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Mexico

Spice of Life

For all you gourmets out there, Mexico offers some of the tastiest culinary experiences in the world. by Judy Koutsky





A culinary class at Sazón cooking school

Central Mexico: San Miguel de Allende

San Miguel de Allende with its cobblestone streets, centuries-old *palacios* and magical town square has long been a preferred destination for lovers of architecture. Founded in 1542, San Miguel is one of the best-preserved colonial towns in the country and has been named a national monument.

Food Facts: This region is known for its beef dishes, and you'll find plenty in this city. Local favorites include *pacholas* (ground beef patties), pork *empanadas* and *fiambre* (cured meats topped with fruits, vegetables and olive oil). Tomato-based stews and sauces, flavored with tomatillos and dried chilies, are also menu staples.

Get Cooking: At Sazón, a gourmet cooking school and retail shop located in an 18th-century hacienda, you can sign up for a variety of programs ranging from two-hour cooking classes, which focus on preparing simple local specialties like soups and meat marinades, to weeklong culinary packages that include hands-on instruction and lectures, accommodations at the nearby **Hotel Casa de Sierra Nevada** and field trips to local sites. Opt for one of

these and you'll shop for ingredients at area markets, dine in private homes and local restaurants and explore historic sites.

Sazón has recently introduced the Toque Travels series, which features top visiting chefs from around the world. Like the standard offerings at Sazón, the programs are varied: There are single classes in, say, learning the various uses of chocolate in regional recipes and weeklong packages that feature the art of cooking French cuisine.



Making quesadillas in San Miguel de Allende

lime and accompanied by avocado and rice, are top choices at this coastal hideaway. And most meals (yes, even breakfast) are spiced with *salsa huichol*. Originally developed by the area's Huichol Indians, the hot sauce is made from a variety of chilies, spices, vinegar and a dash of salt.

Get Cooking: At this high-end destination, everything is at your beck and call. Have the concierge arrange an in-villa cooking class and you'll get one-on-one instruction for creating delicious Mexican seafood

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Stay Here: Stay at the Orient Express-operated, 33-room boutique **Hotel Casa de Sierra Nevada**, and you'll be only steps from Sazón. Located on the opposite side of the colonial town plaza, the property is spread across numerous courtyards and nine different buildings, including a former customs house, an 18th-century mansion and a military fort (Sazón cooking classes start at \$50; 800-701-1561; sazonsanmiguel.com. Doubles at Casa de Sierra Nevada start at \$290 a night; 800-701-1561; casadesierranevada.com).

Pacific Coast: Punta Mita

Punta Mita is a quiet, gated villa and resort beach community that's 40 minutes northwest of busy, popular Puerto Vallarta. Visitors to the area enjoy a variety of activities: hiking, cycling and horseback riding, as well as water sports like sailing, surfing and kayaking. Golfers get a bonanza—they can tee off at the community's Jack Nicklaus Signature Course, a 19-hole championship green with sweeping ocean vistas.

Food Facts: Seafood dishes, flavored with cilantro and



Pacific vistas from a private villa in Punta Mita