

Healthy Options Award



A guide to Mexican
restaurant dishes

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Mexican restaurants within the UK may serve not only Mexican style food, but also foods from other areas of Latin America (such as Argentina and Brazil).

As the recipes and methods of cooking can vary between restaurants, this list is not exhaustive and aims to provide a *general* guideline only.

General Ingredients

- **Chipotle** – Smoke-dried jalapeno chillies.
- **Chorizo** – Sausage made with fermented, cured, coarsely chopped fatty pork.
- **Cilantro** – Another word for coriander leaves.
- **Refried beans** – Usually black or pinto beans. Beans are soaked, cooked and mashed up, then fried with lard or oil. Often onion, garlic & spices added. 'Refried' means that the mashed beans have been over-fried to dry out the paste (it does *not* mean it has been fried twice).

Mexican Cheeses

- **Anejo (enchilado)** – Hard and dry cheese suitable for grating, usually made from goats milk. Mild and slightly spicy flavour, sometimes used in enchiladas, burritos and tacos.
- **Cotija** – Strong flavoured, firm cheese usually made with cows' milk. Can be used to sprinkle on cooked foods, or in salads. Moister version also available.
- **Jack Cheese / Monterey Jack Cheese** – Mild, white, semi-soft cheese made with whole, semi skimmed or skimmed cows' milk. Sometimes with added jalapenos, or garlic. **Dry Jack** is aged Jack cheese, with a hard texture suitable for grating.
- **Queso Blanco** - creamy, soft, mild white cheese made with cows' milk. Softens rather than melts when heated.

Sauces and dips

- **Chilli con Queso** – Smooth, *cheese* based sauce / dip, often made with diced tomatoes, jalapeno peppers and onion. Hot chillies may be added.
- **Chimichurri sauce** – Olive oil with a combination of chopped parsley, oregano, garlic, salt, pepper, onion +/- paprika. Sometimes also vinegar. Can be a sauce or marinade.
- **Creole sauce** – from New Orleans / Louisiana cuisine, but sometimes served in Mexican restaurants. Recipe varies, but tomato based with added ingredients such as onion, celery, bell pepper, garlic, stock, cayenne pepper, chilli, herbs, salt and pepper.
- **Enchilada sauce** – Usually a red, tomato based sauce with chillies.
- **Guacamole** – Mashed avocado mixed with lime/lemon juice. Variations may include salt, onion, garlic, chillies, red pepper or coriander (cilantro). Some recipes may include sour cream.
- **Pico de gallo / Salsa Picada** – Raw chopped tomato, lime juice, onions, garlic, coriander and chillies. Can also contain avocado or cucumber. A less liquid, *raw* version of salsa.
- **Salsa** – Usually cooked tomatoes, onions, garlic, coriander and chillies.

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- **Sour cream** - Cream that has soured and thickened by the action of lactic-acid bacteria. Approx 20% fat.

Tortilla based dishes

- **Burrito** – Flour tortilla filled with meat or chicken and rolled up (tucking in the ends). Sometimes oven baked. Can contain other fillings (e.g. beans, rice, lettuce, tomatoes, cheese, salsa, guacamole, sour cream). Generally filled with pre-cooked ingredients (unlike quesadilla).
- **Chimichanga** – Deep fried burrito, usually served without sauce, but may be accompanied by salsa, guacamole etc.
- **Enchilada** – Means ‘seasoned with chillies’. Corn tortilla, sometimes softened by briefly frying in hot lard / oil and dipped in Enchilada sauce. Tortilla is then filled (meat / chicken / prawns / cheese / vegetables / potatoes), rolled up, placed in a dish and layered with more Enchilada sauce (and sometimes cheese). Baked.
- **Fajita** – Strips of meat (steak, chicken, pork or prawn) often cooked with onions and peppers then served on a sizzling platter. There is also a vegetarian version. Corn or wheat tortillas are usually served on a separate plate along with salsa / sour cream / guacamole and customer makes up their own fajita.
- **Flautas** – (see Taquito).
- **Nachos** – Corn tortilla chips covered with melted cheese (basic nachos). Other toppings can include mince beef, chicken, chorizo, jalapenos, refried beans / bean chilli, salsa, guacamole, sour cream. Tortillas often baked together with chosen fillings. Usually a starter.
- **Quesadilla** – Flour tortilla, filled with cheese and often other ingredients (e.g. chorizo, ham, mushroom, jalapenos or scrambled egg). It is then folded in half and baked (or grilled).
- **Taco** – Folded warm corn tortilla, with pre-cooked filling.
- **Taco shells** - usually hard, deep fried corn tortillas, half folded so pre-cooked fillings and salads can be added (filling often added by customer).
- **Taquito / Flautas** - Often a *small* tortilla (corn or wheat) rolled up quite thinly with a filling (meat, chicken, vegetables, potato) and *deep fried* (or char-grilled). Sometimes covered in sauce and cheese, or left plain and served with a dip. As usually smaller, they can be served as a starter.
- **Tortilla** – Thin, unleavened flat bread made from corn or wheat flour (often called ‘flour’ tortilla).
- **Tortilla chips** – Corn tortillas cut into wedges and deep fried (could be baked).
- **Tostada / Tostadas** – Deep fried flat tortilla (usually corn). Topped with a layer of refried bean paste, chicken, beef, fish or vegetables. Cheese, lettuce, onion, sour cream, guacamole, salsa often added. Often a starter, but also main.
- **Totopos** – Round corn chips similar to tortilla chips, usually baked. However, *fried* tortilla chips are sometimes referred to as totopos.

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Other dishes

- **Albondigas** – Meatballs, sometimes containing rice. Can be made into a *soup* ('Sopa de Albondigas').
- **Mexican rice** – Recipes vary. Usually, uncooked rice browned in oil, then onion, garlic, coriander and canned tomatoes added and simmered until rice is cooked and most of the liquid absorbed.
- **Moqueca** – A Brazilian curry / stew, usually seafood. Can contain a range of ingredients such as peppers, prawns, onions, garlic, coriander, chilli, *palm oil* and *coconut cream*.
- **Paella** – Rice dish. Meat and vegetables usually stir-fried in oil and then rice is added to become coated in oil. Stock added and reduced by boiling until rice is cooked.

Desserts

- **Banana Taquito** – Deep fried tortilla filled with banana.