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La Marea Restaurant: Familiar Yet Exotic, It Takes Mexican Cuisine to Another Level

Chef Jetzabel Rojas Barragán has been on a mission to take her culinary heritage back – and in the process has taken Mexican cuisine to the highest level at the Viceroy Riviera Maya’s La Marea restaurant.

While the popularity of Mexican food has soared in recent years, and today can be found all over the world, quality and sophistication are too often lost in translation. Menus tend to feature only basic foods, lack subtlety in preparation, and make poor substitutions for unavailable ingredients.

“The result is a perception of Mexican food as being simple tacos and enchiladas, when we have an ancient and diverse culinary heritage,” explained Chef Jetzabel. “Mexican cuisine employs time-honored, distinctive methods of preparation, uses a wealth of fresh ingredients, and creates a tableaux of flavors with subtle spicing and food combinations. UNESCO recently recognized the centuries-old cultural traditions of our cuisine by designating it a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.”

At Viceroy Riviera Maya, Chef Jetzabel is changing the thinking about Mexican food by embracing tradition and at the same time unleashing innovation and incorporating new interpretations and techniques. “When you give time-honored traditions new life through innovation,” said Chef Jetzabel, “the palate is simultaneously satisfied with the familiar and tantalized by the exotic.”

Full Menu of Dining Choices & Classes

La Marea’s trendy, high-end Mexican cuisine served on a casual open-air loft sets the culinary tempo at the Viceroy Riviera May, yet it’s only one of many dining choices and options. Guests may choose from a diverse array of foods, settings and experiences as well as classes where you learn insider tips about preparing Mexican foods and drinks.

Coral Grill: By the picturesque Caribbean, the grill serves a Mexican-Mediterranean menu cooked on wood-burning grills, everything from Chipotle Caesar Salad to Seafood Pizza to Carne Asada.

Monday: *Guacamole & Margarita Class*

Tuesday: *Antojería* – A culinary festival of Mexican street foods

Wednesday: *Tequila Class & Ceviche Tasting*

Thursday: *La Mesa del Chef (Chef’s Table)* – Unique Mexican menu each week prepared with Mediterranean techniques and paired with Mexican wines.

Friday: *Beach Barbacoa* – A classic Mexican beach barbecue.

Artisanal Cocktail Coaching: Hands-on mixology class where guests learn methods and techniques and also work the Coral Bar to gain experience. Offered on request.

Her favorite innovation is to borrow dishes from leading international cuisines and make them Mexican. A risotto prepared with a Yucatan cheese called *queso de bola*, sweet potatoes and corn is infused with Mexican character. Black Paella puts a Mexican spin on the Spanish dish with epazote leaf, Mexican chili peppers, turkey and smoked sausage, and the source of the color, black huitlacoche mushrooms. Bouillabaisse reconfigured with dried chilis and local fish and shellfish becomes a Mexican seafood stew. Capellini discover Mexican roots with an ancho chili pepper sauce. A thick pork chop is prepared using French techniques, but the sauce bursts with Mexican flavor blending poblano chili, tomatoes and huitlacoche. A gazpacho flavored with a favorite here, hibiscus, assumes a Mexican personality.

"Guests want to try new dishes and flavors, and have new experiences when they travel," said Chef Jetzabel. "In fact, it has been our guests who have inspired my creativity because they asked me to be innovative rather than serve a typical upscale fine dining menu at La Marea."

Top-flight ingredients are of course the lynchpin of her kitchen, as well as integral to her showcasing of Mexico's culinary heritage. Ingredients are specially procured for their quality and origin, mostly from local or regional sources, but also from across the country. Each region of Mexico boasts its own individually distinctive cuisine and ingredients, and the chef brings many of them into the culinary mix on the menu.

Moles, for example, are stars of Mexican cuisine, with the most acclaimed ones coming from Oaxaca and Puebla, but Chef Jetzabel has instead introduced little-known *Mole Rosa* from Taxco, which is creamy and pink, and incorporates walnuts, pinenuts and chipotles. *Tikin Xic* is a classic baked fish dish of the Yucatan flavored with a traditional spice paste blending the seed of the local annatto tree with cumin, cloves, pepper and oregano.

"Whether it is something basic, such as substituting duck in a dish that traditionally uses chicken, or turning an international favorite into a signature Mexican creation, our goal is to generate exciting dining experiences found only at the Viceroy Riviera Maya," said Chef Jetzabel.

La Marea not only celebrates Mexico's rich culinary heritage but chic Mexican style. Guests dine on a romantic loft with views of the aquamarine Caribbean in a casual, open-air tropical ambiance flavored by rattan furniture, a large palapa roof and gentle sea breezes.

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