



Oaxaca Times[®]

The inner life of Oaxaca

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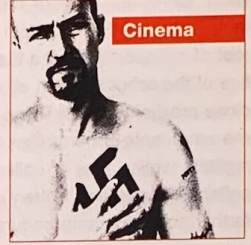
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Semana Santa



Sunbathing at the beach, observing religious masses, or enjoying an ice cream at the Zócalo... How will you spend Semana Santa in Oaxaca? This traditional Catholic holiday, which commemorates the last week in the life of Jesus Christ, begins on Palm Sunday (April 9) and culminates on

Easter Sunday (April 12). Generally a somber holiday, Semana Santa in Oaxaca has a more lively and celebratory feel.

Every year, more than 10,000 tourists come to the city during that week, and as many are expected this year, according to the Tourism and Economic Development office

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in Oaxaca. Most of these tourists are Mexican students and family members who live in other parts of the country and come to visit their relatives.

But many foreigners also choose the beginning of April to travel to Oaxaca. In fact, Semana Santa is the second busiest season for Oaxacan hotels, after Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead) in the fall. At the luxurious Hotel Camino Real, each of the 91 rooms was reserved between 2- 6 months in advance and the small bed and breakfast Casa Las Bugambilias, with only 9 rooms, was booked a year ago.

Travel agencies throughout Mexico and the United States are given the schedule of events months in advance and actively promote trips. As traveling that week has become increasingly popular, few hotels won't increase their rates and low season prices are not likely to start before the Monday after Easter.

As thousands of visitors pour into Oaxaca, many locals take off to the beaches, Puebla, the Isthmus, or Chiapas. Since Thursday and Friday before Easter are paid vacation days and Easter Sunday is a national holiday, most workers, including government employees, receive the whole week off with pay. Therefore, for many Semana Santa is the annual week of vacation.

However, many Oaxacan religious families prefer not to travel on Saint Days and stay at home. Observance of Semana Santa in Mexico dates from the Spanish conquest, but as with

other traditional Catholic holidays, elements of indigenous customs have been incorporated throughout the years. In some parts of Mexico, self-flagellation and real crucifixions (without nails) are practiced. In all pueblos, silent religious processions occur almost nightly.

In Oaxaca, church members perform elaborate re-enactments, rehearsed for months, and streets are taken over by festive carnivals, religious artwork exhibitions, and fireworks. Vendors sell refreshing springtime treats like Aguas frescas, fruit flavoured waters, Raspados, shaved ices, and delicious Dulces regionales, regional sweets and candies made of coconut and tamarind.

If you chose Oaxaca to celebrate Semana Santa, you won't lack options. And whatever you decide to do, you won't be alone!

Some highlights:

For a complete listing of Semana Santa events, visit the tourist information stand across from Sto Domingo

church on Alacalá ST. Also check the Casa de la Cultura on Colon and Santos Degollado for alternate activities.

Sunday April 5th- Palm Sunday Blessing of the palms at all Churches. Parades throughout the city. Figurines made of Palm leaves are sold on the streets. A very important ceremony will take place at 10 AM in San Antonino Castillo Velazco (30 minutes away from downtown Oaxaca) Friday April 10th- Good Friday 6pm: Silent candlelight Processional. Begins at the Church of the Precious Blood of Christ (on the corner of Macedonia Alcalá and M. Bravo) and continues along Macedonia Alcalá, Xólotl, García Vigil, Morelos and returns to the Church along Macedonio Alcalá. 8pm: La Soledad Church: Procession of the Holy Virgin around the church and musical performance Sunday April 12th- Easter Sunday Easter mass at all churches.

Carmen Alto Church: feather dance, processional, and fireworks.



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Los Olvidados y Los Malcriados

Alternate Upbringings in the 21st century

■ SAM LOWRY

Here's a question for readers: Which would you rather, that your child grew up learning about life on the street, or safe at home watching TV? Most Westerners wouldn't stop to think before answering this question. In the West, safety is primary, and danger, especially for children, is to be avoided at all cost. An easy life is a good life, and a hard life is therefore a bad one. These days (for the last few decades in fact) even gory fairy tales are kept from children in order to protect them from imaginary brutalities, namely: from reality. Every parent reassures its child at one time or another that there are no such thing as monsters. Santa Claus, the tooth fairy, and Jesus Christ (even Satan), yes, but monsters, no. (Of course, by most adult westerner's standards Hitler was a "monster," but that's different: he's not going to be hiding in the bedroom closet, and monsters like Hitler aren't considered a necessary part of a child's "experience.")

Parents don't have to "lie" to their children to be seriously misinforming them; they just have to allow the child to believe mommy or daddy have all the answers, and that they can make blanket statements—such as "There are no monsters," "It was only a dream," or "God looks out for little children"—without backing them up with facts. All of this is meant to reassure a child and keep its dreams sweet, but it ignores the possibility that nightmares may be necessary to a child's development, and it forgets that innocence can only be pro-

tected, finally, by avoiding the experience of reality. Most adult westerners seem to have deep "issues" with their parents, however, dead or alive, issues that belie their apparently trouble-free upbringings. This leads one to wonder if perhaps trouble and hardship—like those trials and tribulations which fairy tale heroes and heroines must suffer—don't make for a healthier childhood than comfort and security?

In Mexico, things are a little different. In the West, having children, so far as it is a rational decision at all, is usually based on "romantic" factors, a "wouldn't it be nice" continuation of the love and commitment between two people. Often, in today's ultra-competitive, success-orientated society, it even involves something of a "sacri fice." Many couples opt not to have kids for "practical" reasons, and are not looked upon strangely for such a decision. In Latin America, where the population continues to soar at an alarming rate, this is only partly due to Catholic ban on contraception. In Mexico, having children for the majority of poor, indigenous people is a natural occurrence that just "happens" without any forethought at all. On top of this, it is often a practical means to increase the work force of the family, since children are seen less as an additional responsibility or an extra mouth to feed than as a potential increase of industry.

An "underprivileged" child in Mexico grows up fast. He or she may be out on the street selling chiclets or begging from tourists at the age of five or less, or else be working the land, picking corn

or carrying firewood, helping to feed the whole family. An indigenous Mexican child might even be "working" on the street while still an infant, suckling at its mother's breast while horrified tourists tut and "aah" and throw down a couple of pesos. This is generally regarded as an abomination by westerners, and though it's clearly no way for a child to grow up, is it necessarily any worse than what westerners provide for their children? In the West, a child whose mother works a day job may be left at home all day with a nanny, stuck in front of the TV set with a bunch of videos just to be kept quiet. Which fate is the more harmful? In both cases, a child's inner, creative life is denied the room to flourish. The nanny/TV environment is secure and danger free, but it is also sterile and soul-destroying, and does less than nothing to prepare the child for a real world full of challenges, a world it will soon have to contend with. No wonder if it grows into a neurotic, parent-hating adult ensconced in psychotherapy.



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As adults, we may desire a cushy, sheltered life, but deep down we know that real growth, wisdom and happiness come only through adversity, by confronting and overcoming the everyday problems of a natural, often hostile environment. We may not go hunting and gathering, but modern living provides its share of obstacles, pitfalls, and conflicts, without which we would never have a chance to develop our skills or further our knowledge of ourselves. For some reason, this common sense logic isn't applied to children, however. In the West, it is now more or less socially compulsory to spoil a child, to give it everything it wants and "protect" it from undesirable experiences. Modern day parents often no longer discipline their children in any real sense; instead they negotiate, treating their children like little adults whose every whims is to be indulged and every demand met. Nowadays, for example, in British schools it is forbidden to use the word "naughty" when chastising a child. The word "No" is almost equally verboten. Heaven forbid a grown-up resort to

a disciplinary slap: a mother can now be held on charges for daring to lay a hand on her own child. All of this is now considered potentially traumatic for the delicate little creatures. It is not seen as a necessary means for them to understand that life is full of disappointments, and that there are boundaries that cannot be crossed without incurring consequences.

Western children "grow up" in their demands and expectations—develop egos—long before they develop emotionally, psychologically or physically. Before they can even dress themselves properly, they are demanding autonomy and independence, the freedom to do whatever they please. They are often given it, too. Seven-year-olds carry their own cell phones, have TVs in their bedrooms, video collections, computers, email accounts; everything that grown-ups have, children now consider their right and privilege. Parents give it to them because they don't want to deny their children, but do they stop to consider whether it is actually enhancing their development to be granted all these perks of technology?

In Mexico, many children are happy if they can afford a pencil and a notepad, and consider it a privilege to go to school and learn something. As for those who don't make it to school, those street urchins who must beg and steal to stay alive, even they tend to be better behaved than your average Western child. Of course, they would have to be. Western kids aren't taught manners much more than they are taught basic survival skills, and they certainly don't learn them from TV. The way of the street, on the other hand, is akin to the law of the jungle in its precision and ruthlessness. Every misstep or foolish act will quickly be rebuffed, not by a punishment, but by an equal and opposite reaction from the world at large.

Perhaps we ought not to pity the underprivileged urchins growing up dirty and hungry on the streets, if they are being prepared for life to come? Pity precludes respect, and there are much more practical and constructive approaches to the situation than simple regret, itself a form of complacency. Maybe we would be better off looking at those privileged children, who are given all they need and enjoy the benefits of a smooth, easy, friction-free childhood? It is they who are in for the ruder awakening. A good life is invariably also a hard life.

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