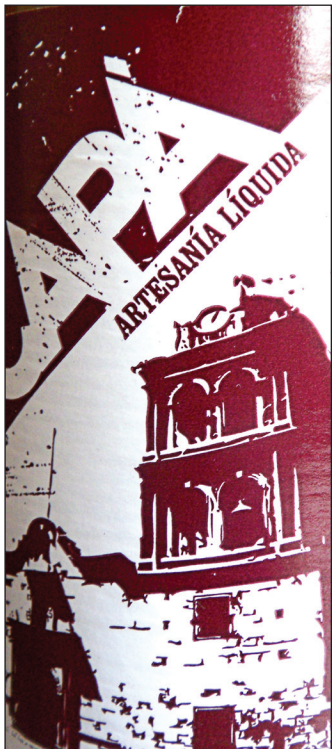


No Lime, Please A NEW WAY OF THINKING ABOUT BEER IN MEXICO



A beer from the microbrewery Cervecería Cucapa. Microbreweries are gaining popularity in Mexico.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GABRIEL FLORES ROMERO

Agua, lupulos, levadura and malta are the four main ingredients in one of the most popular drinks in the Spanish-speaking world – cerveza. Mexico and the U.S. have a great deal of influence on one another, and their beer is no exception. But it's truly up to Mexican microbrewers to set themselves apart and overcome their obstacles in order to survive their infancy.

In the last decade Mexico has gone from having an almost nonexistent craft-beer market to having more than 20 microbreweries and a few even smaller “nanobreweries” popping up around the country. Undoubtedly influenced by Mexico's neighbor to the north, this movement looks to challenge and change the way Mexicans think about beer.

As Mexico moves away from its traditional beers made of corn and rice – and topped of with limes – its beer movement begins to resemble the over-the-top beer craze in the U.S.

“Barrel-aging and the use of American hops in their beers” are some of the ways Mexican breweries are taking after their American counterparts, says John Haggerty, brewmaster at New Holland Brewing Company, based in Michigan.

As Mexican microbreweries are looking for guidance and support, they look to the microbreweries of the U.S. Stone Brewery and Cerveza Tijuana co-sponsor one of the biggest beer events in Mexico, TJ Beer Fest. The two-day festival – one of the first events of its kind – invites microbreweries from both the U.S. and Mexico to participate, including Bear Republic, Mad River and Oskar Blues from the U.S. and Cervecería Cucapa, Cervecería Minerva and Cervecería Primus from Mexico.

Unlike the mega corporations that dominate the Mexican beer industry, microbreweries offer a larger variety of beer styles, ranging from Tequila barrel-aged barley wine to a Belgian-style tripel brewed with pumpkin, calaveritas de azucar and wheat, representing the liquid form of Pan de Muerto (Bread for the Dead), typically served on Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead).

Though the future is bright with market potential, Mexican craft brewers face an uphill challenge. Just like in the U.S., the big beer corporations have the upper hand. Grupo Modelo and Cuauhtemoc Mochizuma, the makers of Corona and Tecate, respectively, dominate the industry. These two groups control the local malters, bars and restaurants by signing illegal contracts to sell only their products in exchange for discounts and equipment. This has forced microbreweries to import ingredients and bottles, making their beers much more expensive.

Breweries have created associations to offset costs; for instance,

Cervecería Primus and Cervecería Minerva came together to start “AC-ERMEX” (Asociación Cervecera de la República Mexicana) to import ingredients at a lower cost and to recognize establishments that sell and promote craft beer. These types of alliances have proven to work.

“Even though it's a very slow and challenging industry, it has grown faster in recent years. Every day there is a greater demand for craft beer,” says Luis Haro, brewmaster of La Legendaria out of San Luis Potosí.

The future looks very promising and dynamic for these breweries, and we should expect great things from them in the next couple of years.

The following recipe is for a classic Mexican dish, sure to pair nicely with a Mexican microbrew.

CHILAQUILES

Serves 7

INGREDIENTS

2 cups oil, for frying
2 cups water
20 corn tortillas, cut into squares
15 tomatillos
3-4 jalapenos for not too spicy, or 5-8 for really spicy
½ large onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves
½ block queso fresco

METHOD

In a large heavy skillet heat the oil to 350 degrees. Carefully stir in the tortilla squares and fry until crisp and golden brown. Remove from heat and drain on paper towels.

Place tomatillos and jalapenos in a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to a boil, and boil until soft.

Place tomatillos, jalapenos, onions and garlic cloves in a blender and pulse until ingredients are finely chopped. Add salt to taste.

Place salsa and fried tortilla strips in a large saucepan and add 2 cups of water. Let simmer for about 10 minutes, but do not let the tortillas get soggy. Top with queso fresco, breaking the cheese apart with your fingers. Add sour cream, if you wish.

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