



# SPIRIT OF... Margarita

A tangy, lime-fused triumph of tequila, the margarita has lured tourists aplenty to Mexico's beaches, colonial cities and artsy mountain towns, though its origins remain a hotly contested mystery

Words: Becca Hensley

Mention the margarita to enough Mexican bartenders, and you'll soon get the picture. Every region or town wants to claim the legendary cocktail as their own. And why wouldn't they?

As with anything mythical, the margarita has quixotic but murky origins. Folklore abounds, with each compelling description involving Gatsby-like characters, sultry sirens and thirst-quenching, jazz-era soirées.

Mexico, with its beaches that hug both the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, has long attracted spirited gadabouts. An easy destination for Hollywood stars, globetrotters, Texas oil magnates and their entourages, and revolutionaries

with a penchant for merrymaking, the home of tequila experienced a particularly glamorous heyday between 1930 and 1950. Sometime during that era, this iconic beverage was born.

Handsome Emmanuel Ibarra Diaz, beverage director for One&Only Palmilla in Baja California's Los Cabos, mixes up a muddled cilantro serrano margarita at the hotel's open-air Agua Bar. The ultimate hideaway for film stars in the 1950s, the resort continues to exude a bygone mystique; it's easy to imagine the first of anything being mixed here. Diaz has instituted a cadre of innovative versions in the hotel's various bars, adding his signature spice to the mixture of tequila *blanco*, Cointreau and fresh lime juice with serrano chilli's sting and coriander's herbaceous flair. "There are many stories about the origin of the margarita, but my favourite version claims it was born in my own birthplace, north of here in Ensenada," he says. According to that account, in the early 1940s a bartender named Don Carlos Orozco at Hussong's Cantina – Ensenada's oldest bar – offered the daughter of the German ambassador, Margarita Henkel, a sip of his newest concoction. When he saw she was smitten with his creation, he named the drink in her honour.

Texas once belonged to Mexico, and the connection between the Lone Star State and its southern neighbour runs deep. For that reason,

Texans cling to the story that credits Dallas debutante Margarita Sames as the visionary behind the margarita, claiming she shook up something resembling today's margarita for some socialite pals at her Acapulco vacation home in 1948. As fate would have it, one of her guests, Tommy Hilton, quaffed the beverage, and then snagged the recipe to serve at his namesake hotels.

Also part of Texas lore, another variant claims that Francisco "Pancho" Morales served up the indigenous margarita in Tommy's Place Bar in El Paso-Juárez on July 4, 1945 to please a pack of partying Texan imbibers. One last Texas association proposes that head bartender Santos Cruz created the margarita for renowned singer Peggy (Margaret) Lee in 1948 in Galveston's trendy Balinese Room, when she asked for something to "clear her throat". Then again, some swear restaurateur Carlos "Danny" Herrera of chi-chi Rancho la Gloria near Tijuana made the first margarita in 1938 for a Ziegfeld Follies dancer who abhorred all spirits but tequila.

Whatever one believes, the margarita's classic recipe, as published by *Esquire* magazine in 1953, has not changed much. Still, mixologists dabble, which has resulted in myriad deviations, from mango-flavoured to fig. Today, a popular adaptation is to add smoky mescal in place of tequila. What would all those Madame Margaritas and their gallant bartenders think of that?



A few beverages on offer at Four Seasons Hotel México, D.F.

## SEVEN PLACES TO TIPPLE THE MARGARITA IN MEXICO

### POOLSIDE PARTY

Perched beside a breathtaking infinity pool and hovering over the cobalt sea, the open-air Agua Bar, lorded over by Emmanuel Ibarra Diaz, keeps guests at the iconic One&Only Palmilla well hydrated with many margarita options. For a twist, sip yours at the hotel's unique Barber and Blade, a men's barbershop replete with cocktail service.

TEL: +52 624 146 7000

[WWW.ONEANDONLYRESORTS.COM/ONE-AND-ONLY-PALMILLA-LOS-CABOS](http://WWW.ONEANDONLYRESORTS.COM/ONE-AND-ONLY-PALMILLA-LOS-CABOS)

### SALOON-STYLE SOIRÉES

A rite of passage for Southern Californians and always thronged with people who want to tipple at a bona fide "first margarita" watering hole, family-owned Hussong's in Ensenada keeps the party going and the spirit alive with sawdust-covered floors, mariachi music and tacky art on the walls. Cheering and hooting at the end of each song, conversations with locals and stellar margaritas add to the saloon-style allure.

TEL: +1 646 178 3210

[WWW.CANTINAHUSSONGS.COM](http://WWW.CANTINAHUSSONGS.COM)

### A MODERN RIFF

While most bartenders will tell you that margaritas should be made with tequila *blanco* as opposed to heavier *reposado* or the more complex, caramel- and vanilla-evoking *añejo*, you'll nevertheless be perplexed by the tequila options at Cantina La No. 20, a nostalgic yet contemporary bar in vibrant Polanco in Mexico City. Choose from 250 diverse tequilas in stock, then see how they enhance the bar's modern riffs on this classic libation.

TEL: +52 55 5281 3524

[WWW.LANO20.COM.MX](http://WWW.LANO20.COM.MX)

### KEEP IT CLASSIC

A distillation of the art scene that has made this colonial mountain town a famous nesting spot for expats, sleek and stunning Hotel Matilda in San Miguel de Allende knows how to mix the perfect classic margarita – as well



Private dining at Moxi in Hotel Matilda



Tuna tartare at Viceroy Zihuatanejo

as others featuring green chartreuse, one of many unusual ingredients. Enjoy yours at the hotel's MÚI Bar before eating a Mexican-themed dinner at Enrique Olvera's Moxi, set within the hotel.

TEL: +52 415 152 1015

[WWW.HOTELMATILDA.COM](http://WWW.HOTELMATILDA.COM)

### HIPSTER SIPS

On the Yucatán's hippest street, 5th Avenue in Playa del Carmen, a retrofitted fishing hamlet turned bohemian-meets-hipster playground, Hotel Cacao is an artwork-imbued contemporary hotel that produces some of the best margaritas in the area. Drink them at The Bar on the rooftop, where you can gaze into each other's reflection in the cool pool or swing in egg-shaped hanging chairs as you glimpse views of ethereal Cozumel on the horizon.

TEL: +52 984 206 4199

[WWW.HOTELCACAO.COM.MX](http://WWW.HOTELCACAO.COM.MX)

### A MEASURED POUR

The brainchild of master mixologist Mica Rousseau, Fifty Mills is named for the bartender's helpful measuring device – the jigger. Set within the majestic Four Seasons Hotel México, D.F. near Chapultepec Castle (which has just undergone a stunning facelift), newly opened Fifty Mills' huge marble bar begs your repose. Belly up for canny renditions of the classics.

TEL: +52 55 5230 1818

[WWW.FOURSEASONS.COM/MEXICO](http://WWW.FOURSEASONS.COM/MEXICO)

### A BOUTIQUE TWIST

Take this tip from *tequilero* Marco Antonio who helms the tropical Bar Coral at Viceroy Zihuatanejo, a boutique-style beach hotel near Ixtapa on the Playa la Ropa: "Drink my tamarind margarita for a local twist on the classic." Tamarind, sourced from a tree pod, adds a sour twist that locals adore.

TEL: +52 75 5555 5500

[WWW.VICEROYHOTELSANDRESORTS.COM/ZIHUATANEJO](http://WWW.VICEROYHOTELSANDRESORTS.COM/ZIHUATANEJO)