



# Oaxaca Times

Oaxaca's English Tourist Newspaper

VOLUME 4, No. 41

December-1992

FREE

## Christmas in Oaxaca

As the Christmas season draws closer, the visitor to Oaxaca is likely to see, on the streets or in some shop windows, images of Santa Claus. This accommodation tourism, however, has not affected the spirit of the Oaxacan celebration of "Navidad".

As the word "Nativity" suggests, the reason for the celebration of Christmas is, the birth of Jesus.

It is not by chance, therefore, that children play a primary role in the popular Christmas celebrations of Oaxaca, especially in the neighborhoods of the city and in the mountain towns.

For families, neighborhoods, and entire villages the celebration of Christmas begins with the "posadas", nine days before the 25th of December. A posada is a folkloric representation of the journey of Mary and Joseph to their native town in search of a place for Mary to give birth to the child. In popular tradition, however, the posadas express an identification of the poor and humble people with the poor Jesus, whose family could not even find a decent place for him to be born.

Each night of the posadas in a given community, there is a "madrina" (godmother) who, having the means to provide coffee and buns or tamales for a large group of people (including many hungry children), agrees to receive the "peregrinos" (pilgrims) in her home. A procession is formed, including a young boy dressed as Joseph and a young girl dressed as Mary, who carry with them statues of Mary and Joseph.

At various houses a traditional song is sung, asking for posada (a place to stay). The group is refused at three homes, recalling the refusal



of housing to Mary and Joseph as described in the Bible, until finally at the home of the madrina the welcome song is sung and the group is invited in for coffee or a corn meal drink and tamales.

Even the food is significant for this celebration: corn, which is the base both for the atole drink and for tamales, signifies life and God's blessing for the Oaxacan people. Since the tamales are often made with a paste of frijoles, this food even today represents the staple of the diet of the poor: beans and corn. If the means of the madrina allow, a "piñata" is hung for the children, which when broken pours forth its fruits and sweets and nuts as a symbol of God's riches to be shared by all.

The evening of the last posada, on the 24th of December, is dedicated to the child Jesus. In the town church or chapel, the creche

"nacimiento" is prepared, with out the image of the child Jesus. This special image is kept at the home of the madrina, where the people gather at about 11 P.M. to accompany the image of the Child in a procession, with songs and prayers, to the church. The procession is planned to arrive at the church at midnight for the celebration of the "Misa del Gallo" (Midnight Mass).

The Oaxacan sense of Christmas is symbolized not in the purchase of a gift for a loved one but rather in the "abrazo", the embrace which means peace, reconciliation, and the desire for God's blessings in the coming year.

On Christmas Day after the Oaxacan family has asked a blessing for their own image of the child Jesus and placed it with reverence on the family altar, the Christmas is celebrated with the traditional food and drink of the region.

Continued on page 2

Enjoy learning  
SPANISH

Enroll  
Today!



Instituto de Comunicación  
y Cultura, A.C.

HOME OF THE OAXACA TIMES  
SCHOOL FAX: 91(951) 6-32-65  
307 ALCALA ST. 2nd. FLOOR.  
TEL. (951) 634 43

4 BLOCKS  
FROM  
ZOCALO



# CHRISTMAS ...

# NO NEED TO SAY 'NO SE' LEARN SPANISH TODAY

It is interesting to note that, although turkey is eaten along with chicken in many parts of rural Oaxaca, there's no special Christmas dish.

Oaxacans, of course, have barely recovered from the excitement of the posadas when they are thinking of the coming of the "Tres Reyes Magos" (Three Wise Men) on January 6th, the twelfth day after Christmas. This is the traditional day for giving gifts, especially to the children.

According to the tradition, a child will leave outside his door on the night of January 5th an old pair of shoes (or his only pair of shoes or huaraches) so that the three kings who brought gifts to Jesus will also leave something for him or her. Most often gift will be something sorely needed a new pair of shoes, a shirt, a dress or perhaps a toy. This tradition of the Feast of the Three Kings is actually more universal and even antedates the celebration of Christmas.

## MEXICAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHRISTMAS

Among the long list of contributions Mexico has made to Christmas celebrations every where are:

### PAVO (Turkey)

Early in the 16th Century, the emperor Moctezuma lived in great splendor. As a special treat, Moctezuma dined on the Hueyxtotl bird. Hueyxtotl, also known as guajolotes, pavos, or turkeys have been an indispensable part of special Christmas dishes in Mexico ever since. Turkeys were exported to Europe by the Spanish conquistadores and evidence of the spread of the popularity of the bird can be found on dinner tables at Christmas and other days of celebration all over the globe.

### CHOCOLATE (Chocolate)

Cocoa beans, grown in Mexico only in the states Tabasco and Chiapas, were so valuable they were used as money by the Olmecs, the Chontales, the Aztecs, the Zapotecs and many other prehispanic societies. The beans were of course, also used to concoct the ever popular beverage, hot chocolate. The Spanish conquistadores developed a special fondness for chocolate and shipped enormous quantities of the beans back to Europe.

In many parts of the world, Christmas is celebrated with special treats made with chocolate.

### FLOR DE NAVIDAD (Christmas flower)

Christmas The flower or "nochebuena" was adopted by the Mexicans especially for the festivities of Christmas to decorate the "Nacimientos" (Nativity scene) at the beginning of the 17th century.

In the wintertime there are many schools offering Spanish classes to foreigners. Beware! Many of these schools are out to make fast money, prices do not necessarily mean quality education. When choosing a school, be sure to select one where teachers are university trained to teach Spanish as a second language.

In Mexico university degrees are very much a status symbol. But having a degree in foreign affairs, chemistry or anthropology does not qualify one to teach Spanish.

Yolanda Garcia C., Director and Founder of the Institute, lived in the U.S. and has been on the Faculty of Languages at the Benito Juarez

University in Oaxaca for many years. Under her able direction, the Institute has expanded to offer English Tourism classes for Mexicans working in the industry and publication of Oaxaca Times to assist Oaxaca's visitors.

The Institute of Communication and Culture meets all the requirements for quality education at a fair price. Please contact us at 6-3443 or visit our school at:

307-12 Alcalá St.  
Oaxaca, Oax. 68000  
México Ph. 6-34-43



Madrina del Niño. Estampa de un periódico de fines del siglo XIX. Lámina No. 12

## OFFICIAL WELCOME

Dec. 7 1992

Esteemed Visitors:

We hope you will receive this most cordial welcome to our beautiful and regal City of Oaxaca. Oaxaca has been declared by UNESCO "Cultural Home of Humanity," recognized for her extraordinary archaeological wealth, colonial, historical, and cultural. I invite you to travel around and to enjoy the traditional Oaxacan hospitality.

Cordially,

Arq. Martín Ruiz Camino

Director of Tourism Development





# Holiday season here a never-ending fiesta

You better rest up, not because santa is coming but because Christmas in Oaxaca is about to begin. Dozens of fiesta, concerts, and other activities are planned. You don't want to miss any of them. Major festivities are: **VIRGIN OF LA SOLEDAD** This fiesta, which honors the city's patron saint, will be held on Friday, December 18th, at the Plaza de la Soledad in front of the Soledad Church on Independencia. Mass celebrated at noon, 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8. The festivities will begin at 8 p.m. but you should plan to get there no later than 6 p.m. if you want a good spot. There will be fireworks, music, and processions but perhaps the most colorful event will be a cascade of fire from a "castle" in the plaza. **NIGHT OF THE RADISHES** This uniquely Oaxaca event will be held on the Zocalo on the evening of December 23rd. Oaxaqueños will build Christmas scenes and sculptures out of radishes leaves, fruits, and fall flowers. The displays will be ready by 8 p.m. and there will be music from the bandstand. At 11 p.m. there will be fireworks. Don't miss the food booths which will be set up next to the cathedral. With the purchase of a fritter with a bowl of syrup, you get the "pleasure" of breaking the dish, something like a Greek wedding. You will see a heap of broken pottery near the cathedral. **CHRISTMAS EVE** "calendas" will be the big event on Christmas Eve. catholic churches will each have a procession with floats featuring nativity scenes, singers, women in native dress, bands, fireworks, and giant puppets. The processions will start at the churches around 8 p.m. then wind around neighboring streets and the Zocalo until they return to their churches for 11 p.m. Mass.



Christmas Eve Mass will be held at 11:30 at the cathedral of Oaxaca. At midnight there will be a grand finale of the Christmas festivities with music and fireworks on Zocalo.

**CHRISTMAS DAY** Most stores and restaurants will be closed on Christmas Day, Friday day, Dec. 25th as well as Saturday, Dec. 26. Hotels and some zocalo restaurants, however, will be open for business. There will be nativity displays on the zocalo and on the Alcalá tourist promenade leading to Santo Domingo Church and some entertainment on the zocalo.

**NEW YEAR'S EVE** Major hotels and discos will offer New Year's Eve dinners and dances. Mass will be at 11 p.m. at all churches except the cathedral at 11:30 p.m. There will be plenty of action on the Zocalo that evening too with music, fireworks and much merry-making.

**NEW YEAR'S DAY** Again, most stores and restaurants will be closed on New Year's Day, Jan. 1 and Saturday, Jan. 2, except for hotels and some Zocalo diners. You will probably appreciate a quiet day to recuperate from all the activities of the previous two weeks.

Just a reminder: the holiday greetings are "Feliz Navidad" (fee- lease nah-ve-dod) for Christmas and "Prospero Año Nuevo" (praspere-on Ahn-yo Nu-wave-oh) for New Year's.

## BIENVENIDOS AMIGOS

**OAXACA TIMES** aims to provide the English-speaking visitor with valuable information which will enhance and enrich his/her stay. Our writers have worked hard to put together a valuable publication. We need your feedback though. Write call (6-34-43) or come by our office (Alcalá 307-12 with your tips and recommendations about Oaxaca. We also urge you to patronize our advertisers and to tell them that you saw their ads. Without their very valuable support, we cannot provide this publication free.

Our office is only 4 blocks north of the Zocalo at the Institute of Communication and Culture, A. C. Come by and get acquainted. Bring us your input. But, above all, enjoy beautiful Oaxaca and have a "Feliz Navidad y Prospero Año Nuevo."

Yolanda García C.  
Publisher.



*Hotel Las Rosas*

A cozy  
ambience just a few  
steps from the Zocalo

112 Trujano  
PH. 4-22-17

Oaxaca, Oax  
68000

**= "ALFA" =**

**The photo store**

*One hour quality and economy processing of  
prints & slides*

**213 Guerrero st      T 4-49-67**  
**Oaxaca, Oax.**

**MUSEO DE ARTE  
CONTEMPORANEO  
DE OAXACA**



RUFINO TAMAYO

**ABIERTO (OPEN): 10:30 A.M. A (TO) 8:00 P.M.**  
**TODOS LOS DIAS - EVERY DAY**  
**MARTES: CERRADO - TUESDAY: CLOSED**  
**DONATION SUGGESTED**  
**M. Alcalá 202    Teléfono 6 84 99**