



Flavours of earth and silk

An Ethnographic and Gastronomic Guide
to Santa María del Río, S.L.P., Mexico
DR. MIGUEL ÁNGEL CASILLAS BÁEZ

UASLP

UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE SAN LUIS POTOSÍ
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FLAVOURS OF EARTH AND SILK

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Dr. Miguel Ángel Casillas Báez

San Luis Potosí, S.L.P.

2026

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To Don Máximo González Bárcenas, who at 96 years old represents the backbone of Santa María's historical memory. His testimony, brimming with life and wisdom, is the heartbeat of these pages; his stories are the bridge between past and present, allowing us to understand the very origins of our identity.

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PROLOGUE:

The Thread that Feeds the Soul

To walk through Santa María del Río is to learn that time here moves to a different beat: the rhythmic strike of the *metate* (a traditional stone grinder) and the whisper of silk. Although many arrive seeking the comfort of a *rebozo* (a hand-woven artisanal shawl), they stay for the aromas drifting from half-open doorways, where wood-smoke tells stories untold in any textbook.

This guide does not seek to classify establishments; it seeks to map a collective memory and a shared treasure. It is the result of afternoons spent in conversation with women who keep the secrets of *asado de boda* (a traditional celebratory pork stew) in the memory of their hands, and with men who patiently wait under the highland sun for the *magüey* (agave plant) to yield its *aguamiel* (sweet sap) or for the *tuna* (prickly pear) to transform into the liquid ruby, known as *colonche* (a fermented cactus fruit beverage).

Here, gastronomy is not a commodity; it is a bond. Eating a *campechana* (a flaky, glazed local pastry) fresh from a brick oven or drinking a jar of *aguamiel* at the Municipal Market is to participate in a ritual of cultural resistance. In every bite and every sip, the people of Santa María del Río offer us their identity: a heritage that is kneaded, fermented, and shared with the pride of those who know that this flavour is unique in the world.

We invite you to set aside your watch and open your senses. You are about to journey through a town that is not merely visited, but savoured. Welcome to the table of Santa María del Río, where every flavour has a name, a lineage, and a story waiting to be heard.

This guide is born from the wonder of hands that, with equal skill, knot silk, *tatemar* (roast or char over fire) sweet potatoes, or toast seeds and chillies for the wedding stew. Here, flavour is not a recipe, but an act of love that crosses borders; it is the nostalgia of the son in distant lands and the resilience of the grandmother

still foraging for *pirul* (Peruvian pepper tree) in the hills. Upon opening these pages, the reader will find the common thread of a living history served on a clay plate and enjoyed with the heart. For in the end, Santa María del Río transcends the tour: it is felt. And if the *rebozo* is the skin of this town, its gastronomy is, undoubtedly, the soul that nourishes it.

INTRODUCTION:

Cuisine as Heritage and Territory

This ethnographic and gastronomic guide, '*Sabores de tierra y seda*' (Flavours of Earth and Silk), arises from an urgent need: to document the wisdom of the matriarchs who safeguard the identity of Santa María del Río. Through a journey spanning from the central neighbourhoods to the communities of Ojo Caliente, El Fuerte, and El Cerrito, this work seeks to reclaim the value of cuisine as a complex system of symbols, emotional ties, and tradition.

To understand Santa María, we must look beyond the plate. Here, gastronomy is intimately linked to three fundamental pillars that structure this work:

Rituality: Flavours that celebrate life, death, and the sacred, such as the mystical *atole negro*.

Geography: An 'archaeology of flavour' that harnesses what the desert offers — the prickly pear and the *nopal* cactus.

Resistance: The role of women as the backbone of the economy and culture, preserving ancestral techniques in the face of encroaching modernity.

This is not a list of restaurants; it is an ethnographic directory. It is an invitation to meet the women who, amidst the woodsmoke and the aroma of chocolate, continue to write the history of this *Pueblo Mágico*. Welcome to a journey where every bite is a reunion with our own roots.

SECTION I: ORIGIN AND PURPOSE

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

1. **Heritage as a Resource:** We understand heritage not only as monuments (tangible) but as the flavours and wisdom (intangible) that provide the territory with its soul.
2. **The Ethnographic Approach:** Listening to the 'female knowledge bearers' with over 20 years of experience to document the collective memory.
3. **Localized Agri-Food Systems —SIAL—:** The unbreakable connection between the producer, the land, and the table.
4. **Identity Hypothesis:** The integration of gastronomy strengthens the sense of belonging and guarantees the preservation of recipes at risk.

More Than a Guide: A Promise of Identity

This work is born from deep research into the heart of Santa María del Río. It is not just a list of places, but an effort to document the soul of the territory: its heritage. We understand heritage not only as the monuments you can see but as the flavours you can experience (the intangible) and the landscape that surrounds them (the natural).

Flavour as Resistance (Our Approach)

We believe in experiential tourism. For us, eating a *gordita* in Ojo Caliente or an *asado* in the Santa María del Río market is not just 'consumption'; it is connecting with the local network—what experts call the Localized Agri-Food System—that links the producer, the land, and your table.

However, our identity faces a challenge: culinary erosion. The loss of ingredients such as the purple sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), the native *criollo* walnut, and local fruit trees puts the memory of our flavour at risk. This guide acts as a bridge of

reconnection between you, the visitor, and the origin of the product.

The Guardians of Knowledge (Our Methodology)

To select the locations featured in these pages, we did not rely on commercial trends, but on community legitimacy. We have listened to the 'knowledge bearers': individuals with more than 20 years of craft who inherited recipes from their ancestors and who still defend the use of the *metate*, wood-fired ovens, and manual curdling.

Our selection criteria were:

Authentic Heritage. Families who keep ancestral techniques alive. Here, flavour does not come from a jar; it comes from patience and fire.

Flavour of the Territory. Producers who use ingredients from the micro-region, such as the sweet potato or the *criollo* walnut that give soul to our traditional candies.

Stories with a Face. People willing to share not just a recipe, but the profound meaning behind it.

Your Journey with Purpose. By following this route through the municipal hub, Ojo Caliente, El Cerrito, Fracción de Sánchez, Peregrina de Arriba and Peregrina de Abajo, or Bernalejo, you become part of the solution. Your visit helps young people see their parents' craft as a dignified way of life, ensuring that *asado de boda* and the cheeses made in the Peregrinas do not become mere memories, but remain a living legacy.

SECTION II: THE ROUTE OF THE SENSES

Geography of Flavour: From the City Center to the Communities
The Potosino Landscape as a Natural Larder

Stop 1: Ojo Caliente – The Threshold of Flavour and Railway Memory

If you travel along Highway 57, the landscape begins to transform—not just before your eyes, but through your sense of smell. The aroma of toasted chilies, burning wood, and freshly cracked maize signals your arrival in Ojo Caliente. This community is the gateway to the culinary culture of Santa María del Río and a place where tradition is reinvented to amaze the traveler.

The 'La Nueva Rosita' Phenomenon: The Potosino Sopepizza

To speak of food in Ojo Caliente is to pay tribute to a living legend born in 1960: the restaurant '*La Nueva Rosita*'. Founded by Don Julio Ruiz Campillo and Doña Aurelia Sánchez, this establishment saw the birth of a monumental scale of flavour thanks to the ingenuity of their daughters, Apolonia and Martha Ruiz Sánchez.

They transformed the traditional *picadita* into the famous *sope gigante* (or *sope-pizza*), an artisanal piece 12 inches (30 cm) in diameter that defies the senses. Made with *nixtamal* dough on a wood-fired griddle (*comal*), this dish—now led by Martha Alicia Lara in its third generation—has become so iconic that it has transcended the highway, opening a branch in the municipal hub (Vicente Guerrero #240) and establishing itself as a mandatory landmark.

The Ritual of Asado de Boda

Alongside their innovations, the cooks of *La Nueva Rosita* maintain the region's culinary pillar. You cannot say you know Santa María del Río if you haven't tasted the *asado de boda* here. In this kitchen, *ancho* chilies, chocolate, and orange peel are transformed into a smooth, glossy, and deep sauce that coats perfectly cooked pieces of pork. It is a flavour that masterfully balances sweet, salty, and spicy, rescuing the 'savoir-faire' that is already being passed down to a fourth generation.

Healing Waters and Railway History

Living up to its name (*Warm Eye*), this community is blessed with thermal springs and spas that invite relaxation. Furthermore, walking here means stepping into the history of the old train to Pardo which, at the beginning of the 20th century, connected these flavours with the rest of the state.

Gorditas de Comal (The Heart of Maize)

Beyond the giant *sope*, traditional *gorditas de comal* remain the soul of the town. At *La Nueva Rosita*, the menu evolved from original *carnitas* to these hand-patted pieces, filled to order with seasonal stews. The secret remains the same: fresh dough and the heat of direct fire.

Traveler's Tip: For the original highway experience, stop at the flagship '*La Nueva Rosita*' at Carlos Díez Gutiérrez #13, in Ojo Caliente. If you are already in downtown Santa María del Río, visit their new branch from Wednesday to Monday. The *sope gigante* is proof that heritage is more alive than ever.

Stop 2: El Cerrito – A Watchtower of Tradition and Flavours by the Road

Strategically located along Highway 57, the community of El Cerrito is much more than a transit point; it is a 'service parador' and an open window into Potosino identity. For those travelling this great artery, El Cerrito offers the chance to pause with purpose, where traveler comfort meets artisanal flavour.

Traveller Services and Tradition

Unlike other highway stops, El Cerrito offers an infrastructure designed for those traversing the '57'. Here you will find essential services, parking, and a diverse gastronomic offer that allows you to recharge without straying from your route, but with the quality of home-cooked meals. It is, quite literally, elevating the travel experience.

The Infinite Postcard

From its viewpoints, Santa María del Río reveals itself in all its splendour. Stepping out of the car, a few steps are enough to observe the layout of the town's streets and the greenery still surviving in the courtyards—the very origin of our traditional cuisine. It is the perfect place to understand the geography of the *rebozo* and the importance of the native *criollo* walnut orchards, as the fresh highland breeze clears your senses after time behind the wheel.

The Feast at Las Indias

As evening falls, the scent of charcoal guides you to emblematic stalls like 'Las Indias'. Here, grilled meat (*carne asada*) is elevated to a regional art form, accompanied by local *nopales*, fire-roasted onions, and *molcajete* salsas made with the ancestral techniques documented in our research. Dining here, with the highway as a backdrop and the town at your feet, is to immerse yourself in the vibrant, real life of Santa María del Río.

Stop 3: Peregrina and Bernalejo – The Heartbeat of the Countryside and Dairy Heritage

For those seeking pure origins, the road leads inland toward Peregrina de Arriba, Peregrina de Abajo and Bernalejo. Here, the hustle and bustle disappears, replaced by the sounds of stables and the aroma of fresh milk. This is the stage for what we call 'flavours in resistance'.

The Guardians of Cheese

In these communities, you will meet small-scale livestock producers. Luxury here is simplicity: try the pressed cheese (*queso de prensa*), *requesón*, butter, and hand-made curds. Their flavour depends on local grazing and a curdling technique passed down through generations—a process the industrial automation has been unable to replicate.

Generational Succession

By visiting these homes, your presence validates the work of the young people who have chosen to stay and protect their parents' craft. This is immersion tourism in its purest state: no neon signs, just the hospitality of a shaded patio and a product that is living history.

Economic Justice

Buying directly in Peregrina or Bernalejo is an act of resistance. You ensure the benefits go directly to the producer and that manual techniques are not replaced by mechanical processes that erase the collective memory of regional flavour.

Stop 4: Ex-Hacienda and Lourdes Spa – The Sanctuary of Miraculous Waters

To close this journey through the senses, we head to a site where history and nature converge: the *Balneario de Lourdes*. This corner, framed by the majesty of a former

hacienda called *Labor del Río*, is world-famous for its thermal and mineral waters with unique properties.

A Toast with the Earth

Lourdes is synonymous with its iconic, emblematic mineral water. Drinking it directly at its source is a distinct sensory experience; it is the taste of the Potosino subsoil, imbued with minerals that have brought fame to the region for decades. It serves as the quintessential palate cleanser after the intensity of the *asado de boda*.

Architecture and Nostalgia

Wandering around the former hacienda is a trip to the past. The stone walls and gardens whisper stories of an era when this place was the epicentre of elegant relaxation in the region. The combination of ancient stonework and verdant scenery creates a microclimate that invites reflection on how the territory shapes our customs.

The Traveller's Rest

Lourdes offers the ideal finale for our route. After visiting the mills, the *comales*, and the candy workshops, immersing oneself in its waters is a way to honour Santa María's most valuable natural resource: the water that nourishes the quince orchards and gives life to the entire food chain we have explored.

Closing Recommendation: Do not leave without a bottle of Lourdes water for the road. It is the liquid reminder that, in Santa María del Río, the earth not only feeds us—it also heals us.

LOGISTICS OF FLAVOUR: Times and Distances

To ensure your journey is seamless, we have designed this mobility scheme. Santa María del Río is best enjoyed when its geography is understood:

Stop	Geographic Location	Distance from Town Center	Estimated Time	Star Product
1. Ojo Caliente	Highway 57 (North)	8 km	10 min	<i>Asado de Boda</i> & Thermal Springs
2. El Cerrito	Highway 57 (Access)	1 km	3 min	Grilled Meat
3. Peregrina / Bernalejo	Rural Zone (Highlands)	12 - 15 km	25 - 30 min	Pressed Cheeses & Curds
4. Lourdes Spa	Springs Area	15 km	20 min	Mineral Water & Ex-Hacienda

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CONSCIOUS TRAVELLER

To ensure your experience is as rewarding for you as it is for the community, we suggest bearing the following in mind:

The Rhythm of Tradition

Remember that you are visiting family workshops and authentic kitchens. Here, craftsmanship cannot be rushed; *asado de boda* and *campechanas* involve slow, deliberate processes.

Local Transportation: If you are not travelling in your own car, shared shuttles (*colectivos*) and taxis depart from *La Plazoleta* in Santa María del Río, taking you to Ojo Caliente and El Cerrito economically and safely.

Cash on Hand: While some establishments in the town centre accept cards, cash is indispensable in the communities of Peregrina and Bernalejo, as well as the stalls of Ojo Caliente. Your direct payment without intermediaries strengthens the local economy.

Harvest Seasons: If you are looking for quince, *perón* (pear-apple), or walnut candies, ask about the season. Consuming what the earth yields in its own time is the best way to combat culinary erosion.

Respect for the Environment: In the thermal springs of Ojo Caliente and Lourdes, remember that water is our most sacred resource. Help us keep the waterways and facilities clean.

Stop 5: Santa María del Río (Town Centre) – The Melting Pot of Flavours

The heart of the town unfolds an array of options where quality and tradition are the standard.

Asado de Boda and Oven-Baked Gorditas

In the municipal market and restaurants of the centre, *asado de boda* is served with ancestral elegance. Here, unlike on the highway, the *gorditas de hornos* reign supreme: brittle-textured pieces cooked with the dry heat of brick, holding sweet or savoury fillings. It is the essential snack while walking under the shade of the main plaza.

'Martín Bautista' Municipal Market

A sanctuary for oven-baked *gorditas* and red or purple sweet potatoes, either boiled or embers-roasted (*tatemado*).

A Bridge Between Eras: From Migration to Deep Roots

While Chinese food speaks of a Santa María that looks toward the world and embraces the return of its migrants, another cuisine exists—quieter and more subterranean—that returns us to the very origin of our land. While in the town centre the aroma of noodles mixes with that of *asado*, a sacred language survives in the intimacy of homes and the clamour of patron saint festivals: that of *atoles* and *tamales*.

This is not just food; it is the thread connecting us to the ancient Otomi peoples of Central Mexico. Here, maize ceases to be sustenance and becomes an offering,

and the cheese from our highlands is wrapped in maize husks to converse with those who have passed. To move from the modernity of the giant *sope* or Asian influence to the purity of a *puscua atole* is to take a centuries-long journey in a single sip; it is to recognise that Santa María del Río is a tree with cosmopolitan branches but with pre-Hispanic roots that still draw nourishment from faith and the hearth.

Chinese Food: The Flavour of Migration

Santa María manifests a fascinating social phenomenon through its Chinese restaurants. This is not a foreign offering, but a reflection of migration and homecoming. Families from Santa María who travelled north or abroad brought back techniques and flavours from Asia, adapting them with local ingredients and seasoning. Today, a plate of rice or noodles in the centre is a testament to the contemporary history of its inhabitants: a demonstration of resilience and of how Santa María embraces the new without forgetting its identity.

Master Directory: The Flavour of the Homecoming

	Suggested Hours	Order Contact	Signature Dishes	House Special / 'Plus'
China House	12:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	485 853 1234	Orange Chicken and Special Rice.	Greatest Value: Their family packs are famous for ensuring everyone is satisfied.
El Pelón Sifuentes	1:00 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.	485 111 1102 485 151 2223	Boneless Bites and Wings (Mango Habanero) + Chinese Combo.	Fusion: Perfect if someone in the group prefers snacks over Chinese cuisine.

	Suggested Hours	Order Contact	Signature Dishes	House Special / 'Plus'
China Star	12:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	444 131 0256	Beef with Broccoli and Buffalo Wings.	Digital Presence: They have one of the best online platforms for consulting the menu.
La Gran Muralla	1:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	485 853 2124	Assisted Buffet and "Sopa Negra" (Black Soup).	Tradition: The place to be on Sundays; a very family-oriented atmosphere.
Asia To Wok	2:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.	Via Facebook	<i>Birriamen</i> and Custom Woks.	Modernity: Ideal for the youth or those seeking spicy flavours and Instagrammable presentations.
China Salsas	1:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	485 122 3075	Sushi (Florida Rolls) and General Tso's Chicken.	Variety: The only spot that allows you to mix sushi rolls with Chinese food in the same order.
Pekín (Benito Juárez)	12:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	485 129 8345	Kung Pao Chicken and Spring Rolls.	Speed: Located in a strategic area, it is ideal for quick collection.

Supplementary Data for the Ethnographic Traveller

Suggested Hours: Most operate from 11:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Sundays are the busiest days, coinciding with the end of Mass and the stroll in the plaza.

The Delivery Phenomenon: In Santa María, Chinese food leads the delivery market. Tourists are encouraged to ask their hosts for the 'nearest Chinese food number', as it is a common local practice.

Palate Adaptation: Unlike Chinese food in large cities, here you will find a less sweet, more spiced adaptation—a reflection of the flavours migrants longed for and now successfully fuse.

Syncretism at the Table: It is common to see families sharing fried rice at the centre of the table, accompanied by handmade *tortillas* or local *chile de árbol* salsas, unifying Otomi heritage and the migrant experience.

A Note for the Tourist: Everyday Savours

From the chickens (roasted, charcoal-grilled, or Arkansas-style fried with a unique marinade) to the late-night 'antojitos'; there is always a table ready.

SECTION III: FINDINGS AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF FLAVOUR

1. Rituality and Roots: The Flavour of the Sacred

Asado de Boda: The Ultimate Test of Santa María's Seasoning

If the *rebozo* is the soul of Santa María del Río, the *asado de boda* (wedding stew) is its vital pulse. In this region of San Luis Potosí, *asado* is not just a dish; it is a ritual of prestige and the standard by which a cook's mastery is measured. Whoever masters the *asado* masters the fire and the memory of the land.

A Dish of Celebration and Community

Traditionally linked to weddings and major religious festivities, this dish is a symbol of abundance and hospitality. In Santa María, the *asado* possesses a unique personality that distinguishes it from versions in neighbouring states like Zacatecas. Here, the balance between sweetness, acidity, and heat is an art form.

The Pillars of the Recipe: The Alchemy of Chilli and Chocolate

Santa María-style *asado* is characterised by a smooth, dark, and glossy sauce that requires impeccable execution:

The Triad of Chilli: Primarily high-quality *ancho* chilli is used for colour and body, occasionally accompanied by *cascabel* chilli to provide earthy notes.

The Citric Touch: The best-kept secret is the use of orange peel (preferably sun-dried), which cuts through the pork's fat and adds a refreshing aromatic note.

Profound Sweetness: *Metate*-ground chocolate and *piloncillo* (raw cane sugar) balance

the spice, creating a harmony that does not overwhelm the palate.

The Protein: Pieces of pork (leg or loin) that are slow-cooked within the *asado* paste itself.

The 'Trial by Fire' for the Cook

For local cooks, *asado* is a technical challenge for three reasons:

The Consistency of the Sauce

The texture must be 'mirror-like': thick enough to coat the meat without dripping, yet fluid enough to remain elegant.

Removing the Bitterness

Managing the *ancho* chilli and orange peel without making the sauce bitter is what separates an amateur from a master.

The Seasoning of the Vat

It is traditionally cooked in copper or clay vats (*cazos*), where heat is distributed so that the sugar and fat emulsify perfectly without burning.

The Dining Experience

A good *asado de boda* in Santa María is always served with:

- Well-grained red rice.

- Refried beans (preferably cooked with lard).

- Handmade tortillas—the essential vehicle to ensure not a single drop of sauce is left on the plate.

Ethnographic Note: When visiting the establishments in Ojo Caliente or the downtown

inns (*fondas*), you will notice that every family boasts its own nuance: some add a pinch of cinnamon, others a hint of clove or cumin. To taste the *asado* is to participate in a centuries-old dialogue where every spoonful tells a story of family heritage.

Sweet Identity Profile: The Campechanas of Santa María

Santa María del Río is not only the 'Cradle of the Rebozo' but also the land of one of Mexico's most delicate pieces of fine pastry. Unlike *campechanas* from other regions, those from here stand out for their extreme puff pastry technique and their crystal-like glaze.

The Art of Puff Pastry (Ethnographic Technique)

The creation of a *campechana* is an artisanal process that requires manual mastery, as the secret lies in the almost invisible layers of dough:

The 'Fold': Master bakers stretch the dough with vegetable shortening (and traditionally a touch of lard) until it is as thin as tissue paper.

The Characteristic Shine: Before entering the oven, they are dusted with refined sugar. The intense heat caramelizes the sugar, creating that crunchy, golden crust that 'shatters' at the first bite.

Texture: An authentic *campechana* must be hollow and light. If it feels heavy or doughy, it has not reached the technical quality required by local tradition.

The Bond with the Rebozo

There is a cultural narrative that unites both crafts: just as the artisan weaves silk threads on a backstrap loom, the baker 'weaves' layers of dough to form the *campechana*. Both processes require patience, precision, and are passed down through generations in the family workshops of the town centre.

Pairings and Cultural Consumption

The Ritual. It is a tradition to buy *campechanas* fresh from the oven in the downtown bakeries to enjoy them with a water-based hot chocolate or the same *café de olla* (spiced coffee) served in Ojo Caliente.

Variations. In addition to *campechanas*, other varieties of fine sweet pastry are crafted, such as *ojos de buey* (ox-eyes, with a sweet bread border) and *banderillas*, all utilising the same puff pastry base.

Traveler's Data (Logistics)

If you are looking for purchasing recommendations, these are the key points:

Jardín Hidalgo Stalls: This is where visitors acquire the traditional wooden or cardboard boxes to take home as gifts—the 'must-have souvenir' for protecting delicate local sweets.

Clock Tower Square (Plazoleta del Reloj): This vibrant space is the premier destination for regional delicacies. It is the ideal spot to purchase artisanal *campechanas*, seasonal fruits, and the famous queso de tuna. Buying here ensures you are supporting the local producers who gather at the feet of the town's iconic monument.

The Map of Baking Dynasties: From a Family Secret to a Shared Legacy

To understand the *campechana*, one must travel back to the 1930s, when the recipe arrived in town as a closely guarded treasure. For years, the technique of manual stretching and precise baking was knowledge that lived behind the doors of a few pioneering families, such as the founders of *La Perla*.

However, the true 'boom' occurred in the 1980s. What was once a craft for a few expanded thanks to an involuntary generosity: master bakers who learned in the original ovens began founding their own workshops, such as the Rivera family (RR) and other local lineages.

Today, 'competition' in Santa María del Río is not a rivalry, but a brotherhood of flavour. Every family has imprinted its own seal: some prefer the rustic touch of the wood-fired oven, others specialise in the extreme lightness of the puff pastry, but all share the same artisanal DNA. Walking through these streets, you aren't just buying bread; you are tracing a family tree of flour and sugar that has nourished San Luis Potosí for nearly a century.

The Bakeries of Santa María del Río

With over 43 bakeries dedicated to this traditional delicacy, here are the landmark stops:

La Perla de Santa María del Río

Location: Melchor Ocampo #245, in front of the Clock Plaza, Downtown.

History: A family business founded in 1935 by Mrs. Genoveva González and Mr. Juan Hernández, creators of the original recipe. It is currently run by the fourth generation.

Highlight: Considered a mandatory stop to taste the 'original' and traditional *campechanas*.

Campechanas RR (Rivera Family)

Location: Calle Francisco Villa #256, Colonia Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

History: A pillar of local identity with a family atmosphere where you can sometimes witness the production live.

Highlight: Famous for their decorated photo wall and fresh products like *cochinitos* (pig-shaped cookies) and *ojos de pancha*.

San José Bakery

Location: Downtown.

Highlight: An essential part of the souvenir route due to its warm service and strategic location for visitors exploring the heart of the *Pueblo Mágico*.

Campechanas Michel

Type: Artisanal wood-fired bakery.

Description: Since 2013, they have earned a place for their quality and positive spirit. They craft *campechanas*, *cochinitos*, and *ojos de pancha* with walnut *cajeta*.

Tourist Note: The wood-firing process grants a distinctive rustic flavour highly prized by connoisseurs.

El Tepeyac Bakery

Location: José Ma. Morelos y Pavón #297, Downtown.

Description: A quiet and fresh spot, ideal for a more relaxed shopping experience in the town centre.

'La Tradición' Bakery

Context: Represents the group of families that, following the 80s boom, preserved the crunchy puff pastry technique that defines the municipality today.

La Chocante Bakery & Café

Location: Ignacio Zaragoza Seguin #445, Downtown.

Signature: A contemporary proposal combining artisanal baking with a coffee shop, perfect for a full gastronomic pause.

La Campechana Express

Signature: Focused on cultural outreach, this bakery highlights the *campechana* as a regional identity product for the traveller on the go.

The Golden Moment: Baking Tips

The magic of the *campechana* is its flaky texture. While they last for several days in their packaging, nothing beats the experience of eating them fresh from the oven.

The 'First Shift' (7:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.)

Ideal for visiting traditional bakeries like *La Perla* or *El Tepeyac*. At this hour, the aroma of toasted sugar floods the downtown streets. This is the best time to buy those you intend to take on your trip, as they are at room temperature and are sturdy enough ready to be packed without breaking.

The Afternoon 'Warm Batch' (4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.)

Many bakeries, especially *Campechanas Michel* and *RR*, bring out a second batch in the afternoon. If you are looking for the indulgence of a *campechana* that still steaming, this is your time.

Expert Tip: Do not stack them while hot. If you are lucky enough to buy them fresh out of the oven, ask them not to close the bag immediately. The steam softens the pastry, and they will lose their characteristic 'crunch'.

6. The Art of Puff Pastry (Ethnographic Technique)

The preparation is a manual process that no industrial method has been able to replicate successfully:

The Stretching: Master bakers work the dough on wooden tables with vegetable shortening, stretching it until it reaches a transparency similar to fine silk.

The Caramelization: The shine is achieved by dusting refined sugar before baking. The heat of the vaulted oven creates that golden protective layer that gives it its name and texture.

7. Cultural Pairing

It is recommended to enjoy these pastries accompanied by a frothy *chocolate en agua* (Mexican-style, water-based chocolate) or, to complete the gastronomic journey, with a *café de olla* after savouring the giant *sopes* in Ojo Caliente.

Guide Tip: To avoid 'jealousy' among local bakers, we recommend the traveler try a piece from different bakeries; although the technique is the same, each family's oven 'touch' offers a distinct nuance that only an attentive palate can distinguish.

The Sweet Finale: Preserves and Milk Sweets

Beyond the savoury *sope* and the crunch of the *campechana*, Santa María del Río offers a universe of artisanal sweets that serve as the crowning jewel of the Potosino culinary experience. Local confectionery reflects the region's agricultural wealth and the patience of its artisans.

1. Regional Fruit Preserves: The Flavour of the Orchard

These preserves capture seasonal flavours in homemade syrups and jams.

Variety: Depending on the time of year, you can find peaches in syrup, quince paste—*ate de membrillo*, a local classic—, guavas, and preserved prickly pears—*tunas*.

Craftsmanship: The key lies in using *piloncillo* and slow-cooking in copper cauldrons, a technique that grants a deep amber colour and a traditional flavour far superior to industrial products.

2. Milk Sweets (Dulces de Leche): A Melting Pleasure

Dulce de leche is a staple found on every corner. Its smooth, creamy texture results from hours of patience over the fire, transforming fresh cow's milk and sugar into unforgettable delicacies.

Presentations: Ranging from traditional wafers with *cajeta*—ideal for the road—to burnt milk cubes and rolls that are easy to pack and share.

3. Key Points of Sale

Martín Bautista Market: The heart of local life. This is the ideal spot to find the greatest variety and experience the charm of interacting directly with the artisans.

Downtown Craft and Grocery Stores: Around *Jardín Hidalgo*, specialised shops offer these sweets in iconic wooden boxes—the quintessential Santa María del Río souvenir.

Highway Stalls: Located near Highway 57 at Ojo Caliente, these are perfect for a quick stop to grab popular sweets before continuing your journey.

Traditional Drinks: Ritual in a Clay Jar

The Whisper of Maize: Atole de Puscua (Heritage and Light)

Tasting an *atole de puscua* is an act of communion with the Otomi roots of Santa María del Río. Unlike commercial versions loaded with sugar, *Puscua* is the apotheosis of simplicity: white maize, water, and the slow heat of clay. It represents purity—maize in its most natural state, processed to offer a smooth, mild flavour that celebrates daily life.

The Tasting Ritual

Notice its pure ivory tone, achieved only through the exhaustive cleaning of the grain and fine grinding on a *metate*. Its aroma is that of the fields after rain—an honest scent of *nixtamal* and fresh earth. On the palate, it is subtle and ethereal, traditionally paired with sweet bread or cheese tamales to balance the flavours.

The Mystery of Atole Negro: The Essence of the Roast (The Shadow)

If *Puscua* is light, *Atole Negro* (Black Atole) is its counterpart of shadow and depth. This drink is a testament to the mastery of fire and cacao.

The Secret of its Colour: Its ashen tone comes from the precise roasting of cacao husks or maize silk. It is a process of "flavour archaeology" that utilises every part of the fruit. **Flavour:** On the palate, it offers smoky notes with hints of rustic chocolate and cinnamon. Its texture is dense and velvety, ideal for the cold mornings of the Altiplano. **Researcher's Note:** Finding *Atole Negro* today is a significant ethnographic find. It represents culinary resistance against instant mixes; it is a "living" drink that demands time, smoke, and memory.

Light and Shadow: Duality in the Clay Jar

In the cosmogony of Santa María del Río, maize and fire dialogue through colour. Understanding local gastronomy implies understanding this duality of Light and Shadow manifested in these traditional *atoles*.

Festive Atole and Sweet Potato Jam

Festive Atole: A communal preparation that marks the rhythm of sacred celebrations. **Sweet Potato Jam (Mermelada de camote):** The creative use of a crop that today struggles to return to the fields of Santa María.

Cheese Tamales (Tamales de queso)

Traditionally prepared for the Day of the Dead, these tamales represent the union between backyard livestock farming (Bernalejo/Peregrina) and the altar of life. They are a fundamental food for connecting with ancestors—a tradition that resists being replaced by commercial options.

When paired with *atole negro*, these tamales form an emblematic combination that offers a glimpse into the depth of Potosino ritual culture.

Elixirs of Cactus and Maguey

Colonche: The "liquid ruby" made from the *tuna cardona* (red prickly pear); ephemeral and vibrant, in season only from July to October.

The Tlachiquero: The ancestral skill of "scraping" the *maguey* to obtain *aguamiel*—unfermented agave sap— and pulque. This technical knowledge is currently at grave risk of disappearing.

SECTION IV: FLAVOURS IN RESISTANCE (LIVING HERITAGE)

Ethnographic Directory and Cultural Resilience

This section is not a simple commercial listing; it is a recognition of the men and women who, through their daily craft, sustain the biocultural heritage of Santa María del Río. Here, the visitor stops being a mere spectator and becomes an ally of tradition.

1. Santa María del Río: The Heart of Tradition

The municipal seat is the grand stage where the region's flavours converge. However, walking its streets also means witnessing how some treasures hang by a thread.

The 'Martín Bautista' Market: This is the epicentre of gustatory memory. Here, amidst the bustle, you will find stalls offering boiled or slow-roasted (*tatemado*) sweet potatoes. It is a daily ritual: buying a piece of this red or purple sweet potato—sweet and soft—to enjoy with cold milk. It has been the breakfast or dinner for generations of locals.

The Sweet Potato Paradox: Although it is the cultural food *par excellence*, today we face a painful reality: the cultivation of purple sweet potato in Santa María del Río and Fracción Sánchez has been almost entirely lost. Most of what we consume in the market today is imported from other regions. Reclaiming this crop in our lands is the greatest challenge to our food sovereignty.

Artisanal Bread Workshops: In neighbourhoods like El Cerrito, look for family-run *campechana* workshops. These are spaces where the puff pastry is worked by hand and the brick oven dictates the timing of excellence.

Traditional Restaurants: Establishments in the centre that preserve the original *asado de boda* recipe, using micro-regional ingredients such as orange and artisanal chocolate.

Guardians of Fire and Memory

The heritage of a *Pueblo Mágico* is not limited to by its stone monuments or the shimmer of its silks; its purest and most resilient form resides in the memory of its women. In Santa María del Río, the kitchen has historically been a space of cultural resistance where knowledge—which the modern world threatens to erase—is preserved.

We call these women 'Living Heritage' because, in their hands, the past is not a static memory but a daily practice. They are the heirs to a wisdom that dictates how to gather mesquite in the hills, how to achieve the exact point of the *asado de boda* that comforts the migrant from afar, and how to keep the market hearth burning for three generations.

Through this Ethnographic Directory, we honor four matriarchs who represent the different faces of Santa María's seasoning. Their stories teach us that cooking is, in reality, an act of love, urbanism, education, and identity. They are the true guardians of the invisible thread that unites the flavour of the earth with the heart of its people.

Ethnographic Directory of the Matriarchs of Flavour

1. Doña Ma. Socorro Martínez: Memories of the Hills and the Road

Born in 1941, Doña Socorro is the guardian of the wild flavours of Tierra Quemada and El Fuerte. Her kitchen is a 'living archaeology' that rescues ingredients that the modern world has cast aside.

Flavours in Resistance: Mesquite *atole* and *pirul* water (made from sun-dried and soaked 'tree berries').

Muleteer Legacy: Heir to the *itacate* culture, she preserves the technique of *tostadas de salita* (lightly salted) and *pinole* with *piloncillo* for long journeys along the *Camino Real*.

Technique: A defender of the *metate*, wood-fired parboiled rice, and the distinction between *tatemado* (slow-roasted) and copper-pot cooking.

2. Doña Rosa 'Rosita' Padilla Silva: Community Spirit and Nostalgia

Born in 1942, Doña Rosita represents the link between flavour and the social fabric. From finishing *rebozos*, she moved on to feeding the Seminary and founding the Javier Mina Elementary School in her own home.

The Flavour that Crosses Borders: Her fame as one of the best *asado de boda* cooks has transcended Mexico. She is frequently hired to travel to the United States to cook for 'absent sons' (migrants), providing the feast that momentarily restores the taste of their homeland.

Social Impact: Alongside her husband, Don Flavio, she was a pioneer in opening streets and bringing basic services to the Díaz Ordaz neighbourhood, proving that traditional cooking is an engine for progress.

3. Doña Marina Cano Calderón: The Heart of the Municipal Market

Originally from the San Juan neighbourhood (b. 1941), Doña Marina is the commercial pillar of the town's daily gastronomy.

Specialty: Her unrivalled *atole de miel* (honey atole), always cooked over woodfire, along with her famous tamales and *gorditas*.

Generational Resilience: Her greatest pride is continuity; today, her granddaughter represents the third generation of women maintaining this gastronomic corner.

4. Francisca Ventura Cano: Master of Root Confectionery

With 45 years dedicated to the art of sweets, Francisca (b. 1957) is the authority on transforming the fruits of the earth through fire.

The Art of the Sweet Potato: Heir to her mother's knowledge, she masters the techniques of baked and boiled sweet potato, as well as the emblematic sweet potato and guava candy.

Craft and Patience: She represents technical specialisation. In her kitchen, candy is not an industrial product but an artisanal process requiring decades of practice to reach the exact point of flavour and texture.

5. The Orta Family and Ofelia de los Santos: The Hearth of the Camino Real

Since 1945, on the stretch of Highway 57 connecting Santa María with Querétaro, the restaurant 'Las Indias' has guarded the memory of ancient travellers. What began as a reed shack offering *aguamiel* and *nopales* to those traversing the old dirt *Camino Real* is today a sanctuary of root cuisine.

Lineage and Expansion: Founded by Raúl Orta Torres, the legacy was strengthened by Cristina Torres and Refugio Orta (2nd generation). Today, Ofelia de los Santos Salazar, alongside her husband and nephews, keeps the flame alive for the 3rd generation, while her daughter expands the heritage at 'Las Marías' (4th generation), proving that santamariense tradition does not break; it multiplies.

The Dictatorship of Maize: Faithful to ancestral techniques, the family begins the *nixtamal* ritual every morning at 7:00 AM. The *metate* transforms the grain into dough which, until 2:00 PM, becomes handmade tortillas—the only utensil required at the table.

Identity Flavours: The menu is a declaration of principles against modernity. Specialising in wood-fired grilled meat (*aguayón* or *bola*), accompanied by home-made noodle soup, pot-cooked *bayo* beans, local cheese, and *cascabel* chili salsa made in a *molcajete*.

Architecture of Resistance: Although health regulations forced concrete to replace adobe, the family stood firm on one non-negotiable condition: preserving the original hearth. Visiting this space is a mandatory ritual for the traveler seeking the luxury of the authentic.

6. Doña Amalia Donjuan (RIP) and her Heirs: The Flavours of the Martín Bautista Market

With a career spanning over 40 years, the kitchen of Doña Amalia Donjuan Ornelas is the bridge between the old 'La Plazoleta' market and the present day.

Market Lineage: Her daughters, Angélica María and María Fany Padrón Donjuan, 'grew up' in the old market. Today, they manage two stalls where customer service is an extension of flavour, following the hallmark of hospitality: '*If you don't like the*

food, the waitress pays for it'.

The Secret of the Asado: Their *asado de boda* is an informal export item; the secret lies in the 'well-crushed, thick, and richly-textured' chilli technique.

Maize Sovereignty: Like the great matriarchs of the town, they continue to boil their own maizeto make tortillas, rejecting industrialised dough to preserve the texture and aroma that local diners demand.

Gastronomic Heritage Profile: 'La Nueva Rosita' and the Giant Sopos

Location (Main): Calle Carlos Díez Gutiérrez #13, Ojo Caliente.

Branch (Town Center): Vicente Guerrero #240.

Origin and Culinary Genealogy (Since 1960)

The restaurant *La Nueva Rosita* is a historic gem with over six decades of history. Its legacy is a testament to the family's dedication across four generations:

Founders (1st Gen): Don Julio Ruiz Campillo and Doña Aurelia Sánchez Martínez, who started the business selling *carnitas*.

The Creators of the Giant Sope (2nd Gen): Sisters Apolonia and Martha Ruiz Sánchez. They evolved the menu from *carnitas* to *gorditas* and eventually transformed the traditional 'picadita' into the giant format famous today.

Continuity (3rd & 4th Gen): Martha Alicia Lara (3rd generation) leads the preservation of original recipes, integrating the fourth generation to innovate without losing their essence.

The Signature Dish: The 'Sopepizza'

What began as a customer request for larger sizes resulted in a unique regional innovation. These *sopes* and *quesadillas* are approximately 12 inches (30 cm) in diameter, topped with refried beans, cheese, cream, and traditional stews. The 'The crown jewel of the menu' is the *asado de boda* version.

Cultural Value

The giant sope of Ojo Caliente has transcended its role as food to become a major tourist attraction. It represents the adaptability of Mexican cuisine, where a traditional *antojito* becomes a communal experience (designed for sharing) and a symbol of identity for Santa María del Río. It is traditionally recommended to pair this experience with artisanal *café de olla*.

The Chronicle of Loss (Culinary Erosion)

We denounce the loss of local purple sweet potato cultivation. Most of what is consumed today is imported. We also note the disappearance of walnut, *perón*, and quince orchards in Fracción Sánchez due to changes in land use and water scarcity.

Gastronomic Calendar: The Seasons of Flavour

In Santa María del Río, time is not measured by clocks, but by the aromas wafting from the kitchens. Every festivity features a dish that acts as a bridge between the sacred and the earthly.

1. August: Feast of The Assumption (August 15th)

The most important patronal feast.

The Dish: *Asado de boda* is the king of the table. Large copper cauldrons are prepared to feed pilgrims and locals alike.

The Drink: *Colonche* (fermented red prickly pear) is at its peak, refreshing the days of dance and procession.

2. October and November: Day of the Dead

A time of transition where the desert yields its final fruits.

The Sweet Altar: Preserves of pumpkin and sweet potato made with *piloncillo*, alongside

queso de tuna (prickly pear paste) and *melcocha* (hand-pulled honey candy).

Wild Treasures: Season for gathering the 'mountain potato' (*papita de monte*), integrated into altar stews accompanied by Mexican chocolate and cheese tamales.

Bread of the Dead: Local bakeries bake versions with a touch of anise and sugar.

3. December: Christmas and the Magic of Cheese

The mountain cold invites comforting, calorie-rich flavours.

Cheese Gorditas: An absolute delicacy made with white maize masa and 'ranchero cheese' that melts perfectly on the *comal*.

Mesquite and Date Atole: A tradition rescued; using mesquite flour and dried dates to create thick, warming drinks.

Buñuelos: Plazas fill with stalls offering *buñuelos* bathed in maguey honey or *piloncillo*.

4. Lent (February – April): The Cuisine of Abstinence

Culinary creativity overflows to compensate for the absence of red meat.

Torrijas with Maguey Honey: The quintessential dessert. Egg-battered bread bathed in that dark, translucent honey extracted from the heart of the agave.

Gualumbos and Chorchas: The flowers of the palm and maguey become the primary protein, braised with eggs or made into small patties (*tortitas*) with red chili sauce.

Vigil Stews: *Nopales* in *pepián* (pumpkin seed sauce), shrimp patties, and the constant presence of the *papita de monte* (wild mountain potato).

Traveler's Note: Learn to wait. Santa María del Río teaches that the best food is that which respects nature's cycles. If you visit in June, look for date *atole*; if you come in winter, do not leave without your cheese *gorditas* fresh off the *comal*. Always ask at the Martín Bautista Market for 'the seasonal best', for therein lies the true pulse of the *Gran Tunal*.

The Clock of the Desert: Varieties and Seasons of the Prickly Pear (Tuna)

In Santa María del Río, the landscape changes colour according to which *tuna* is "in season." Not all are equal; each has its own texture, sugar level, and purpose.

1. The Harvest Calendar (The Golden Season)

June and July (The First Fruits): The first green *tunas* and the *ranchera* variety appear.

August and September (The Apex): This is the season of the Tuna Cardona (the queen of the desert). The fields turn purple. This is the time for *Colonche* and the start of the great grindings for *queso de tuna*.

October (The Closing): Only the most mature and sweetest fruits remain, ideal for *Orejones* (sun-dried slices) to be stored for winter.

2. Catalog of Local Varieties

Tuna Cardona (*Opuntia streptacantha*): The most emblematic. Intense red colour and very juicy, sweet pulp. The indispensable base for *melcocha*, *queso de tuna*, and *colonche*.

Tuna Taponá (*Opuntia robusta*): Recognized by its circular, flattened shape. It is extremely fleshy and prized for its freshness.

Tuna Blanca or Chapeada (*Opuntia megacantha*): Light green skin with slight rosy 'blushes'. A favorite for the table due to its balanced sweetness and softer seeds.

Tuna Xoconostle: The acidic version. Unlike the sweet varieties, this is used as an ingredient for traditional stews, *molcajete* salsas, and the famous *mole de olla*, providing a unique citric acidity.

3. Preservation Processes: The Art of Stopping Time

Queso de Tuna: It contains no milk; it is named for its shape and consistency. It is *Tuna Cardona* pulp concentrated over low heat and molded. A piece of *queso de tuna* with a slice of ranch cheese is the town's supreme pairing.

Melcocha: The evaporated honey of the *tuna* until it reaches a near-solid, yet malleable density. It is the "candy" of the desert.

Orejones: Peeled and sun-dried *tunas*. They become like giant "raisins" that can be preserved for months.

The Colonche: Blood of the Gran Tunal

Colonche is an alcoholic beverage of pre-Hispanic origin, intense red in colour with a bittersweet flavour. It is the result of fermenting the juice of the *Tuna Cardona*.

The Two Faces of Colonche: It can be prepared '*cojudo*'—raw fermentation—, which is more effervescent and wild, or cooked—fermented from honey—, resulting in a more stable, sweet, and deep beverage.

Fruits of the Sierra: Pine Nut and Walnut

While the *tuna* reigns in the plains, the highlands yield treasures with hard shells.

The Pine Nut (Piñón—Pink Gold): Harvested from pinyon pines in the arid mountains. The regional *piñón* is small, thin-shelled, and extremely creamy. It is a luxury ingredient for fine candies and ice cream.

The Walnut: Centenary walnut trees watch the passage of time in local orchards. The harvest peaks in late August.

Guide Tip: A local secret is to eat *queso de tuna* accompanied by a handful of freshly peeled walnuts. The contrast between the dense sweetness of the fruit and the natural oil of the nut creates a balanced flavour that has nourished shepherds for centuries.

The Empire of Milk: Goat Cajeta and the Enigma of Chongos

The abundance of goats since the colonial era allowed San Luis Potosí to develop a unique mastery of milk.

Goat Cajeta: The Liquid Gold of the Desert

San Luis Potosí is a world leader in goat milk *cajeta* production. The secret lies in the goats grazing in the semi-desert, consuming herbs that imbue the milk with a density and complexity of flavour superior to cow's milk—ideal for the slow-reduction process in traditional copper cauldrons.

Potosino Heritage: Emblematic companies such as *Coronado* (founded in 1932) and *Real del Potosí* have successfully taken this sweet from rural kitchens to international shelves.

2. The Chongos Zamoranos Phenomenon: Michoacán Heart, Potosino Industry

This is one of the most surprising facts in this guide: despite their name and origin in the convents of Zamora, Michoacán, *chongos zamoranos* find their primary center of industrialization in San Luis Potosí.

One of a Kind: San Luis Potosí stands out as the place where this dessert of curdled milk, sugar, and cinnamon has been scaled to industrial levels without losing its rural essence.

The Name Paradox: Although consumers associate the sweet with Michoacán, it is the infrastructure and vision of Potosino entrepreneurs that ensure its continued prevalence in the national market.

3. Other Curdled Delicacies

In addition to *chongos*, the following are sold in town markets and capital shops:

Obleas with Cajeta: The ideal accompaniment for Potosino *cajeta*.

Burnt Milk Sweets (Dulces de Leche Quemada): Available in bars or cubes, they are the pride of local confectioneries.

Gorditas: The Daily Pulse of Santa María del Río

If the *rebozo* is woven with silk, the identity of Santa María del Río is kneaded with maize. *Gorditas* are not merely food; they are an institution found in every corner of the municipality, adapting to every space and moment of the day.

1. A Map of Flavours on Every Corner

In Santa María del Río, the search for the 'best *gordita*' is an endless journey, as the culinary signature shifts with the setting:

The Municipal Market (Food Section): The epicenter. Amidst the smoke of the griddles and the bustle, the rhythmic patting of the masa defines the rhythm of the morning. It is the ideal place to try the most traditional combinations.

Private Homes and zaguanes: A very local tradition is the sale of *gorditas* from private homes, where a small table and a *comal*—griddle— at the entrance announce 'freshly made *gorditas*'. Here, the flavour is the most authentic, and the hospitality is intimate and familial.

Fixed and Street Stalls: From carts in the plazas to strategic corner stalls, they feed workers, students, and travellers passing through.

Restaurants: Establishments like *La Nueva Rosita* have elevated the *gordita* and the *sope* to legendary status, integrating complex stews such as *asado de boda*.

2. The Ritual of the Comal and the Nixtamal

Unlike other regions where they are fried, the *gordita* from Santa María is griddled on a *comal*.

The Masa: White or yellow *nixtamalized* maize, ground to the exact texture so the *gordita* puffs up—the famous 'evidence' that it is perfectly cooked.

The Opening: The art of opening a hot *gordita* by hand or with a small knife to fill it without breaking it is the signature of an expert.

3. The Universe of Stews

The versatility of the *gordita* allows it to be the vessel for all local gastronomy:

Cheese Gorditas: An absolute delicacy, especially when the ranch cheese melts and creates a golden crust on the edge.

Traditional Fillings: Deshebrada (shredded beef), chicharrón prensado (pressed pork rinds), *nopales* with chilli, *rajas* with cheese, and, of course, *asado de boda*.

Seasonal Fillings: Depending on our previously traced calendar, they can be filled with *chorchas* (palm flower), *gualumbos*, or *papita de monte*.

Ethnographic Note: The *gordita* in Santa María is democratic; it does not distinguish between social classes. Whether in the market line or at a fine-dining restaurant, everyone waits with the same anticipation for that bite of warm maize that holds the secret of Potosino essence.

SECTION V: THE TRAVELER'S TOOL-KIT

Glossary: *Sope Grande*—pinched-edge maize patty—, *Campechana*—masterfully folded pastry— *Potosino Pizza*—a monumental culinary evolution of the traditional *sope*—. **Pairing:** The Loom and the Table. The hands that weave are the same hands that knead. **Logistics:** Times and distances—Ojo Caliente 10 min, Lourdes 20 min, Bernalejo 30 min—. Estimated travel times from the Town Centre.

FACT SHEET: Asado de Boda (A Ceremonial Flavour)

Origin: Rural ranch traditions and communal celebrations.

Key Ingredients: *Chile ancho* (lustre), artisanal chocolate (body), regional orange peel (aroma), and free-range pork.

Artisanal Technique (Savoir-faire): Slow-cooked in copper or clay cauldrons, seeking that "smooth and glossy" texture that only patience can bestow.

Heritage Value: Represents the perfect *mestizaje* (cultural blending) between pre-Hispanic cacao and the citrus fruits introduced during the colonial era.

FACT SHEET: The Giant Sope or 'Potosino Pizza' of La Nueva Rosita (Innovation of the Comal)

Origin: Ojo Caliente, S.L.P. (An evolution of the traditional *sope* or *pellizcada*).

Distinction: Large-format *nixtamal* masa—the largest in the region—filled with melted local cheese and traditional regional braises.

Social Impact: A prime example of success within the LAS (Local Agri-food Systems), where a traditional knowledge bearer from the rural periphery has successfully established her craft within the municipal centre.

THE CONSCIOUS VISITOR'S TEN COMMANDMENTS

To ensure your passage through Santa María del Río leaves a positive mark and helps halt culinary erosion, we invite you to adopt these commitments:

1. **Honor the producer:** Seek direct purchases in Ojo Caliente, Fracción Sánchez, or Bernalejo. Your direct payment is the engine of local development.
2. **Respect the time of "know-how":** *Asado de boda* and *campechanas* are not fast food; they are slow processes born of fire and patience.
3. **Choose local over imported:** Ask for regionally grown sweet potatoes and orchard walnuts. Your demand encourages the replanting of these lands.
4. **Value the wild:** The mountain sweet potato (*camote de cerro*) is a seasonal gift from the highlands; consume it with respect for its natural cycles.
5. **Recognize the cook as an authority:** Behind every recipe lie decades of heritage. Ask, listen, and learn from the knowledge bearers.
6. **Pay a fair price:** The artisanal labor of the *metate*, the wood-fired oven, and manual curdling is beyond haggling.
7. **Foster generational renewal:** Your recognition motivates young people to follow the craft of their grandparents.
8. **Protect the productive landscape:** Do not harm the orchards or the springs of Lourdes or Ojo Caliente; they are the source of our food.
9. **Be an ambassador of identity:** Share your experience by highlighting the history and the name of the person who fed you.
10. **Travel with purpose:** Remember that every bite in Santa María is an act of cultural resistance.

CONCLUSION: THE FLAVOUR THAT UNITES US

To finish this journey is to understand that Santa María del Río is much more than a destination; it is a living organism that breathes through its hearths and orchards. As you close this guide, we hope you take with you not just the memory of a flavour, but the awareness that every culinary choice has the power to preserve or erase an identity.

The 'Cradle of the *Rebozo*' is also the cradle of a gastronomy of resistance that struggles not to be silenced by the haste of the modern world. May your passage through Ojo Caliente, El Cerrito, Fracción Sánchez, Peregrina, and Lourdes be the beginning of a new way of travelling: one where the visitor becomes a guardian and flavour becomes the unbreakable bond that unites us with the land.

Buen provecho and a better journey ahead.

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