



# Oaxaca Times®

Volume XV No 219

THE INNER LIFE OF OAXACA • SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER 2007

www.oaxacatimes.com

**Find**

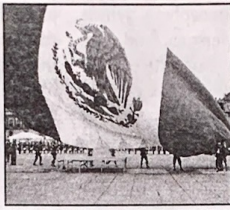
**Festive**

**Feature**

**Food**



**Day of the Dead field trips** Page 9



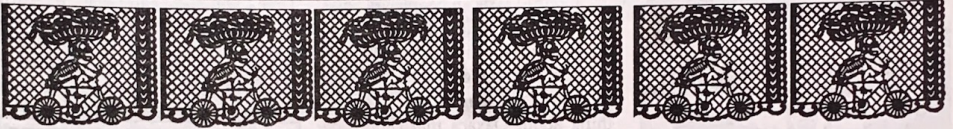
**Viva Mexico!** Page 6



**Pochote** Page 8



**Stone soup** Page 10



## Dancing on their Graves

*Mexico's extended family reunion with the dead*

By Alexander Hanrath

Nowhere in the world do the dead receive such a warm welcome back as in Mexico. The Day of the Dead (October 31st to November 2nd) is not a sombre or mournful occasion; on the contrary, it marks an opportunity for the dead to taste the pleasures of the living world, thanks to the efforts of their descendants. It is not just the pleasure but also the duty of the family to welcome its deceased, make a place for them, beckon them into the house, and offer them all the earthly pleasures they enjoyed when they were living, be that mezcal or mole.

The scenes in the cemeteries are magical. Vivid orange and yellow cempasúchiles (marigolds) decorate the tombstones and crosses, illuminated at night by the incandescent glow of thousands of small candles, made mystic by the blue smoke and the scent of burning copal. More than just decoration, both the



cempasúchiles and the copal serve to guide the dead to the realm of the living and back again. Entire families, dressed in their Sunday best, crowd around their family tombs, bringing offers of food, alcohol, snacks, photos, and books. Music and dancing figure highly in the cemetery festivities, and people have been known to bring a band of mariachis to the grave.

The Day of the Dead is a blend of cultural traditions: the pre-Hispanic cult of death, the

reverence of ancestors practiced both by the indigenous people and by Spanish pre-Christian pagans, and the commemoration of Catholic Saints on All Saints' Day. Above all, it is a wholly Mexican occasion. The most ostentatious Christian festivity of the year—more exuberant than either Easter or Christmas—it illustrates the special relationship that Mexico has with death, a laughing, mocking familiarity embodied in the portrayal of grinning paper

*continues page 4*

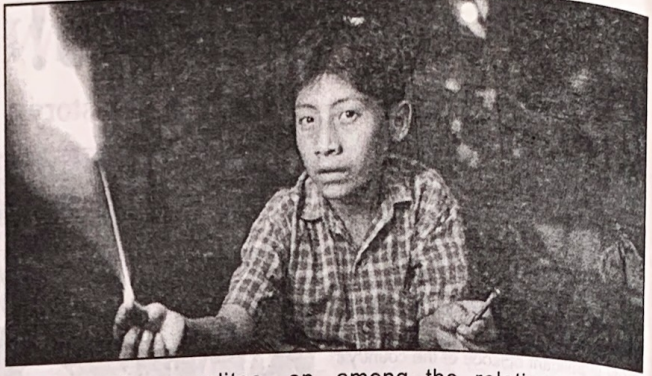
Learn Spanish at the ICC: Oaxaca's Best Language School



TRAVEL

mache skeletons performing life's everyday tasks. Dancing on someone's grave, an action which carries negative connotation in the rest of the Christian world, here represents a reaching out of the living to the dead, a reunion in the most festive spirit.

At heart, the dia de muertos is a family affair, and therefore much of the ceremony takes place indoors, within the privacy of the family circle. This is the authentic Mexican day of the dead, a sight few foreigners see. On October 31st, the family builds the ofrenda (offering altar) together. There are many ways a family can build their *ofrenda*, but typically it will consist of an arch made of reed or corn husks, placed on a table with tablecloth, and decorated with flowers, fruit, bread, tins filled with sugar, and decorative tissues or paper. Figures of patron saints, candles, and pictures of the deceased occupy the centre of the altar. And then there are the earthly pleasures. Rich helpings of food are set out in the ofrenda for the arrival of the guests—i.e. the dead. They arrive in order of sacredness. The first to arrive are the souls of dead



children, the angelitos, on November 1st around noon. The adults visit at the end of the afternoon on November 2nd. Glasses of water are left on the altar, as a refreshment after their long journey.

In some parts of Mexico, tables are set for the entire family, including empty chairs for the ancestors. In their brief return to the realm of the living, the dead eat and drink whatever they like: adults are offered their favourite food, as well as cigarettes and mezcal to their liking; candy, soda or even junk food will be bought for the *angelitos*. The dead, who are not seen but rather felt, do not eat the food but consume its essence, leaving behind positive energy. After the feast, the food from the altar is generously shared

among the relatives, neighbours and friends.

The best way to get an overview of the varied celebrations around Oaxaca is to spread around your sightseeing. *Oaxaca Times* will be organizing tours to Dia de Muertos events. See the *tianquis* beforehand if you can. Find out when various celebrations are taking place, and visit cemeteries and processions of different communities. The Panteon General (Nov 2nd) and San Felipe cemeteries of Oaxaca are impressive sights, as are the processions on the night of November 1st. While people are generally friendly and open to the presence of tourists, it is easy to forget that you are intruding on an important family reunion. Don't be

*continues page 6*

# massage



Anti estress  
abhyanga  
hot stones  
happy feet  
chocolate  
reflexology  
thai  
shiatsu  
facial treatments

Open from 10:00 a.m. to 20:00 p.m.

**Yamaste**  
espacio integrativo  
masajes tradicionales

Constitución 100\_3 centro  
appointment 516 96 45  
na ma ste e | ya hoo.c.com



### FLY CHARTER

Oaxaca to Puerto Escondido

8:00 a.m. & 10:00 a.m.

Puerto Escondido to Oaxaca

7:00 a.m. & 9:00 a.m.

Info and reservations at Monte Alban Hotel

Alameda de León No. 1, Oaxaca

Phone: 516-2777 & 516-4982

Puerto Escondido phone: (958) 582-0151

E-mail: aerovega@prodigy.net.mx

Authentic Oaxacan Style

# Mexican cooking classes

At the ICC  
Alcalá No 307 • 516-3443



**Taly**  
DESDE 1965

Folk Art Shop

**BIG SALE!**

15% Discount on all  
items

¡Come on Down!

5 de Mayo 409  
Downtown



INTERESTING

*Dancing on their graves...continues  
from page 4*

afraid to take pictures, but keep your distance when doing so. With the right amount of respect and courtesy, you will gain a real insight into a beautiful tradition and a very Mexican celebration. Halloween will never be the same again.

Another tradition that has been kept alive in Oaxaca is the village or neighbourhood *comparsa* (procession). In the Oaxaca *barrios* of Trinidad de las Huertas and Jalatlco, and the village of ETLA, masked dancers go from house to house, chanting, dancing to music and performing pantomime acts, all intended to help the dead go back to their realm, where some apparently are reluctant to return. The processions take place most of the night of November 1st through to the morning of November 2nd, lasting up to 12 hours or more. Programmes are distributed in advance on order to help visitors locate the processions' whereabouts.

Finally, another Oaxacan attraction, the tapetes de arena—elaborately decorated rugs made of sawdust, colour-

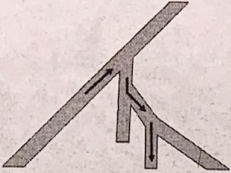
red sand and glittery powder—is on display in the patio of Oaxaca Cathedral. These elaborately decorated works are usually used in burial ceremonies and specially exhibited in Oaxaca City for Dia de Muertos.

**For more info, contact  
the ICC on 516 3443, or  
visit the office at calle  
Macedonia Alcalá, 307.**

**INDIGO RUGS**

Welcomes you  
Visit our workshop  
and see the beautiful rugs

On the road to Teotitlan del Valle  
Km. 2.5 on the right side  
You will see a sign of indigo Rugs  
then turn



Camino Real #1  
Teotitlán del Valle  
Ph./Fax. 01 52 951 166 62 10  
E-mail: Indigorugs@yahoo.com.mx

*Viva Mexico! ...continues from page 3*

during the conquest was never repented, and what came after the independence was something new, something that amalgamated the pre-Hispanic and the Spanish, the pagan and the Catholic, the old and the new, the past and the future. This mixture is what created the concept, culture and historical construction we now refer to as "Mexico," a package that current inhabitants inherit, add to and pass on. Both the past and future, therefore, are intrinsically linked with the present. Think about that as you pass the banners and hear the bells, about what you would see preserved, or forgotten.



**THE IDEAL RETIREMENT  
HOTEL**

Everything you need to  
feel like home during  
your visit

Progreso No. 27 Sn. Sebastian  
Etla  
Ph. 521 23 42  
campestrelosabuelos@gmail.com

**OAXACA-MEXICO**

## Teach Your Children Well!

The ICC Spanish Program for Children offers the same high standard of teaching for which we are renowned, with a specially designed program to teach children through creative, lively and fun activities!

- \* Spanish Conversation
- \* Gramma! in Action
- \* Spanish Games and Songs
- \* Mexican History
- \* Plus Visits to:  
Museums, Markets, Libraries, Workshops and Artisans



Instituto de Comunicación y Cultura, 307 Alcalá. Tel: 516 3443  
www.iccoax.com



### Catedral Restaurante Bar

*A splendid restaurant  
at the heart of the Historical Center  
Oaxacan and International food  
Live Music*

*30 years of experience demand for conventions up to 3,000 people  
Everyday except Tuesday from 8am to 1am*

García Vigil 105, Centro. Ph. 5163285

www.restaurantecatedral.com.mx restaurante@restaurantecatedral.com.mx



### LA CASA DEL TIO GUERO

TYPICAL OAXACAN CUISINE  
VEGETARIAN AND MEAT DISHES

A la carte  
service  
all day



Breakfast,  
Lunch,  
Dinner

**Café RESTAURANTE**  
Terrace service available

Open from Monday to Saturday  
7:30 am - 9:30 pm

García Vigil 715 Historical Center Oaxaca.

Phone: 51-69584