

# TOP-10 MEXICAN RESTAURANTS

Their cuisine hails from all parts of Mexico, but one thing unites them: They're the best of the best when it comes to mouthwatering, mind-blowing, tongue-tingling, *muy delicioso* Mexican food. Here are our top-10 picks for the best Mexican food joints in the Valley.

## AMERICA'S TACO SHOP

The citrus-splashed and flame-grilled *carne asada* steak from America's Taco Shop is simply the best in the Valley, whether stuffed into a *torta*, taco or burrito. What began as an *asada*-only *casa* now includes a fabulous *al pastor* (chile- and pineapple-marinated pork loin roasted on a vertical *trompo*), but vegetarians shouldn't despair. Creamy Peruvian beans are a welcome departure from pintos in the bean-and-cheese burrito (splurge for grilled jalapeños, \$.25), and caramelized onions jazz up the vegetarian quesadilla. There's a nice selection of ice-cold Mexican beers, too. Early birds get the scrumptious breakfast burrito with scrambled eggs, potatoes and Schreiner's *chorizo* and pair it with a *cochata*, a mixture of iced coffee and house-made *horchata*. Although we're partial to the original Downtown bungalow with its creaky wooden floors, the other two locations have charm, too, and the same killer *carne asada*.

**Info:** 2041 N. Seventh St., Phoenix, 602-682-5627, [americastacoshop.net](http://americastacoshop.net). Other locations: 4447 N. Seventh Ave., Phoenix; 735 E. University Drive, Tempe. **Hours:** 7:30 a.m.-9 p.m. M-Th; 7:30 a.m.-10 p.m. F-Sa; 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Su. \$

## BARRIO CAFÉ

Ask Chef/owner Silvana Salcido Esparza why Barrio is still so *caliente* after nine years, and she'll say it's because she only cooks with love. We say it's because of the flavor-popping dishes from Mexico's heartland, served with grace on white linen-covered tables in an artsy setting. Who doesn't love that mural of a Mexican wrestler - a *luchador* - watching over the tiny bar's broad, deep tequila list?

Fall in love with the chunky guacamole topped with dried cranberries this time of year (and bejeweled pomegranate seeds in winter) and dreamy, creamy *queso fundido* with poblano and *chorizo*. Dig into black or spicy red *mole* enchiladas, but do not - *do not* - miss the dish that put Barrio on the Valley's dining map since opening in 2002: the succulent achiote- and sour orange-marinated, slow-roasted *cochinita pibil* (pork).

**Info:** 2814 N. 16th St., Phoenix, 602-636-0240, [barriocafe.com](http://barriocafe.com). **Hours:** 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Tu-Th; 11 a.m.-10:30 p.m. F; 5 p.m.-10:30 p.m. Sa; brunch 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Su; dinner 3 p.m.-9 p.m. Su. \$-\$\$\$

## CAROLINA'S

Carolina's (car-o-LINE-ahs) sets THE standard for flour tortillas. Since 1968, locals and tourists have flocked to the original, bare-bones location in south-central Phoenix for a griddled flour fix. While the hot tortillas are mighty fine straight out of the steam-filled bag, they're equally divine wrapped around a red chile beef burrito, or the Oaxaca Special, a zesty mixture of *chorizo*, roasted potatoes, pinto beans and cheddar and Monterey Jack cheese.

Break out the plastic knife and fork if you smother your burrito in the restaurant's cumin-spiced enchilada sauce, and grab extra napkins for the heart-stopping, deep-fried chimichangas. Tacos, tamales and enchiladas also populate the basic Sonoran menu, but choose the rib-sticking burros to experience Carolina's best.

**Info:** 1202 E. Mohave St., Phoenix, 602-252-1503, [carolinasmexicanfood.com](http://carolinasmexicanfood.com). Other locations: 2126 E. Cactus Road, Phoenix; 9030 W. Peoria Ave., Peoria. **Hours:** 7 a.m.-7:30 p.m. M-F; 7 a.m.-6 p.m. Sa. \$



Voted Best in Phoenix 2010  
e. Salsa

America Corrales Bortin (right) and Terry Bortin, the husband and wife team behind America's Taco Shop.

