



Oaxaca Times

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FESTIVALS OF THE MONTH

ETHNIC GROUPS

PART VII

The Chontales



For some Archeologists the Chontales might have come from Nicaragua. Historians believe that the Chontales came from Guerrero, México. However both sources agree that the Chontales were warriors. They used to fight with the Zapotecs until the Spanish Conquistadores, directed by Ignacio Maldonado, conquered the territory in 1569. The situation of the Chontales changed by the end of the XVII-century, when they became the principal producers of "cochinilla" (insect use for dyes) one of the finest natural colors which were in grand demand by the European market in those days.

As producers of this valuable product the Chontales could enjoy privileges which other indigenous people were unable to have. Tall, robust, brave, joined together in 1864 in 25 towns in the Department of Tlacolula, they were not softened by force of arms, but by the teaching of the missionaries. "Now," Fr. Pablo Villaseñor said, "They are easy to get along with and with a good religious spirit!" Perhaps this tribe has some relationship with the Triques and that their language is of the Maya family.

On October 9 there will be a big celebration honoring the Patron Saint of the Tule and the tree. When Christ was born this tree was already huge, and now it's reputed to have the largest girth in the world. Many people from different parts of Oaxaca travel to the famous little town on these day...

Tamales, Green, Yellow and zucchini blossom empanadas traditionally serve alone with Tepache (Fermented pineapple juice drink). A dance is also held at night in the Municipal Palace. The Tule is 15 minutes from downtown by "colectivos". Also on October 8, don't miss the annual celebration of the Patron Saint of Tlacolula a small town famous for it's excellent food and it's magnificent XVI century chapel.



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Oaxacan Jewelry

The beautiful State of Oaxaca is one of the places where the people have jealously guarded their traditions. The rich culture of its seven regions emerges in many different forms, all full of color and meaning. Costumes, food, ceramic work, textiles and, of course, jewelry are among the indigenous ornamental traditions which have remained virtually intact here.

Oaxaca has been famous for its silver and goldsmiths since pre-Hispanic times. These artists of subtle and refined taste produced the extraordinary jewelry found by Alfonso Caso in the seventh tomb of Monte Alban, from the Zapotec culture. You can admire these pieces (bracelets, pendants, necklaces, rings and breast plates) today in the Museo Regional de Oaxaca, in the ex-convent of Santo Domingo. Their designs are so perfect that they stand up to any work done in any part of the world today, in spite of all the technological and stylistic advances made since their creation. The artisans of Oro de Monte Alban (Gold of Monte Alban), an establishment located next to the Santo Domingo Church make fine replicas of these pieces in gold and silver.

Interestingly, each region of Oaxaca has conserved its characteristic jewelry, although in recent years some have incorporated the use of plastic in certain pieces. On the northeast coast of the state, unique crosses are made, with virgins hanging from the arms and feet. If these pieces have a crown, it means they were made in Pinotepa Nacional; if there are lizards eating a fish, or scorpions, they are from Santa Catarina; the ones from San Juan Colorado have coins on the necklace they hang from, and those from San Pedro Jicallan are made with small figures of horses between the beads. Small silver hens are typical in San Lorenzo, as are rabbits on necklaces in Huazolotitlan, and hollow gold beads from Pochutla.

Artisans from San Pedro Quiatoni have used blue, green and blue-green murano glass beads in their necklaces since the sixteenth century. People from the Mixtec region prefer red beads with silver figurines, and in Ejutla, mostly long necklaces are worn. In Ocotlan de Morelos, colorful yarn pompons and red beads adorn silver crosses. The women of Tuxtepec usually wear very short necklaces, and in Yalalag they make beautiful crosses with smaller

ones hanging from them by silver balls. At the foot of each of the smaller crosses is a heart. These pieces were inspired by Salamanacan jewelry and further enriched by the imagination and creativity of Oaxacan artisans. With a little bit of luck, you will see long earrings with roosters or pomegranates in silver and gold, dating back to colonial times. One very old tradition in this region is that single women wear earrings, and married women wear necklaces. In Betaza and San Pedro Atoyac, long necklaces made

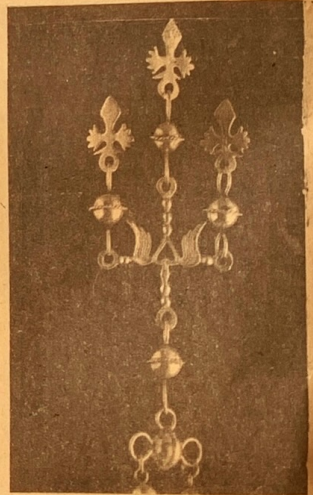


from red beads are worn, with coins that lie flat (as opposed to sideways, according to how they are strung). The women of Mixitlan wear beautiful heavy glass necklaces over their dark green dresses, creating a very special contrast. In the area near the isthmus, Tehuantepec and Juchitan have excellent masters of gold filigree work. The Tehuana Indian women adorn themselves mainly with gold coins (either minted in Mexico or the United States) hanging from bracelets, and surrounded by three-colored gold leaf flowers, or filigree. According to tradition, women from this region should wear two necklaces: a choker made of small coins with a central pendant and a long necklace, usually a thick chain wrapped around the neck several times, or a necklace made of larger coins with a central ornamental piece. They must also wear earrings, which can either be filigree or made from coins (graduated from small to large) with pearls and gold balls between them;

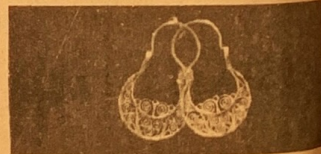
their bracelets are almost always coins joined by a chain, and the finishing touch is provided by three-colored gold rings.

Near the city of Oaxaca, we can find silver crosses with signs of the passion of Jesus engraved in a line, with small animals. There are also many large engraved lockets.

As you can see, Oaxaca is much more than just a fascinating place for a vacation and getting to know Mexican customs. It also has creative, imaginative jewelry displaying the extraordinary sense



of beauty that people with deep historical roots, and a touch of magic, can produce.



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Walking is the ideal way to get around Oaxaca. The colonial heart of the city is laid out in a simple grid, and all mayor attractions are within easy walking distance of each other. Taxis are readily available,

especially near the main hotels, check with your hotel desk for the current fare.

Most of the larger hotels offer bilingual day tours to places of interest outside the city. If your hotel does not offer such tours, check with a large hotel close by. Advance reservations are recommended.

If you prefer traveling by yourself or with a smaller party, hire a taxi by the hour. Again, ask your hotel desk what the going rate is.

THINGS TO SEE AND DO IN THE CITY

ANDADOR TURISTICO: (Pedestrian Mall) Calle Macedonio Alcala (near Av. Independencia (near the Cathedral) to Calle A. Gurrion (near the church and Ex-monastery of Santo Domingo). Historical buildings, shops, and small restaurants line the street.

BASILICA DE LA SOLEDAD: (Basílica of Our Lady of Solitude) Calle Independencia 107th century, the basilica houses the image of Our

Travel - Wise Getting Around Oaxaca

Lady of Solitude, patron saint of Oaxaca. Daily 5:30 a.m. - 9 p.m.

CATEDRAL: (Cathedral) Av. Independencia 50; Tel:5-55-80 Built in the 16th century; partially destroyed by earthquakes; reconstruction finished in 1733. Daily 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.

IGLESIA Y EX-CONVENTO DE SANTO DOMINGO: (Church and Ex-Monastery of Santo Domingo). Calle Macedonio Alcala at the corner of Calle A. Gurrion; tel; 63720. One of the most brilliantly decorated churches in Oaxaca; completed in 1600. Part of the secularized monastery now houses the Regional Museum of Oaxaca (see Below) Mon-Sat. 7 a.m.- 1 p.m. 4-8 p.m. Sun 7 a.m.-2 p.m.

MUSEO CASA DE JUAREZ: (Juarez House Museum). Calle Garcia Vigil 609. Memorabilia of the Mexican hero Benito Juárez, housed in the 19th century home where he was a servant in his youth. Tues.-Sun. 9 a.m.- 7 p.m. Admission \$500 Mex., Sun and hols. free.

MUSEO DE ARTE PREHISPANICO "RUFINO TAMAYO": (Tamayo Museum of Pre-Columbian

Art) Av. Morelos 25; Tel 6-47-50. Collection assembled by the famous Mexican painter and donated to his native city. Mon., Wed-Sat. 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.; 4-7 p.m. Sun. 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. Admission \$5,000 pesos

MUSEO DE OAXACA: (City Museum) Andador Turístico; Calle Macedonio Alcala 202-204. Tel: 6-84-99. Exhibits featuring local crafts and the work of local artists in a variety of media. Housed in the

Casa de Cortés (Cortés House) a former colonial residence. Tues-Fri 10 a.m.- 2 p.m., 5-8 p.m.; Sat: 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

MUSEO REGIONAL DE OAXACA: (Regional Museum of Oaxaca) Housed in the former Monastery of Sto. Domingo (see above). Tel:6-29-91. Ethnological collection focusing on the various Indian groups who live in Oaxaca state. The archaeological collection features the treasures discovered in tomb 7 at Monte Alban and material from throughout the state. Tues-Fri. 10 a.m. -6 p.m.; Sat-Sun. 10 a.m. -5 p.m. Admission \$950 Mex. Sun and hols, free.

INSTITUTO DE ARTE GRAFICAS (Institute of Graphic Arts): Housed in a beautiful colonial house this museum displays the work of Mexico's leading graphic artists, both modern and classical, including works by Alfredo Zalce. The hours are Wed.-Mon. from 9-1:30 and 4-6 p.m.

Village markets-Days and specialties

There are several villages outside of the city of Oaxaca, which are famous for their markets. Even if you do not intend to buy anything, just going to any of these villages can be a fascinating experience, as each village is unique and has something different to offer.

There are various ways to get to the village. You can catch a bus at the second class bus station, which

is located next to the Mercado de Abastos, or, you can take a collective taxi. (collectivos are also located at the Mercado de Abastos). Every day of the week, there's market in one or another of the nearby villages. The following is a partial list.

MONDAY: Miahuatlan, which is known for its leather and Mezcal.

WEDNESDAY: Etla, is known for its excellent meat and

cheese. San Pablo and San Pedro Etla, both of these districts are known for their ceramics.

THURSDAY: Zaachila, known for its excellent meat.

FRIDAY: Ocotlán, famous for its beautiful hand-made clothes.

SATURDAY: Oaxaca, where Mercado de Abastos is the largest market in Oaxaca.

SUNDAY: Tlacolula, known for its ceramics.

CONSULATES IN OAXACA

The main consulate office in Oaxaca is the office of the Oaxaca Consular Corps, located on the second floor of Hidalgo 817, Suite 5, one block from the Zocalo. You will often find Wolfgang Wilczek Westphal in the office. He is the German consul and president of the Oaxaca Consular Corps. The United States, Roberta French, Consular Agent. Ph. 6-06-54, 6-42-39

Canada and Great Britain, Valerié Sommers, Representative, Ph. 6-56-00

Spain, Manuel Alonzo Serrano, Consul, Ph:5-00-31, 5-35-25.

France, Manuel González Valle, Consul, PH: 6-35-22,6-35-20.

Italian Consul and Vice President of the Oaxaca Consular Corps. Alfredo Greganti Felici. Ph: 6-50-58,5-31-15,5-46-55

Looking for reading matter in english and Oaxaca Times

"THE NEWS"

Flown in daily from México City and distributed by better hotels and some news stands 10:00 am. (mas o menos) daily. One source, in the zocalo, corner of Trujano and Miguel Cabrera Current price (always subject to change) 1100 pesos. If they're sold out, have no fear; un muchacho will probably visit your table at one of the outdoor restaurants surrounding the zocalo. You can bargain and end up paying 1600 pesos.

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Gurrerero # 104, Tel: 6-42-43, Hours: 9:30-2:00 and/or 4:00-8:00. New and used paperbacks (mostly popular American novels); plus, selection of books in English on Mexican history and culture. "Trade-in" your own books.

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Hidalgo #807 (two doors from American Express) Tel: 6-28-85. Hours: 9:00-1:30 and/or 4:00-7:30, daily except Sunday. Current periodicals, Time, Newsweek, Vogue, etc., plus some paperbacks.

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ON THE ROAD AGAIN *Vega del Sol*



I was fortunate on my return trip by bus from Tuxtepec to Oaxaca to have as a seat partner a young bilingual (Spanish/Chinanteco) school teacher, who made the long trip very enjoyable. We subsequently became friends and he invited me to spend a weekend in his hometown, Vega del Sol.

I left Oaxaca early on a Saturday morning traveling up and over the mountains towards Tuxtepec and at about 1:00 p.m. we arrived in Valle Nacional where my friend was waiting for me.

Ringed by mountains and rivers and with a tropical climate, the Valle Nacional area was a vast prison without bars and dumping ground for political prisoners during the reign of Porfirio Diaz, at the turn of the century. "You checked in, but you didn't check out" as the saying goes.

We boarded a local bus and travelled for about half an hour before getting off in the middle of nowhere. We then walked for about two miles along a dirt road passing an occasional farm and many cultivated plots of land. Suddenly we arrived at a wide and swift running river with a sandy beach. On the other side I could see a rowboat guided by a man with a long pole and in about fifteen minutes he expertly guided the boat across the river and reached the bank where we were waiting. We piled into the small craft and away we went against the current until we reached the beach on the other side.

After walking about 100 yards we reached Vega del Sol. For a moment I thought I was back in Samoa. The streets are all very wide and covered with grass, almost like a giant lawn. The houses are very spacious, most with thatched palm roofs, the lower sections being of split bamboo. Coconut palms, jasmine, bouganvillea, hibiscus and other tropical plants are everywhere. Every house seems to have chickens, turkeys, ducks,

pigs and at least one horse.

Vega del Sol has two main natural springs, the largest being Tzul-Zul, which resembles a volcano crater ringed with palm trees. The water is a beautiful clear blue-green and very cold. Since the village has no running water these springs are the source of all the water used aside from rainwater which is collected in barrels.

There are no frills here. A government store sells basic necessities and a few smaller ones have beer, candy and aguardiente. Most all of the 3000 inhabitants are pure Chinanteco and use this language exclusively, however, most of the younger people are bilingual.

There are three schools and one Catholic church which celebrates mass every two or three weeks depending on the schedule of the travelling priest.

The food is also very basic: tortillas, onions, tomatos, chiles, corn, fowl and pork.

The main source of income seems to be the gathering of "Hule" - the liquid rubber trapped from the trees which are everywhere, though some villagers commute daily to jobs in Valle Nacional. I took several long walks and watched a football game (Vega del

Sol vs La Rinconada) for which the entire opposing team arrived on horseback.

Early Monday morning accompanied by my friend we retraced our steps back to Valle Nacional to wait for the arrival of the Tuxtepec/Oaxaca bus.

Lo and Behold, a pickup truck stopped and it was a friend of mine returning to Oaxaca from Loma Bonita. We made the journey in 3 hours, saving me almost 4 hours of bus travel. Que casualidad!

It was a trip back in time and I was touched by the kindness and simplicity of the people.

Travel Info.

Hotels: None
Restaurants: None
Night Lite: None.

WEATHER

October, 68.58°; November, 67.68°; December, 65.70° (° Fahrenheit). The rainy season is over. You'll may need a light sweater, sometimes it gets a little cool at night.

MOVIES

There are 8 or 9 movie houses in Oaxaca, mostly in the downtown area. The films shown are usually American or Mexican with an occasional Spanish, English or French feature. Most all of the American films are shown with sub-titles (as opposed to being dubbed into Spanish as are most U.S. T.V. shows). You will see a lot of American films featuring unknown stars which are so bad they have never been released in the U.S.

All theatres change the same price; 2,000.00 pesos, which is extremely inexpensive. Films change every few days & some houses have double features.

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