

¡Olé! ¡Olé! ¡Olé!

Mexican food, fun and culture
The warm months 09

GREEN GUM

Biodegradable
chewing gum saves
city streets and
protects the rainforest

also in this issue:
Mezcal comes
to wahaca



Flour power

From cool experiments with hibiscus flowers to the Devon crab and seafood taquito that's got everyone fired up, this summer is about adventurous flavours...

The days are getting lighter and summer is just around the corner. Carmino, our fruit and veg supplier, has again been sourcing the best corn he can find. This year, as well as our traditional sour cream, crumbled Lancashire and chilli recipe, we are also serving it with our chipotle mayonnaise – a rich and indulgent combination that we love.

This season we are welcoming the sunshine in with another agua fresca to add to our hugely popular hibiscus drink. 'Horchata' is made from ground rice, ground almonds and dusted with a touch of cinnamon. Although it tastes a bit like a milkshake it has absolutely no dairy in it, making it a light and deliciously refreshing drink for a hot summer's day.

The hibiscus version (high in antioxidants and Vitamin C so incredibly good for you), has been such a success that we've been thinking of other ways to use it. From May we will be making a syrup from the flowers to pour over vanilla ice-cream. It is the yummiest thing, rivalling our churros in deliciousness. The syrup is also used to make an hibiscus salad dressing for our summer **fuertza** salad and pickling the flowers in a sweet/sour marinade nicely tops it off.

But most exciting of all is our new Devon crab and seafood taquito. It is full of Devon crab and Marine Stewardship Council approved shrimp, dressed in our habanero-laced, sweet-sour escabeche marinade and crisp fried. It is the best thing we've tasted for ages and we really hope you like it.



Hands-on producer

We are immensely proud to announce our relationship with a new producer. Dodie has been cooking Mexican food for over 15 years and we think she is a corn expert. Last year she bought an amazing machine (right) and is now making the best corn tortillas in the country. Forget about those plastic ones in the supermarket! These are the real McCoy, made of white corn and very little else. They are soft and supple and make the perfect tacos. You could almost imagine you were in Mexico. We just hope that more people start making good ones like these so that everyone can have the pleasure of tasting real corn tortillas like they eat in the market stalls of Mexico.



Read on for new additions to our menu

Mezcal on the menu

Almost every village in Oaxaca has its own local Mezcal but the best comes from the organic certified Del Maguey cooperative. Each Del Maguey Mezcal is from a single village and uses only natural processes which are over 400 years old, blending just two ingredients: water and the heart of the maguey (agave plant). Del Maguey has consistently been voted as one of the 'Best Mezcals in the world' and Wahaca is proud to introduce Del Maguey Minero, from the village of Santa Catarina Minas. The hearts of the maguey are roasted over hot stones for three to five days and covered with earth. They are then mashed using horse-powered stone mills, allowed to ferment in wooden vats and finally, slowly twice distilled in wood-fired clay stills. It has a nose of flower essence, vanilla and figs and delicious burnt honey and lemon flavours leading to a deep, warm, sweet finish. Less than 3,600 thousand bottles are made per year.



Global kitchen

This year's Madrid Fusion (Spain's annual celebration of global gastronomy) not only attracted Spain's greatest chefs and a scattering of the finest from America, Italy and the UK but also played host to Mexico as its guest nation. I was kindly invited by Food from Spain to go and see what was cooking in the 7th year of Spain's most hyped food event.

The hot topic of the event was molecular gastronomy and how far it had reinvented food in the last ten years. Aside from the incredible Spanish chefs, the biggest excitement was watching David Chang of Momofuku cooking Korean inspired dishes, Sotohiro Kosugi cooking delicate Japanese dishes using sea urchins and the Italian Gennaro Esposito of Torre del Saracino cooking a squid ink risotto in front of our eyes, beating it continuously as if he were whipping cream.

Then of course there were the Mexicans. Mexico is at last gaining recognition not only for its huge biodiversity (the Slow Food Congress was held in Puebla last year in recognition of this) but also for its varied and exciting cuisine (the three Michelin-starred Pierre Gagnaire is said to be obsessed with Oaxacan ingredients and cooking).

Most of Mexico's most recognised chefs were present (including Enrique Olvera, pictured above), cooking recipes that showed off its 'materia prima' of scores of varieties of corn, chillies, tomatoes and beans, with some chocolate, vanilla and courgette flowers thrown in for good measure. Their success at the event was most strikingly seen at a food stand they set up for the event where tacos, ceviches, tostadas and tequila tastings were demolished as soon as they were served. Viva Mexico!

Thomasina Miers



Mean screen

Following our review of the critical success 'Silent Light', directed by Carlos Reygadas (Ola London Cold Months 07/08), we bring you news of the latest big thing in Mexican cinema. Rodrigo Pla is the latest Mexican director to emerge on the international stage, with a buzz surrounding the DVD release of his film 'La Zona' (above). A chilling Mexican thriller starring Maribel Verdú (Pan's Labyrinth), La Zona explores ambiguous relationships between victims and villains around a fictitious enclave of wealthy Mexican society. Wahaca asked Pla about the inspiration behind the film.

Rodrigo what was the inspiration for La Zona? How did the idea come about?

My wife originally wrote this piece of work as a response to the extreme inequality between the rich and poor living in Mexico and the violence that has emerged because of this disparity. We were wondering if there was anyway of working towards a more just and fair society and thus the film was born. Although the story is fictional it is based on real events and the real feelings of paranoia and fear that are currently eating away at our country. If we can make people reflect on this situation even a little and start a debate on this subject, then we have succeeded as film-makers.

How truthful a reflection of Mexican society do you believe the film provides? Is the issue of wealth divide as destructive a force as it seems to be in La Zona?

We believe that the whole world is suffering from the same poverty, corruption and inequalities that we describe in 'La Zona' so we think the film asks universal questions and this was in fact our intention. How is it that human beings seem incapable of solving these problems and seem rendered frozen by them, no matter how enormous their affect is on society?

A number of the sequences, especially the opening, are stunningly beautiful: who would count as influences in terms of the visual style of La Zona?

We never intended to use specific references but when one finishes filming projects like this, one realises that hundreds of images and ideas that have been sitting in your memory come out in your work. Analogies between the Zona and books and other films I have seen appear almost by accident. We work with the script, the photographer and the art team in communicating topics more than trying to 'arrange' visual references.

Premium mezcals new to Wahaca May '09

Genie in a bottle

Once tequila's dowdy country cousin, Mezcal has re-invented itself in Mexico as the drink of choice for intellectuals, artists, hipsters and gourmets. Prior to putting Mezcal on its menu, Wahaca sent Tara Fitzgerald to uncover its mystery...



Por todo mal- mezcal. Por todo bien, también. Si no hay remedio... litro y medio.

According to the saying, mezcal should accompany everything bad, everything good and if the situation is hopeless then you should down a bottle or so. One urban legend says mezcal doesn't give you a hangover, while the worm (actually a larva) found floating in some bottles is said to induce hallucinations. What's the real story?

Whatever you believe or have heard, it's clear that mezcal - once regarded by many as low-class moonshine imbibed only by labourers and tourists - has re-invented itself in Mexico as the drink of choice for anyone on the cutting edge. Formerly tequila's dowdy cousin, the mezcal worm has turned.

In the last few years, mezcaterias (dedicated mezcal bars) have sprung up all over Mexico City, including pioneer La Botica, whose combination of affordable prices and low-key, edgy design has been instrumental in introducing mezcal to the younger generation. Organised mezcal tasting evenings all over the city allow connoisseurs and new recruits alike to debate the merits of the fiery beverage.

Distilled from the fermented juice of the spiky-leaved agave plant, mezcal is a close relation of Mexican staple tequila, and is mostly produced in the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. But where the production of tequila has been industrialised to meet demand, mezcal is still largely crafted by small producers using traditional methods.

Varieties to try include: joven (young), reposado (aged for two months to a year) and añejo (aged for more than one year). Although served in shot glasses (cáballitos), mezcal should be sipped and is often accompanied by sal de gusano (worm salt) and orange slices.

"We still haven't reached the level of exclusive, fine whiskies, but that is what should happen eventually with traditionally made mezcals," says Alan Ibarra, a mezcal sommelier and partner in mezcal label Milagrato del Corazón (www.milagrato.com).

High-end restaurants here are also stocking up with quality mezcals and some of Mexico's top chefs, including Enrique Olvera, Monica Patiño and Benito Molina, use mezcal in their cooking. At Los Danzantes - a mezcal brand with restaurants in Mexico City, Oaxaca and Playa del Carmen - owner Jaime Muñoz is proud to be an integral part of the growing mezcal tradition. "Projects like Los Danzantes, which has been around for 15 years, or La Botica, which is more recent, have managed to introduce the mezcal culture to an elite sector of the population, something that would have been impossible years ago."

"Now you cannot speak of Mexico without mentioning mezcal," he says.

Where to drink mezcal in Mexico City:
La Botica www.labotica.com.mx
Los Danzantes www.losdanzantes.com
Red Fly, Orizaba 145, Colonia Roma
La Pata Negra www.pataneegra.com.mx



Can you do better than last time? Ask staff for crayons and get colouring!

It doesn't stick to streets, is biodegradable and protects the Mexican rainforests. Mark Selby, co-founder of Wahaca, on why Chicza is a chewing gum revolution.



Wahaca has always supported farmers and believes in sustainability and recycling - it's at the core of everything we do. But... chewing gum farmers from Mexico? We agree it sounds a little unlikely - but Chicza, the new biodegradable and 100% organic chewing gum from the south-east of Mexico, deserves everyone's support.

Firstly, the biodegradable bit. It's a first - and it means no more aggravating chewing gum goo on streets, seats, shoes and carpets... which in turn means huge savings for local councils who spend a fortune (at our expense) trying to remove chewing gum. Did you know it takes Westminster Council 17 weeks to remove chewing gum debris from Oxford Street - and only 10 days for it to be covered anew?

Chicza gum will, in perfect conditions, vanish back into nature, from whence it came, in around six weeks (we add it to our kitchen bio-waste or why not pop it on a compost heap?). If it's chucked on to a pavement or street (still not recommended!), it will take around three months - a vast improvement on the five years or more that regular gum takes. It doesn't stick to clothes so, if you're out and about and there are no bins handy, you can simply pop it into a pocket or handbag, and dispose of it properly when you are back home. No stick, no mess and no marks. Sounds good so far? It gets better.

The chewing gum farmers (chicleros) work in 1.3 million hectares of Mexican rainforest, the Gran Petén, in the Yucatan peninsula of south-eastern Mexico, part of the second-largest rainforest in the Americas after Amazonia. They farm the gum sustainably, tapping the trees every six or seven years and then leaving them to rest. This follows in the footsteps of their Mayan ancestors, who used to chew the sap of the trees to clean their teeth and to aid digestion. It means the trees continue to grow - up to 100 feet or more - and live for up to 300 years, all the time acting as the earth's lungs. The success of this gum will have a direct impact on the survival of the rainforest for future generations. Chewing gum can help save the planet, strange though it sounds!

The chicleros farm the gum sustainably, tapping the trees every six or seven years and then leaving them to rest

Now to the "100% organic, natural chewing gum" bit. Did you know that regular chewing gum is made from petro-chemicals and polymers? That's why it bonds so well to pavements and tarmac. Not so tasty... Chicza is certified as 100% organic, (a lengthy procedure to accomplish) and sweetened with natural agave syrup. This is the reason it biodegrades so well: natural products return to nature far easier than synthetic ones.

So, we have a chewing gum that's biodegradable, that doesn't stick to clothes, seats and pavements, that's sustainably farmed and thus protects the all-important rainforests, that gives a decent living and much-improved social conditions to the farmers and their families, and is made of 100% organic ingredients. We've been waiting over a year since we discovered it and are now proud to be the first people in the UK to stock it along with Waitrose.

Chicza is available from Wahaca's restaurants in Covent Garden and at Westfield Shopping Centre, White City. It costs £1.40 for 12 squares (we believe the higher price compared to everyday chewing gum is well worth it) and is available in mint, spearmint and lime flavours. Try it and sample the taste of the rainforest, in the knowledge that you're doing good in so many ways.



Something to chew on

Try Chicza new at Wahaca

Co-founder of Wahaca, Tommi Miers, went out to the rainforest to get some first hand experience of the Chicza harvest...

As we went deeper into the Mexican rainforest in a beautiful corner of the Yucatan peninsula, one of the chicleros (gum tappers) pointed out ancient trees that had the tell-tale criss-cross scars of previous cuts tappers had made to harvest the sap. Men as old as 80 hike themselves up the trunks of the zapote tree in a simple harness until they are 60 feet above the ground, gripping the tree in boots with long spikes. They make diagonal cuts so that the sap runs down and around the tree into a collection pouch.

The zapote tree not only produces the gum and a delicious fruit that the locals make into sorbets, agua frescas (cool, refreshing drinks) and other puddings but it is also valuable for its beautiful hardwood. This is one of the reasons why the rainforests in Quintana Roo have suffered so much devastation in the past. Another is the mass wave of intensive farming that was encouraged from the seventies onwards, causing mass deforestation to allow corn production, a practice that has left the unsuitable sandy, chalky soil raped of top soil and no longer fit for cultivation.

This band of chicleros, a co-operative of over 2000 men in 80 communities scattered across 800 square kilometres of land in the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo have better things in mind for this land. Not only does the co-operative promise a wage to these men but it is initiating a programme of re-forestation, starting small but with great ambition. The land that I went to see had re-generated over a period of five years and in five years more will be rich in flora and fauna, full of native trees laden with allspice, pepper and other valuable spices which grow naturally among the zapote trees.

Not many people know but chewing-gum is a naturally indigenous product of Mexico, discovered in the 1870s. It wasn't until the early 1900s that the market exploded. By the time the United States had been dragged into the Second World War the market was worth millions. The Americans had discovered that if they added synthetics to the natural gum (petroleum, waxes, polyparaffins and flavourings) the gum would be softer and the flavour would last longer.



It takes Westminster Council 17 weeks to remove chewing gum debris from Oxford Street and only 10 days for it to be covered anew

Slowly they decreased the percentage of natural Mexican gum in their product until it was completely phased out. Recently the chicleros have been making as much of a wage as possible by exporting their gum to the Japanese, who still believe that a small percentage of natural gum (5% for a really top quality product) is a good thing.

No-one had reckoned on the arrival of a man called Manuel Aldrete Terraza, who moved to Quintana Roo from his home state of Chihuahua fifteen years ago. He was bewitched by this ancient art and its importance in preserving the rainforest and Mexico's rich biodiversity. Anyone who knows Mexico will know with amusement, and a certain amount of frustration, that Mexicans can sometimes be pig-headed, contrary and anything but straightforward. For so many communities to accept a man from the North, a foreigner to all intents, is quite an achievement. Manuel has gone further though. From this month Wahaca and some branches of Waitrose will be selling the Chicza gum produced by his co-operative of tappers. The gum is 100% bio-degradable, 100% organic and a product of the rainforest (save a few organic flavours - lime, spearmint and Mexican agave syrup). We are delighted to be selling it in Wahaca and hope that you enjoy it as much as we do. We also hope that the local councils will be delighted that their battle against gum-littered pavements just got easier!

wahaca

mexican market eating

wahaca
Mexican market eating
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Covent Garden
+44 (0) 20 7240 1883
White City
+44 (0) 20 8749 4517

New
for the
warm
months
'09

Street food

Choose 2-3 dishes per person or share lots with friends

Tacos



Three soft corn tortillas with one of the delicious fillings below.

Pork pibil £3.75

Slow cooked pork in our special Yucatecan marinade.

Chicken tinga £3.55

Shredded, marinated chicken with chipotle chillies.

Grilled British steak

With chipotle salsa: £3.85

With grilled cheese & salsa: £4.25

Summer vegetable £3.25 v

Courgette, tomatoes and spinach, lightly sautéed with tarragon, mint, chipotle salsa.



Taquitos

2 corn tortillas wrapped around one of our wholesome fillings, deep fried and served with crema.

Tender, marinated chicken £3.75

With shredded lettuce, Lancashire cheese and fresh tomato salsa.

Tostadas



Two crisp tortillas, piled high with one of the light salads below.

MSC* shrimp ceviche £3.75

MSC shrimp ceviche with lime juice and habanero chilli, served on a bed of round lettuce and crisp, corn tortilla

Beef salpicón £3.75

Tender, shredded, aromatic beef with spicy habanero and red onion salsa.

Nopalitos £3.40 v

Mexican cactus, super healthy and protein rich, tossed in our fresh tomato salsa and sprinkled with Lancashire cheese.



Devon crab £5.50

Seasonal Devon crab, MSC shrimp, avocado & chilli salsa.

Broad bean, thyme and feta £3.50 v

With tomatillo salsa, shredded lettuce and Lancashire cheese.



Quesadillas



Toasted flour tortillas oozing with melted cheese and one of the fillings below. Served with our house salsas.

Black beans & cheese £3.40 v

Our homemade black beans with cheddar cheese and mozzarella.

Chorizo & potato £3.75

Our special organic, homemade Mexican chorizo, fresh thyme and steamed potato.

Chipotle chicken £3.75

Chicken cooked in a spicy tomato marinade.

Broad bean and feta £3.75 v

Oozing feta, mozzarella, crushed broad beans and thyme.



Wahaca selection

A selection of our favourite plates for 2 people to share £19.75*

*This selection is fixed. Your waiter is happy to help in picking other street foods to suit your tastes.

Sides

Enjoy with your favourite street food.

Green rice £2.00 v

Rice blitzed with coriander, onion and garlic.

Frijoles £2.00

Rich, creamy black beans cooked twice for flavour. Served with:

- Crumbled cheese and crema v or
- Home-cured organic chorizo

Spicy slaw (not too hot) £1.80 v

Shredded cabbage and red onion with our chipotle dressing.

Green salad £2.75 v

Salad leaves and pumpkin seeds with our house dressing.

Summer sweetcorn £3.25 v

Served with

- Our smokey chipotle mayonnaise or
- Crema and Lancashire cheese.



Soup & salads

To eat on their own or with your favourite street food

Chicken tortilla soup £6.75

Chicken, avocado, toasted ancho chilli, crumbled cheese, crema and topos in lightly spiced tomato broth.

Tortilla soup £6.00 v

As above without the chicken.

The Sonora salad

Avocado, pumpkin seeds, beans, quinoa (a protein rich grain) and cos lettuce in a crispy tortilla bowl with either:

Char-grilled steak: £7.00

Tender, free-range chicken: £7.00

Wahaca's smoky black beans: £6.25 v

MSC* shrimp ceviche salad £7.75

MSC certified shrimp cured in lime juice, herbs and chilli salsa, layered over avocado and mixed leaves. Served in a crispy tortilla bowl.



Summer Fuerza salad £6.75 v

Marinated beetroot, home-pickled hibiscus flowers, cucumber, avocado, radish, topos, fried ancho, mint and salad leaves and quinoa (a protein rich grain) all tossed in our homemade hibiscus dressing.



Market salsas

Dress up your street food the Mexican way.

Chipotle (the red one)

A mix of fresh, smoked and dried chillies and tomatoes. Its smokey flavour is a knock-out drizzled over the steak tacos.

Salsa verde (the green one)

Green tomatillos blended with chillies and herbs. A must on our fish pastor tacos and delicious on taquitos and quesadillas. This searing salsa is a force to be reckoned with.

Platos fuertes

Bigger plates

From the grill

Fish escabeche £9.95

Grilled sea bream with a sweet-sour marinade of sherry vinegar, soft red onion and toasted pumpkin seeds.

British steak, the Mexican way £9.00

Strips of British steak served the Mexican way with coriander rice, charred spring onions and our special house salsas.

Marinated, grilled chicken £8.50

Chargrilled, free range chicken in our homemade Yucatecan marinade with cumin, oregano and spices. Served with coriander rice and pink pickled onions.

Enchilada

The Mexican favourite – two soft corn tortillas, served with three different sauces, crema and Mexican green rice:

Classic enchilada £8.50

Succulent free-range chicken bathed in our house tomato sauce and sprinkled with crumbled cheese.

Mole £8.50

One of the seven moles from Oaxaca, served enchilada-style with succulent free-range chicken.

Enchilada verde £8.50

Our free-range chicken bathed in a spicy, citrusy green tomatillo sauce, served with crumbled cheese.

Burritos

From Chihuahua – toasted flour tortillas wrapped around delicious fillings. With black beans, shredded cabbage, green rice, crema & topos.

Char-grilled steak £6.25

Chipotle salsa & grilled spring onions.

Tender marinated chicken £5.85

Chipotle, onion & spices.

Slow-cooked pork £6.00

Pink pickled onions & habanero chillies.

Baja cheese Any of the above with our own British farm house cheddar and mozzarella mix. Add 40p.

Summer vegetable £6.00 v

Courgette, tomatoes and spinach, lightly sautéed with tarragon and mint.



Specials

Pork pibil £8.25

The famous dish from the Yucatan. Tender, marinated pork served in its parcel with smoky black beans, green rice and pink pickled onions.

Courgette and corn enchilada £7.75 v

Summery courgette, spinach and corn sautéed and served between two soft tortillas covered in hot tomatillo sauce, crema and toasted pumpkin seeds. Served with Mexican green rice.



Puddings

Churros y chocolate £3.40

Our favourite! Mexican doughnuts with a rich chocolate sauce.

Vanilla ice-cream £3.40

With toasted pumpkin seeds and drizzled with either:
- our home-made hibiscus syrup or
- our caramel "cajeta" sauce.



Lemon margarita sorbet £3.25

Fresh, light with a hint of tequila.

Chocolate ice-cream £3.25

Rich, chocolatey with a touch of spice.

Mango sorbet £3.25

Served as in the markets of Mexico.

As in the markets, some plates may be delivered at different times. We think the freshness is worth it.
v = vegetarian.
All dishes may contain traces of nuts

Our chicken and pork are free-range. All meat is from the UK. All of our fish is sustainable. Our prawns come from a fishery certified to the Marine Stewardship Council's environmental standard.



Awarded "Best Cheap Place to Eat in the UK" by The Observer Food Monthly Magazine.

Wahaca gets certified!

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) was set up to provide a way for fisheries to be independently certified as well managed and sustainable. When you eat dishes with the logo attached you are supporting fishermen operating sustainably. To carry the MSC logo, fish must come from a fishery which has been independently audited to meet the MSC standards. It must catch fish from healthy stocks and catch them using sustainable methods to minimise bycatch and impact on local habitats and species. At Wahaca we have just introduced the logo on our new shrimp taco and shrimp salad.

