

Ceviche

By J A Williams

The Mexican markets are organisms that live at full volume and top speed, every moment, of each day... well except at siesta when the whole world shudders to a halt. The instant you walk through the door, your senses are hammered by the cacophony. You will see bright blankets of, wool and cotton, bolts of cloth that would blind most Canadians, while the vendors call out generic phrases as you saunter by proclaiming the quality of their wares. The scent of spices mix together creating a heady atmosphere that fills you, penetrates your brain, and draws you in. Then the gentle aroma of fresh mangos and bananas waft through your senses in a way impossible in our super-sanitized grocery stores.

My market was in ciudad Mante, (Mante City,) in the south of the State of Tamaulipas. A large square brick building with sixteen-foot ceilings, it took up an entire block near the city square. Outside the doors stood vendors with blocks of ice, using old style ice shavers to make... yes snow cones; shaved ice, topped with sugary-syrupy flavours. Try the lemon-chile, cucumber, or tamarind.

The market was filled with fruits, often picked that day; puestos (stalls) were dedicated to chillies of every imaginable kind, or vegetables and mini restaurants, seating five or six at small counters. Here, for the first time I tried, many of the traditional dishes. Mole Poblano, pronounced moh-lay, pozole, menudo, and small four-inch tacos stuffed to overflowing with any kind of meat imaginable, served with green or red salsas, minced radishes and onions, fried or raw; there were poblano peppers stuffed with chorizo, cheese, garlic and onion, all under one roof with no walls partitioning of the stalls.

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In the back of the market, sits one lonely booth that opens directly onto the street. It has a metal roll-up door that is higher than the booth is wide and contains nothing more than a broken down chest freezer, small disposable bowls, and spoons, with a weathered wooden cigar box that holds change and the days profits. Inside the freezer a large plastic tub snuggles, surrounded by ice, and filled with Ceviche.

The tiny stall where the vendor sold his wares was too small to make the ceviche so he would prepare it at home and transport it to the market each morning on his 'moto de carga.' This is a three-wheeled motorcycle with a small pick-up-like truck-bed on the back, a very Mexican mode of transport, (as

are bicycles with racks for carrying cages with live poultry or pigs.)

So as not to scare anyone off I will say ceviche (se-vee-chay) is marinated fish. It is a most wonderful appetizer and almost makes itself. Now silly me, I left Mexico without the recipe and struggled to find a decent one for years. In fact, I never did find one that I liked but never fear, recipes are not commandments they are suggestions. I experimented with the half a dozen of the better recipes and came up with one that looks similar to the ceviche in the market in Mante and tastes divine. What more could one desire? Without further ado, here is my version of ceviche.

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Ceviche

- 1-Kg red snapper, sole, halibut, or pollock fillets, (or other fish of choice.)
- 1-cup (250ml) limejuice
- ¼ cup virgin olive oil
- 1-3 fresh serrano peppers minced (or other fresh chilli peppers) -adjust to taste-
- 3-medium tomatoes, peeled and chopped
- 1-small onion minced fine
- ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- ¼ tsp. dried oregano (or 1 tbs. fresh minced)
- 1-tbs. Worcestershire sauce
- 3-cloves garlic finely minced
- ¼ tsp. salt or salt substitute (try Half Salt or sea salt)

Cut fish into 1-centimetre pieces, (about ½ inch), place in non-metal bowl, cover with lime juice and refrigerate four hours or overnight.

Drain fish, add all ingredients, fold together and let sit in refrigerator ½ an hour before serving.

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Cooks all over the world use the ingredients they have on hand locally. As we live on the coast, I have tried it with salmon and it turns out quite wonderful. You must be sure though, to leave salmon in

the lime juice 12 to 16 hours before assembling the dish.

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The State of Tamaulipas where I lived is for the most part a lush sub-tropical region. Fruit trees of every sort abound and fruit is incorporated into a multitude of dishes or eaten as a snack. Vegetables on the other hand tend to find their way into meals as garnishes or in specialty dishes and are not much favoured as a feature. This of course runs against the grain with me, vegetables are one of my favourite things. In my quest for ever healthier Mexican food, I turn the garnishes into a main ingredient in many dishes. I brought my family along on my quest and they came... kicking and screaming!

When I make the garnish for my tacos, enchiladas, pozole and etcetera, I mince the lettuce, radishes, onions, cilantro, add the diced tomato, then mix them all together in a very un-Mexican fashion and squeeze them liberally with lime juice (the family loves lime juice and it's healthy.) As an alternative to the limejuice, with the intention of getting everyone to eat more salad...err garnish, I top it with a wonderful, healthy, dressing passed on to me by the sister-in-law of one of my work companions. They also love it as a dip for vegetable sticks. Wink, wink, try it on your kids, they'll never know they're eating healthy food!

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Creamy Almond/Avocado Salad Dressing

1-cup blanched almonds. Place in blender with 1½ cups water and blend.

Add:

1 bunch fresh parsley

2 large garlic cloves (peeled and minced)

1½ tsp sea salt

½ cup olive oil

Juice from 1 whole lemon

1 whole avocado, peeled and seeded

Blend well and adjust to taste.

Tips:

- Add more garlic or lemon juice to taste.
- Add olive oil or water to adjust consistency.
- May also be used as a sandwich spread instead of mayonnaise.

(Thanks to K. Bebbington for the dressing recipe.)

Happy cooking all.

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