



# Oaxaca Times<sup>®</sup>

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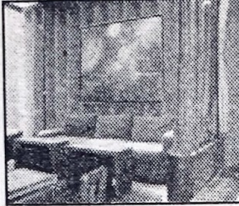
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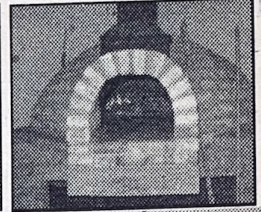
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# Guelagueta

A taste of "the real Mexico"



Mexican and foreign tourists alike are drawn to Oaxaca by its diversity - both in terrain and in culture. Tour guides recommend the state for an encounter with "the real Mexico," whatever this might mean. As a matter of fact, any corner of the country is an example of "the real Mexico," whether a modern building, a rustic cabin or an outhouse; but people tend to associate the idea of authenticity with the indigenous world.

Before the Spanish Conquest, the land of Oaxaca was not known as

Mexico. Its inhabitants didn't have a national concept that united them, especially not the word indigenous, as this was an idea introduced by the conquering Spaniards. Thus

the word indigena evokes not authenticity, but rather draws attention to the chasm between those who lived before the conquest and those who lived under the conquerors' rule. In truth, Mexican history is only 200

a result of purism, but of mixing. The syncretism, or combination, of the vastly varied pre-Spanish traditions with Western ways is the foundation of many beloved Mexican traditions: the Day of the Dead, the Virgin

Guadalupe and the Guelagueta, to name a few.

The Guelagueta is a centuries-old tradition that dates from the colonial time. Officially, it is said that its origin was a Christian festivity related to Corpus Christ, celebrated at the Car-



men Alto church. Later on, local indigenas joined this celebration - not to worship the Western god but their own Centeotl, goddess of corn. As time went by, people from

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the seven regions of the state came to celebrate the spirit of Guelaguetza, which is a Zapotec word meaning "partaking or cooperation." In the original celebrations, each group of people came to share their produce, their traditional music and their dances. It was an open air festivity in which anybody could participate.

True to its adaptive nature, Guelaguetza has changed a lot since the colonial times - it has transformed according to the general spirit of the country. Today, the modern concept of capitalism has turned the cultural celebration into a major tourist lure. The festival is no longer for everyone to participate in - now, dance troupes rehearse for months before the event and spectators must buy a

fancy costumes and pineapple dances, or in the exploitation of whatever has an indigenous flavor (including the revolutionary tourism of Chiapas).

For those who wish to see for themselves, this year Guelaguetza will begin with the street parade of the dancers on Saturday July 21th. They will march from the Conzatti Park to the Alameda de León and then through the restored zocalo. The shows will take place at 5 p.m on Monday, July 23th, and at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. p.m. Monday, July 30th. Tickets can be purchased through Ticketmaster or at the Alcalá Theatre (Independencia and 5 de Mayo).

For more information visit <http://www.oaxaca.com/guelaguetza/>

ticket to see the show. Traditionally, Guelaguetza was always celebrated the first Monday after July 16th, and then repeated the following Monday. Today, tourists can watch year-round "guelaguetzas" at hotels and restaurants, which are basically traditional dance shows devoid of any deeper meaning. This might lead one to wonder whether the "real" Mexico is to be found in



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