

## CONSUMPTION HABITS

Traditional Mexican fish and food dishes are reflected in those found in many Canadian restaurants, such as chili, tacos, burritos, fajitas, enchiladas, tortillas, etc. While it is true that many of these dishes are a regular part of the Mexican national gastronomy, consumers often prepare a large array of other dishes which combine many different foodstuffs. During the Nineteenth Century, Mexican cooks strived, for religious reasons based around Lent, to prepare with distinct elegance, all fish and seafood dishes.

Many dishes emerged from the Lent tradition, dishes which still make up a large portion of Mexican cooking today. *Torrijas* bathed in honey is a well known lent dessert made with bread, eggs, milk and vanilla, and cooked in a coal hearth. Another famous lent dish is *Huevos Reales* (Royas Eggs). Stews and casseroles included a dash of garlic and cinnamon to give them a distinct lent flavour. Many Mexican historians include clam soup, European spinach or sardine ravioli, and fish with melted cheese and tomato sauce Veracruz style, as lent dishes. Lamprey is eaten with pleasure, the same with salmon and lobster mayonnaise, and finished off with various famous lent turnover pastries. Shrimp, catfish, salted codfish cooked in a tomato sauce, white bean soup, *romeritos*, rosemary cooked in tomato sauce with potatoes, (also popular at Christmas) beet salad, *capirotada*, a typical Mexican dessert made of bread, raisins, peanuts, bathed in a brown sugar syrup; fried beans, and wine or beer were, and remain, indispensable components of any feast. Amongst the customs of small towns is the preparation of *axolotl*, edible salamanders, fresh water shrimps, frogs, as well as purslane, spinach and *quelites*.

Mexican consumers are experiencing an increase in disposable income as the result of the strengthening national economy. These increases are resulting in the purchase of a more diverse variety of food products, both for consumption at home and in more social settings like restaurants. Imports of food products have increased due largely to a curiosity to try new products and because imports are viewed as a status symbol. The metropolitan centres of Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey contain over one-third of the total Mexican population and offer a large selection of restaurants and cafes featuring international cuisine, in addition to the wide diversity which can be found in the main tourist areas of Acapulco, Cancun and Puerto Vallarta. It is not uncommon to find many food establishments with French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Argentinean, Swiss, Arabic, Lebanese, Japanese, Indian and Chinese food on the menu. Mexico is also experiencing an increase in the popularity of specialty restaurants like sushi bars, vegetarian cuisine, health-food cafes, and fast food outlets like McDonald's and Fuddrucker's. Mexican consumers are influenced by "Westernized" advertising and cultural tendencies, a fact that is becoming increasingly evident in Mexican food consumption patterns and habits.

Business travellers should note that it is common in Mexico for a business meeting to take place over a "power breakfast". Mexicans consider breakfast to be an extremely important meal, and often encourage the scheduling of significant meetings to occur during breakfast, another reflection of the personal approach taken by many Mexican with respect to the conduct of business.