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Guelaguetza 2015

The Guelaguetza 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 Carmen 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 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. Guelaguetza, however 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 ticket to see the show. Tradition-

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Travel Tips

Petrified Waterfalls at Herve el Agua

By Scott Squires

I spat out a mouthful of dust hopping out of the camioneta. The jolting, zigzag ride up the mountain in the back of an open-air passenger truck, outfitted with bench seats in the back and covered by an A-frame tarp (in the inevitable case of rain) left me feeling dusty and in need of a shower, or something like it. Fortunately for me, that's exactly what I made the journey to Herve el Agua for in the first place.

Translated as "the water boils," Herve el Agua is Oaxaca City's closest natural spring. While not actually boiling, the cool, fresh water springs, located on top of a mountain in the Puebla of San Lorenzo Albarradas, just outside

the town of Mitla, are saturated with calcium carbonate and other minerals. The water deposits these minerals as it runs off the edge of the cliff in a manner similar to the way stalactites are created in caves. The result is an impressive rock-waterfall type structure cascading off the mountain capped by beautiful natural swimming pools with turquoise-green water.

Herve el Agua has been a tourist destination since it was officially established in the 1990s, but it is speculated that the springs were used as a sacred site and were the headwaters of a Zapotec irrigation system nearly 2,500 years ago. Evidence of irrigation systems are rarely found in pre-Hispanic Mexico, and it is speculated that it was a concept unique to the Zapotec culture. Continued on Page 3

The Chapel is dressed in the color, flavor and rhythm of the **Guelaguetzza**



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ally, 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 fancy costumes and pineapple dances, or in the exploitation of whatever has an indigenous flavor (including the revolutionary tourism of Chi-

apas). For those who wish to see for themselves, this year Guelaguetza will begin with the street parade of the dancers on Saturday July 18th. They will march from the Conzatti Park to the Alameda de León and then through the restored Zócalo.

The shows will take place at 5 p.m. on Monday, July 20th, and at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday, July 27th. Tickets can be purchased through Ticketmaster or at the Alcalá Theatre (Independencia and 5 de Mayo).

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Though the water is chilly, the springs are undoubtedly as refreshing as the views. Make the journey in the middle of the week during low-season, and you'll be rewarded by a nearly empty swimming pool, sweeping vistas, and best of all, some real peace and quiet.

To get to Herve el Agua, take a colectivo taxi (M\$60) from Estadio Eduardo Vasconcelos or a local bus (M\$18) from the second-class bus station to Mitla, then pick up a camioneta going up the mountain. Due to local property disputes (which temporarily closed the site between 2005 and 2007), you will likely have to pay an M\$10 toll on the road, in addition to the M\$25 entrance fee to the site. Amenities available at the site include changing rooms, restrooms, foods stalls and basic overnight accommodations. The site is open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., although public transportation is sporadic after 4 p.m.



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