



## Mexico



### Mexico City 1968

# IN THE LAND OF 1001 FLAVOURS



As vast as the land and varied as the landscape, with a thousand tastes and colours; such was the culinary experience of the Games of the XIX Olympiad in Mexico in 1968.

It was as mysterious as arriving in Mexico for the first time and discovering the rugged, vigorous landscape as if by drawing back a curtain. It was with the same surprise that the athletes discovered the dishes on offer in the Olympic Village and the restaurants of Mexico City. Colour and more colour, a thousand and one flavours were offered for the athletes to discover in the Olympic Village named after Miguel Hidalgo.

At the entrance - or exit - of the Village, the Games organizing committee installed a huge dining area with various annexes and appointed Mr Cesar Balza to prepare the menus. He was assisted in preparing the food by the Mexican army, who were specialists in cooking the exquisite dishes enjoyed day after day by the athletes, coaches and officials.

The athletes ate in the Olympic Village (situated in the south of the city) or in the facilities of the Mexican Sports Centre (which still exists) in the west. The Olympic family had its quarters in the Hotel Camino Real near the Chapultepec wood.

To serve the 5,531 athletes taking part in the Games, 6 restaurants were built in which up to 350 different

by Rosalinda Coronado



dishes were served. These were prepared with 214 tons of fruit, 118 tones of meat and 31 tons of fish and seafood. Altogether, 849,447 meals were eaten in the Olympic Village. The restaurants catered to different geographical regions - Asia and Africa, Latin America, Western Europe and the English-speaking community - and were

*Outside the Olympic Village.*



open from 6:00 to 9:00 am for breakfast, 11:30 am to 2:30 pm for lunch and 4:30 pm to 9:00 pm for dinner. The sixth restaurant served international cuisine and remained open 'round the clock. Entrance to the restaurants was by voucher, which guests could purchase for 25 pesos for breakfast, lunch or dinner.

It was in the international area that Mexican fruits made the most vivid impression on the foreign athletes. Julian Nuñez Arana, today President of the Mexican Athletics Federation, remembers that weightlifting champion Leonid Zhabotinsky of the USSR was capable of eating up to 6 melons and one watermelon at lunch.

The main items consumed were: 62,115 kilos of seasonings; 9,925 kilos of three types of sugar, 76,780 kilos of fowl, chicken, turkey, duck, beef, lamb, mutton, pork and cold cuts, 9,560 caramel creams, jellies and puddings. Beyond all doubt, the variety of food for the athletes to choose from was impressive. There was not only international-style food but also traditional fare that was in keeping with different religions and customs. Special legal allowances had been made so that food from every country could be imported into Mexico.

For example, the United States imported purified water, the Europeans their wines, and the Muslims their seasonings. The menus for Asia consisted mainly made of fish and seafood, which were fished in the Mexican



seas along the far-reaching Pacific and Atlantic coasts.

Breakfast menus were the same in all six restaurants: a buffet of milk, yoghurt, juices (orange, grapefruit, carrot, tomato, grape, apple) and fruit (melons, watermelons, papayas, apples, bananas, grapes, strawberries, pineapples, plums, pears, peaches, cherries).

Then, Logically, there were the cereals: oats, wheat, and corn flakes. There was honey, jam and, of course, eggs, which were combined with ham, bacon, cheese, different types of mushrooms (including a black type which grows in maize fields) and prickly pears. The prickly pear is a kind of cactus with high nutritional value and is one of the most delicious vegetables on earth.

There was bread, but also rolls and pancakes, which are typical of North American cuisine. In the Latin American zone, there was a special dish known as *chilaquiles*, made of maize tortillas

with green sauce (green tomatoes with chilli or garlic, liquefied to make a sauce) and minced chicken. Also on offer were *quesadillas*, a typical Mexican dish. They are made as follows: a tortilla is laid out in a frying pan and cheese is placed in the middle. The tortilla is folded and cooked until the cheese melts. Then, it is covered in a dressing that usually consists of red chilli, parsley and onion.

As regards deserts, Mexico is a nation with a veritable rainbow of sweets including jellies, caramel creams, puddings, pancakes, etc. There are also breakfast pastries with names such as "shells", "trousseaus", "flutes", etc.

In addition to juices, the beverages included coffee, tea and fruit-flavoured water. This is a Mexican speciality. Purified water is placed in a blender with a fruit such as a mango (without the skin, of course) and sugar is added. The ingredients are liquefied into a tasty, re-

freshing drink. There were also beverages with the flavours of Jamaica, like tamarind and barley water. Another drink was *tepache*, which is made with fermented pineapple skin.

The food consisted of the specialities of the Mexican chefs. There was an hors-d'oeuvre buffet with cold meats, ham, cheese and salami, followed by soup, rice, creamed spinach, mushrooms, carrots, vegetables, noodles, spaghetti, etc. Then came the *plat de résistance*, which ranged from a simply cooked cut of meat with no seasoning to typical Mexican dishes containing stuffed chillies, meat with pickled green peppers and beans.

The variety of fruits and desserts was so great, and so delicious, that athletes were often spotted taking an extra one out with them to their rooms or to competition venues.

The fare at dinner was very similar to that on offer for lunch, but it had even

more variety because the athletes had to replenish their energy supply. The refrigerators were therefore filled with ice-creams, lollipops and sweets.

Whenever one of the athletes had a birthday, a special cake was baked for the occasion, usually with chocolate, apple, condensed milk or cream cheese.

Beyond all doubt, the food at the Games of the XIX Olympiad was a treat for the visitors, and the athletes' palates greatly appreciated the work of the Mexican chefs.

Needless to say, for the Mexicans themselves, one of the most popular dishes was chilli, a black chilli sauce known as *mole* and, of course, tortillas.

*Refreshments.*

