

[The History Of TexMex Cuisine In, Of Course, Texas!](#)

You live in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio or elsewhere in Texas and you love TexMex cuisine. That makes you a bona fide "chile head." TexMex food is the specialty in these here parts and it's got quite a history!

History of the word "TexMex"

The term "TexMex" first entered the common lexicon as a nickname for the Texas-Mexican Railway, chartered in 1875. Train schedules, published in newspapers, abbreviated the names of railroads. For example, the Missouri Pacific was called the Mo. Pac. and the Texas-Mexican was abbreviated Tex. Mex. It was in the 1920s that the hyphenated form was used in reference to the railroad as well as to describe people of Mexican descent who were born in Texas.

Food historians claim that the first print evidence of "TexMex" in reference to food happened in 1945. From there, TexMex restaurants slowly surfaced outside the Southwest U.S. in cities with substantial Hispanic populations. Then TexMex went "gourmet". In the 1970s Mexican culinary expert Diana Kennedy is credited for taking this common food and making it trendy fare and a new "must-eat" cuisine for a younger generation.

What exactly is TexMex cuisine?

Several hundred years ago, during the mission era, Spanish and Mexican-Indian foods were combined Anglo fare in Texas, as in other parts of what was called the Northern Frontier of New Spain. It was this cuisine that would eventually be called TexMex. The cuisine actually originated with the Texans of Hispanic descent or Tejanos, as a hybrid of Spanish and Mexican Indian foods when Texas was still part of New Spain and, later, of Mexico.

Served at dinner tables across the South Texas region, between San Antonio to Brownsville, this cuisine has varied little from its earliest origins and was heavily influenced by the cuisine in the neighboring northern states of Mexico. Originally, TexMex started with a taste for cabrito (kid goat), barbacoa (barbecued cow heads), carne seca (dried beef), and other products of cattle culture that were common on both sides of the Rio Grande during that period.

TexMex incorporates ingredients common to Mexican cuisine, although some unknown in Mexico are often added. This cuisine is also characterized by its heavy use of meat (particularly beef), beans and spices, in addition to Mexican-style tortillas (maize or flour), fried or baked. Nachos, crispy tacos, crispy chalupas, chili con queso, chili con carne, chili gravy and fajitas are all TexMex inventions.

Serving tortilla chips and a hot sauce or salsa as an appetizer is also an original TexMex dish. In addition, TexMex has imported flavors from other spicy cuisines, such as the use of cumin (common in Indian food), but used in only a few authentic Mexican recipes. In the 20th century, TexMex took on elements such as yellow cheese from the United States, because it became cheap and readily available.

The cuisine evolved during the 1950s in Mexican restaurants, whose popularity coincided with the arrival of large numbers of Mexican immigrants and created the style of TexMex food, the mix of Northern Mexican peasant food with Texas farm and cowboy fare. Chili was unknown in Mexico and derived from the use of beef in Texan cooking. Refried beans were a mis-translation of the Mexican dish, frijoles refritos, which actually means well-fried beans.

With this followed the combination platters, replete with enchiladas, tacos, and tortillas, which have now become the standards of the Tex-Mex menu. New dishes, like chimichangas and nachos were created to please the American palate. One of the most successful ethnic TexMex dishes to date is the fajita

Yo quiero Taco Bell!

The food community began referring to Americanized Mexican food as "TexMex," a term previously used to describe anything that was half-Texan and half-Mexican. Texas-Mexican restaurant owners considered it an insult. Yet this insult launched many successes. For the rest of the world, TexMex had reflected the wilder, untamed parts of Texas. It evoked images of cantinas, cowboys and the Wild West. Dozens of Tex-Mex restaurants sprang up in Paris, and across Europe, to Bangkok, Buenos Aires and Abu Dhabi.

Tortilla chips, margaritas and chili con carne are now well-known TexMex staples around the world. The cuisine is found in many independent and chain restaurants in the state of Texas as well as throughout the rest of the country. TexMex chain restaurants include Chili's, Ninfa's, Casa Ole, Chuy's, El Fenix, El Chico, and Taco Cabana. While Chili's serves some TexMex items, it is considered to be more Southwestern cuisine. And of course, there's the ubiquitous Taco Bell; a conglomeration of fast food versions of Mexican and TexMex dishes, owned by Yum! Brands, Inc., based in Louisville, KY.

If you love spicy dishes, you'll love the variety of entrees TexMex cuisine offers. But as good as TexMex is, it should be everything in moderation. Because, as you'll discover, what you put into your body now will affect your health down the road. And your health, good or bad, will eventually affect your bank account.

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