

# Living

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## EATING WELL IN SAN MIGUEL

More than a pretty colonial town, San Miguel has eateries for any budget. Here are some of the residents' favorite spots for special occasions or everyday fare.

BY JIM JOHNSTON  
Special to The News

I'm not sure if it's a cultural thing, but Americans seem to be fussy about their food. At least that's the case in San Miguel de Allende, a place famous for its sizeable population of American expats. But on a recent trip to the picturesque city, I had no problem finding plenty of restaurants and eateries offering up tasty Mexican cuisine.

It's 7:30 in the morning and I'm hunting for breakfast and a cup of coffee without much luck, when I see a group of people eating intently at a long table hidden behind the main market building. Alas, no coffee, but the "tamales" and "atole" are delicious and filling. The standard tamal



San Agustín is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Their "churros" and hot chocolate are a favorite.



The Restaurant is a perfect spot for a romantic dinner.

choices here are red, green and pink (sweet), served with a cup of thick, hot atole – a pre-Hispanic drink made with corn and flavored with fruit (guava is a favorite) or chocolate.

I finally get a decent cup of coffee and even a passable bagel at the **Bagel Cafe (Correo 19)**. Right next door (**Correo 23**) is **El Correo**, a cozy place in one of those massive colonial buildings that line the streets of San Miguel. They make a fine version of the classic Mexican

comfort food "chilaquiles" (tortilla chips cooked in sauce, served with cheese, onions and crema), and satisfying "migas," eggs scrambled with strips of tortilla and ham.

My favorite place for a midmorning snack or a quick lunch in San Miguel is **Los Burritos (Mesones 69-A)**. When I lived here I went at least once a week, often twice, and still dream about their "burritacos." They're made from freshly cooked flour tortillas (like

burritos), but they are smaller and are filled with "guisados," or cooked fillings (like tacos – hence their name). Pay first up front and then sit at the counter where you can choose from a variety of "guisados." "Rajas con crema" (poblano pepper strips in cream), "tinga" (shredded chicken in a tangy red sauce), red and green moles, nopales (cactus leaves) and chorizo sausage (one is made with soy for vegetarians) are among many offerings. "Aguas

frescas," made from fresh fruit, are the perfect drink with this meal. And at 4 pesos per burritaco, this turns out to be one of the best deals in town. (Open from 10:30 to 6, every day except Sunday.)

Another quick lunch option is **Tortillán (Juaréz 17)**. I've been hunting for a better torta in Mexico City for 10 years without luck. The "pierna," or roast pork, is especially tasty here and there are fresh fruit juices to wash it down.

On my first visit to San Miguel in 1989, a friend suggested the **Mesón de San José (Mesones 38)**. "The salads are great!" she said. "Salad! You can't eat salad in Mexico!" was my response at the time. Dozens of fiber-filled lunches later, I can attest that you can. A meal in itself, their classic Cobb salad adds bacon, chicken and hard-boiled egg to a mound of fresh greens. And there is no overkill on the dressing.

Ex-San Francisco graphic designer Carol Romano takes a break from work to lunch on Caesar salad at **Hecho in Mexico (Ancha de San Antonio 8, Tel.: 154-6383)**. "I usually get it with the grilled shrimp

skewered on a sprig of rosemary. Oh, and of course, I get a slice of their amazing peanut butter pie for dessert – that's the real reason I go. The salad just makes me feel less guilty."

Surprisingly, finding good Mexican food in an attractive setting is not so easy in San Miguel. **El Rincón de Don Tomás**, on the main plaza, is a top choice for home-style Mexican cooking. Their soups, like "flor de calabaza" and "sopa de tortilla," are especially popular, as are their handmade tortillas.

Helene Kahn, who has been in Mexico 18 years and gives tours of San Miguel, knows every nook and cranny of the place. "My favorite restaurant is **La Posadita (Cuna de Allende 13, closed Wednesdays)**, just off the Jardín. The view from the terrace is beautiful. I love their 'enmoladas.' They also make a great chile relleno and pozole verde, and the prices are reasonable."

**Olé Olé (Loreto 66, not far from the market)** has been run by the Mendoza Araiza for the past 18 years. The walls of this inviting place are covered

with bullfight memorabilia. Most people come here for one thing, their excellent fajitas, made with chicken, beef, or shrimp (or all three). The guacamole is among the best in town, and the "champiñones al ajillo," or mushrooms with garlic, are guaranteed to please.

*The Restaurant is the perfect spot for a romantic dinner.*

### ELEGANT EATERIES

Stan Gray worked in finance until his retirement in San Miguel more than 10 years ago. Now he gets to indulge his passion for gourmet cooking. "I'd rather eat at home," is his usual response when I've asked him where he dines in San Miguel. "But there is the **Sierra Nevada (Hospicio 35)**.

"I've had great meals there. The veiche and the lamb were excellent, and their mousse de 'huitlacoche' is a winner. Our guests thought it was the best food they had in San Miguel. I also love the **Villa Santa Mónica (Fray José Guadalupe Mojica 22,**

on **Parque Juárez**) which never fails to impress because of its sublime patio.

"Their eggs baked in a cazuela are sinfully rich and delicious."

For high-end dining in San Miguel, local caterer Michele Vallon recommends **Dos Casas (Quebrada 101)**. "For several months they had an Asian-influenced menu with excellent flavors. Chef Gustavo Calderón is very accommodating." It's one of the most attractive places to eat in town, elegant and inviting, with lots of dark wood detail. Highlights were the smoked marlin appetizer, "tacos de garra de león" (scallops), and a perfectly cooked tuna steak on a bed of oriental vegetables – but this place changes its menu according to the season, so there's always a surprise.

Hints of Asia and the Mediterranean abound on the eclectic menu of **The Restaurant (Sollano 16)**, and located in a beautifully restored colonial home, it is a perfect spot for a romantic dinner.

At the other end of the spectrum, there's a lot of talk about a taco stand in Col. San Rafael,



Olé Olé is famous in San Miguel for their fajitas, guacamole and mushrooms with garlic.



Mesón de San José specializes in all types of salads.



La Posadita is recommended for their "enmoladas" and the view.



Tortillán offers great tortas.

a short hike from the center of town. Patrice Wynne, who deserves a prize for the busiest person in town (she gives tours of Mexico City and runs an apron and accessory business), lives across the street from **Tacos Don Félix**. She loves their classic meat tacos, the grilled onions, great salsas, and the relaxed family atmosphere. And how many taco stands can boast their own bilingual Web site? (It's at [tacosdonfelix.com](http://tacosdonfelix.com) – you'll need their map to find it.)

**San Agustín (San Francisco 21, facing the San Francisco church)** is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, but ex-New York fashion designer Lucille Chayt goes at night for their "churros" and hot chocolate, which I have to confess, are even better than the famed El Moro in Mexico City.

San Miguel de Allende is more than just a pretty colonial town – it's a great place to eat. ¡Buen provecho!

Jim Johnston, author of "Mexico City: an Opinionated Guide for the Curious Traveller" lived in San Miguel de Allende for 10 years. His blog is [www.mexicocitydf.blogspot.com](http://www.mexicocitydf.blogspot.com)