

[Jewish Delis and Restaurants](#)

America's Best Jewish Deli Is in Mexico City

Mendl's delicatessen has an excellent matzah ball soup and super-cute merch.

By [Rachael Narins](#) | December 26, 2023

In February 2023, Mendl's Delicatessen opened on a leafy-green street in the Condesa neighborhood of Mexico City. Condesa is an area that's been home to Jewish families for 100 years, and is currently extremely trendy, so the fit was right. The New York-style, full-service deli has a walk-up take out window, shaded outdoor tables and two bright and airy dining rooms inside. There's also pretty much always a wait to get a seat because the place is a vibe, but don't worry, it never seems to take long to get in, and lounging on the sidewalk benches is a charming part of the experience.

The idea behind the deli was simple: to boil and bake bagels like those of the East Coast of the U.S., and offer Mexico City diners elevated versions of Ashkenazi cuisine heavy hitters.

According to the young and energetic Chef Montserrat Garza Garduño (a Sephardi Jew from Andalusia, Spain), "The idea of the restaurant is to serve traditional American/New York Jewish food."



MENDL'S TAKEOUT WINDOW, PHOTO CREDIT RACHAEL NARINS

Her near obsession to open the spot began with years of extensive research, fueled by a love of Claudia Roden's books and the drive to get everything just so. The goal was to make the restaurant a love letter to Jewish dining.

It didn't happen without overcoming some hurdles, though. For one thing, popular Mexican flavor profiles and the old world pantries of the shtetl don't overlap much.

"Our biggest challenge was finding a good meat purveyor, the right kinds of fish, and things like dill, rye and poppyseeds," said Garduño, noting that the typical herbs and spices of Eastern Europe are not at all common in Mexico. Much of what she uses has to be imported or is grown by farmers she's developed relationships with.

She needed those specific items because almost everything that's served is thoughtfully made in-house. That attention to authenticity makes the spot appealing to expats, world travelers, tourists, Jews, Gentiles and all the locals craving or curious about Chef Garduño's food. While not kosher, the restaurant serves the expected hits, alongside less familiar staples like smoked whitefish, borscht and kreplach.

"We have to educate a lot of people about some of the dishes, but once they try, they're excited. I send things to my friends to eat and then they will talk about it and order it," said Garduño.



MENDL'S WHOLE SMOKED TROUT, PHOTO CREDIT RACHAEL NARINS

Part of what also makes this spot a treasure is that it's just no easy feat to make what they serve. The elevation in CDMX is more than 7,000 feet, and baking at that altitude is quite hard, though they make it seem effortless. The black and white cookie is a flashback to a childhood dream and the enormously popular bagels that come in all the classic varieties are dense and chewy, with a slight hint of malt (another atypical imported ingredient) and have a bright, shiny exterior. The 48-hour cured lox is a vibrant coral color, beautiful and silky. They cure it plain, with dill and, in a nod to the local love of heat, chile spiced.

I'd also be remiss if I didn't mention the half- and full-sour pickles, which I believe will rival any you've ever had. They pack a garlicky punch.

The deep pink pastrami with it's dark, nubbly and highly spiced exterior is cured for two weeks before going into their rooftop smoker (that also accommodates the exceptional smoked fish) has proven to be a menu favorite as well.

"Mexicans love meat and they love our pastrami. At first we tried to slice it thin, but now do it thick and it's a bestseller."

Four and a half ounces of the meat is served on thick pieces of fragrant rye, making it a hefty sandwich. Paired with a house-made cream soda it's a perfect lunch.



MENDL'S BESTSELLING PASTRAMI SANDWICH, PHOTO CREDIT RACHAEL NARINS

Is there matzah ball soup? Oh yes. The matzah ball itself is about the size of a croquet ball and hovers the fine line between airy and dense. The light broth has carrots and fresh dill and is all flavor — bright yellow and clear as a bell. The heady secret, according to Chef Garduño, is that “We use hen stock. It’s higher in fat and gives more flavor.”

This is the of-the-moment restaurant for anyone who wants a top-notch, homey and coquettishly photogenic brunch. The food is just what you're expecting but somehow a bit better, and they will soon add a natural wine bar serving Sephardi foods to the upstairs area, which will draw in the evening crowds.

Mendl gets it. If you can't be there in person, send someone in to pick up some of their super cute merch, like a tote bag or t-shirt, to mail to you, or gather some of their assorted jarred goods including halva, preserved lemon and salsas. And start planning your trip to Mexico City for some of the best deli food in North America.

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MENDI'S EVERYTHING BAGEL PHOTO CREDIT RACHAEL NARINS