



# Oaxaca Times

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FREE

## Cochineal: The Dye To Die For

In the pre-Hispanic world of Mesoamerica, each individual, from common laborers to royalty, wore fabrics that signaled his social status.

Long before the Spanish landed in the New World, Zapotec Indians from the valley of Oaxaca were producing dye from the cochineal insect, whose brilliant red hues were prized by the Aztecs for their robes. Cochineal insects look like small, gray seeds (thus their Spanish name *grana* which means "seed") and thousands of the dried bodies of the tiny insects are ground to a powder and toiled in a water solution with lime juice and certain dried leaves to make dye. Although synthetic dyes replaced cochineal centuries later, they did not produce such brilliant hues or achieve such long-lasting colors (one Oaxaca weaver has a piece of cochineal-dyed red wool which is more than three centuries old; its red color is nearly as dazzling as the day it was made). The hand-woven rugs for which Oaxaca is known worldwide are often colored with natural dyes but few weavers today know the art or take the time to prepare the scarlet cochineal dyes.

Cochineal could be just another of the

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MR. IGNACIO J. DEL RIO DUENAS & HIS FAMILY IN THE NOPAL FIELDS OF HIS "COCHINILLA RANCH".

arts lost to history but, fortunately the engineer Ignacio Javier del Rio Duenas and his family have opened a ranch where the insects which are the basis for this dye are grown. The small, wild cochineal lives on prickly pear and similar cactuses but the slightly larger form, cultivated domestically, depends on human care for seasonal protection from the cold and thrives specifically on cactuses called nopal in México. The ranch, Rancho de Grana Cochineal, is located only 15-20 minutes from the city of Oaxaca in the village of San Bartolo Coyotepec. Visitors are welcomed to the ranch to learn and see the cultivation of cochineal; there is no charge for the tour and various souvenirs of the ranch are offered for sale. To reach the site, follow the arrow saying "Grana Cochinilla" in the village of Sn. Bartolo Coyotepec you will be traveling in royal footsteps when you go as Prince Charles of England visited the ranch during his visit to Oaxaca last February.

In the pre-Hispanic world of Mesoamerica, each individual, from common laborers to royalty, wore fabrics that signaled his social status. Dyes were the principal basis of this hierarchy of clothing and the cochineal dyes of the Zapotecs were the most valued. Indeed, the war-mongering Aztecs did not enslave or annihilate all their captives. If a captured people could provide a valuable profit for the Aztecs, they were merely exploited by extracting a periodic tribute from them. The highland people of Oaxaca thus escaped captivity by providing cochineal and other dyes such as indigo, and finely woven textiles. During Spanish colonial times, the *grana* was shipped from Mexico to Spain where it became the rage of Europe. It was ranked second only to gold as the most desired commodity imported from New Spain. As an example of its popularity, a three-ship fleet that sank off the

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# CULTURAL EVENTS

## Cochineal: The Dye To Die For

JANUARY

Mexico maintained its monopoly of cochineal until 1777 when a French naturalist managed to enter Mexico secretly, travel on foot to Oaxaca, and collect several cactus pads with their insects intact, then return to the coast and smuggle this living booty to Haiti. There the French cultivated a lucrative commerce in cochineal for merchants in Paris for a number of years. Although many South American countries subsequently produced cochineal, only Peru and the Canary Islands continue to produce the dye commercially for export. The dye has been used in the food, cosmetic, and pharmaceutical industries, coloring such diverse products as pork sausage, pies, dried fish and shrimp, jams, jellies, ice cream, canned fruit, soft drinks, candies, cider, vinegar, medicinal pills, laboratory stains, lipstick and rouge, and the famed maraschino cherry. Cochineal has gradually been replaced by synthetic red substitutes (red dye no. 2 and red dye no. 40). These substitutes have not been problem-free, however. Almost all of them have caused cancer in laboratory tests and are therefore suspect for human use. These tests have caused manufacturers to turn their attention to the biological world for safe color additives. Cochineal, already approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the United States and time-proven safe, is now being reconsidered for more extensive use. The Oaxaca cochineal ranch will be ready when the demand increases.

To find rugs died with cochineal dyes, you should travel to Teotitlán de Valle on the road to Mitla and seek out Isaac Vasquez, the most prestigious master weaver and dyer in the contemporary Zapotec culture. Other weavers have abandoned cochineal dye as too time-consuming and use synthetic dyes or other natural dyes which do not have the brilliancy or long-lasting properties of cochineal.



PRINCE CHARLES VISITING THE COCHINILLA RANCH.

### EXHIBITIONS.

1-31.

"Copal Sculptures"  
Contemporary Art Museum  
Alcala # 202. Free entrance.

1-31.

"Photographs".  
From 10:30 to 20:00 - Graphic Arts  
Institute. Alcala # 507. Free entrance.

7.

"Paintings by "Rodolfo Morales"  
"Art Gallery of Oaxaca" - Murguia # 1  
Free entrance.

7-30.

20:00 Paintings by "Vicente Lopez P."  
- "Rufino Tamayo" Gallery of the  
C.C.C. Free entrance.

27.

Photographs of Mixes children  
Library of the Estate - 19:00  
Free entrance.

### TRADITIONAL HOLIDAYS.

25.

Holiday Of "San Pablo".  
Place: San Pablo Etla 15 min. from the city  
All day - Free entrance. Music, Dances etc.

### Music

22.

"Concert of the Primavera Orchestra"  
Theater of the Cultural Center - 22:00  
Entrance: N\$ 30.00.

29.

"Jazz"  
Jose Vasconcelos Auditorium. Ex-Com  
of Carmen. Entrance: N\$30.00.

From January 1st to February 28

All Wednesdays

MARIMBA MUSIC KIOSK of the Zoo  
Monday, Wednesday, Friday & Sat.  
STATE BAND OF OAXACA-Tuesday 10  
7 pm - Sunday concerts: 12:30pm  
Cultural Activities-In front of  
Santo Domingo church-6pm

### TRADITIONAL FESTIVITIES

2.

Candelaria's Day (Blessing of the baby  
by all of the churches. All day long)

5

Mexican Constitution Day (Banks shall  
closed)

14

Valentine's Day

16

Ash Wednesday

18

First Friday of Lent Season. Stroll with  
music. El Llano park - 8 am.

24

Mexican Flag's Day

25

Traditional stroll. El Llano park - 8 am.



FEBRUARY

# Our sixth anniversary



Welcome, Reader, to the sixth anniversary of the "Oaxaca Times". Oaxaca, Mexico's best kept secret, is a beautiful, clean, colonial city with friendly people and a nearly perfect climate.

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 to our office (M. Alcalá 307) with your tips and recommendations about Oaxaca. We also urge you to patronize our advertisers and tell them that you saw their ads. Without their very valuable support, we cannot provide this publication for free.

We would also like to invite you to come to our language school and learn Spanish in a setting beloved by our students. The peace and quiet of our XVI century building provides the atmosphere that you need to study. Also, the patience and experience of our Oaxacan teachers certified in Spanish as a second language, will guide your learning experience.

Our School 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 our beautiful Oaxaca.

Yolanda Garcia  
Publisher.

## KEEP IN TOUCH WITH OAXACA

The OAXACA TIMES offers you the opportunity to keep in touch with the activities in Oaxaca with a subscription. One Year (Twelve issues) sent to the U. S. or Canada by surface mail costs \$ 20 U.S. annually, arrange for subscription in person or by mail our office at the institute.

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# BEYOND THE CITY

Attractions are listed according to their direction from Oaxaca.

**MONTE ALBAN:** 10km (6mi) west, on an artificially flattened mountaintop. One of the most important archaeological sites in Mexico. Large ceremonial plaza surrounded by the ruins of religious and public buildings. Small museum, cafeteria, shops. Tues-Sun 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

**SANTA MARIA ATZOMPA:** (or Atzompa) about 8km (4mi) northwest, a short distance off Hwy. 190. The village produces a green-glazed pottery and unglazed pottery figures.

**NOTE:** Here, and at other craft-oriented villages, stop at any home or shop that gives indications that the craft is practiced within, or simply ask the way to artisan's homes.

**CHUILAPAN DE GUERRERO:** About 14 km (9 mi) southwest on the Zaachila road. Contains what was once the Dominican Monastery of St. James the Apostle, begun in 1555 but never finished. Much of the structure stands roofless. Daily 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

**Zaachila:** 5 km (3 mi) beyond Cuilapan. Zaachila was the Zapotec capital when it fell to the Spanish in 1521. Little of the archaeological zone has been explored, but a palace and two tombs can be visited. Daily 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

**SAN BARTOLO COYOTEPEC:** (or Coyotepec) About 15 km (9 mi) south on Hwy 175. The village is famous for its pottery. Valente Nieto, the son of Dona Rosa, who is credited with the black pottery, still practices the craft and gives demonstrations for visitors Fri. 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

**SANTO TOMAS JALIEZA:** About 10 km (6 mi) beyond Coyotepec, off Hwy 175. A center for the weaving of cotton belts, sashes, table runners, place mats, and other items. The products are sold from a central location across from the village church.

**OCOTLAN DE MORELOS:** About 17 km (10 mi) beyond Coyotepec on Hwy 175. Market town and the home of the Aguilar Family, producers of clay figures painted in bright colors.

**SANTA MARIA DEL TULE:** About 14 km (8 mi) east-southeast of Oaxaca on Hwy 190. Its main attraction is a gigantic Ahuehete, or Mexican Cypress, in front of the village church. The tree is estimated to be about 2,000 years old.

**TLACOHACHUAYA:** About 20 km east-southeast of Oaxaca off Hwy 190. 17th century Church of San Jeronimo and native artists.

**TEOTITLAN DEL VALLE:** 2 km (1 mi) from Tlacoahuaya and about 3 km (2 mi) from the highway. Main wool weaving center. Local crafts people produce ponchos, tapestries in traditional and modern designs.

**TLACOLULA DE MATAMOROS:** About 10 km (3 mi) beyond Lambienco. Principal attraction is the 16th century Church of Our Lady of the Rosary. Tlacolula.

**YAGUL ARCHAEOLOGICAL ZONE:** About 2 km (2 mi) farther along Hwy 190 (2 mi) off the road. Large archaeological zone includes a large ball court and the Patios. Daily 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

**SAN PABLO VILLA DE MITLA:** About 5 km (3 mi) beyond Yagul. Hwy 190. Then 4 km (2 mi) down a turnoff for lightweight woolen and cotton goods which are sold in a large market area. Church. Center for the production of an intoxicating drink distilled from the maguay plant.

**MITLA ARCHAEOLOGICAL ZONE:** Remains of a large Zapotec population that had been influenced by the Maya by the time of the Spanish conquest. Groups of ruins, the most interesting is the Group of the Columns. Group of ruins open daily 8:30 a.m. - 6 p.m.

There are several villages outside Oaxaca which are famous for their crafts. Even if you do not intend to buy anything, going to any of these villages can be a very interesting experience as each village is unique and offers something different to offer.

There are various ways to get to the villages. You can catch a bus at the second station, which is located next to the Mercado de Abastos. Or, you can take a colectivo (collectivos are also located at the Mercado de Abastos). A minibus service is located on the sixth block of Armenta y Lopez. The bus goes to Ocotlan, Coyotepec and Miahuatlan and Santo Toma's Jalisco. On the day of the week there is a market in another of the nearby villages.

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