

SUGAR SWEET AND CHILI HOT

Antonio Quero Hernandez is part of a traveling group of merchants from Oaxaca, Mexico. They go from city to city throughout the year selling the handcrafted wares made for generations by their families. Their booths are set up in the parking lot at Mega Comercial Mexicana in San Jose Del Cabo twice a year, in December before Christmas and during the Easter weeks.

Antonio's rainbow colored family business is candy, the non-preservative kind. Decades ago his grandparents started out selling the treats they concocted in their small kitchen at their local market in San Pablo Villa de Mitla. Mitla, is close to the capital city of Oaxaca in southern Mexico, and is a place better known to tourists for its pre-Columbian Mesoamerican ruins than for candy. The Hernandez family are now distributors to a multitude of stores around the country. Their grandson Antonio has hopes to expand the business and export to the United States.

It's an enticing feast for the eyes seeing his beautifully merchandised products; stacked red, white and green coconut bars depicting the colors of the Mexican flag; trays mounded with honey roasted peanuts, chili and garlic; mango flavored lollipops coated with chili powder; blocks of amaranth seeds pressed together with maguey syrup (think tequila) and resembling treats I've fed to my birds. Many more of the candies are fruit based, oranges, limes, strawberries, lots of coconut variations and the number one seller sticky tamarind pulp with a side of chili powder for dipping.

If you grew up in Mexico the combination of sweet, sour and spicy rolled into one candy is what would satisfy your sweet tooth and the hotter the better. For someone, like myself, not born into these exotic tastes it's been a trial and error adventure to acquire a liking and so far my eyes enjoy them more than my taste buds. It's hard to convert a chocaholic.

If you miss visiting Antonio at the Mega parking lot and would like to experience some rousing flavors, that depending on your origins may have you gasping for water, there are many candy stores, *dulcerías* scattered around Los Cabos. I can't guarantee though that they'll be as good as the ones the Hernandez family makes.