

A Short History of Vanilla



The Gift from Mexico to the World

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The Totonac

- Papantla, Veracruz, Mexico
- Xanath (Totonac), or Tlilxochitl (Nahuatl)
- The legend of Tzacoponziza and Xzakan-Oxga



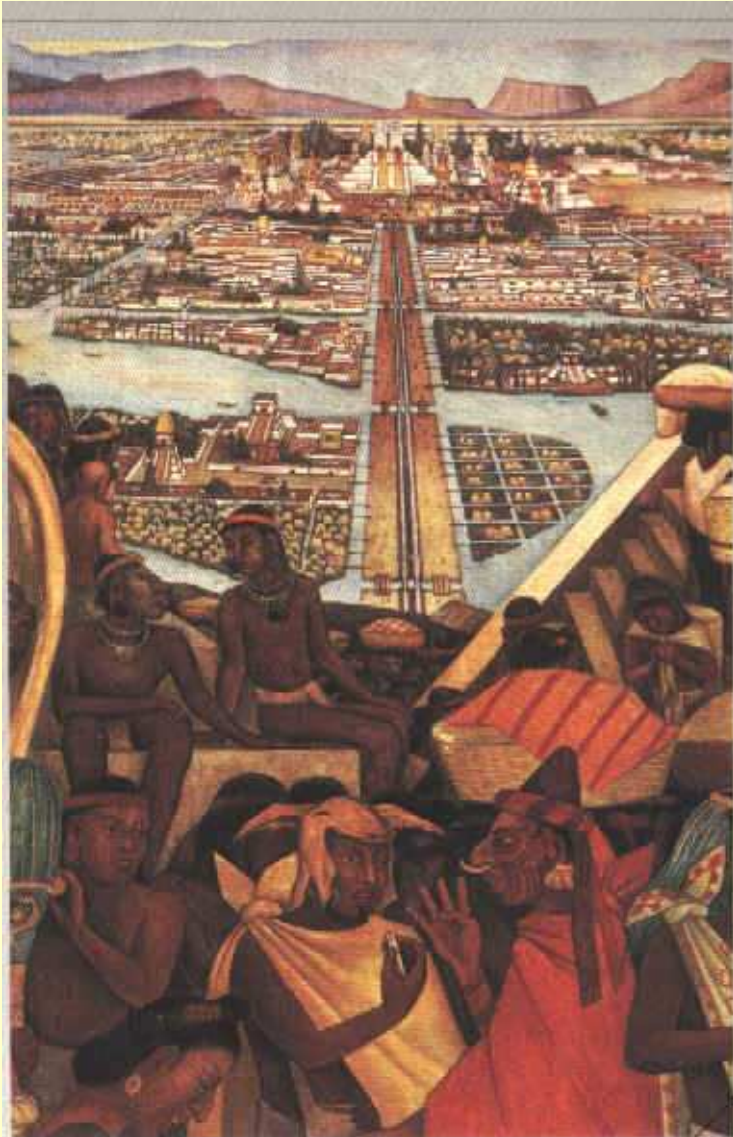
El Tajin, Veracruz, Mexico



The Totonac

- Medicinal uses
 - Aphrodesiac
 - Venomous bites
 - Stomach pains
 - Cough
 - Congestion





The Aztecs

- Moctezuma, Rey de los Aztecas
- Xocolatl or Xocohotl
 - Moctezuma's favorite drink
 - Drink of the gods
 - Prepared with cocoa, xanath and chile



The Spaniards



Hernan Cortes - 1517

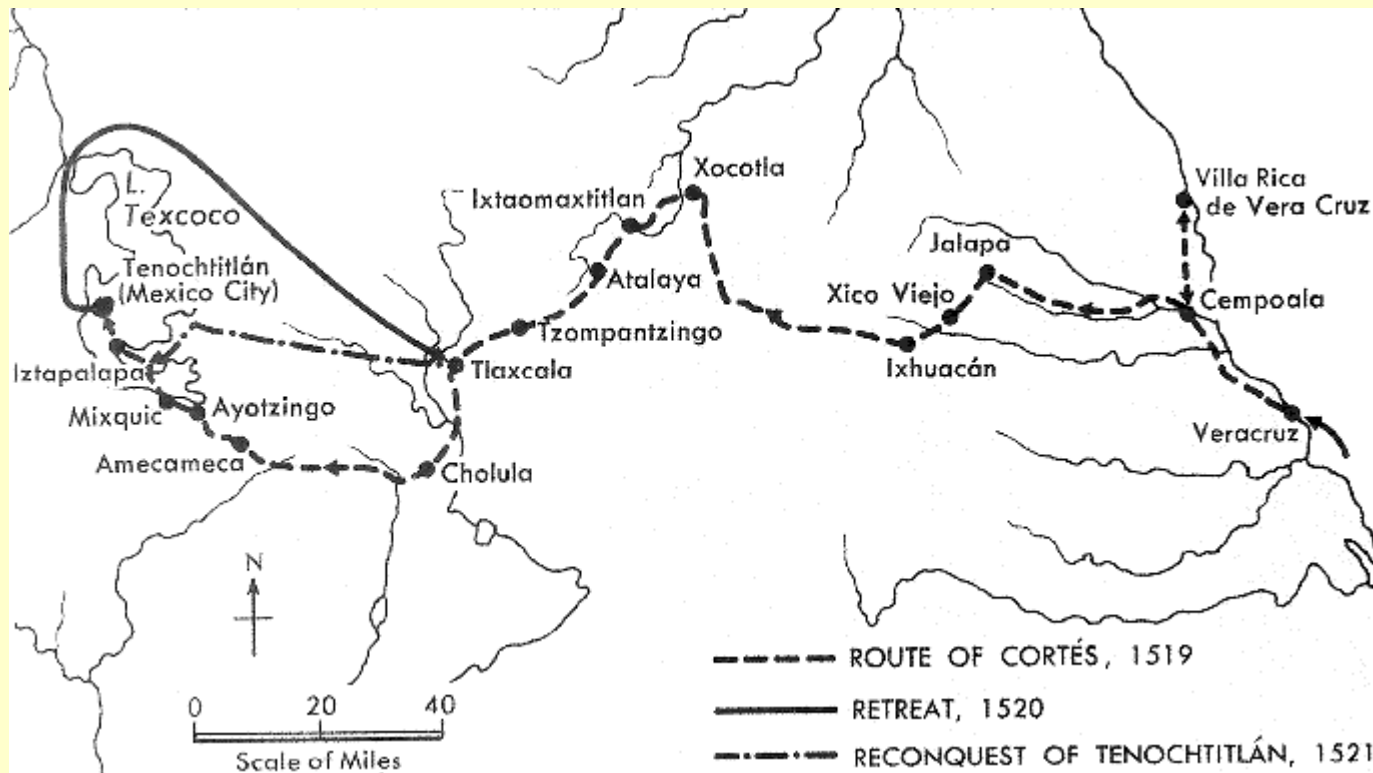


The Spaniards

- Landed in what is now Veracruz – he named the land for the True Cross (Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz)
- Marched to Tenochtitlan to find the riches of Moctezuma



The Spaniards



Cortes' path across Mexico



The Spaniards

- Moctezuma introduced Cortes to the Drink of the Gods – Xocolatl or Xocohotl
– Cocoa and Vanilla
- Returned to Spain in 1528 with vanilla and cocoa



The Aristocracy

- Because of price and rarity vanilla beverages became an exclusive club of the rich and famous of the time.
- 1602, Hugh Morgan, apothecary to Queen Elizabeth I, suggested that **vanilla** could be used as a flavoring all by itself, and the versatility of the exotic bean was finally uncovered.



New World taste in the Old World

- Vaina or vainilla – Spanish name, meaning little sheath
- Spain guarded the secrets of vanilla and cocoa for over 100 years.
- Tried to cultivate the vanilla orchid in Europe
- The plant would grow and flower, but would not set fruit.



Vanilla meets the world

- Vanilla plant used for medicine
 - Nerve stimulant
 - Upset stomach
 - Aphrodisiac
- Plants take to Reunion, Mauritius and the Malagasy Republic and points beyond
- New species evolved on Tahiti
- Only in Mexico would the orchid produce fruit



Vanilla goes to South Pacific

- Introduced in Tahiti by Admiral Louis Bonard in 1850
- Tahitian vanilla is either a mutation of the original *v. planifolia* from Mexico or a cross breed of the *v. planifolia* and *v. pompona*.



Boy meets vanilla



- 1841, Reunion Island
- 12 year old slave, Edmond Albius
- Developed hand pollination of the vanilla flower
- This method still in use today.



From Mexico to Madagascar

- Vanilla cultivated in Mexico and Reunion (Bourbon Islands)
- In the late 1950's a freeze destroyed most of the vanilla crops in Mexico
- Madagascar rose as the major world producer
- In 2000 several major Typhoons destroyed most of Madagascar's plantations and cured crop



From Mexico to Madagascar

- After 2000 plantations sprang up from Uganda to Papua New Guinea to India and many other locations
- The vanilla from these plantations are now on the market
- Madagascar is finally recovering from the typhoons
- Mexico is now beginning to re-grow their vanilla prominence.



Interesting facts in vanilla history

- What may be the first American recipe for vanilla ice cream, written in the same hand that penned the Declaration of Independence, is among Thomas Jefferson's papers at the Library of Congress



Interesting facts in vanilla history

- Queen Elizabeth I of England had a passion for vanilla
- Her navy would raid Spanish Galleons, looking for vanilla, among other things
- By the end of the 17th century coffee houses in England had cocoa drinks flavored with vanilla



Interesting facts in vanilla history

- Only pollinated in the wild by one species of bee (purported to be the Melipona bee of the eulaema genus)
- Self pollinated flowers produce sterile seeds
- Vanilla plants grown from cuttings



Vanilla varieties

- Around 100 vanilla orchids
- Only 3 are used commercially today
 - Vanillae Planifolia
(aka V. Fragans)
 - Vanillae Tahitensis
 - Vanillae Pompona
- Only Planifolia and Tahitensis can be used in food in the USA



V. Planifolia

- Original species from Mexico
- Most widely cultivated today
- Bourbon, Madagascar, Mexican vanilla beans are all from v. planifolia



V. Pompona

- Variant of the v. planifolia
- Mainly grown in the West Indies
- AKA Guadeloupe or Antilles Vanilla



V. Tahitiensis

- Comes from v. planifolia that mutated into its own species, in Tahiti
 - Some say this is a cross of the V. Pompona and the V. Planifolia
- Smaller, fatter pods than v. planifolia
- More earthly, rustic aroma

