

LOS DOS : LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEWS

REGIONAL YUCATECAN / BEYOND CENTRO

NOTE: Our star qualification system is not intended to be referred to across categories. In other words, a three-star *cocina economica* is in no way meant to compare to a three-star formal dining establishment. The stars should be considered only for the sake of comparison to other entries within the same category.

- **Hacienda Ochil***** *Regional specialties. Open every day 11am – 7pm. Km. 176.5 Carretera Mérida/Uxmal. Information: 910.6035.* This *parador turístico* is far better than others of its ilk. It's one of the few places around where you can order *pipian rojo*, a divine pumpkin seed sauce stained with *achiote* and served over pork or venison. *TIP: While there be sure to visit the tiny but fascinating museum about henequén history, the charming craft shops where you can see artisans at work, and the amazing cenote at the rear of the property.*
- **Hacienda Temozón****** *International and Yucatecan specialties. Open every day 7am – 11pm. KM 182 Carretera Merida-Uxmal, Temozon Sur. Reservations: 923 8089.* My only real complaint about Temozón (and I hope they read this!) is that supposedly their restaurant is open to the public. Well, it ain't. You must make a reservation – long in advance and often with considerable begging and name-dropping. And I don't know why, since the place is empty most of the time. Anyway, do persist. The atmosphere is stunning. Take a table on the terrace balcony for a view of the old machine house, now set off by a dramatic pool. They change chefs frequently, so who knows what quality of meal you will experience when you go. However, within the last year, they claim they have hired a chef to oversee all restaurants of the Starwood Luxury Collection/The Haciendas of which Temozón is a part (they should!) and everything seems to have improved. I love their *ceviche*, and the *guacamole* is prepared fresh tableside (usually). Make them do it, since that's what their menu advertises. Other regional specialties, such as *Cochinita Pibil* and *Poc Chuc*, are very good but better elsewhere. Their best marks: presentation, service and ambience. *TIP: Notice the antique railway that runs through the grounds; originally the tracks were used to haul the henequen harvest to production rooms or shipping centers. Walk through the former Casa Principal to see antique furnishings and paintings. Check out the small gift shop, which occasionally features hard-to-find hand-painted bags and other local artisan crafts.*
- **Hacienda Teya****** *Regional Yucatecan. Open daily 12pm – 6pm. Km 12.5 on the Merida – Cancun highway. Information: 988.0800.* This is about as real as it gets. Teya is owned and managed by the Cárdenas family who personally oversee every detail. The restaurant is located in a restored hacienda used for special events. But just dining at Teya is special. The service is careful and attentive and the food consistently good. When I go with groups we always order the *Nohoch Yucateco*. *Nohoch* in Mayan means “gigantic” and this dish doesn't disappoint: a giant heated stone platter is laden with several typical Yucatecan pork dishes: *Cochinita Pibil*, *Lomitos de Valladolid* and *Poc Chuc*. You will take home leftovers.
- **Hacienda Xcanatún****** *International & Yucatecan specialties. Monday-Wednesday from 7:30am to 11:00pm; Thursday-Saturday from 7:30am to 12:00am; Sundays from 7:30am – 9:00pm. Km. 12 Carretera Mérida/Progreso. Information: 941.0213.* In a fabulously restored hacienda, the Casa de Piedra restaurant of the Xcanatún Hotel and Spa is Mérida's most romantic setting. Indoor/outdoor dining. Large shrimp stuffed with dates and wrapped in crispy bacon is a favorite, as is the *Crema de Poblano* soup with Roquefort cheese. Yucatecan specialties are the best, such as the *Chile X'catik* stuffed with *Cochinita Pibil*. Happily, the duck breast in Xtacentún glaze and plantain fritter is back on the menu! Marvelous! Try it, since it's something you're not likely to get anywhere else in the world. Their best marks: hospitality (rub elbows with charming owner and hostess Cristina Baker) and ambience. If you want to feel like you're on vacation while you are on vacation, you definitely want to experience Xcanatún. *TIP: Try a relaxing afternoon massage in their spa followed by a drink in the lovely bar, and finish with a romantic dinner at Casa de Piedra. I've done it and I assure you that you will remember the experience forever.*

- **Restaurante Kinich****** *Regional Yucatecan. Open daily 10am – 7pm. Calle 27 No. 299 between Calle 28 and 30, Izamál, Yucatán (50 meters from the pyramid Kinich Kak-Moo). Information: 988.954.0489.* Popular with tourists. Popular with families from Izamál. Popular with folks who travel from Mérida just for the food. Enjoy the pleasant tropical breezes that drift through the spacious *palapa*. Be sure to step inside the smaller palapa at the rear to watch local women making fresh tortillas to order. Everything is good and authentic here, but something about their *Sikil P'aak* (pumpkin seed dip) and crispy *totopos* are absolutely addictive. Even though it's on the house, don't be embarrassed to ask for more. I always do! *TIP: Climb the Kinich pyramid after you eat to work off the pounds. While in Izamál be sure to visit the Mexican folk art museum featuring an excellent, hand-picked collection; and Hecho a Mano, a folk art shop where you can purchase high quality pieces from all over México.*
- **Muelle 8***** *Seafood and regional specialties. Open every day from 11:30am to 6pm. Calle 21 No. 141 Avenida Rogers Hall at Prolongación Montejo, Colonia Buenavista. Information: 944.5343.* Arguments abound regarding the superiority of Muelle 8 versus La Pigua. Certain effete artistes seem to love Muelle 8's tacky Popeye interior motifs. But I say La Pigua wins hands down for both ambience and food. Still, some things on the menu at Muelle 8 you won't find elsewhere. Try the grouper stuffed with beautifully seasoned *chaya*.
- **La Pigua****** *Seafood and regional specialties. Open Sunday through Tuesday from 12 noon to 6pm; Wednesday through Saturday from 12 noon to 10:30pm. Calle 33 No. 505A x Cupules and 62, northeast of the Fiesta Americana and Hyatt Hotels Information: 920.1126.* Originally founded in Campeche, La Pigua will bring you visions of *coctelerías* along the glorious seaside there. And speaking of *coctelerías*, do be sure to order your favorite seafood combo as a *coctel* – and also be sure to ladle on as much *habanero* sauce as you can stand for the full effect. Also highly recommended are the octopus salad and a crazy fabulous seafood mix called The Sir Frances Drake.
- **El Príncipe Tutul-Xiu***** *Regional specialties. Open every day from 11am to 6pm. Calle 26 No. 208 between Calle 25 and 27, Maní, Yucatán. Information: 997.978.4257.* The best source for *Poc Chuc* in the region, this restaurant has become a destination for folks throughout the state. Sit under the breezy, tranquil *palapa* and watch happy families come and go. All the food is well prepared and authentic, but the *Poc Chuc* is the best – smoky, tender, moist and accompanied by all the usuals: *Cebollas Asadas*, *Frijol Colado* and *Chiltomate*. *Tortillas* are hand-made and scrumptious. *NOTE: There is also a branch of El Príncipe Tutul-Xiu in Mérida: Calle 123 No. 216 between Calle 46A and 46B, Colonia Serapio Rendón. Information: 929.7721. TIP: While in Maní, be sure to visit the main church, full of colorful folk retablos and altars. The large lawn in front was the scene of the infamous burning of the Mayan codices by the ever-repentant Fray Diego de Landa.*
- **Siqueff**** *Lebanese and regional specialties. Open Tuesday – Sunday, 8am – 7pm. Calle 60 No. 350 between Calle 35 and 37. Information: 925.5027.*
- **Taquería Yucatán****** *Taquería. Open Monday – Saturday, 7am – 4pm. Calle 18 No. 98 at the corner of Calle 19, Colonia Yucatán. Information: 925.9493.* Along with Wayan'e, Taquería Yucatán is another corner taquería that has enjoyed a long life and is so popular with locals that competition for tables is sometimes an issue. This is one of the only *taquerías* I know of that serves handmade *tortillas*, which can be dangerous for the waistline if you happen to like today's *guiso*. And I did: *Empanizado* is a thin pork cutlet breaded, fried and coarsely chopped, topped with a delicious *Xnipek*; and scrambled eggs with *nopales* was a lighter option for our early breakfast meal. And just for balance, I also tried their *pezuñas* – fully boned pigs' feet, breaded/fried and amazingly succulent. Fridays is *Pan de Cazon* day.

LOS DOS : LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEWS (CONTINUED)

- **La Tradición*** *Regional specialties. Open every day 11am – 6pm. Calle 60 #293 Colonia Alcalá Martín. Information: 925.2526.* The three “Cs” – Comfortable, clean, convenient. Maybe it’s four C’s, since that’s their score, too. All the standard Yucatecan fare served family style. One pleasant surprise was to see *Pavo en Sackool* – wood-grilled *achiote* turkey served in a bowl of “Maya gravy” (stock thickened with *masa* instead of *roux*) – rare to find in local restaurants. It’s more of an “*abuela-cooks-at-home*” dish.
- **Wayan'e****** *Taquería. Open Monday – Saturday 7am – 2pm. Calle 20 four blocks south of Chapur Norte, Colonia Itzinná. Information: 926.3265.* This outdoor corner stand is so popular with local businessmen crowding in for *almuerzo* that you should be sure to go early. By noon or 1pm supplies have dwindled down to nothing. The menu is overwhelming but the good news is you can’t go wrong with anything you choose. For something healthy, try a *torta* of scrambled eggs with *chaya* or chard (*acelgas*). But for a hit of the real thing, order the artery-clogging *castacán* (fried pork belly). Their varied *salsa* selection is sublime. Just be sure to grab plenty of napkins.