

Cultural Daily

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Mexico City Eats: El Cardenal

R. Daniel Foster · Friday, March 18th, 2022

El Cardenal's premier location (there are four in CDMX) is located in Mexico City's El Centro Histórico. Here you can enjoy the ultimate Mexican breakfast: signature hot chocolate (Doña Oliva), and freshly baked pastries from El Cardenal ovens. They include conchas, anise rolls, cinnamon rolls, and semitas.

Close to the vibrant city center square, Zócolo, the [El Cardenal](#) location draws Mexican families out for a Sunday treat along with tourists exploring the nearby Templo Mayor Museum, the Mercado Ciudadela, and the Diego Rivera murals at the Palacio de Bellas Artes.



El Cardenal dishes included lomo de robalo a la talla. Photo: R. Daniel Foster

El Cardenal was founded over 50 years ago, in 1969, in the Royal and Pontific University of America located at the corner of Moneda and Seminario. Founders Olivia Garizurieta and Jesús Briz mentored four of their seven children to further their enterprise, backed by a passion for authentic Mexican cuisine.

This is the third and final installment of an exploration of standout Mexico City restaurants. In the first post: Roma Norte's rooftop eatery [Aleli](#). And in the second (also located in Roma Norte):

Nudo Negro, which turned out the best meal during my December CDMX visit.

We had dinner at El Cardenal's Alameda downtown location, inside the city's Hilton Hotel. It's a large open space delineated by a front side room with a vintage mural. The main dining room with its terra cotta walls sports a lengthy line of whimsical calacas, the skeleton figures popular in Dia de los Muertos celebrations and altars. They're perched above the bar, overlooking diners.



El Cardenal presents a formal atmosphere, including white tablecloths. Photo: R. Daniel Foster

El Cardenal features old-school traditions. Waiters are dressed in buttoned-up uniforms, and while

the formalities can at times seem stiff, the food is exceptional. Raw ingredients are produced via artisanal methods, helping to make the establishment's national folk cuisine a standard in CDMX.

The restaurant creates its own tortillas, starting with the selection of corn, along with grinding and nixtamalization, the process of soaking and cooking maize in an alkaline solution such as limewater before washing and hulling. Cream is made daily from milk procured from El Cardenal stables, along with cheese.

We started with the *chile relleno a la oaxaqueña*—filled with chopped pork cooked with spices and covered with mole coloradito sauce. We ordered a side of black beans that paired nicely.



El Cardenal's dining room with its vintage mural. Photo: R. Daniel Foster

A *verdolagas con pollo* (soup of green tomatillo and purslane served with diced chicken breast) was up next—also excellent and served in beautiful clay bowls with interior dark stripes. The soup was still bubbling around the edges when it hit the table.

We also had the *pechuga de pollo rellena de queso de cabra con mole coloradito*—chicken breast layered with goat cheese and ladled with a mole coloradito sauce. It was about the best mole I've tasted, with its hint of cinnamon, cumin, raisins, and so much more blended within its spicy-smooth flavor.

The last main dish to land: *lomo de robalo a la talla*, a grilled snook loin marinated in a mixture of lime juice and dry chilies. Delicate and smoothed with a red glaze made from guajillo chiles, the fish, along with the chicken, was substantial.



Dessert: vanilla ice cream laid with a cinnamon stick, and wreathed with tejocotes. Photo: R. Daniel Foster

Of course, we finished with hot chocolate poured from heavy white ceramic pitchers, along with vanilla ice cream laid with a cinnamon stick, and what we thought were apricots or at least a variation of the fruit. The astute waiter served up the answer: they were tejocotes, a Mexican delicacy (also called hawthorn). High in pectin, the fruit is best cooked to bring out its tangy sweetness.

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El Cardenal, Mexico City, with locations in Palma, Alameda, Lomas, and San Ángel

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