along Oaxaca's Pacific coast
- Sierra Norte: Known for rugged landscapes and indigenous communities
- Monte Albán: Archeological site and famous peak

Specialty Ingredients

- **Coffee:** high altitude, slow maturing beans produce nutty, chocolatey, spicy, citrusy notes
- **Chocolate:** usually unsweetened, grainy texture from coarse sugar, often blended with nuts and spices
- **Oaxacan Cheese:** semi-hard, buttery flavor like mozzarella, braided shape
- **Chiles:** many varieties owing to diverse microclimates.
- **Staple crops:** peanuts, agave, medicinal plants and mushrooms



Grasshoppers (*Chapulines*)



- Insects were a vital protein source before the Spanish conquistadors introduced domesticated animals to the region
- Prepared by cleaning, boiling, then toasting on a *comal*
- Eaten as a snack, seasoned heavily, with garlic, lime and salt
- Ground and used as seasoning
- Rich in vitamins and minerals

Special Chiles of Oaxaca

- **Pasilla:** Prized for distinctive smokey, fruity flavor, rehydrated before use
- **Mulato:** Variety of poblano, mild heat, sweet flavor



Estofado de Almendras



- Translates to “stew”
- Uses raisins, almonds, plantain and olives
- Thickened with bread
- More soupy texture than mole

Salsa de Chile Pasilla

- Chiles are rehydrated before blending
- Traditionally ground by hand with a *molcajete*
- Thick texture, pasty consistency
- Used as a topping or ingredient in fillings



Masa

- Nixtamalization process (soaking and cooking corn in an alkaline solution) creates a distinctive flavor, allows for better absorption of nutrients
- From the Nahuatl word *nixtli* meaning "ashes," and *tamalli* meaning "cooked maíz masa."
- Process makes corn easier to grind and form into dough
- Used as base for many staple foods: *sopes*, *molotes*, *memelas*, *tamales*, *tlacoyos*, *bocoles*
- Baked on a *comal* or pan fried

Uses of Masa

- **Street food:** (*antojitos*)
- **Memelas:** larger, thinner, and more ovular than *sopes*
- **Molotes:** torpedo-shaped, stuffed like *empanadas*
- **Tlacoyos:** like tortillas, but thicker and oblong
- **Bocoles:** thick patties, sliced open and stuffed like a sandwich



Mole

- Traditional sauce and marinade, accompanies boiled meat, served with rice and tortillas
- Complex flavors: chiles, chocolate, spices, nuts
- Multiple stages of preparation: depth of flavor built in layers
- Many variations, *mole negro*, containing chocolate, is Oaxaca's most famous



Meatballs (*Albóndigas*)



- Made with beef and pork
- Served in broth or soup, or "*caldo*"
- Can be flavored with chipotle or other dried/fresh chiles

Flan with Caramel



- Spanish conquistadors brought the recipe to Mexico
- Must be baked slowly and gently (using hot water bath) to not curdle the eggs
- Nuanced, spiced flavor of Mexican vanilla
- Caramel should be dark and slightly bitter
- Firmer texture than French versions



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Any Questions?