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The Times

Mexico City

& the Best of Mexico



Written by local experts

Three colours *chilango*



Chilangos love football almost as much as they loathe the city's interminable traffic jams that make it a mission to get to a match. Weekends wouldn't be the same without putting your feet up with a group of friends or family to watch *el fut* on TV. Part of the ritual involves munching your way through a massive piece of *chicharrón* (pork scratchings) and sinking a few *chelas* (beers).

Fans congregate in bars for big European and domestic matches, much like their fellow obsessives in the Old World. For the most authentic sports bar atmosphere, try the Black Horse (see p134), Condesa's surprisingly stylish English pub. Even better, get off your backside and go straight to the source. It's the only way to learn the lingo and share the city's obsession with the beautiful game.

Charrería

Rancho del Charro

Constituyentes 500, Puerta 4, Bosques de Chapultepec, third section, Chapultepec (5277 8706/www.nacionaldecharrros.com). Metro Observatorio L1, then bus or taxi. Admission free.

The official national sport is *charrería*, and Rancho del Charro at the far west end of Chapultepec park is the site for *charreadas* – competitions featuring intricate manoeuvres on horseback by men, women and children. The men – *charros* – wear ornate som-

breros and dazzling skin-tight suits as they compete in roping and riding events, while the *charras* wear long, flouncy dresses and perform their precision movements riding side-saddle.

Residents fans rarely book ahead, tending to turn up and buy a ticket on the day. Reserve your seat in advance if you plan to catch a popular club match or one involving the national team, called *el Tri* after the tricolor Mexican flag. *Clásicos* are *chilango* versions of a British 'derby' – matches between rivals from the same city or clashes of titans like Liverpool versus Chelsea. América participates in every DF *clásico*, attracting hatred and adoration in equal measure. They contend with Guadalajara's Chivas in the original *clásico* and challenges Cruz Azul in the *clásico joven*, a term coined in the 1970s when competition between that pair of *chilango* teams was at its peak.

DF has bid farewell to other teams along the way. Atlante now plays in Cancún and Necaxa in Aguascalientes. The capital also loses promising footballers to foreign clubs with their deeper pockets. Still, Mexico City remains a top training ground for some of the nation's most promising players, like youthful striker César Villaluz, who earned his studs at Cruz Azul, and goalie Francisco 'Memo' Ochoa who has saved América's skin on countless occasions.

Football rivalry runs deep in DF, but generally, it's all good fun. Teams have playful nicknames for each other. The Águilas (Ámerica) are known as the *pollos* or *gallinas* (chickens or hens) while the Pumas (Club Universidad Nacional) are reduced to *gatitos* (pussy-cats). Crowds are boisterous, invariably vocal but rarely violent. Games are family friendly – if you're the kind of family that swears at one another. Insults range from *¡Pinche árbitro!* ('bloody ref!') to the usual interplay about players' lack of ability in the bedroom, and conversely, their mothers' unbridled carnality.

The Mexican football league has two seasons per year, one running from August to December, the other from January to May. The debate rages about which team is the town favourite, though plenty of *chilangos* thumb

Football

their noses at all three and support Chivas of Guadalajara instead. Advance tickets, recommended for derby matches between DF teams or when Chivas are playing, can be purchased through Ticketmaster (5325 9000, www.ticketmaster.com.mx). Ticketmaster is your only option if you want to pay by credit card (AmEx, MC, V).

Estadio Azteca

Calzada De Tlalpan 3465, Santa Ursula Coapa (5617 8080/www.esmas.com/estadioazteca). Metro Tasqueña L2, then tren ligero to Estadio Azteca. Ticket office 10am-5pm Sun. No credit cards.

With capacity for 120,000 screaming fans, Estadio Azteca is the largest football arena in the country and home to Águilas del America, Mexico City's most successful team, with ten national titles to its name. The stadium also hosted the World Cup finals in 1970 and 1986. Games take place at 4pm on Sundays, with tickets costing from MX\$50 to \$680 depending on the game and seat location. Tickets are available through Ticketmaster or at the stadium box office one or two days prior to match days and on the day itself.

Estadio Azul

Indiana 225, Ciudad de los Deportes (no phone/www.cruz-azul.com.mx). Metro San Antonio L7/Metrobus Ciudad Deportiva. Ticket office 10am-6pm Sat. No credit cards.

Cruz Azul, winner of eight league championships, play at Estadio Azul, next door to the Plaza México bullring. Matches kick off on Saturdays at 5pm. Tickets cost around MX\$250 during the regular season and are available in advance from Ticketmaster or on game days at the stadium box office.

Estadio Olímpico

Insurgentes Sur south of Avenida Copilco, Ciudad Universitaria campus (no phone/www.pumas.unam.com.mx). Metro Copilco L3. Ticket office 9am-2pm Sun. No credit cards.

Estadio Olímpico on UNAM's Ciudad Universitaria campus is home to five-time title-winning Pumas, and while not really a college football team, Pumas does represent the university to a certain degree. Fans have a reputation for being rowdy, but plenty of families pack the stadium as well. Games kick off at noon on Sundays. Tickets, which cost MX\$70 and upwards during the regular season, are available in advance from Ticketmaster or on game days at the stadium box office, which opens three hours before kick off.

Equestrian events

Hipódromo de las Américas

Avenida Industria Militar just south of Ejército Nacional, Lomas de Sotelo (5387 0600/www.hipodromo.com.mx). Metro Tacuba L2, L7, then Tecamachalco-bound bus. Ticket office 2-6pm Fri-Sun. No credit cards.

Horse racing takes place at the Hipódromo de las Américas, north-west of Chapultepec park. The first race starts at 4pm on Fridays, 3.30pm on Saturdays, and 3pm on Sundays with subsequent races every half hour. Your MX\$10 entry ticket is good for any of the general admission areas, and lower-level table seating is MX\$15. The minimum bet is MX\$3, and a racing programme (MX\$16) is essential. Photo p200.

Lucha libre

This 'free wrestling' involves masked and caped characters competing in a highly choreographed affair of acrobatics, body slams, limb-twisting and tossing from the ring. Despite the testosterone-infused atmosphere and scantily clad women presenting each round's wrestlers, families flock to Arena México and Arena Coliseo to cheer on their favourites.

Arena México

Dr Lavista 197, Doctores (5588 0266/www.arena.mexico.com.mx). Metro Cuauhtémoc L1. Ticket office 5.30-10pm Fri. No credit cards. Map p265 J6.

Arena México plays at 8.30pm on Fridays. Tickets for regular matches are MX\$40 and up, available in advance through Ticketmaster or at the ticket office on the night. For some matches, called 'Cabello vs Cabello' (in which the loser's hair gets cut off) or 'Máscara vs Máscara' (the loser is unmasked), prices jump considerably and seats can be hard to come by except for the general admission section. The Doctores neighbourhood is sketchy at night, so exercise caution walking to the metro station after the match, or call a taxi rather than hailing one on the street.

Arena Coliseo

República de Perú 77, Centro (5526 1687). Metro Allende L2. Ticket office from 4.30pm Tue; from 2pm Sun. No credit cards. Map p267 M3.

Matches at this scruffier venue take place at 7.30pm on Tuesdays and at 5pm on Sundays. Tickets are only available at the arena ticket office, which opens three hours before each event. Touts tend to buy up the good seats, so get there early.

Participation sports

While *chilangos* are enthusiastic spectators, there's a slowly growing fitness culture as well. The city's 2,250-metre (7,380-foot) elevation may leave you short of breath and the air quality can be less than desirable at times, but there are plenty of recreational activities available to prevent the tamales and tequila from packing on the pounds. Runners have numerous options including Bosque de Chapultepec, the Magdalena Mixiuhca sports complex and Bosque de Tlalpan. To stretch your legs and lungs even more, head west to Desierto de los Leones for hiking, horse-riding or a mountain biking session.