



At Tacos de Cabeza “Los Güeros” intrepid foodies can find oven-roasted sheep head tacos.

# CULINARY STROLL IN THE CENTRO HISTÓRICO

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Special to The News

Go downtown to indulge your palate and try new foods, but without breaking the bank

As readers of my columns know, one of my favorite places to shop is the Mercado San Juan, south of the Alameda. After years of trips there, I've also gotten to know many of the eateries clustered between the market and the nearest Metro stop, Salto del Agua.

A stroll along Calle López, which runs north from Arcos de Belén, is like leafing through a Diana Kennedy cookbook. In four short blocks you can fill up on a variety of Mexican “antojitos” or snacks. But don't let that word fool you – there's a lot of hearty fare to be found.

Start at the northwest corner of Arcos de Belén. Amid the DVD vendors is a small juice stand where, for a mere six pesos, a half-liter of fresh-squeezed orange juice is waiting for you.

Across López is the entrance to the Mercado San Juan de los Arcos de Belén. (This wonderful, traditional market is not to be confused the Mercado San Juan where I do my shopping, which is a few blocks away.)

This market is a great place for a quick comida. The choices are varied enough that your tour could end here. **Birria y Flautas de Barbacoa**, the first stand as you enter on the left, specializes in lamb-filled flautas, as well as birria tacos – goat meat that has been marinated and cooked in a rich chile sauce.

Walking further down this

aisle, you will find **La Olla de Abundancia** on the left. They serve just about every Mexican classic and their 35-peso “comida corrida” or full lunch is generous. I like the enchiladas verdes, but you never know what will be on their extensive menu.

Across the aisle on the right is a nameless but plentiful **tostadas stand**. There are at least half a dozen toppings you can choose from to heap onto your crispy fried tortilla. Wash them down with an “agua fresca,” or fresh fruit drink, from the stand next door.

**Carnitas El Kioskito**, at the corner of Delicias – as you exit and turn right from the market – is a branch of a beloved institution known for Michoacán-style carnitas. I always order “maciza,” or solid meat, which is less fatty. Local workers frequent Carnitas El Kioskito, one of the sure signs of a good taco stand.

Next you'll see **Taquería Cocula**, a friendly fonda that does flavorful tacos of “costilla,” or pork rib, with a selection of sauces. Their icy horchata goes well with everything.

**Cochinita Pibil XEW** is another hole-in-the-wall offering the spicy pork specialty of the Yucatán. It's named after the nearby radio station XEW, which broadcast just about every famous Mexican singer of

## TAKE THE TASTY TOUR

If you're taking the Metro, get off at Salto del Agua. Then start at the Mercado San Juan de los Arcos de Belén, and don't miss Carnitas El Kioskito for Michoacán-style carnitas and La Gran Cocina Mi Fonda for Spanish cuisine with a Mexican touch.

the twentieth century.

**La Gran Cocina Mi Fonda** is my favorite place of all on Calle López. This old-fashioned fonda is run by a Spanish exile. A host of regular customers, often asked to share a table, pack the place daily to enjoy home-cooked Spanish-style food with a Mexican touch.

Although paella is the specialty of the house, I like the roast chicken en su jugo and the Madrid-style “potaje de lentejas,” a lentil soup flavored with chorizo.

For something a little lighter, **El Paisa** across the street serves chicken soup like your grandmother might have made. But I'll bet she didn't make hand-made tortillas to go with it.

**Tacos de Cabeza “Los Güeros”** is usually crowded. If you're feeling adventurous, try

their oven-roasted sheep head tacos. They're better than you might expect.

**Taquería González** is at the corner of Vizcainas on the right. The sign boasts “Los mejores tacos del Centro Histórico.” Try the “longaniza,” a spicy, less greasy sausage. You can also supplement your tacos with nopales, beans or colorful salsas.

**Ricos Tacos Toluca**, at the corner of Puente de Paredo, is a rare taquería serving specialties associated with Toluca and the State of Mexico. The chorizo verde is very green – naturally so, they claim. It is loaded with pignoli nuts and tastes a little like Italian sausage. The roast tomato and chile sauce is another winner. The “cecina,” a pounded, salted meat is also worth sampling.

Finally, stop for a relaxing espresso at either **Café Cordobés** or **Café Villarias**, both traditional cafés where you can also buy coffee beans.

And remember, Calle López is one of the older streets in the Centro, so don't miss an opportunity to take in all the extraordinary architecture around you.

Nicholas Gilman is author of “Good Food in Mexico City: A Guide to Food Stalls, Fondas and Fine Dining,” available at all online booksellers. Visit his Web site: [www.mexicocityfood.net](http://www.mexicocityfood.net).

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