La Comida Mexicana

One of the greatest things about Mexican culture is the amazing food, and history and life in the food. In Mexico, food is more than just something to eat; it is history, it is pride and it is love. I talked with my Aunt Marianela as well as Kukulcan's cooking teacher Gloria about the importance of food in Mexican culture and the role it plays in people's lives. I chose food for my interview because I saw the importance of food in the culture. I also have food allergies, so I am usually very aware of what food is being served around me and I enjoy eating ethnic foods. Both of the women I talked to about this topic have been cooking forever. While I knew a bit about Mexican food to start with, my eyes were opened more to the importance of food in Mexico, and I learned some valuable lessons.

To start with, Mexican food has always had an important place in the culture and people lives. But why is it important? Mexico has many different types of people, and many indigenous groups. Food is something that has always been unique to Mexico as a whole but also to every group. Each ethnicity within Mexico has its own food that they have eaten throughout history. So food brings together past history and present time, as well as creates a source of pride for the Mexican people. Mexicans are proud of their own area and food traditions as well as Mexico’s traditions as a whole. There are many other reasons that food is also important, for example showing love to your family and friends by preparing them good food. For example, in a popular book in Mexico, “Like Water For Chocolate,” the main character Tita prepares food and her emotions go into what she feeds her family. People receive her emotions, sadness, love, jealousy, etc. I found out that many of the Mexican people feel this concept is not far from the truth. They feel that food prepared in love is very delicious while food prepared with emotions like anger or sadness has a very different taste. This also includes the idea that beautiful preparation of food is important. When Mexicans cook, it is important that the food looks
pleasing as well as tastes good. This shows your honor and love to the people you are feeding. There is no doubt that food has many more levels than simply nutrition.

Food also brings family together. While in the United States it is not as common to see families eating meals together anymore, it is still a very important tradition in Mexico. In fact, many businesses close down around 3 and open again after the main meal just so everyone can return home and eat and share conversation together. This is a tradition that has gone on forever and helps to keep family ties strong. Meals are usually eaten together in the home, but there are special occasions when a family goes out to eat at restaurants.

Food is filled with tradition. Generally still today, it is the women that do the majority of the cooking. Many restaurants though have male chefs that are very good cooks. While some men do enjoy to cook and help out in the kitchen at home many of the men are still “machismo” and prefer things the traditional way, women in the kitchen. Preparing food is one of the main duties of women, and meals take a lot of time and energy during the day, depending on the meal prepared. Breakfast and dinner are both smaller meals, and can take an hour or less to prepare. The mid-day meal is the biggest and can take anywhere from two to three hours to prepare. For this meal there are usually a number of courses served. First will usually be a soup, and then following will be salad and then the main dish of meat with a side like rice or cactus. This is how food has been traditionally served and it gives the people eating more opportunity to enjoy the taste and the presentation of the food instead of having everything served in one moment.

As I stated in the beginning, one of the most important ideas about Mexican food is the source of pride from different regions and indigenous groups in Mexico for their regional dishes. The state of Morelos and specifically the city of Cuernavaca eat all of the very common Mexican dishes, but also have a few unique dishes. For example, one common food known to Morelos is la lasesina. It is a meat cut like steak with salt, and it is served in a tortilla with cheese, cream, and green salsa. Pasole, an indigenous soup, is also very common. And of course all of Mexico's really common foods such as
tacos, different soups and meats, tortillas, and sides like beans and rice are always served. Mexican food is also very natural. Yes, there are processed foods available in the supermarkets, but it is not very common that families eat boxed meals. It is much more common that meals are prepared by hand out of love for the family. Natural grains and fruits and vegetables are eaten daily and incorporated into the meals. Mexicans also use all their natural food resources like cactus, and foods in Mexico are less genetically modified. It is also important that people eat everything on their plate. Adults teach their children this, not to waste anything.

Certain times of the year also call for special dishes. For example, the holiday el día de los muertos is the opportunity for families to cook the favorite dishes of their relatives who have passed away. On their altars to their loved ones, they place the favorite food. This is one of the many situations in which food is used to love and honor someone. Common foods for this holiday are mole, tamales and pan dulce. For September 15, Mexican independence day, the most common food eaten is chiles en nogadas. This is the most common food for this holiday because of its appearance and preparation. The chile is green, and it is covered in a white sauce with a red fruit, granada, on the top, which forms the colors of the Mexican flag.

While Mexico has its food staples, such as corn, rice, beans, fruits and vegetables, meat, and toppings such as chile, onion, cream and cheese, and herbs like cilantro, the Mexican diet is filled with a variety of unique dishes and colorfully prepared food. There is no end to the beauty and history and love found in Mexican food. I enjoyed the opportunity to be in Mexico and experience food in the culture. With my food allergies, going to new places and eating new things can sometimes be a challenge. Eating in Mexico was incredibly easy, and my body feels good eating such natural and delicious food. By learning how to cook and sharing food with my Mexican family I learned about history and I learned more about the power of love and family in Mexico.
Interview questions:

1. Is there food that is typical or well known specifically in Morelos or Cuernavaca?
2. If so, what are the ingredients?
3. What is the importance of food in Mexican life?
4. What do you think of the book “Like Water For Chocolate” and is the idea of emotions in food a true idea?
5. Normally, do Mexican families eat together in the home?
6. Is it more common to eat in the home or in restaurants?
7. Is dessert common after meals?
8. What are some foods popular during Christmas?
9. What role does food play during celebrations like el día de los muertos or independence?
10. Who usually prepares the food in the home, men or women?
11. Do you feel like the food in Mexico is really natural, and are there things like “genetically-modified” foods?