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[ROSALIND CUMMINGS-YEATES](#) | AUGUST 23, 2016 10:00 PM ET

Yummy Yucatan: Foodie Highlights in Merida, Mexico



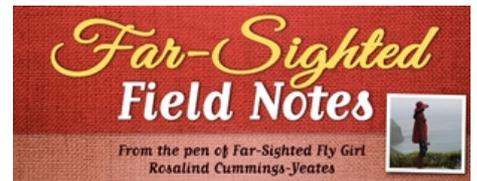
PHOTO: The lively colors and succulent flavors of the Mercado Lucas de Galvez. (All photos by Rosalind Cummings-Yeates)

Travelers to Mexico quickly discover that there's a lot more to Mexican cuisine than tacos and fajitas. In fact, the flavors of Mexico are as diverse as the landscape and the sophisticated Yucatan capital of [Merida](#) serves up the region's culinary diversity with flair. From the sprawling covered market, to street food finds and top chefs restos, the city covers all the foodie bases. Don't miss these tasty standouts during your next Merida trip:

Take A Yucatecan Cooking Class

There's no better way to learn about a destination's food than by actually cooking it. I'm no kitchen queen but I feel like I've gained a few new skills after taking a cooking class with the lively Chef Christian Bravo at [Casa Lecanda](#). The boutique hotel is housed in a stunning hacienda and the kitchen leads to a formal dining room.

[ROSALIND CUMMINGS-YEATES](#)



Rosalind Cummings-Yeates is a journalist, author and blogger who specializes in travel and culture topics. She loves guiding readers through the richness of various cultures and discovering the essence of a destination. Her travel and culture blog, [Farsighted Fly Girl](#), offers travel insights through the music, food, art and history of various countries and cultures. Join her on the journey at [www.Rosalindcummingsyeates.blogspot.com](#).

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PHOTO: Chef Bravo in the kitchen.

The [cooking class](#) features classic Yucatecan dishes like sopa de lima and Chef Bravo supplies all the cultural background for each dish. As a finalist on Mexico's "Top Chef" TV show, the chef knows a thing or two about Mexican cuisine. The class starts with a trip to the main market, where Chef Bravo guides you in selecting fresh ingredients for your menu. Then it's back to Casa Lecanda's kitchen to whip up a three course meal.

I chopped limes and blended peppers for soup and grilled snapper and then plucked leaves for a mango flan dessert decorated with edible local flowers. Although several Margaritas were served during the class, I abstained in to make sure my knife would cut vegetables, and not my fingers.

In the end, eating the elegant dishes was almost as much fun as preparing them.

Visit the Landmark Mercado Lucas De Galvez

Merida hosts several local markets but this is the main one and it rolls out for about seven blocks in a colorful mass of sensory overload. [Mercado Lucas De Galvez](#) is actually several markets crammed into one and it offers everything from clothes and toys to paella pans. Stroll down the aisles and sample some of the hallmarks of Yucatecan cuisine. You can taste dozens of chiles and recados, the spice mixtures that are an important part of popular dishes like the banana leaf-wrapped fish of tikin-xic.

Sit down at one of the cochinita pibil stands and nibble on the pork delicacies in taco or torta options. Then head over to the dulceria section to try out local candies. The creamy caramel of cajeta is my fave.

Eat Your Way Through Merida En Domingo

Every Sunday, the city's main plaza transforms into a street festival, complete with music, dancing, craft vendors and lots and lots of food. This is where I discovered Merida's overwhelming love for gouda cheese. Called queso de bola, I spotted blocks of it for sale or sliced into sandwiches or served in the noteworthy marquesita, a sweet and savory treat of a warm rolled wafer, filled with cajeta and gouda.

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PHOTO: The simple yet delicious marquesita, a Yucatecan classic.

This is a classic Yucatecan dessert that's worth a trip just to taste it. The cheese was introduced by the Dutch in the 1800s and thanks to marquesita carts on every corner, Merida locals eat more gouda than the Dutch. Also try another local fave, panuchos, small fried tortillas slathered with refried beans, chicken or turkey, lettuce, pickled onions, avocado and hot sauce or habaneros.

Experience Gourmet Perfection at Nectar

Merida offers the entire spectrum of food experiences, and [Nectar](#) is at the top. This chic restaurant supplies a complex offering of visually inspiring dishes that borrow from Yucatan tradition but are innovatively prepared by Chef Roberto Solis to create something new. Fresh, local ingredients are transformed into dazzling meals like Cebollas Negras black onions doused in traditional spices, sous- vide rabbit with roasted carrots in a yogurt sauce or barbecued octopus with garlic and tomatoes. The open kitchen displays the magic and the outdoor patio showcases the vibrant city.



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