



Oaxaca Times

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Free

Lunes del cerro

They come from all corners of the State of Oaxaca to the hill at El Fortín. Mixtecs, Zapotecs, Popolocas, Chontales, Chinantecs, Tlaxiotes, Mixes and members of other ethnic groups. Their festive clothing is a multicolored tapestry on the slopes of the hill. And this is a festive holiday. But it's not any old holiday; we're talking about Guelaguetza, an ancient ritual practiced by the ancestors of the people who come to El Fortín. Guelaguetza, in the Zapotec language means "mutual aid" or "offering," and represents high social consciousness because it involves giving one's fellows the product of one's labor and artistic efforts.

Guelaguetza or Monday of Cerro Fortín is celebrated in the foothills of El Fortín in the city of Oaxaca on the two days following the 18th of July, the anniversary of the death of Benito Juárez. Today it is the state's most important folklore event. In attendance for the celebration are representatives from Oaxaca's seven regions: the Sierra, the Ravine, Tlaxiotepec or Papaloapan, the Mixtec region, the coast, the Isthmus and the Valleys—who present lo-



"Tehuana" ("Rivas" Photo Collection)

cal authorities and distinguished guests with gifts or offering coffee and hats from the Coast; totopos (crispy tortilla pieces) from the Isthmus; palm-leaf place mats from Huajuapán de León in the Mixtec region; mezcal from the valleys... But their biggest gift is artistic: with unparalleled enthusiasm they perform dances and songs from each of their regions.

The origins of this festival are to be found in pre-hispanic times. The Zapotecs and Mixtecs who were distinguished by their heroism in battle performed a yearly celebration in honor of a supreme god (creator of all things) as well as other deities such as Zaagui (the Mixtec god of rain and fertility) and Pitao Cozobi (the Zapotec god of corn, both ethnic groups organized a festival in which they paid homage to their divinities in dances and songs,

executed with art and skill.

In 1495 the Zapotecs and Mixtecs were conquered by the Aztecs. Nevertheless, their rituals did not die out but instead gained importance, since the Aztecs adopted as their own deities Centéotl (god of agriculture) and Xilonen (goddess of

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the new corn), making their own offerings to these gods in the form of songs, dances and festivals in the eight month of their calendar,

which was called Ney tecuilhuhuitl. The Aztec's festivities merged with those of the Oaxacan peoples, and thus began the yearly celebration of a great festival in honor of the goddess Xilonen, bringing together the valley's important personages at Daninayaolani hill (known today as el Fortín).

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Lunes del cerro

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"Tehuanas" 1948 ("Rivas" Photo Collection)

When the Spaniards arrived, they tried to suppress these pagan rites, but it was no easy task convincing the Indians to abandon them. They continued gathering on the slopes of the hill. In 1700 Carmelite missionaries decided to build a church on the hill where the natives celebrated their festivals, attempting to replace these rituals with Christian rites in honor of the Virgin of Carmen on the 16th and 24th of July.

But from the first of these "new" celebrations, the Indians, after paying tribute to the God of their evangelizers, took to the streets in a veritable pagan masquerade. They danced to the beat of the sponaxtli (Indian percussion instrument) as one hundred young men, some dressed as Spaniards and oth-

ers as Indians, marched in a parade, followed by La Tarasca - a huge, fantastic papier-maché serpent. Things went on this way every year until 1741, when bishop Tomás Montaña decreed, "because of the fear inspired by the serpent," that it be replaced by mammoth puppets representing the races of humanity. These "giants," as they were called, appeared for the last time in 1882.



MOVIE Theaters



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For fifty years the festival on the hill was reduced to a simple fair with an infinite variety of local foods and snacks. But in 1930, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the proclamation of the city of Oaxaca, an attempt was made to revitalize the fiesta, organizing first the festival dancers

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Viajes Xochitlan



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Lunes del cerro

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from all seven regions of the state of Oaxaca. While the date of the celebration has changed, the state government of Oaxaca has continued its efforts to promote it.

During the presidency of Luis Echeverría an open auditorium was built on the slopes of El Fortín, and that is where the festival is now held.

It begins with the choosing of the young lady who will play the part of Centeocihuatl (the goddess of corn); a female representative of each region, dressed in regional costume, gives a speech - sometimes with the aid of a translator - about her area, and a jury elects the most "authentic" of the representatives. In the dancing plaza near the Iglesia de la Virgen de la Soledad (Church of the Virgin of Solitude), the history of Guelaguetza is presented: the Zapotec, Aztec and Hispanic eras through which the celebration has passed. Then comes the parade of the marmotas (giant paper dolls), the dragon, the zancudos - which dance on stilts as much as six feet high. Last but not least are the dances and songs of each of the seven regions. The festivities are capped off with a fireworks display.

Today, tourists from around the world come to the festival of Guelaguetza. Nevertheless, the dancers and singers continue to maintain the mysticism of their traditions, and in their dark smiling faces one can see the tenderness, gentleness and wisdom of the peoples.

Guelaguetza tickets can be purchased in any of the tourist offices located at:

Cinco de mayo street corner with Morelos • 607 Independencia Street.

Prices are: N\$ 150 in section "B" and N\$ 200 in section "A".

For more information call: 6-48-28

Written by Mary Lou Dabdoub. ■



"Mujer del valle de Oaxaca" ("Rivas" Photo Collection)

Oaxaca's Lending Library

While visiting Oaxaca, come visit with us at the Oaxaca Lending Library. We are on the "corredor turístico", 307 Macedonio Alcalá Street.

Come in and browse, read magazines, check reference works about the area you wish, become a member and borrow books. If you have books you've read on your trip and don't wish to carry home, we'd appreciate your donating them to us. Most of our collection is from donations. We depend on them.

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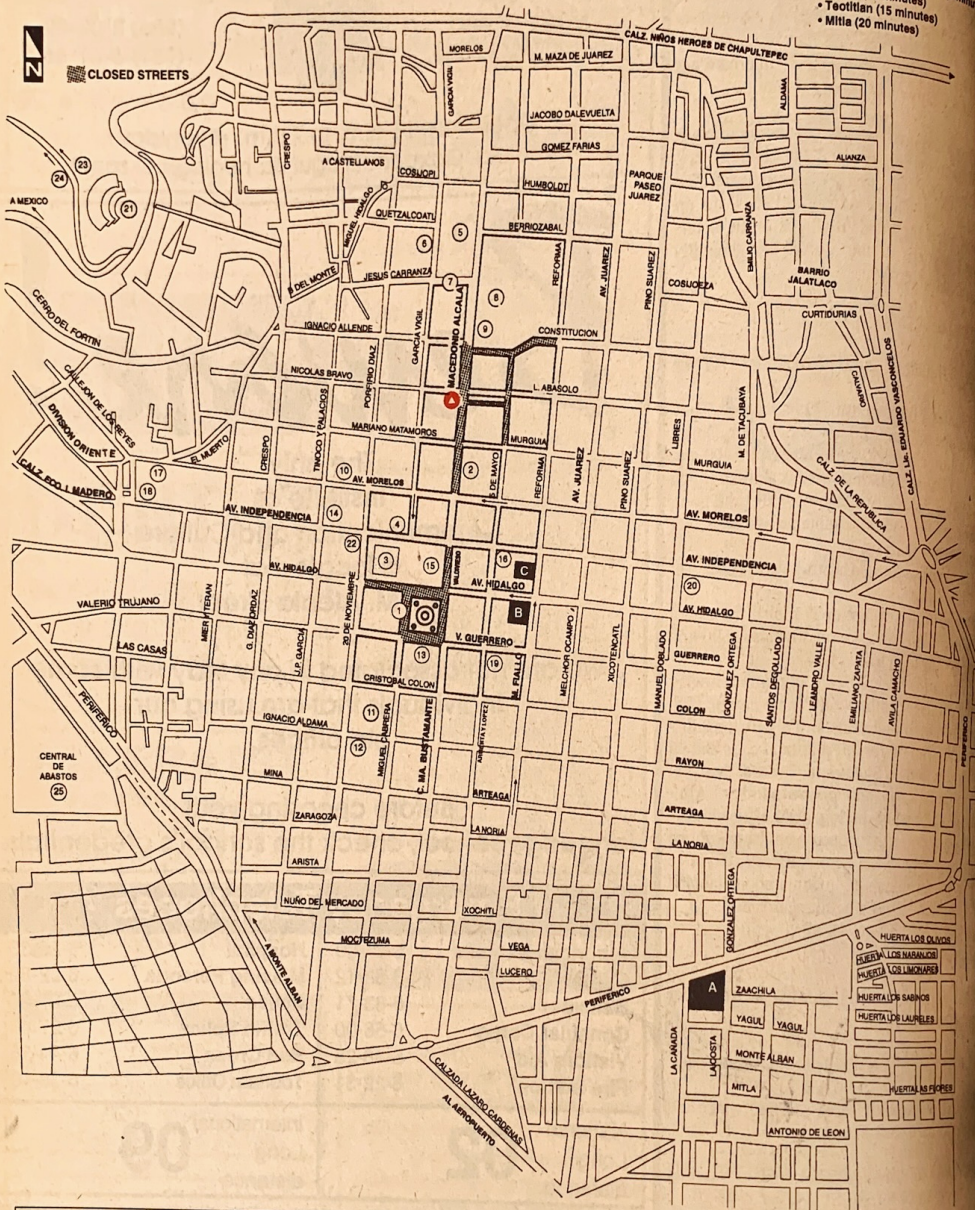


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CAMINO REAL

THE CITY OF OAXACA

- Ciudad de las canteras (6 minutos)
- El tule (10 minutos)
- Teotitlan (15 minutos)
- Mitla (20 minutos)



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| <p>▲ Instituto de Comunicación y Cultura (Spanish Language school) Oaxaca Times</p> <p>1 Zócalo • Main Square</p> <p>2 Museo de Arte Contemporáneo • Contemporary Art Museum</p> <p>3 Alameda • Alameda Park</p> <p>4 Secretaría de Turismo • Tourist Information</p> <p>5 Exconvento del Carmen Alto • Carmen Alto Convent</p> <p>6 Casa de Juárez • House of Juárez</p> | <p>7 Plazuela del Carmen Alto • Carmen Alto Square</p> <p>8 Museo Regional de Oaxaca • Regional Museum of Oaxaca</p> <p>9 Iglesia de Santo Domingo de Guzmán • Domingo de Guzmán Church</p> <p>10 Museo Rufino Tamayo • Rufino Tamayo Museum</p> <p>11 Mercado Benito Juárez • Central Market</p> <p>12 Iglesia de San Juan de Dios • San Juan de Dios Church</p> <p>13 Palacio de Gobierno •</p> | <p>Government Palace</p> <p>14 Iglesia de San Felipe Neri • San Felipe Neri Church</p> <p>15 Catedral • Cathedral</p> <p>16 Teatro Macedonio Alcalá • Macedonio Alcalá Theater</p> <p>17 Iglesia de la Soledad • La Soledad Church</p> <p>18 Museo de la Soledad • La Soledad museum</p> <p>19 Iglesia de San Agustín • San Agustín Church</p> <p>20 Iglesia de la Merced • La merced Church</p> | <p>21 Auditorio de la Guelaguetza • Guelaguetza Auditorium</p> <p>22 Correos • Post Office</p> <p>23 Observatorio • Sky Observatory</p> <p>24 Planetario • Planetarium</p> <p>25 Mercado de Abastos • Main Market</p> <p>A. Hotel "Hacienda la Noria"</p> <p>B. Hotel "Hostal de la Noria"</p> <p>C. Posada San Pablo</p> <p>Map courtesy of Hotel "Hostal de la Noria"</p> |
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