

## LOS DOS : LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEWS

### REGIONAL YUCATECAN / CENTRO

NOTE: Our star qualification system is not intended to be referred to across categories. In other words, a three-star *cocina económica* 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.

- **Alberto's Continental.** *Lebanese and regional specialties.* Open Monday – Saturday 1pm – 11pm; Sundays 6pm – 11pm. Calle 64 No. 582 at Calle 59. Information: 928.6336. It's a must to visit Alberto's just to see the owner's over-the-top collection of religious folk art. As for the menu, stick to the Lebanese appetizers, which are always flavorful.
- **D'Al's\*\*\*** *Cocina económica.* Open Monday – Friday 9:30am – 9pm; Saturday 9:30am – 5:30pm. Calle 54 No. 454 at Calle 53. Information: 923.7012. A gringo favorite and for good reason: hearty, homemade and original Yucatecan fare at just a few dollars for a meal that will last you all day long. Daily specials change but it's hard to go wrong here. Pleasant, clean, attractive corner location in a newly gentrified zone with several amazing restored homes.
- **Los Almendros\*\*\*** *Regional specialties.* Open 11am – 11pm every day; holidays from 12 noon – 8pm. Parque La Mejorada, Calle 50 between Calle 57 and 59. Information: 928.5459. The unfortunate ambience (depressing picture window view of an indoor parking lot, “Mexican”-themed furnishings) is alleviated by authentic regional dishes. This is Yucatecan “home cooking” at its best. Nothing fancy, just real, and one of the few places in town where you can order a Maya favorite: venison.
- **Benny's\*\*\*** *Cocina económica.* Open daily, 6am – 3pm. Stall No. 242627 in Mercado Lucas de Gálvez. Don't let its appearance put you off. Sit down for quick service and real regional food at this market stall. Grab a rickety stool and watch the crazy crowds in the market go by as cooks prepare your meal right in front of you. *Salbutes* are fried to order. Try a couple with *relleno negro*, *carne asada* or *pavo en escabeche*.
- **El Buen Gusto\*\*\*\*** *Cocina económica.* Open Monday – Saturday, 6am – 2pm. Market in Parque Santiago. To the left of the church in the middle of the row of stalls on the Calle 72 side of the park. Enjoy a relaxing afternoon in the park while savoring crispy, mouth-watering fried shrimp tacos. Read review.
- **El Cangrejito\*\*\*\*\*** *Taquería featuring seafood and regional specialties.* Open daily from 10:30am - 3:30pm. Calle 57 No. 523 between Calle 64 and 66. Information: 928.2781. A trip to the beach, right in the heart of Centro! Thank heavens 50-year-old El Cangrejito serves their *tacos* on machine-made rather than hand-made *tortillas*, or I'd be there every day of the week, slathering on the kilos. Even so, these are close to perfect. Their panoply of seafood offerings is the place to start: salt cod makes me wince, but their *bacalao* is exquisitely smoky and riddled with savory potatoes and peas; lobster salad is just right in creaminess with a hint of scallion; and breaded fried fish filet stays miraculously crisp beneath its tiny mountain of salsas. Also try their rotating daily specials, such as *Tsi'ik de Venado* (shredded venison salad) or *huevos con chicharrón* (eggs scrambled with pork cracklings). By 12:30 the joint is jumping, with cars pulling up to the curb to unload the hungry. Go early!
- **La Chopería.** *Beer/video bar with regional specialties.* Open Tuesday – Saturday, 1pm – 2am; Sundays from 1pm – 7pm. Calle 56 No. 456 between Calle 51 and 53. Information: 924.4488. PLUSES: Clever design incorporating five colonial homes. Real Mexican barrel beer on tap (Modelo Pilsener and Dark). Most beautiful parking lot in Mérida. MINUSES: Ridiculously loud music. Pitiful service. Stick to the snacks.

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- **El Fogoncito\*\*\*\* Taquería and grill.** Open every day from 1:00pm - 1:00am. Corner of Calle 61 and Calle 62 on the Plaza Principal. Although this casual hang-out is one link in a chain, the food is fabulous enough to rank a “wow-factor” from all of our out-of-town guests. I lost count of how many *tacos* El Fogoncito features but it must be pushing 20, which is a good excuse for trying their *taco* platter with an assortment of five varieties. Or just be experimental and order one at a time. Not to be missed are their *tacos al pastor*, and its sister *taco* – the *gringa* – a *pastor taco* loaded with cheese. Their colorful *salsa* carousel makes for some fun and flavorful variation. El Fogoncito also has larger restaurants on Prolongación Montejo at Calle 7 and in the Altabrisa mall.
- **Jhovany\*\*\*\* Taquería.** Sundays from 8am – 10pm. Calle 60 at Calle 61, in front of the Palacio de Gobierno. Their specialty – and you must try it! – is *carne asada*. Smoky, savory, tender. Enjoy it as a *torta* (on French roll) or as a *taco* (open faced on a maize *tortilla*). It’s pleasant to sit at the tidy, shaded booth during Mérida en Domingo, when streets are closed to vehicular traffic. But if you crave their meat during the week, visit their permanent local in a little strip mall in Fraccionamiento del Parque: Calle 59, Local 10, between Calle 12 and 14.
- **El Marlin Azul\*\*\*\*\* Seafood.** Open Monday – Saturday 8:30am – 4:30pm. Calle 62 between Calle 57 and 59. Ignore the funkiness and just enjoy the refreshing cool blue color (and air conditioning!) of this tiny but scrumptious seafood restaurant. This is honest, simple fare that is beyond delicious. Best by far is the filete al mojo de ajo: a whitefish fillet is lightly seasoned and griddle-fried in butter, then doused with a gorgeous green pond of garlic sauce. My lunch companion and I agreed it was the best mojo de ajo we ever ate. Just be careful whom you kiss afterward!
- **El Mil Chistes\*\*\* Cocina económica.** Open Monday – Saturday, 7am – 3pm. Calle 68 at the corner of Calle 63. Thank goodness El Mil Chistes is just a block from Los Dos! I would return for their *puerco empanizado* any day!
- **Tío Will\*\*\* Cocina económica.** Open Monday – Saturday, 7am – 4pm. Calle 70 No. 506, between Calle 63 and Calle 65. I had a memorable pork-stuffed *chile Poblano* one rainy afternoon at Tío Will.
- **El Pórtico del Peregrino. Regional specialties.** Open daily, 12pm – 12am. Calle 57 No. 501 between Calle 60 and 62. Information: 928.6163. Charming ambience, good service, sub-par food but may be worth it as a convenient and pleasant place to dine in Centro.