

AS IF THE ARRAY OF DISHES ON THE YUCATECAN MENU were not sufficiently overwhelming, simply navigating the “where” and “when” of eating in Yucatán can be a daunting process in itself. Locals tend to eat quite differently than the average tourist – both in the hours set for meals and the variety of establishments in which to take them.

The multitude of answers to the question “Where shall we eat?” can send the less hardy culinary adventurer into a tailspin of doubt. “What is a *cocina económica*?” “The food at this *taquería* looks tempting, but is it safe?” “Where do real Yucatecans actually eat?”

This guide can help you swim rather than sink – and also offers many restaurant suggestions.

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### ☞ WHERE TO EAT ☞

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#### *La panadería*

The bakery, or *panadería*, is often the first stop in the morning, where you can grab a sweet roll or savory ham and cheese puff pastry for a quick breakfast. Housewives, too, will stock up on bread for the next day or two, or buy a slab of party-sized sandwichón, or “giant sandwich”, for their afternoon guests.

#### *La chicharronería*

The *chicharronería* is where the fat, offal and skin left over from a pig slaughter are utilized, first fried in giant vats in which the lard is rendered, then chopped into delectable taco toppings or sold as billowing sheets of *chicharrón* – crispy pig skin. *Chicharronerías* are popular destinations between the hours of 9:00am and about 1:00pm. The first arrivals are housewives or children who line up outside, metal pails in hand, to await a few ladles of hot, fresh lard. When the first meats start emerging from the seething vats around 9:30am, tables in the front fill up with hungry diners who order *tacos de chicharra* or bags of the fresh meats *para llevar* (“to go”).

#### *Comida callejera*

*Comida callejera*, or “street fare”, is consumed throughout the day, as much by professionals as by children and laborers. It is common to see entire families perched on wobbly stools at *taquerías* or market stalls, wolfing down a couple of *tacos* or a *torta* on their way to school, work or the bus station. And peppered through the streets are wheeled carts – usually with small propane tanks stashed out of sight to provide cooking flames – operated by vendors who sell everything from chopped *carne asada* (grilled pork) to hotdogs. They follow the rhythmic flow of customers, setting up in one place in the morning, and another in the afternoon or evening. (As for the “safety” question, I eat everything at these places, but tell visitors they should listen to their own tummies. And if a stall is bustling with customers, it is probably OK.)

#### *La cocina económica*

Something you must try while in Yucatán, the *cocina económica* is a casual, family-run restaurant that often features tables set up in the owner’s parlor or front porch. These are usually open for breakfast and closed by 3:00pm. Short of getting an invitation to an afternoon meal with a local family, this is one place where you can be assured of enjoying authentic Yucatecan home cooking. And as the name implies, the meals here are very “economical”: a fully plated lunch with a beverage usually costs no more than about \$40 pesos (under \$3 dollars at today’s exchange rate).

*La cantina*

Finally, the cantina – formerly a bastion of Mexican machismo – is now known as much for its light tapas-like snacks as it is for the beer and tequila. Many of these establishments have been re-branded as a *restaurante familiar* – or “family restaurant” – and open their doors to women and children alike. Some still preserve the male enclave while having a separate entrance and seating for the wife and kids. For the price of a beer, small plates of pickled potatoes, squash seed dip or local sausages are brought to the table in gluttonous quantity until your bottle runs dry.

☞ WHEN TO EAT ☞

Although the rhythm of life in Yucatán is leisurely, days start early and end late, and eating is timed accordingly. Families awake at dawn to begin the day before the oppressive heat sets in. And the eating goes on until the wee hours of the morning when cooler breezes prevail.

Youngsters line up outside schools by 6:45am, and school doors shut promptly at 7:00am. Fathers, and nowadays mothers, head off to work after taking the children to school. Therefore, *desayuno* (breakfast) is usually consumed between 5:00 and 6:00am. In the early 20th century, a typical Yucatecan breakfast was a plate of fried, sweet *churros* served alongside a cup of thick hot *chocolate* for dipping. Nowadays, it might be a piece of toasted bread or even a bowl of cereal if breakfast is taken at home. But many people grab something at a market stall or *panadería* as they rush to the day’s activities.

Students and working folk alike usually have a break between 10:00 and 11:00am, at which time they enjoy *almuerzo*, a light mid-morning snack. *Taquerías* and street vendors with their rolling carts do a boom business at this time of day. *Tortas* (sandwiches on French rolls) or *tacos* are the most popular items for *almuerzo*, although increasingly you will see school children with a bag of potato chips and a cola.

Families reunite by 2:00pm to enjoy the main meal of the day together – the *comida* (sometimes called the *comida fuerte*). This meal may be prepared at home if mother doesn’t work or if grandmother still lives with the family. The *cocina económica* is also a popular place for the afternoon meal, as are the *cantinas* and *restaurantes familiares*. After the meal, which finishes at around 4:00pm, professionals return to work and students go for tutoring, sports or ballet lessons. By 8:00pm, everyone begins heading home.

A custom that is sadly dying out – but that is still upheld by the generation that came of age around the time of World War II – *merienda* is the Yucatecan equivalent of the British “tea time”. At around 5:00 or 6:00pm, people “of a certain age” head for their favorite *panadería* to purchase sweet breads, cakes or other treats, to be enjoyed back home with coffee or *chocolate*. Bakeries in the tiny pueblo of Pomuch in Campeche – famous for its specialty breads – come alive at around 4:00pm or so, just in time for afternoon purchases for the *merienda*.

*Cena*, or dinner, is traditionally composed of something left over from the afternoon meal. Influences from north of the border have changed local customs, and now it is just as common to go to a sushi bar or to order a pizza delivery. But even if people go out to eat, they will not do so until 9:00pm or later.

*Travelers’ tip: Bear this rhythm in mind as you plan your meals in Yucatán. That charming cocina económica you passed this morning and planned to return to for dinner in the evening will likely be closed by 3:00pm. Or a taquería you heard of through the grapevine and wanted to try for lunch might be sold out by noon since they do the majority of their business for almuerzo.*

## CENTRO

### Regional Yucatecan

- **Los Almendros** *Regional specialties*. Open 11am – 11pm every day; holidays from 12 noon – 8pm. Parque La Mejorada, Calle 50 between Calle 57 and 59. Information: 928.5459. The unfortunate ambience (depressing picture window view of an indoor parking lot, “Mexican”-themed furnishings) is alleviated by authentic regional dishes. This is Yucatecan “home cooking” at its best. Nothing fancy, just real, and one of the few places in town where you can consistently order a Maya favorite: venison.
- **Benny’s** *Cocina económica*. Open daily, 6am – 3pm. Stall No. 242627 in Mercado Lucas de Gálvez. Don’t let its appearance put you off. Sit down for quick service and real regional food at this market stall. Grab a rickety stool and watch the crazy crowds in the market go by as cooks prepare your meal right in front of you. *Salbutes* are fried to order. Try a couple with *relleno negro*, *carne asada* or *pavo en escabeche*.
- **El Buen Gusto** *Cocina económica*. Open Monday – Saturday, 6am – 2pm. Market in Parque Santiago. To the left of the church in the middle of the row of stalls on the Calle 72 side of the park. Enjoy a relaxing afternoon in the park while savoring crispy, mouth-watering fried shrimp tacos. Read review.
- **El Cangrejito** *Taquería featuring seafood and regional specialties*. Open daily from 10:30am - 3:30pm. Calle 57 No. 523 between Calle 64 and 66. Information: 928.2781. A trip to the beach, right in the heart of Centro! Their panoply of seafood offerings is the place to start: their *bacalao* is exquisitely smoky and riddled with savory potatoes and peas; lobster salad is just right in creaminess with a hint of scallion; and breaded fried fish fillet stays miraculously crisp beneath its tiny mountain of salsas. By 12:30 the joint is jumping, with cars pulling up to the curb to unload the hungry. Go early!
- **La Chaya Maya** *Authentic regional specialties*. Open daily from 7:00am - 11:00pm. Calle 62 at the corner of Calle 57. Information: 928.4780. A more “upscale” branch with hours from 1pm - 11pm has opened at Calle 60 No. 502 between Calle 59 and Calle 61. Information: 928.2295. We can’t quite understand the popularity of this one (there are frequently lines forming to get in); yet, while there are much better Yucatecan restaurants in town, this is one of the few sit-down restaurants where you can order authentic and regional tamales not usually served in restaurants such as *brazo de reina* (rolled “log” tamal with chaya).
- **Jhovany** *Taquería*. Sundays from 8am – 10pm. Calle 60 at Calle 61, in front of the Palacio de Gobierno. Their specialty – and you must try it! – is *carne asada*. Smoky, savory, tender. Enjoy it as a *torta* (on French roll) or as a *taco* (open faced on a maize *tortilla*). It’s pleasant to sit at the tidy, shaded booth during Mérida en Domingo, when streets are closed to vehicular traffic.
- **Manjar Blanco** *Regional specialties*. Open Monday – Sunday 8:00am – 6:00pm. Calle 47 No. 496 between Calle 58 and 60 in front of Parque Santa Ana. La Tradición and Los Almendros finally have some stiff competition in the “traditional Yucatecan” category. Not a large menu but with some interesting riffs: a combination plate featuring smoked meats from Temozón; Cuban *tostones* (which they call *tortillitas*) topped with pulled pork; and a *queso relleno negro* – Edam stuffed with chopped meat in Yucatán’s signature charred chile sauce.
- **El Marlin Azul** *Seafood*. Open Monday – Saturday 8:30am – 4:30pm. Calle 62 between Calle 57 and 59. Ignore the funkiness and just enjoy the refreshing cool blue color (and air conditioning!) of this tiny but satisfying seafood restaurant. This is honest, simple fare that is beyond delicious. Best by far is the *filete al mojo de ajo*: a whitefish fillet is lightly seasoned and griddle-fried in butter, then doused with a gorgeous green pond of garlic/cilantro sauce.
- **La Negrita** *Cantina and restaurante familiar*. Open Wednesday - Sunday, 12pm – 10pm. Calle 62 at Calle 49. Information: 928.2311. This cantina originally opened in 1918, and as happened with many other cantinas in Mérida, with the passing of the years it set aside its “men only” rule and opened a room in the back for women and families. The new owners have completely renovated the cantina bringing it to the 21st century but leaving lots of the old details. As in other cantinas, the food is simple finger-food and Yucatecan botanas. Of particular interest are local artisanal beers.
- **Tío Will** *Cocina económica*. Open Monday – Saturday, 7am – 4pm. Calle 70 No. 506, between Calle 63 and Calle 65. I had a memorable pork-stuffed *chile Poblano* one rainy afternoon at Tío Will.
- **La Tradición** *Regional specialties*. Open every day 10am – 10pm. Calle 60 #468 between Calle 55 and Calle 53, Santa Lucia park. Information: 923.0100. The three “Cs” – Comfortable, clean, convenient. All the standard Yucatecan fare is served family style. One pleasant surprise was to see *Pavo en Sak K’ool* – wood-grilled *achiote* turkey served in a bowl of “Maya gravy” (stock thickened with *masa* instead of *roux*) – rare to find in local restaurants. It’s more of an “abuela-cooks-at-home” dish.
- **El Pórtico del Peregrino**. *Regional specialties*. Open daily, 12pm – 12am. Calle 57 No. 501 between Calle 60 and 62. Information: 928.6163. Charming ambience, good service, sub-par food but may be worth it as a convenient and pleasant place to dine in Centro.

## Mexican

- **Apoala Mexican specialties. Open Monday – Saturday 1pm – 12am, Sunday 2pm – 11pm.** *On Parque Santa Lucia, Calle 60 No. 471 at Calle 55, Local 2. Information: 923.1979.* This popular addition to Centro – in the newly restored Parque Santa Lucia – is owned and run by a chef from Oaxaca, and offers updated Mexican dishes. A list of 30 different mezcals invites you to try inventive pairing with the menu.
- **La Casa de Frida Mexican specialties. Open Monday – Saturday 6pm – 10pm.** *Calle 61 No. 526 at Calle 66. Information: 928.2311.* A bright magenta environment dressed with images of Frida Kahlo and reproductions of her work warmly greets the primarily tourist clientele of this small, charming restaurant. My students and guests who order the *chiles en nogada* (a specialty from Puebla) rave about the food; those who don't – don't.
- **La Fundación Mezcalería Mexican mezcal bar. Open Wednesday - Saturday, 8pm – 3 am.** *Calle 56 between Calle 53 and 55. Information: 928.2311.* Over 50 kinds of mezcal from across Mexico. Definitely a party place, music is either live or by a DJ. Gringos in search of an “authentic” Mexican experience flood the place, but young locals like it, too.
- **Pancho's Mexican and Yucatecan specialties. Open daily 6pm – 2am.** *Calle 59 No. 509 between Calle 60 and 62. Information: 923.0942.* The first of three links in the Trotter family restaurant chain (the others being La Tratto and Trotter's), Pancho's has been pleasing tourists and locals alike for more than two decades. Hold on to your *sombrero*, because it is a riotous environment with over-the-top Mexican stereotypical décor (blown up photos of Pancho Villa, get it?) and waiters with gun belts stuffed with wine corks instead of bullets. Mexican meat specialties won't disappoint. Particularly tasty are the plantain chips they use for dips instead of regular *tortilla* chips.
- **La Parranda Grill and taquería. Open daily from 11:30am – 2 am.** *Calle 60 No. 502 at Calle 59. Information: 287.8119.* A new branch of the original old-timer on Prolongación Montejo. And what a smart idea so that they can capture all those tourists passing by on popular 60th Street! Think “meat” and you'll be happy here, although I do enjoy their “taco lite” featuring delicately grilled strips of chicken breast. As at other *taquerías*, experiment by ordering one at a time. The waiters are used to it.
- **La Parrilla Grill and taquería. Open daily 12pm – 1am.** *Calle 60 No. 502 between Calle 59 and Calle 61. Information: 928.1191.* With La Parranda right next door, it's hard to choose between the two – unless one or the other is packed. The best bet is their “Carnívoro” all-you-can-eat-*arrachera*-buffet every afternoon Monday through Saturday for just \$125 pesos. The *arrachera* is grilled on the spot to your preference. Save room for the wide variety of Yucatecan and Mexican specialties, too. If the buffet is just too much food for you, try ordering a few *taquitos* of *carne al pastor*, or a delicious “Gringa” which is the same meat smothered in melted cheese. Ohmygod. Another favorite is their *brocheta*: I like the *mar y tierra* version with steak and shrimp.

## BEYOND CENTRO

### Regional Yucatecan

- **Hacienda Ochil Regional specialties. Open every day 11am – 7pm.** *Km. 176.5 Carretera Mérida/Uxmal. Information: 910.6035.* This *parador turístico* is far better than others of its ilk. It's one of the few places around where you can order *pipian rojo*, a divine pumpkin seed sauce stained with *achiote* and served over pork or venison. *TIP: While there be sure to visit the tiny but fascinating museum about henequén history, the charming craft shops where you can see artisans at work, and the amazing cenote at the rear of the property.*
- **Hacienda Temozón International and Yucatecan specialties. Open every day 7am – 11pm.** *KM 182 Carretera Merida-Uxmal, Temozon Sur. Reservations: 923 8089.* Take a table on the terrace balcony for a view of the old machine house, now set off by a dramatic pool. I love their *ceviche*, and the *guacamole* is prepared fresh tableside (usually). Make them do it, since that's what their menu advertises. Other regional specialties, such as *Cochinita Pibil* and *Poc Chuc*, are very good. Their best marks: presentation, service and ambience. *TIP: Notice the antique railway that runs through the grounds; originally the tracks were used to haul the henequen harvest to production rooms or shipping centers. Walk through the former Casa Principal to see antique furnishings and paintings. Check out the small gift shop, which occasionally features hard-to-find hand-painted bags and other local artisan crafts.*
- **Hacienda Teya Regional Yucatecan. Open daily 12pm – 6pm.** *Km 12.5 on the Merida – Cancun highway. Information: 988.0800.* This is about as real as it gets. Teya is owned and managed by the Cárdenas family who personally oversee every detail. The restaurant is located in a restored 17th century hacienda now used for special events. But just dining at Teya is special. The service is careful and attentive and the food consistently good. When I go with groups we always order the *Nohoch Yucateco*. *Nohoch* in Mayan means “gigantic” and this dish doesn't disappoint: a large heated stone platter is laden with several typical Yucatecan pork dishes: *Cochinita Pibil*, *Lomitos de Valladolid* and *Poc Chuc*. You will take home leftovers.

- **Hacienda Xcanatún *International & Yucatecan specialties.* Monday-Wednesday from 7:30am to 11:00pm; Thursday-Saturday from 7:30am to 12:00am; Sundays from 7:30am – 9:00pm.** *Km. 12 Carretera Mérida/Progreso. Information: 941.0213.* In a fabulously restored hacienda, the Casa de Piedra restaurant of the Xcanatún Hotel and Spa is Mérida's most romantic setting. Indoor/outdoor dining. Their best marks: hospitality (rub elbows with charming owner and hostess Cristina Baker) and ambiance. If you want to feel like you're on vacation while you are on vacation, you definitely want to experience Xcanatún. *TIP: Try a relaxing afternoon massage in their spa followed by a drink in the lovely bar, and finish with a romantic dinner at Casa de Piedra. I've done it and I assure you that you will remember the experience forever.*
- **Restaurante Kinich *Regional Yucatecan.* Open daily 10am – 7pm.** *Calle 27 No. 299 between Calle 28 and 30, Izamál, Yucatán (50 meters from the pyramid Kinich Kak-Moo). Information: 988.954.0489.* Popular with tourists. Popular with families from Izamál. Popular with folks who travel from Mérida just for the food. Enjoy the pleasant tropical breezes that drift through the spacious *palapa*. Be sure to step inside the smaller palapa at the rear to watch local women making fresh tortillas to order. Everything is good and authentic here, but something about their *Sikil P'aak* (pumpkin seed dip) and crispy *totopos* are absolutely addictive. Even though it's on the house, don't be embarrassed to ask for more. I always do! *TIP: Climb the Kinich pyramid after you eat to work off the pounds. While in Izamál be sure to visit the Mexican folk art museum featuring an excellent, hand-picked collection; and Hecho a Mano, a folk art shop where you can purchase high quality pieces from all over México.*
- **K'u'uk' "Vanguard Mexican Cuisine." Cafeteria opens 8:00am; lunch service 1:30pm - 5:00pm; dinner service starts at 7:30pm.** *Calle 30 No. 313, between Calle 37A and 39, Colonia San Ramón Norte. Information: 944.3377.* Former chef of star-studded Pujol in Mexico City now spearheads a brilliant new offering in Mérida's restaurant scene. Traditional Yucatecan (and some Mexican) themes and ingredients appear in all new costumes for the performance of a lifetime! Tasting menus and á la carte offerings will have you cheering for an encore. Ask for a tour of their creative wine "cellar", Star-Wars-tech kitchen, and charming kitchen garden, which supplies several organic herbs and vegetables for the kitchen.
- **Muelle 8 *Seafood and regional specialties.* Open every day from 11:30am to 6pm.** *Calle 21 No. 141 Avenida Rogers Hall at Prolongación Montejo, Colonia Buenavista. Information: 944.5343.* Arguments abound regarding the superiority of Muelle 8 versus La Pigua. Certain effete artistes seem to love Muelle 8's tacky Popeye interior motifs. But I say La Pigua wins hands down for both ambiance and food. Still, some things on the menu at Muelle 8 you won't find elsewhere. Try the grouper stuffed with beautifully seasoned *chaya*.
- **Na'lu'um *Regional specialties.* Open daily 12 noon to 8pm.** *Exit Carretera Merida-Cancun km 22.9 detour Carretera Merida-Chetumal; Libramiento Tecoh (before Z.A. Mayapan). Tecoh, Yucatán. Information: 999.195.6294* Traditional, but extremely well done. The squash seed sauce on the *papadzules* is creamy and rich, and the accompanying tomato sauce smoky – just as it should be!
- **Néctar *Regional specialties.* Open Tuesday – Saturday, 1:30pm to 12pm.** *Avenida A García Lavín, Plaza Jardín. Information: 938.0838.* Newly (and thankfully!) reopened after a hiatus to regroup and move to a new location, chef Roberto Solis is back with more innovative cuisine with a Yucatecan twist. The new restaurant is much more comfortable than the former, and has an upstairs dining loft for larger parties.
- **La Pigua *Seafood and regional specialties.* Open Sunday through Tuesday from 12 noon to 6pm; Wednesday through Saturday from 12 noon to 10:30pm.** *Calle 33 No. 505A x Cupules and 62, northeast of the Fiesta Americana and Hyatt Hotels Information: 920.1126.* Originally founded in Campeche, La Pigua will bring you visions of *coctelerías* along the glorious seaside there. And speaking of *coctelerías*, do be sure to order your favorite seafood combo as a *coctel* – and also be sure to ladle on as much *habanero* sauce as you can stand for the full effect. Also highly recommended are the octopus salad and a crazy fabulous seafood mix called The Sir Frances Drake.
- **El Príncipe Tutul-Xiu *Regional specialties.* Open every day from 11am to 6pm.** *Calle 26 No. 208 between Calle 25 and 27, Maní, Yucatán. Information: 997.978.4257.* The best source for *Poc Chuc* in the region, this restaurant has become a destination for folks throughout the state. Sit under the breezy, tranquil *palapa* and watch happy families come and go. All the food is well prepared and authentic, but the *Poc Chuc* is the best – smoky, tender, moist and accompanied by all the usuals: *Cebollas Asadas, Frijol Colado* and *Chiltomate*. *Tortillas* are hand-made and scrumptious. *NOTE: There is also a branch of El Príncipe Tutul-Xiu in Mérida: Calle 123 No. 216 between Calle 46A and 46B, Colonia Serapio Rendón. Information: 929.7721. TIP: While in Maní, be sure to visit the main church, full of colorful folk retablos and altars. The large lawn in front was the scene of the infamous burning of the Mayan codices by the ever-repentant Fray Diego de Landa.*
- **Siqueff *Lebanese and regional specialties.* Open Tuesday – Sunday, 8am – 7pm.** *Calle 60 No. 350 between Calle 35 and 37. Information: 925.5027.* The distinguished Lebanese Siqueff family has owned and operated restaurants in Yucatán for close to a century. The fried kibis, humus and other Lebanese specialties are unsurpassed in the area, and since they are credited with the invention of *Huevos Motuleños*, be sure to try them if you are there at breakfast time.
- **La Taberna de los Frailes *Regional specialties.* Open daily 12pm - 11pm.** *Calle 49 No. 235 at Calle 50. Next to Convento de San Bernardino de Siena, Valladolid, Yucatán. Information: 985.856.0689.* The owner and chef are constantly playing with regional ingredients.

Try the *dzik de carne ahumada* (sort of like a Cobb salad featuring chopped vegetables and smoked pork), or their stellar *mero en recado blanco* (grouper fillet marinated in a pepper-and-clove blend then charcoal grilled). On breezy days the pleasing fragrance of *maracuyá* (passion flower) wafts gently toward you from its place draped over the surrounding wall.

• **Taquería Yucatán Taquería. Open Monday – Saturday, 7am – 4pm.** *Calle 18 No. 98 at the corner of Calle 19, Colonia Yucatán. Information: 925.9493.* Along with Wayan'e, Taquería Yucatán is another corner taquería that has enjoyed a long life and is so popular with locals that competition for tables is sometimes an issue. This is one of the only *taquerías* I know of that serves handmade *tortillas*, which can be dangerous for the waistline if you happen to like today's *guiso*. And I did: *Empanizado* is a thin pork cutlet breaded, fried and coarsely chopped, topped with a delicious *Xni-pek*; and scrambled eggs with *nopales* was a lighter option for our early breakfast meal. And just for balance, I also tried their *pezuñaas* – fully boned pigs' feet, breaded/fried and amazingly succulent. Fridays is *Pan de Cazon* day.

• **La Tradición Regional specialties. Open every day 10am – 6pm.** *Calle 60 No. 293 between Calle 25 and Calle 27, Colonia Alcalá Martín. Information: 925.2526.* The original location of this family-style restaurant right in the hotel zone. See comments above in “Regional Yucatecan / Centro”.

• **Wayan'e Taquería. Open Monday – Saturday 7am – 2pm.** *Calle 20 four blocks south of Chapur Norte, Colonia Itzimmá. Information: 926.3265.* This outdoor corner stand is so popular with local businessmen crowding in for *almuerzo* that you should be sure to go early. By noon or 1pm supplies have dwindled down to nothing. The menu is overwhelming but the good news is you can't go wrong with anything you choose. For something healthy, try a *torta* of scrambled eggs with *chaya* or chard (*acelgas*). But for a hit of the real thing, order the artery-clogging *castacán* (fried pork belly). Their varied *salsa* selection is sublime. Just be sure to grab plenty of napkins.

## Mexican

• **El Corral del Carnero Mexican barbacoa. Open Thursday – Sunday from 7am – 5pm.** *Calle 38A No. 104 between Calle 33 and 31B, Colonia Zozzil Norte. Turn east at light opposite Liverpool. Information: 941.9417.* Not for everyday dining, the *barbacoa* of heavy, fatty yet savory mutton (*carnero*) served at El Corral is the real thing. Do you hear them bleating in the background? Could be, since they slaughter their own sheep and cook it on a bed of *maguey* leaves in a pit out back, just like in central and western Mexico. And be prepared for some menu surprises, since real *barbacoa* wastes nothing: kidney, liver, sweetbreads, heart, stuffed stomach and even testicles one way or another make their way onto a *taco*. The grilled liver and onion *tacos* are sensational, and the melted cheese rolled with fatty mutton into a *pita* (*taco Arabe*) is an embarrassment of riches. Not for the faint of heart (nor those with heart ailments, for that matter), El Corral del Carnero is a taste of wild-west Mexico just north of Mérida.

• **El Fogoncito Taquería and grill. Open every day from 1:00pm - 2:00am.** *Prolongación Montejo at Calle 7. Information: 944.0315.* Although this casual hang-out is one link in a chain, the food is fabulous enough to rank a “wow-factor” from all of our out-of-town guests. I lost count of how many *taco* varieties El Fogoncito features but it must be pushing 20, which is a good excuse for trying their *taco* platter with an assortment of five kinds. Or just be experimental and order one at a time. Not to be missed are their *tacos al pastor*, and its sister *taco* – the *gringa* – a *pastor taco* loaded with cheese. Their colorful *salsa* carousel makes for some fun and flavorful variation.

## Latin & International

• **Acqua International “Cocina Creativa”. Open Tuesday – Saturday, 1:30pm – 2am; Sundays 1pm – 6pm; Mondays 6pm – 2am.** *Avenida 21 No. 73B between Calle 12 and 14, Colonia Mexico. Information: 926.8211.* College cafeteria ambience, appropriate for tasty comfort foods like *Fondue al Chipotle* and *Ensalada Capri*. Meet the owners, Maricela Chaia and Ernesto Casares, who will charm and welcome you.

• **La Recova Argentinian grill. Open Monday - Saturday from 1pm-2am; Sundays from 1pm to 12am.** *Calle 34 No. 382 at Prolongación Paseo de Montejo. Information: 944.0215.* Beautiful, chic modern setting designed by architect Javier Muñoz Menéndez. Excellent cuts of beef with an Argentinian flair (think lots of *chimichurri*). A particular favorite: the Kobe beef (probably “Kobe-style” but they're not talking) burger with stacks of French fries.

• **Trotter's “Steak/Tapas/Vino”. Open Monday through Saturday 1pm – 2am; Sunday 1pm – 6pm.** *Circuito Colonias between Calle 60 and Prolongación Paseo de Montejo. Information: 927.2320.* Any time I have out-of-town guests and want to be assured of an impressive dinner, I take them to Trotter's. Everyone is always pleased with the food, and the atmosphere is electric (especially on 2x1 nights at the bar!) I've had pleasant bites of my companions' meals on many occasions, but I always order the same thing: *Steak Frites*. But then, how can you go wrong with a perfectly grilled steak and a pile of crisp fries drizzled with truffle oil?

