

Norte's shredded chicken breast enchilada is topped with either a red mole or spicy tomatillo green sauce.



# THE WHOLE ENCHILADA CARLSBAD'S BEST

**WE CAME, WE SAW, WE SAVORED SOME  
OF THE TASTIEST DISHES IN TOWN.**

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**W**hen you order an enchilada, you can only be sure of one thing: its shape. It won't be served open faced like a tostada. It's not folded like a taco. What you can count on is that it's always rolled and smothered in sauce. With the enchilada, the surprise—and delight—comes with what's inside.

It started with fish rolled in corn tortillas during the days of the Aztec Empire in northern Mexico back in the 15th century. When Spanish conquistadors arrived, they adapted the dish to their own tastes with fillings of cheese, pork or chicken and topped with a spicy sauce. (Enchilada is derived from the Spanish word *enchilar*, which means "to add chili pepper to.")

Today, the enchiladas that we enjoy around Carlsbad come in many more variations, each one delicious in its own right. They are filled with chicken, pork, beef, cheese, vegetables and fish. The sauces that smother them in goodness are the colors of the Mexican flag: red, white and green. Some are mole-inspired and some are made with rich creams and cheeses. Some enchiladas are heavily garnished with lettuce, onions, sour cream, olives, cilantro or avocado, while others are embellished with only a savory, rich sauce and sprinkled with a bit of cheese.

Carlsbad has an abundance of Mexican restaurants (thank goodness) and almost all of them serve enchiladas made with fresh or from-scratch ingredients. Carlsbad Magazine hit the streets from the Barrio to the Village and down to La Costa to sample some of the tastiest enchiladas around. What we found is this: no two enchiladas are alike, but we sure liked all those enchiladas.



### **NORTE** 3003 Carlsbad Blvd. | 760.729.0903

Back in the day our very own publisher, Tim Wisley, was a waiter at Norte serving up Martha Montanez's family recipes that were passed down from her grandparents—and that included the enchiladas. Martha turned 91 this year and Norte is still rolling grandma's enchiladas with the same recipes from five decades ago, but with a modern spin.

#### **THE WHOLE ENGHIELADA**

Norte prides itself on using high-quality ingredients in dishes that are cooked and seasoned to perfection. The shredded chicken breast enchilada is straightforward, a corn tortilla stuffed full of shredded chicken and topped with a red mole sauce or spicy tomatillo green sauce.

#### **HOLY MOLE**

Norte offers a wide array of seafood options—mahi mahi, shrimp and crab—reminiscent of the original enchilada from the days of the Aztec Empire.



### **CASA DE BANDINI** 1901 Calle Barcelona | 760.634.3443

Casa de Bandini boasts more than 10 kinds of enchiladas on its expansive menu, with everything from chicken mole to enchiladas verde. The top sellers are the Enchiladas Suizas, filled with shredded chicken and topped with a tangy salsa verde.

#### **THE WHOLE ENGHIELADA**

Manager Gilbert Gastelum says the Enchiladas Del Mar are special because they are made with deep sea cod and Mexican wild white shrimp sauteed with sweet peppers, onions, butter and dash of brandy. It's rolled into hot-off-the-griddle tortillas and topped with a jalapeño cheese sauce. "The Enchiladas Del Mar are a melody of flavors," he says.

#### **HOLY MOLE**

There is a special sauce that accompanies each enchilada plate: jalapeño cheese sauce, rich ranchero, tangy verde, mole poblano, salsa roja or zesty jalapeño sauce. The jalapeño cheese sauce on the Enchiladas Del Mar was developed 30 years ago and patrons are still relishing its creamy texture and spicy flavor today.



### **LOLA'S 7 UP MARKET & DELI** 3292 Roosevelt St. | 760.434.2191

Lola's has been a mainstay in the Barrio for over 80 years, with humble beginnings as a market in 1943. (The deli was added in 1986.) This third-generation, family-owned business is beloved in Carlsbad for its authentic Mexican food. Connie Trejo, who is the last remaining daughter of Lola's founders, turns 90 this year.

"Homemade with love is our slogan," says Soco, Connie's granddaughter. "We have a staff of five amazing women who feed our community. They put their hearts and souls into the food we eat here in Carlsbad."

#### **THE WHOLE ENGHIELADA**

Grandma Lola's enchiladas are rolled using homemade corn tortillas stuffed full of beef, chicken or cheese. Nothing is canned. Nothing is processed. The kitchen team hand chops the vegetables and shreds the Monterey jack and cheddar cheese daily.

The chicken enchilada is filled with white meat chicken breasts simmered over the stove. The rice is cooked with the broth from the chicken and the refried beans are vegetarian, made without lard.

#### **HOLY MOLE**

Soco says the homemade mole is the secret sauce to the enchilada's deliciousness. "The enchilada sauce is a very important aspect of bringing flavor to the dish."



**TORTILLA MIA**  
2939 Carlsbad Blvd. | 760.434.5850

Mike and Susan Fraijo, who own Carlsbad Danish Bakery, took over Las Olas's prime location near the beach a year and a half ago and turned it into a new space renowned for its homemade corn and flour tortillas. Tortilla Mia's signature dish, according to Mike, is none other than the enchilada—it's the restaurant's most popular menu item.

**THE WHOLE ENGHIELADA**

Queso de Oaxaca enchiladas are the number-one seller. The tortillas are pure corn (no flour) made to order. They are filled with queso de Oaxaca—a special cheese from Mexico—and topped with guajillo sauce.

**HOLY MOLE**

That sauce is special, made by slow simmering pasilla and guajillo peppers until all the savory flavors are released.



**CASERO TAQUERIA**  
2674 Gateway Road | 760.405.4195

Casero translates to "homemade" in Spanish and that accurately describes the food you get, which the restaurant's motto states is Baja inspired and Carlsbad made. "Our dishes are crafted from a different cloth but rooted in tradition," says General Manager Sam Mor. For over four years, Casero has successfully taken a California-casual approach to Mexican cuisine that is approachable and affordable.

**THE WHOLE ENGHIELADA**

Casero began serving a new enchilada dish six months ago called Chicken Mole Rojo Enchiladas, and it's been embraced by customers. The homemade corn tortillas are filled with chicken tinga simmered in a spicy tomato sauce and topped with a savory mole sauce.

**HOLY MOLE**

Mor says the spicy, garlic-rich mole tomato sauce makes Casero's enchiladas special. Mole is notorious for the number of ingredients it takes to make, which is usually in the double digits. Casero's mole is a complex combination of smoky and sweet, which Mor recommends pairing with a spicy margarita.



**FRESCO COCINA**  
2858 Carlsbad Blvd. | 442.333.9321

One of the newer additions to our vibrant Village scene is this Latin-inspired restaurant offering an eclectic selection of shareable plates and main courses. From Peruvian Ceviche to Argentinian Empanadas, Fresco Cocina combines the cuisine from many Latin cultures to offer a different spin on traditional Mexican food.

**THE WHOLE ENGHIELADA**

Fresco Cocina just launched a brand-new enchilada for spring that embraces the birria trend, called Birria Short Rib Enchiladas. "The most important part of our enchilada is the time and effort we put into braising the short rib," says Travis Mckinnon, executive chef. Birria is a special way of cooking and braising meat. After it is braised, the braising liquid is combined with vegetables and peppers and blended. The chefs cook the enchiladas in the birria sauce, reinforcing its flavor. Add in some cotija and Oaxaca cheeses, rice, cilantro and onion, and you have yourself a flavor fiesta.

**HOLY MOLE**

The birria consomé comes from blending the braising liquid of the short ribs with the liquid fat that was cooked out of the meat. "We use a blend of chilis, mirepoix, spices and stocks for our braising liquid. We slowly braise the short ribs for several hours until it's ready and then we need to let it rest until it can be used for service," Mckinnon says.



**ALEJANDRA'S FINE MEXICAN FOOD AND CANTINA**  
6996 El Camino Real | 858.500.5150

Alejandra's opened in 2023 and has continued evolving ever since. It now offers combination plates, weekend brunch and Taco Tuesday with live music and an exclusive menu out on the patio.

**THE WHOLE ENGHIELADA**

Alejandra's serves carnitas, chicken, cheese or shrimp enchiladas with a spicy green sauce or a red sauce. One of the popular choices is the chicken tinga enchiladas with a green sauce and dressed with cabbage, micro cilantro, queso and sour cream.

**HOLY MOLE**

All the sauces at Alejandra's are made in house, from scratch. The green enchilada sauce is heated by the poblano, serrano and jalapeño peppers, and reduced with sour cream to give it that perfect amount of spice. General Manager Juan Canche says, "It's all about the tortillas and having a balanced enchilada sauce."



## BARRIO EAT MEXICAN

530 Grand Ave. | 760.453.7242

Chef Arturo Garcia stays busy cooking tasty enchiladas that can be paired with flights of salsa (that range from spicy to flaming hot) and house-made margaritas. Barrio has served enchiladas since it opened nine years ago; the current menu features Enchiladas Suizas, mole enchiladas, red enchiladas and cheese enchiladas.

### THE WHOLE ENCHILADA

The process for making the Barrio signature chicken enchiladas begins in the morning when the chicken is simmered with herbs, spices, tomatoes and onions. The corn tortillas are stuffed with a generous portion of chicken and topped with enchilada sauce, shredded lettuce, pico de gallo, sour cream and fresco cheese.

### HOLY MOLE

Choose from three homemade enchilada sauces: creamy verde tomatillo, classic red sauce or a chocolate chili rich mole. You can't go wrong!



## MIGUEL'S COCINA

5980 Avenida Encinas | 760.759.1843

Miguel's Cocina puts a San Diego twist on Mexican food at its six locations around the county, including Carlsbad.

### THE WHOLE ENCHILADA

The most popular enchilada is the Enchiladas Suizas smothered with verde sauce and sour cream. Miguel's slow cooks the chicken with bell peppers, onions and tomatoes before assembling it with homemade corn tortillas.

### HOLY MOLE

Miguel's signature creamy white jalapeño dip is fondly referred to as "white gold" by regulars. Dip pretty much anything in that sauce, including a bite of your enchilada, and you just raised your Mexican food game.



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