



Adventures on the Sea of Cortez

The Shrimp's Journey into Your Cocktails

BY MARTINA DOBESH

Sunlight danced across the Bay of Conception. My sister, Alisabeth, and I stood on the shore near the Almeja restaurant and watched a panga coming to get us. We were staying in Mulegé and happened to meet the crew of El Joven, a fishing trawler out of Guaymas. We received an impassioned plea to join them today for a night of shrimping. Against my better judgment, Alisabeth convinced me it

would be an experience of a lifetime. Chamula, the Captain of El Joven, came out to get us and once we were settled in, he opened the throttle and the rear of the panga settled into the sea as the bow lifted slapping against the swells. Boarding from the panga to the larger trawler was quite a feat, because both objects were moving at the same time in different directions. I gripped the rough rusting rail. At the

exact moment the panga rose and the Joven remained still, I flung myself up and over as though mounting an uneasy horse. There I was straddling the railing, wondering what to do next. One of the crew reached out to help and as my feet touched the deck it lifted and set me off balance. So I rather fell into the festivities, but no one seemed to notice the lack of grace.

Green colored nets hung over the ship, fanning out from the gunwales, ready for the night's work. The rusty steel decks rocked gently with the swells of the Gulf. Dried fish-smell assailed the nostrils from forgotten creatures caught in the corners, which had escaped the morning hose down. The salty smells and gusty laughter of the Mexican sea-

men made the scene surreal. I looked out to the sea wanting to capture every detail; the *lobos*, sea lions, rolled lazily in the water, flippers raised to the sky, the shore in the distance with the mountains layered behind. Freddie took us to the engine room. Proudly he displayed the heart of the Joven. Everything was well maintained. He started the *maquina* while we watched. An ear-splitting roar filled the small engine room, followed by the thundering clatter of pistons and gears.

Climbing back out of the hold in the early evening sunshine, we started to prepare for the adventure. I felt like we were in a Nation Geographic episode "On Assignment," entitled "How shrimp find their way to your cocktails."

The anchor was dragged from its depths. Alisabeth and I watched in fascination as the crew handled the heavy cables and ropes. There was no stress in their action. It was one fluid synchronized motion.

We stood with Chamula at the helm. The sea was calm, glassy, and the ship sliced through its stillness. The nightly routine began. The nets were dropped just outside the protected coastline a short time after dusk. Shrimp slept during the day and fed at night. The heavy nets disappeared below the surface as trolling for shrimp began. One small net called a "*chango*" or monkey, was used to check the catch before bringing up the two larger nets. When the count in the chango was ten or more the

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The History of Churros

BY FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ

There is little doubt that Churros are one of the most recognizable Mexican sweets, as famous as Mexico's pan dulce. This popular and tasty fried dough has transcended

international borders and become a valued delicacy throughout the world.

In many countries, Churros are commonly known as "Spanish and or Mexican

donuts." And while most everyone might think or believe their origins began in Mexico, history shows us they may have first appeared in China. Around the year 1513 A.D. Portuguese merchants trading goods with China discovered what was known as "youtiao," a fried salty dough strip that was served for breakfast.

Another version of their origin says that they could have been brought to Spain by Marco Polo who brought them from China in 1269. Similar recipes are also said to have been found in medieval manuscripts in Arabia. Another account indicates Churros were invented by Spanish shepherds from the Castilla y León around the 13th century. Unable to bake bread in an open field, the shepherds had to resort to frying a Churro-like dough as a substitute for their main source of carbohydrates. They

apparently called them Churros because of their similarity to the horns of churras sheep, an indigenous breed from that era. The name Churro was introduced in the dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language in 1884.

The oldest Churrería in the country, Churrería El Moro, was founded in 1935 by the Navarrese emigrant Francisco de Elizondo in Mexico City. Since then, the people of Mexico have been unable to resist the crunchy craving for the deep-fried delicacy. In Baja, as in all over Mexico, there are Churro carts that are stationed through town that specialize in serving Churros with as many as 6 per paper bag for a mere \$25 - \$40 pesos. The batter is piped through a star-shaped tip into hot oil to give the churro its signature shape. Churros are frequently dusted with cinnamon sugar and dipped into coffee, hot chocolate or milk. 🍌



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What Mexico Has Taught Me

BY THE UNKNOWN GRINGO



Ensenada never seems to have a shortage of festivals. Of course they have their famous Carnaval and the month-long wine festival in the summer but I'm talking about the festivals that seem to come out of nowhere when I'm visiting. A beer festival. A taco festival. A beer AND taco festival. Paella festival. One for Oaxaca. Or Local art. Seafood. Mushrooms. Held in many locations. Often in front of the Riviera Pacifico casino or just across the street in the art museum's outdoor area. At the flagpole on the malecon. In a city park or they just block off a city street. You can just turn a corner.....and there's a festival.

The city seems to accomplish two things with this. They support local businesses by providing them with an

easy way to give out samples or sell their products to new customers. And the citizens of the city have something to do that will inform them or entertain them. I call that good government. And they must not make it too hard for the event's promoter to pull a permit. Does it make for a colorful and enjoyable visit?

Example- I was in town for an event held collectively by the four indigenous native tribes at the big flagpole in the malecon. Their music, dancing, chanting, with folk art objects and food for sale. A wonderful event. Low and behold.....next door in Three Heads Park, as the locals call it, was a Calamari Festival where restaurants could set up a booth and sell their calamari entrees or give away free

samples. A large tent was set up for kids to hang out in if the parents chose to leave them there and go explore the booths. The tent had adults entertaining the kids by showing them what a whole calamari / squid looks like and gave them crayons and paper with a squid on it to color it in. Smart. Mom and dad could browse at their leisure. And....at the same time....on Ruiz, on the same block that Hussong's is on, was a small wine festival. The whole block was closed off to cars. Free small samples, full glasses or bottles to buy, and food booths to complete the experience.

I got three festivals instead of just the one I was in town for that were in walking distance of each other. And you wouldn't have to spend a peso

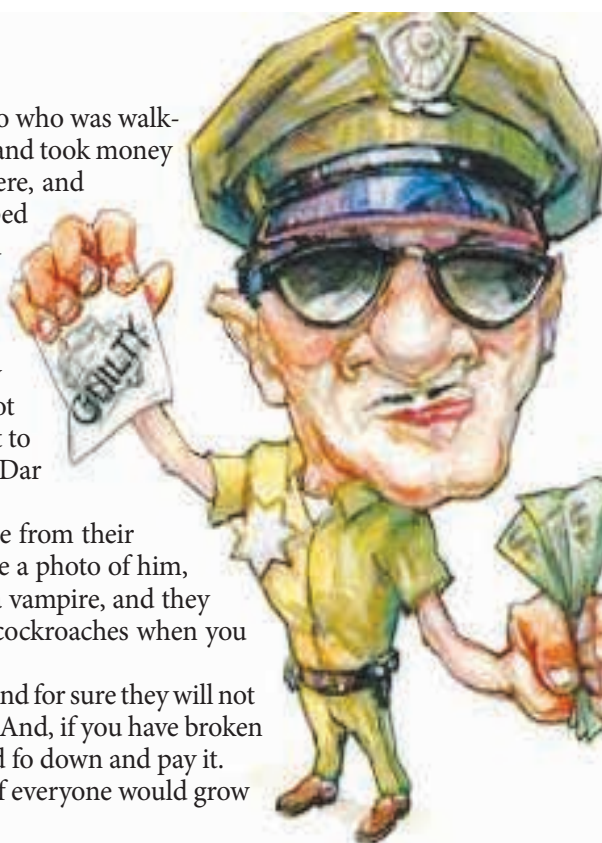
What To Do If You're Stopped By The Police

We recently got a report from a local Gringo who was walking back home and a police cruiser stopped him and took money from him to let him go. That's extortion anywhere, and there are bad hombres anywhere. If you are stopped for an alleged traffic violation, ask for a ticket and go down to the police station later on or the next day, and pay it. They will take your driver's license to ensure that you show up, and that's OK. They do not want your license, and there's nothing they can do with it. You will get it back. And no, do not give them money if they ask you to pay the ticket to them right there. Just keep asking for a ticket, "Dar may un teeket por favor." Be polite and firm.

If they get nasty, write down their last name from their name badge, or pull out your cell phone and take a photo of him, her, or them. That's like holding a mirror up to a vampire, and they will jump in their vehicle and scurry away like cockroaches when you turn on the light.

It's extremely rare for them to write a ticket, and for sure they will not cite you when you haven't done anything wrong. And, if you have broken a law, the ticket is ridiculously small. Man up and fo down and pay it.

This police extortion would stop in a week if everyone would grow a back bone and stand up to them. 🐦



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if you didn't want to. There were no entrance fees and a lot of the products on sale had free samples offered. And you could learn about the native culture and the gifts of the ocean and vineyard as well. A win-win for everyone that the city seems to actively support.

I've been on my bicycle in Ensenada way inland from the tourist area and found festivals in small city parks. The Oaxacan people often have a festival way inland. Sometimes a small vacant lot will have 8-10

temporary plywood booths set up with food vendors. They will tell you where their regular restaurant is if you ask because they want to reach new customers. This is where zig-zagging around town on my bicycle rewards me. And, again, always check our the front of the old casino and the art museum across the street on Costero. Also, asking at either of the two tourist offices in town couldn't hurt. One is near the fish market and the other is next to the art museum. 🐦

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Resolving Real Estate Problems in Mexico Through Mediation and Arbitration

BY LINDA NEIL

Lawsuits, courts and attorneys cause headaches in any country. Mexico is no different. INEGI, the National Statistics Institute, says that there are 33,000 persons in Mexico City for each judge. It isn't really any better in other parts of the country. We simply do not have enough courts and judges to listen to every complaint, legitimate or not, within a reasonable time. The result is that reasonable claims may take years to be heard and then additional years to be resolved. After that, there is an appeal period that adds to the delay. Thus it is not unusual to hear

of a civil complaint to force a seller to honor a real estate contract taking five, 10 or even 15 years to resolve.

Once resolved, attorney fees may take 30% to 50% of the award, in addition to the costs that have already been paid by the plaintiff.

Instituting a lawsuit can be a lose-lose proposition for everyone.

The good news is that we now have an alternative method of resolving disputes and enforcing them in Mexico. Due to provisions in the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement (formerly known as NAFTA), Mexico has modified its laws to permit arbitration and mediation and has provided for enforcement of arbitration awards in the courts. Articles 1415 to 1463 of the Mexican Commercial Code provide the guidelines for resolving problems outside the courts and eliminating much of the delay and expense of a lawsuit. The court authorities in Mexico now realize that all matters cannot always be resolved by government and they now realize and accept that the most economical and efficient resolutions may be obtained in a resolution arrived at outside of a court of law.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has been practiced in the United States and Canada for many years and has become a highly successful and preferred method for settling conflicts by many. The process is now receiving the approval and encouragement of the highest courts in Mexico which have set up separate departments to study and implement mediation and arbitration sections in the federal, state and local courts.

Instead of being forced into a lose-win situation, as is the case in a lawsuit which is confrontational by nature, in mediation, the parties may find areas of mutual interest and amicably settle their differences in a cost-effective and timely manner. In addition to commercial and trade disputes, ADR has been highly successful in family and divorce matters and, even more, in real estate-related matters.

Some basic elements:

MUTUAL CONSENT is a requirement. In order for a problem to be submitted for resolution through mediation or arbitration, it is necessary that both the complaining party and the defending party agree to submit to arbitration. This is often accomplished by inserting a special clause in the contract of purchase/sale or the deed before the notary public when real property is involved. In this manner, both parties have agreed prior to a conflict arising and do not have to argue about this point when the problem comes up.

MEDIATION first, then **ARBITRATION**: Most clauses

which provide mutual consent will specify that a good faith attempt is made to settle the matter in an informal setting. Agreements made through mediation are not binding upon the parties. If the parties cannot reach a mutually agreeable solution, the matter goes to arbitration in a more formal setting. The parties have the opportunity to approve or disapprove of the arbitrators and, generally, one to three arbitrators are called to hear the case, depending upon the wishes of the parties and the severity of the matter to be decided. The decisions handed down by the Arbitrators are binding upon the parties and, should it become necessary, the courts will be called upon to enforce the judgments.

MEDIATORS and **ARBITRATORS** are generally professional people with legal backgrounds and/or expertise in the subject matter under consideration.

COSTS FOR MEDIATION, ARBITRATION are generally minimal in comparison with those involved in a lawsuit. Normal charges

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will involve processing fees, hearing room rentals, hourly fees for the arbitrators and travel expenses as required as well as charges, as necessary for translators, copies, courier services and expert witnesses.

TIME CONCERNS Since the arbitration and mediation services are private and run by business people, economy of effort and time is seen as an important portion of the equation for the success of the company supervising the arbitration and mediation services. It has been found that most mediation/arbitration services will be completed within a few

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Ask a Mexican

What is the most interesting or fun tradition you and your family do and why?



Illustration by danjazzia

Brenda Ramos, 37, musician.

My family has a weird way of celebrating birthdays and our "saint day" (Saint day is the day of the Saint you were named after, not always the same day as your birthday). We usually try to make it in a moment when the person does not suspect it, but it's like building a cake on them. Someone will throw water, crack a couple of eggs on their head and at the end, throw a bowl of flour on top of their head. We have tried lately to do

it when the person is not in their Sunday best or showered since some of us have gotten pretty angry, but also some of us have gotten smarter, so some ropes and chairs have been involved. I know it sounds really crazy, but my family is really fun and we are all big pranksters.

Hector Lozano, 35, nutritionist.

My family has a lot of good luck little things, like when we are wearing something new, we will pinch each other, or when we see a train going over a

bridge while we are driving and we are going under, we have to honk and put up our feet. My grandma is super superstitious, and she does all the new year's things, like going around the block with empty suitcases and sweeping the house.

Lucas Segovia, 53, blacksmith.

We are a very big family and there are a lot of kids. Most of them are my grandkids. I love to have fun with them so I make up stories at the ranch and we go on big walks and treasure hunts. I mix up some true myths and local stories but make sure they're not scary. We have special names for the landmarks and the particular trees, we name the cows and bulls and I tell them little stories about how some of them have to go to work and such.

Carlos Jimenez, 41, audio engineer.

My family is really religious so we do the big Christmas posada with the biblical performance, and a small performance on semana santa and the kids love it. The teens, not so much, but they know they have to be in it. It's actually very fun for all of us and the dressing up. My mother also loves making dresses for baby Jesus and the saints, and it's really entertaining to see how she changes it up depending on the time of the year.

Yessica Flores, 36, stay-at-home mom.

I live in a family full of women, so we love cooking and baking, and since the pandemic, we have started to make themes for our Sunday meals. The older girls look up recipes and the younger ones take care of decorations, so it's really fun for all of us. We try to rotate and we have accidentally learned from so many cultures and countries. I think it has become my favorite thing.

Mariana Dominguez, 21, student.

Traditions are different in my family since all my aunts and uncles lived in different states and countries and now that we all live in the same state, we sort of merged into different things. We like to have tea on Thursdays

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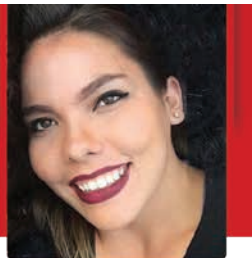
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with my grandma, no matter who has homework or who gets out of work late, and we play cards. It's on Thursdays because on Sundays we like to go out on a nature trip or somewhere new, but not everyone has to go to

that. Only Thursdays. We also gather on birthdays and Christmas, because all the spouses' families live far away, and we spend about a whole week all together cooking and decorating and playing games. 🐾

Cooking Like a Mexican

BY ALEJANDRA BORBOLLA



Mexican cheeses are a huge part of our diet and I had no idea they were such a big mystery for you guys until one of my lovely readers, Cheryl, emailed me about them. Queso is such an everyday ingredient and present in so many of my recipes, it took me by surprise to know I had never given it the spotlight it deserves.

First off, cheese is not something that existed in Mexico before the arrival of the Europeans, Mesoamerican diet did not include milk products. Spaniards brought cows, sheep and goats to the New World and with them, cheese-making techniques; like Manchego which is still very popular in Mexico and we have shaped it to our liking but I'll talk

about that later. With time, the cultural mix that naturally occurred between Europeans and indigenous and their traditions also made cheese-making processes develop into recipes that adapted to the ingredients available in different regions but also the taste of the people and resulted into what we have today; magic.

Cheese making started in Mexico a lot similar like it started in Europe, at home, and some of the best quesos are still homemade. In Colonial times, some particular regions stood out for their cheese making: the highlands in Jalisco, the lagoon area in Coahuila and Durango which are to this day the biggest cheese producers in the country. Most of the cheeses

you can find in supermarkets are made with pasteurized milk, but some of the home-made cheeses you can find at smaller markets are still made with fresh, raw milk-which are some of my favorite.

Now, here's a list with pictures of our Mexican quesos, what they look and taste like and how to eat them!



Queso Cotija

Aged minimum 3 months. Strong and salty flavor. Thick outside skin from aging. Dense texture, sometimes covered in chile paste. Crumbles and shreds like a dream. High-fat content. Does not melt, used to sprinkle crumbled over refried beans, enchiladas, corn on the cob, sopes and tostadas. Made from cow's milk.

ferred. Made from cows' milk usually but also from goat milk.



Queso Panela

A type of queso fresco, also soft on flavor and crumbly but slices perfectly, super white, with a porous and bouncy texture. Very low in fat, which gives it a particular squeaky bite. It is made in baskets which gives it its characteristic texture. Melts a little bit but not with a big cheese pull. It's eaten as an appetizer, to stuff chiles or vegetables, and also used as a low-fat cheese alternative overall. Made from cow's milk.



Queso Ranchero

Also called queso de mesa or queso fresco, made from super fresh raw milk. Soft but dense texture and soft taste, not very salty. Medium fat content, since it's made from whole milk. Does not melt, and is usually eaten as an appetizer. Crumbles beautifully but it's too soft to shred, it's usually crumbled on flautas and fried quesadillas similar to cotija when a softer flavor is pre-

Queso Adobera

Another type of fresh cheese that may also be air aged. Soft with a mild to strong flavor. Crumbles and slices perfectly and melts great, with a really good cheese pull and really good browning. High-fat

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ADVENTURES ON THE SEA...

continued from page 1

other nets would be hauled in.

Piloting in S shape patterns across the Gulf waiting for the count, Alisabeth and I took a walk about the deck. Leaning over at the railing I watched a school of dolphin move in and out of the bow wave. I swear one kept turning on its side looking up at me. When it was time the men took their places. Two men were on each side of the nets and two men handled the winches. Straining groans issued from the cables as they brought their prize to the surface. The first time I saw the heavy nets swing over the deck, I was stunned. I had not expected this. The *manineros* pull the heavy ropes and released a mountain of living things; besides the shrimp, all kinds of bottom fish, starfish, small shark, sea snails, shells, crab, and eels. All were dumped in an unceremonious writhing mass on the deck.

My sister and I didn't know how to feel. This was work for these men in order to feed their families, and the whole world wanted shrimp. We were horrified to witness the destruction of the sea bottom. I had to ask myself, would I give up my fish tacos to save the Gulf of California's sea life? Would anyone? The deck crew began

to work the haul after securing the ropes and cables. With primitive wooden tools, they began to sort through the carnage, separating the shrimp, and throwing them into large wicker baskets, where they waited to be washed and de-headed. The edible fish were tossed to the side and would become breakfast or dinner. The rest of the mass became food for the sea birds.

This ritual of gathering would be done three times during the night. Sleep for the crew happened between the nets being pulled and after the sorting. Lisa and I tried our best to fit into this sleep pattern. I was completely surprised at the ease with which I dropped off into deep sleep. Maybe it was the rocking of the ship and the pounding

ers and headed out on deck, rubbing sleep from their eyes. I could hear the growl of the winches as they strained to pull in the nets. Like magic, the sky began to fill with circling birds; black shapes against the rising sun. Their numbers increased to nearly swarm proportions. They knew the feast was certain.

Lisa joined me on the stern to watch in utter astonishment as the mound of undesirable sea life was pushed overboard to become the morning meal for the winged-ones. Brown pelican, great frigate birds, sea gulls and terns in one swirling body began to dive on the first shovelfuls. The wild screeching filled our ears. Their bodies smashed into each other and into the churning sea. As magically as they filled the sky,



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heartbeat of the *maquina*. It was like crawling into the lap of a giant mother whose job was to watch over me.

Near dawn, and slopping coffee, I made wobbly progress to the helm. It would be hard to describe the soft beauty of the morning. The men starting pulling on their yellow slick-

they were gone seeking out the next incoming shrimp boat.

With a huge hose, the decks were washed down and all the baskets of shrimp were gather together and rinsed down as well. The men pulled up the short wooden stools and began ripping the heads from the bodies. Twist. Toss. Twist.

Toss. The heads went into a pile and would be given to the local pescador's for bait. We were invited to join in. With great humor Chamula offered me a gooey orange mass saying it was shrimp brains, I gagged, and declined; he laughed. 9:00 am and the sun was up, nets stowed and the cook called

everyone in for breakfast. As Alisabeth forked in a mouthful of fresh fish, she looked at me in wonder, "An experience of a lifetime?" I sighed, "Yes, an experience of a lifetime."

Editor's Note: This story is an excerpt from a longer adventure published in Martina's first book. In her second book, Dust in My Sandals, Tales from a Baja Traveler (see our ad), she shares additional stories of her experience aboard the El Joven.

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RESOLVING R.E. PROBLEMS...

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months of filing the complaint.

Unquestionably, the number of conflicts and disagreements that are resolved through Alternative Dispute Resolution will increase considerably over the next few years. Since it will be far less expensive and quicker to solve problems in this manner, it may make sense to begin to include an arbitration clause

in all of your real estate contracts now.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Linda Neil founded The Settlement Company® in 1991. It is the original escrow company in Mexico and has successfully processed thousands of trusts and title transfers of Mexican real estate. Mrs. Neil, a real estate broker licensed in both Baja California

Sur and in the state of California, USA, has spent more than forty years in Mexico in the development of real estate and related activities. She frequently presents seminars on both sides of the border on the subject of real estate ownership in Mexico and is a member of AMPI, NAR and FIABCI. She holds PROFECO Certificate 00065/96, The Settlement Company® handles transfers of properties and provides title insurance for properties located throughout Mexico. It specializes in the Virtual Closing®



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COOKING LIKE A MEXICAN...

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content. It's typically used for quesadillas, molletes and tortas. Made from raw cow's milk.

Quesillo

Wrongfully called "Queso Oaxaca" from Oaxaca. Made from raw or pasteurized cow's

milk exclusively, white and stringy. Soft flavor, not very salty. Melts beautifully and has an amazing cheese pull but does not brown easily. Medium fat content. Used in Tlayudas, quesadillas and as an appetizer.

Requesón

Technically not a cheese, but worthy of being on the list. Closer to a crema, made

from the leftover curds of fresh cheese. Very mild flavor, and can be used for sweet and savory dishes. Very popular smeared on warm fresh out of the oven bolillo, or with toast and honey for breakfast, as stuffing in empanadas, gorditas and quesadillas. Medium fat content.

Queso menonita

Also called queso Chihuahua, made from pasteurized milk, firm and soft, slices and shred perfectly. It is a pale yellow color and has a firm holey texture. It is produced by the Mennonite community established in Chihuahua. It has a round mild flavor and melts great with a beautiful cheese pull and browns great too. It is used for many things, from quesadillas to sandwiches and chiles rellenos, over beans and as an appetizer.

Now that you know the main Mexican quesos, incorporate them into your daily diet! I am always available and happy to hear from you at ale.borbolla@gringogazette.com

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