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Mexico City winning culinary capital status

By Janet Fletcher

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Bananas at the weekly street market in La Condesa.

Serious travelers come to Mexico City for the world-class anthropology museum and the massive Baroque cathedral on the Zocalo. I'm all for that. But what finally lured me to D.F. (the city's nickname, short for Distrito Federal) was the unrelenting rave for its food scene. As a culinary destination promising everything from juicy street-stall carnitas to celebrity-chef dining, this teeming capital is topping the charts. And as a wise friend reminded me before I went, "If it's a choice between a museum and lunch, the museum will only get better."

Pack an appetite for this daylong excursion and download the Uber app. The city's Uber cars are newer and cleaner than most taxis; drivers materialize instantly and charge rock-bottom fares. The Red Tree House, a welcoming, well-staffed bed-and-breakfast in the leafy Condesa neighborhood, makes a quiet and almost-too-comfortable base.

Janet Fletcher is a freelance writer. E-mail: travel@sfchronicle.com

Explore the city

Morning

Fuel yourself for a morning on your feet at El Moro, the city's most beloved *churrería*, or Mexican-doughnut shop. From the sidewalk viewing window, you can preview the treat to come as an automatic dispenser spools the batter into a vat of hot oil and a cook deftly shapes it into an enormous coil. Dip the fritters in foamy hot chocolate and resolve to walk it off later.

From El Moro, it's a 15-minute stroll to the Museo de Arte Popular, where the acclaimed collection of folk art includes baskets, death masks, the fantastical papier-mâché sculptures known as *alebrijes*, elaborate clay "trees of life" used by missionaries to teach Bible stories, and a trove of astonishing miniature sculptures that you need a hand lens to view. Two hours here is barely enough.

Midday

Feed your fitness tracker with a 25-minute hike to the headquarters of the Secretaría de Educación Pública, home to three floors of Diego Rivera murals — 100-plus panels painted between 1923 and 1928. Rivera sympathetically painted the



Churreria El Moro, a choice stop for fritters and hot chocolate.



Fresh fruit vendor at La Lagunilla market.

life of everyday people, from miners and potters to rural teachers. His “Wall Street Banquet” (1928), with its table of fat cats and ticker tape, eerily presages the stock market crash. (View more Rivera murals in the nearby Palacio de Bellas Artes, an Art Deco theater where the Ballet Folklórico performs.)

Claim your 2 p.m. reservation at Contramar, chef Gabriela Cámara’s wildly popular seafood restaurant. Order grilled octopus and pescado a la talla Contramar (pictured), a whole butterflied fish, its flesh slathered with chile sauce on one side and parsley sauce on the other. (Cámara recently opened Cala, a seafood establishment in San Francisco.)

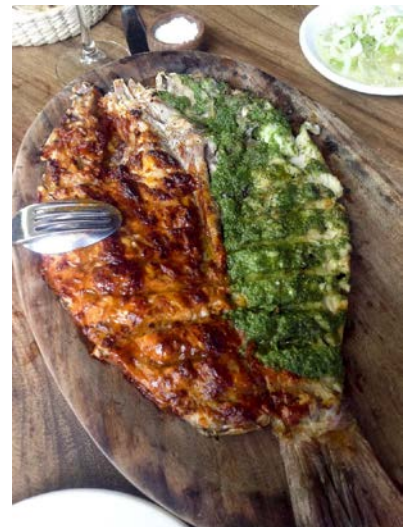
Afternoon

Take Uber back to Condesa and pull out your copy of Jim Johnston’s “Mexico City: An Opinionated Guide for the Curious Traveler” (\$13.95; iUniverse). Johnston’s annotated walking tours No. 9 (Parque México) and No. 10 (Avenida Amsterdam) explore the heart of Condesa and Roma, adjacent park-centered neighborhoods alive with dog walkers, cafes, gastropubs, galleries, Art Deco architecture and a weekly street market (pictured).

Evening

The 5-year-old Limantour has reignited cocktail culture in the capital, with signature drinks and house-made ingredients like cactus bitters and passion fruit syrup. Ditch your Negroni habit and try an El Caminante, a Latin American interpretation with mezcal replacing gin. From Limantour, it’s a five-minute walk to Rosetta, chef Elena Reygadas’ Italian-inflected restaurant. This dreamy greenhouse of a dining room is a whimsical setting for Reygadas’ highly personal melding of Mexico and Italy. The juicy pork loin with a white mole that includes cauliflower and pine nuts, and the peanut ice cream with white chocolate mole reflect Reygadas’ modern vision. (Ask for a table on the ground floor.)

If you skipped dinner, you’ll have time for salsa dancing at Mama Rumba. Join in if you dare, but nobody notices if you just perch on a barstool with a cold Negra Modelo and admire the adept couples on the dance floor. Cap the night at El Califa with textbook tacos al pastor. These “shepherd’s tacos” showcase chili-rubbed, spit-roasted pork shaved directly into freshly made tortillas.



Pescado alla talla (grilled fish with two sauces) at Contramar.

If you go

Red Tree House: Calle Culiacán 6, Condesa www.theredtreehouse.com.

Churrería El Moro: Lázaro Cárdenas 42, Centro Historico.

Museo de Arte Popular: Calle Revillagigedo 11, Centro Historico www.map.df.gob.mx.

Secretariat of Public Education: República de Argentina 28, Centro Historico.

Contramar: Durango 200, Roma <http://www.contramar.com.mx/#>.

Licorería Limantour: Álvaro Obregón 106, Roma Norte, <http://www.limantour.tv>.

Rosetta: Colima 166, Roma Norte, www.rosetta.com.mx.

El Califa: Altata 22, Condesa, www.elcalifa.com.mx.

Mama Rumba: Querétaro 230, Roma Norte, www.mamarumba.com.mx.