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First Sip: Leche Caliente in Mexico

by Karen Catchpole | Jul 01, 2014

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On a clear day you can see the *Volcan de Fuego* (Volcano of Fire) from the Colonial square in **Comala, Mexico**. It's quite a sight... but that's not why I was there. I was there for the famous ***leche caliente***.

Comala's square is ringed by open-air bars which are noted for the plates of tasty snacks which come free with each round of drinks. Over cold beer, tequila and lots of great food, I met Raphael and his siblings who were visiting their hometown from the US where they now live.

After a long, boozy afternoon on the square they insisted that I had to experience *leche caliente* (hot milk) with them early the following morning and they invited me to spend the night with them in their mother's house so that we could make an early start together.

Leche caliente is a sunrise beverage, perhaps because it's sometimes used as a pick-me-up after a long night of drinking, but also because cows are milked at sun up and cows provide a key ingredient in *leche caliente*.



At dawn Raphael, a car-full of extended family members and I drove to a small nearby dairy farm armed with the other necessary ingredients: plastic cups, alcohol (which was sold in a clear plastic jug with a label that simply said "alcohol"), and a mixture of hand

ground chocolate and sugar. When we arrived at the farm we each put some of the chocolate mixture into the bottom of a plastic cup then filled the cup with warm, rich milk straight from one of the farmer's cows. This mixture was topped off with a splash or two of the alcohol.

Soothingly warm cups in hand, we leaned against the brick wall of the cow pasture or found perches on weathered stumps and sipped our adult hot chocolate (the kids among us got virgin versions), which was creamy from the fresh whole milk, bracing from the alcohol, and granular from the slowly-dissolving hand-ground chocolate.

Raphael explained that *leche caliente* is just one of the many things that he and his siblings get homesick for. Their pride in showing me the tradition, simplicity and camaraderie of *leche caliente* is one of the many things that make me miss Mexico too.