

How to Confidently Order Food in a Mexican Restaurant (Cheat Sheet with 60+ Phrases)

If you're traveling to Mexico, you surely want to enjoy the delicious Mexican food. However, dining out can be intimidating if you don't know Spanish. Knowing a bit of the local language goes a long way, especially outside the main tourist areas. With some Spanish phrases, you can communicate your needs, and locals tend to be more open when you try to speak their language. Before you head to a restaurant in Mexico the next time, download my [cheat sheet](#) to learn the basic vocabulary and local customs. ¡A comer! (Let's eat!)

Phrases for Confidently Ordering Food in a Mexican Restaurant

Here's a breakdown of useful phrases and customs, organized by situation. From entering the restaurant, ordering drinks and food to paying the check, you'll know exactly what to say. For a quick overview, you can download my cheat sheet to take with you wherever you go.

Downloadable Cheat Sheet

Download all phrases in my [cheat sheet](#).

1. Entering the Restaurant

In Mexico, polite manners are very important. Starting in the right way sets a positive basis.

- **Buenos días** – “Good morning.” Used before noon.
- **Buenas tardes** – “Good afternoon.” Used after noon until sunset.
- **Buenas noches** – “Good evening/night.” Used after sunset.
- **Con permiso** – “Excuse me.” Used if you're trying to get past someone.
- **¡Buen provecho!** – “Enjoy your meal.” Used to greet other guests sitting in the restaurant, irrespective of whether they're eating.
- **Disculpe** – “Excuse me.” or simply **Jóven** – “Young man.” Used to get a server's attention.

Pro Tip

Make good use of saying *por favor* (please) for a request and *gracias* (thank you). Also, be patient when someone doesn't understand you right away, or when there are communication problems.

2. Asking for a Table

When entering the Mexican restaurant, the waiter might ask how many people you need a table for. This is what you can answer:

- **¿Para cuántas personas?** – “For how many people?”
- You can reply:

- **Para dos, por favor.** – “For two, please.”
- **Somos dos/cuatro.** – “We are two/four.”

If you’re dining alone, say:

- **Solo para mí, gracias.** – “Just for me, thanks.”

If the restaurant is busy, they might ask:

- **¿Tiene reserva?** – “Do you have a reservation?”
 - If you do, say **Sí, a nombre de...** – “Yes, under the name...”
 - If not, say **No, pero ¿tienen una mesa disponible?** – “No, but do you have a table available?”

When they offer you a choice of tables to sit at, you can point to the one you like and say:

- **Aquí está bien.** – “Here is okay.”

3. Ordering Drinks

The waiter will probably ask you first if you want something to drink:

- **¿Algo para tomar?** – “Do you want something to drink?”

You can order the drinks menu:

- **El menu de bebidas, por favor.** – “The drinks menu, please.”

Or you use some of the following common phrases:

- **¿Qué bebidas tienen?** – “What drinks do you have?”
- **¿Tienen agua natural o agua mineral?** – “Do you have still or sparkling water?”
- **Una botella de agua, por favor.** – “A bottle of water, please.”
 - Pro tip: Ask for a bottle for hygienic reasons. If you ask for a glass of water, you might get water from the *garrafón* (a 20-liter tank) that might be old or unwashed.
- **¿Cuál es el agua del día?** – “What is the water of the day?”
 - *Agua del día* is a freshly made drink of juice (for example, mango, tamarind, pineapple, and so on) with lots of water, so it doesn’t get too heavy and helps still your thirst. A great option if you want to have something non-alcoholic and more healthy than a soda.
- **Un agua de jamaica, por favor.** – “A hibiscus drink, please.”
 - Pro tip: If you want your drink without ice, say *Sin hielo, por favor.* (No ice, please.)
- **Una cerveza, por favor.** – “A beer, please.”
- **Un vino tinto, por favor.** – “A red wine, please.”

- Pro tip: If you want your red wine at room temperature, add *al tiempo* (at room temperature). Otherwise, you might get it cooled.

4. Ordering Food

Finally, it's time to order the food. If you didn't get the menu yet, you can ask for it:

- **¿Podría traerme el menú, por favor?** – “Could you bring me the menu, please?”

A good tip is to ask for recommendations:

- **¿Qué me recomienda?** – “What do you recommend?”
- **¿Cuál es la especialidad de la casa?** – “What's the house specialty?”

A lifesaver if you're not a fan of heat:

- **¿Esto es picante?** – “Is this spicy?”

If you're ready to order, you can say:

- **Voy a pedir...** – “I'm going to order...”
- **Para mí, [platillo], por favor.** – “For me, [dish], please.”

And finally, if you have a sweet tooth:

- **¿Me podría traer el menú de postres, por favor?** – “Could you bring me the desert menu, please?”

When you're done, the waiter might ask:

- **¿Se lo retiro?** – “Can I clear the table?”
 - You can answer with **Sí, gracias.** – “Yes, thanks.”
 - Pro tip: In Mexico, it's considered a good custom that the waiter takes away your platter as soon as you're done, even if the other guests at your table are still eating.

My Tip

To understand the various dishes on the menu, [download a translation app](#). And read my posts about typical [food in Puebla](#), [Yucatán](#), and [Oaxaca](#)

5. Asking for More

If you want to order more tortillas or salsa, you can say the following:

- **¿Me puede traer más tortillas, por favor?** – “Can you bring me more tortillas, please?”
- **¿Tiene salsa menos picante?** – “Do you have a milder salsa?”

- **¿Tiene catsup?** – “Do you have ketchup?”

If you want another drink of the same, you can simply point to your empty cup/bottle/glass and say:

- **Otra, por favor.** – “Another one, please.”
 - Pro tip: Note that this is the feminine version, which is valid for another beer, cup of coffee or tea, or glass of wine. If what you ordered is of the masculine version, for example, for a mezcal, tequila, and such, you’d need to say:
 - **Otro, por favor.** – “Another one, please.”

6. Paying the Check

When you’re ready to leave, ask for the check. Mexican waiters don’t bring it automatically, you have to explicitly ask for it.

- **¿Me trae la cuenta, por favor?** – “Can you bring me the check, please?”
 - Or simply: **La cuenta, por favor.** – “The check, please.”
 - Pro tip: If you’re making a sign in the air with your hand as if you’re signing off or checking off a checkbox, it’s understood that you want the check. This is very useful in busy and loud restaurants where the waiter is further away from you.
- **¿Aceptan tarjeta o solo efectivo?** – “Do you accept credit cards, or is it cash only?”
 - The waiter might also ask you this first: **¿Tarjeta o efectivo?** – “With card or in cash?”

About Tipping in Mexico

In Mexico, it’s usual to tip with 10-15% (20% is usual for exceptionally good service, or when the check is relatively small, as you had just one drink, for example).

Always check if the tip is already included on the check so you don’t pay it twice (*Propina está incluida*). It usually isn’t, but it can happen.

Also, make sure to check if everything listed on the check is correct; it happened to me a couple of times that something was listed that we hadn’t ordered. Usually, the waiter repeats the order to make sure they get everything right, but still, misunderstandings can happen.

When paying by card, you can have the waiter add the tip to the credit card:

- **La propina es del diez/quince por ciento.** – “Tip is 10/15%.”

You can also ask first:

- **¿Puedo agregar la propina a la tarjeta?** – “Can I add the tip to the card?”

When paying in cash, you can just leave the amount you want to tip on the table and leave. Or if you don’t want the waiter to give you cash back because you would round up anyway to include the tip, you can just hand them the bills and say:

- **Así está bien.** – “This is ok.” in the sense of “I don’t need the change back”.

7. Solving Problems

If there’s a problem with the check or your order, you can say one of the following:

- **Perdón, creo que hay un error en la cuenta.** – “Sorry, I think there’s a mistake on the check.”
- **Esto no es lo que pedí.** – “This is not what I ordered.”

When there’s a serious issue and you want to talk to the manager, say this:

- **Quiero hablar con el gerente, por favor.** – “Can I talk to the manager, please.”

8. Leaving the Restaurant

When leaving, it’s good custom to say *gracias* (thank you) or *hasta luego* (see you later). You can also add:

- **(Todo) estuvo muy rico.** – “(Everything) was very tasty.”
- **Buen provecho** – “Enjoy your meal.” You can also say this phrase when leaving the restaurant to be polite towards the other guests.

Conclusion

Ordering food in a Mexican restaurant doesn’t have to be a hassle. With a few basic phrases and lots of politeness, your dining experience can be memorable and enjoyable. The effort you put into speaking the language will earn you extra points with the locals, that’s guaranteed! ¡*Buen provecho!* (Enjoy your meal!)