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**PRESS CLIPPINGS**

**Cook who's talking – Chef Ruben, Maya Restaurant**

## Cook who's talking Chef Ruben, Maya Restaurant

As if the heat of a New York kitchen wasn't oppressive enough, Chef Ruben decided to up sticks and experience the desert heat of Dubai. The Executive Chef at Maya, Le Meridien Beach Resort's Mexican restaurant, spoke to *James Brennan* about bad omens, tacos, and the best things you can possibly do with tequila.



**What's the difference between real Mexican food and the ubiquitous Tex-Mex stodge?**

To start with, Tex-Mex food tends to use a lot of flour tortilla, hard shell tacos, and more often than not, it contains a lot of cheese. To give you an example: Chilli con carne is quite possibly the least Mexican dish I can think of. To put it mildly, it is an insult to call this Mexican cuisine! The most common item used in real Mexican cuisine is the soft corn tortilla, which is made from corn, not wheat flour. In real Mexican cuisine, tacos are served soft, and they definitely don't contain cheese. Also, you would never find a real Mexican cooking with cheddar cheese: we have our own authentic and delicious cheeses, including coxaca, panela and asadero, to name a few.

**Will people in Dubai really be able to tell the difference?**

People in Dubai are definitely more familiar with Tex-Mex food; however once you've experienced the flavours and great taste of real Mexican cuisine, the difference is obvious. Visitors to the restaurant should leave behind their existing perceptions of what a Mexican restaurant is. Maya is challenging the status quo of classic haute cuisine. Maya is not a 'Mexican cantina'; it is a whole new experience with a fantastic culinary heritage.

**What's different about Maya?**

Maya is the first modern Mexican fine-dining restaurant in the region. Richard Sandoval is the inspiration behind the restaurant, which combines exciting, bold and flavourful food in his Modern Mexican signature style. The restaurant specialises in authentic Mexican food and uses a contemporary interpretation in the presentation and ingredients. Real Mexican ingredients are used to give real and authentic flavour to the food. Our customers can say they have tried

real Mexican cuisine prepared by a Mexican chef.

**The Maya civilisation in Mexico eventually collapsed – is this a bad omen for your restaurant?**

I don't think so. Yes, it happened to this great civilisation but it doesn't mean it will happen to the restaurant. Maya New York has been operating for over 10 years and is still the best Mexican restaurant in the city. We are about to celebrate our first birthday, and the restaurant continues to grow from strength to strength.

**What made you want to become a chef?**

I grew up surrounded by great Mexican cooks. I had the opportunity to see my abuelita (grandmother) and my mother cooking at home and to witness the love and passion that went into their cooking. This was truly an inspiration and I have many fond memories of helping them as a child.

**Tell us about the toughest time you ever had in a kitchen?**

Working on the grill station in a tiny kitchen in New York. Kitchens are hot places at the best of times, but summertime in New York and doing more than 300 covers in less than three hours – it was challenging.

**Other than Maya, what's your favourite restaurant in Dubai?**

I have not been to many places so I can't really say which one is my favourite, however I recently had the opportunity to try Café Chic at Le Meridien Dubai and I really enjoyed it.

**Tequila or tacos?**

That's a tough one. I wouldn't like to choose between them... My favourite tacos is Tacos al Pastor – it's made of pork meat marinated in adobo sauce, served with grilled pineapple, tomato salsa and soft corn tortillas. My favourite tequila is Selección Suprema – it's made by Herradura.

**Tell us three great things to do with tequila.**

Besides drinking (this is the best way to try it), it's also good for flambé, and to marinate or making sauces with.

**You're shipwrecked on a desert island – what five items from your kitchen would you take with you and why?**

Cornal – Griddle  
Olla – earthenware pot  
Molcaxete – mortar and a pestle tool  
Cuchara – spoon made out of wood  
Cuchillo – knife  
And why all of these items? Because if I was stuck on an island without gas or electricity, I would be able to survive perfectly using just these five utensils.