

# Stuck in Querétaro

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Not that this a bad thing. I spontaneously took a private tour with a foodie guide last night and it might be the best \$40 US I've ever spent.

David studied gastronomía in school in Mexico City, and has been in Querétaro for 18 years tasting and testing his way all over the city with his lovely New Yorker wife. Anna was out of town however, so I had him all to myself and it was a total adventure in the tastes and smells of Mexico's history.

I have decided food is the great time traveler. Buildings tell wonderful histories. Architecture can tell you what religion the original builders were, what region of the world they lived, and even the era in which they lived. Buildings in a town like Toledo, Spain can show you a kind of ancient history that promises a potential future you can only dream of. As you walk through the temples, cathedrals and mosques and learn of this "city of three religions" living in harmony thousands of years ago - you cross your fingers behind your back and silently pray for this kind of harmony to exist in your lifetime.

But alas, buildings burn. Buildings crumble over time. Large chunks of ancient European history fell in clouds of dusty ash at the great Notre Dame and part of that building's history is gone forever. At least visually to the millions who travel to see it.

The same is true for books. Which is heartbreaking to me as I'm pretty sure the

written word was my first true love. I recently read of the historic Los Angeles Library fire that decimated countless, literally countless – books, magazines, archived antiquities, microfilm – all of it. Gone forever. Think of all that was lost to war in the ancient museums of Baghdad. I'm writing this in real time on the terrace of a hotel made of a restored ancient library here in central Mexico. I feel privileged to have handled these encyclopedias dated 1925. For they surely will not last another 75 years. One spine actually began to fall apart in my hands.

Food and its recipes however, can never die. They live fluidly throughout history as they are passed down from generation to generation. They never need to be upgraded to suit modern conveniences. If you burn one, you just start over and make it again. Beautiful dishes can be stolen, destroyed. But their contents live on forever in the great ethos of humanity and our diverse cultures. They do at times evolve and morph over time – but then isn't that the most accurate account of our history?

Last night I had a dish that told the story of a time many Lebanese immigrated to the town of Puebla south of Mexico City. Starting in the 1890's and for the next several decades over 100,000 Lebanese settled in these regions of Mexico. Now hearing or reading of this little-known piece of Mexican history is cool, but tasting it?? Nothing compares. Nothing compels all of the senses as sinking your teeth into *tacos arabes*. A creation born of longing for the tastes of home, combined with incorporating the ingredients on hand in this new land, and then presenting it in a way that your new foreign neighbors will eat. Meet the tiny gyro essentially, a flattened, thinner pita made to look like a tortilla with the meat cooked in the Lebanese fashion (2 days in a deep earthen hole), and then offered up to the locals with their salsa and spices. To Die For. But also a delicious lesson, a savory step back in time. Literally.



I tasted, not read, the real "why" Oaxaca, Mexico is known world-wide for it's molé. I thought I knew tamales. I have a strange Texan arrogance here sometimes, like "uh yeah I'm your neighbor, of course I've had tamales, every Christmas Eve..." And then every single time I'm humbled and educated on how we've really only f'ed up the real deal with our Tex-Mex. Although to be fair - those are the tastes of Texas' history. But I digress.

This tamale came to me in the traditional style dating thousands of years back, of the *tamales oaxaqueños*. This dish dates back to pre-colonial times - like best guesses are from Mesoamerica, pre-spaniards, indigenous... you get the idea. No dry corn husk here. Oh no - succulent chicken (again cooked in the ground forever drenched in their special homemade molé sauce, then wrapped in a banana leaf and presented on the plate tied up like a little present from Mother Earth. And it truly tasted that divine.

