



Oaxaca Times

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MAY IS THE MONTH OF FIESTAS



May is one of the most exciting months of the year in Oaxaca. We celebrate Labor Day on May 1, and Holy Cross Day on May 3rd. This commemorates the discovery by St. Helena, in 326, of the cross on which our Lord was crucified. Large crosses are adorned with flowers and honored by special fiestas. We continue with the commemoration of the victory of the Mexican forces over the French army on May 5th; Mother's Day is May 10th and Teacher's Day May 15th. During May there are fiestas held in Tehuantepec, Juchitan, Salina Cruz and Espinal every Saturday until June. These fiestas are called "Mayordomias". A group of people is specially selected to take charge of the organization of the festivities. They will sell their animals, tools and other possessions even though it may mean their financial ruin. However, they will have their reward as they walk at the head of the procession knowing that everyone is admiring and envying them and secretly hoping that it will be said that their fiesta was the most successful yet. One neighborhood after another honors its patron saint for an entire week with feasting, dancing and parades. Though the fiestas are similar to those found in many other parts of the country, nowhere else are there Indian women even remotely resembling the fabulous Tehuanas. Tall, willowy and graceful, they look like bronze

Gree goddesses, and their beautiful carriage is the envy of many an aspiring fashion model. In the matriarchal society over which these proud beauties preside, the men are practically useless individuals

They are relegated to performing the menial chores around the house, acting as messengers, and siring the offspring. They are seldom entrusted with money and are never permitted to run any of the business establishments or to handle the family finances.

The dress of the Tehuanas is one of the most awe-inspiring to be found anywhere and may be instrumental in keeping the men in a place of secondary importance. The skirts are long and full and of brightly colored cotton print. At the bottom of each skirt is a white ruffle, twelve to sixteen inches long, starched and pleated with thousands of minute creases that would drive the most exacting laundress mad. The short, square blouses or huipils are of vivid red, purple, yellow, or blue decorated with elaborate geometric designs. For ornaments they use necklaces, bracelets, and earrings of gold coins, and it is not unusual to see a Tehuana walking down the street decked out in a thousand dollars worth of gold pieces.

For fiestas the Tehuanas wear skirts of silk, satin, or velvet embroidered with bright-colored flowers copied from Chinese shawls and ending in the same pleated ruffle. They use matching huipils and wear a white lace headdress which is the most enchantingly becoming of feminine adornments.

Actually it is a child's dress with a large ruffled collar and wide pleated border at the bottom of the skirt and sleeves. When attending mass it is pulled completely over the head and shoulders so that the face is tightly framed in the neck of the dress with the ruffled collar standing out like the white petals of a daisy. The rest of the time it is worn bottom side up with the wide pleated border sweeping back from the face. Either way it is lovely, and the costume lives up to its reputation as the most beautiful regional

dress in Mexico. At fiesta time a bamboo or palm-thatched pavilion is erected near the house of the mayordomo and decorated with banana trees, bunches of green coconuts, branches of weeping willow, and rows of little tissue paper flags. Usually there is a marimba orchestra and also a dance band, and modern dances are mixed with those typical of the region such as the sandunqa, llorona

cont'd on page 7

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Golfina Turtles

Pot / By Ian Dryden
 Investigación del autor y de / Research
 by the author and Leticia Merino
 Fotos del autor / Photos by the author



There is no restaurant. There is no hotel. No handicraft store, not even a taco stand. Playa Escobilla is that rarity in this day and age: a virgin beach. A vulture stretches its wings, a sand crab scuttles to its hole, a flight of pelicans glides along the contours of the swell and the waves roll in to break with solemn dignity on the steeply shelving strand. It is a timeless vista and a privilege to witness. The beach faces due south. Nothing between it and Antartica. It stretches for 15 kms-east to west; somewhere between Puerto Angel and Escondido, in the state of Oaxaca. It is here that every year, between July and November, is enacted one of the great marvels of nature: the "arribada" of the sea turtle.

FIFTY THOUSAND NIGHT VISITORS

The gray whale breeds in the waters of Baja California, the Monarch butterflies congregate in their millions in Michoacan and the turtles have chosen Playa Escobilla as their favored nesting site, second only to Gahirmatha beach in the state of Orissa, India. The early riser, greeting the dawn at water's edge, can see the turtles. Small black dots, appearing and vanishing just beyond the surf-line. Careful observation will reveal that there are not just a few turtle-cut there. As far as the eye can see the small dots keep bobbing into view. There must be thousands out there! As indeed there are. In 1988 there were five "arribadas"; five occasions when, over the course of three or four nights, usually during the first or last lunar quarters, they arrived en masse. Up to 50 000 at a time.

They come, usually at night, laboring up the beach; their flippers, used like oars to row themselves 50 meters across the sand, leaving their distinctive tracks.

The word turtle comes from the Latin word tartaruchus meaning demon and, at the same time, derives from the Greek tartarykhos, hell, and ekho, to live. These reptiles belong to the order of the Testudinata and their size and weight range from less than ten centimeters to two meters, and from a few grams to half a ton. There are the land varieties- claw-footed tortoises, and there are both freshwater and marine turtles with palmate feet that turn into fins. As for their eating habits, they can be frugivorous, omnivorous or predators.

BESIDE THE SEA: EGGS LIKE GOLF BALLS

Our knowledge commences at the moment the adult female emerges from the ocean, sometime after eight o'clock at night, between the months of July and November. A walk along the beach around midnight will reveal the distinctive tracks emerging from the tide-line and heading up towards the drier, warmer sand.

Follow these tracks with your flashlight and you will eventually come upon the nest site. If our turtle has finished its business for the night there will be nothing but a large, flattened area of sand and a second set of tracks leading back to the ocean. However, if we are lucky, we will be rewarded by the sight of a golfina-as the species is known in Mexico-starting to dig its nest. Using its rear flippers, it carefully scoops out the sand to form a narrow

hole about 35-40 cm. deep. Settling over this hole and completely covering it, she starts to lay and, for about fifteen minutes, will be totally absorbed in the task of laying about a hundred, white golfball-sized eggs. These she then covers; rocking and thumping her body up and down to compact the sand. She will then move in circles over an area about two meters in diameter attempting to camouflage the nest site before setting out to cross the beach once more on her way back to the relative security of the ocean.

The eggs will, if fertile and undisturbed hatch in about 45 days and then the young will emerge and make their perilous migration to the sea. The vultures will be waiting, as will other seabirds, crabs and the ubiquitous dogs. It is estimated that only four in every thousand survive to adulthood.



OLIVE RIDLEY MAY DISAPPEAR

It should come as no surprise, at this point, to learn that the Olive Ridley turtle is in danger of extinction and is a protected species. Pronatura, a private, Mexico based, environmental group, estimates that the population of this species in Oaxaca has dropped by 80 percent in the last 45 years. Eight percent in 45 years! At the current rate it will take eleven years to eliminate the species.

walking is the ideal way to get around Oaxaca. The colonial heart of the city is laid out in a simple grid, and all major 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 Alcalá from 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: (Basilica 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 Alcalá 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 Alcalá 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 colectivo 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, Valeriá Sommers, Representative, Ph. 6-56-00

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

France, Manuel González Val, 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.

"LIBRERIA UNIVERSITARIA" Gurerrero # 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.

*YOU CAN GET THE OAXACA TIMES IN ALL THIS PLACES.

"OAXACA LENDING LIBRARY" (BIBLIOTECA)

Alcala #301. Hours: 10:00-2:00 and/or 4:00-6:00 (no phone). Substantial selection: Novels, art, history, philosophy, etc. Deposit required: 20,000 pesos (about eight bucks) refundable on your departure. Have interesting "bulletin board" listing apartments for rent, etc.

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.

ANTHROPOLOGY & ARCHEOLOGY BOOKS

For professionals and serious students only. Private collection offered for research by Señor Cecil Welte: Mon., Wed., Friday: 9:30-12:30. Centrally located on Alcalá. Call for appointment: 6-54-17.

Oaxacan personalities

Ing. Arturo López Ramos

This young and intelligent politician is of Mixteco origin and was born in the small town of Juxtlahuaca. His eagerness and enthusiasm for his job have pleased Oaxacans since he is Director of Tourist Development both on the state and federal level, no small task.

After finishing high school in Huajuapán de León, he came to Oaxaca City to further his education, and his first impressions were that of a gloomy old city filled with badly maintained colonial buildings. After travelling to Europe, the U.S. and Canada his first impressions did a complete about turn and he marvels at how different Oaxaca is from those places and how the traditions and cultures of many diverse groups have been maintained, making it unique both in Mexico and the rest of the world. We asked Mr. López about the next steps in the development of tourism in Oaxaca. He stated that the increasing interest in the tropical coastal regions of Huatulco, Puerto Escondido, and Puerto Ángel, etc. merit further development utilizing and encouraging foreign investment. This plus a program of urban services and small business loans will have a big impact on the state in the coming years.



When asked about complaints of smog and excess noise due to strikes and protests, he stated: "Oaxaca belongs to the Oaxacan people, it is a living city with problems like other cities and all these issues will have to be solved by the citizens of Oaxaca by means of the democratic process." He went on to say: "Tourism can also be a risk a risk that could damage our culture and tranquility and any further development must also include safeguards to preserve our heritage."

He would also like to see better maintenance of colonial monuments (many have been transformed into commercial establishments), an improved transit system, and a work-

able policy for price control with regards to hotels and other tourist facilities.

Mr. Ramos has confidence that the new program for tourist development will not only increase the number of visitors to the state, but will at the same time preserve all the cultural riches which make Oaxaca so special.

If you would like to write to Mr. Arturo López Ramos, his address is:

Dirección de Turismo de Oaxaca
Esq. 5 de Mayo y Morelos
Centro C.P. 68000
Oaxaca, Oaxaca, Mexico

CULTURAL EVENTS

- 2-31 Art Show at Rufino Tamayo Art School-Murguía # 306.
- 3-11 Folk Art - Mazatecos Ethnic Group-Same Place as above.
- 3-11 Dances of the Mazatecos, in front of the Cathedral church.
- 7 Musical Concert - Primavera Orchestra - Guelaguetza Auditorium 7:30 p.m. free entrance.
- 12 Miss Guleeshoba Zapotec contest - ISSSTE Cultural Center, on Alcalá St.
- 13 From 11-4 p.m. Cultural Activities of Tehuantepec Alameda de León.
- 18 Vela Tehuantepec (Huge Dance) Salon los Candiles 9:00 p.m.
- 19-20 Mexican Dances - Guelaguetza Auditorium 6 p.m.
- 20 Folk - Parade of Tehuantepec - Principal Streets of the City, 12:30.
- 25 Youth- Chorus - Plaza de la Danza 6 p.m.
- 26 Musical Concert-Libertad Orchestra-Andador Turístico on Alcalá St. 7 p.m.
- 27 Musical Concert-Primavera Orchestra - San Felipe del Agua 7 p.m.
- 30 Musical Concert-Primavera Orchestra- Plaza de la Danza 7 p.m.



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