



Everything You Need to Know About Living in Mexico For Subscribers Only

November, 2006
Viva Mexico!

Hola *Mexico Insider* Subscriber:

This month's edition of *Mexico Insider* features more of the Mexico you love, but with a historic twist. We've taken a look at two towns that are of great historic significance, but for different reasons. One is an important colonial spot, the other, a pre-Colombian mecca.

The first, Alamos, is described as Mexico's hidden colonial treasure. It's not the first place your travel agent will suggest, nor is it a big archeological site...but it is high on charm (and a great place to hear spooky ghost stories, so pack the marshmallows and prepare for story time around the campfire). The second town, Oaxaca, has been in the news of late, but for all the wrong reasons. It's one of Mexico's most diverse, historically significant, culturally rich states, and you won't believe all it has to offer.

For the snowbirds, we've got a feature on two perfect winter destinations. The places are as different as night and day, but each offers variety *and* value. Find out where you can go whale watching, be surrounded by millions of butterflies and soak in sulfur springs (they may not smell great, but the locals say the springs work wonders for all kinds of health problems). If you weren't already planning on leaving town for the winter, you'll soon be considering the merits of a warm, tropical Mexican "winter".

Felices viajes a todos!

Suzan Haskins
Editor, Mexico Insider

For answers to questions about living in Mexico, e-mail *IL* Country Consultant Marzena Romanowicz at Mexico@InternationalLiving.com

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Mexico Insider Ratings: Alamos

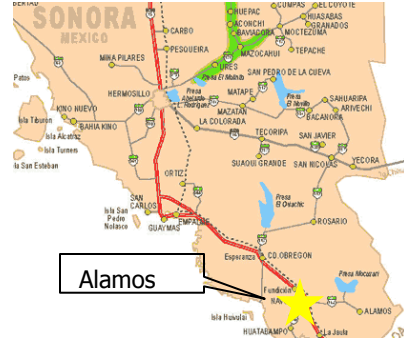
Alamos

Altitude: from sea level to 5577 feet

Climate: warm and sunny—Alamos boasts over 360 days of sunshine a year and winter weather between 80 and 55° F.

Population: 6000 in the city proper

Location: the foothills of the Sierra Madre in the Mexican state of Sonora



Weather and Climate	10
Health Care	8
Overall Attractiveness	9
Housing Availability	8
Housing Cost	8
Accessibility to an Airport	7
Cultural Activities	7
Other Activities	9
Communication Infrastructure	8
Daily Living Cost	9
TOTAL	83
Ease of Doing Business	7

Pros: A historic center that's usually not overrun by crowds of visitors, and weather so close to perfect, it is unbelievable.

Cons: A rather small town, and so some amenities or services are not available.

Our rating system is entirely subjective. We assign points (from 1-10, with 1 being dismal and 10 being excellent) based on *our perceptions* of what is most important to us. As for housing costs, if we think they are extremely reasonable, we give the location a '10' ranking. This, too, is subjective, as housing costs in resort areas can be extremely expensive yet still reasonable based on the fact that they are popular destinations where prices are likely to continue to appreciate. Total points available for any one destination: 100.

NOTE: Ease of doing business may not be important to you but it is quite important to us. What we mean by this is...can we find an English-speaking person in the local bank, phone company, real estate office, etc.? We assign extra points...from 1 to 10, for this category. We have indicated these points in parenthesis.

Alamos: Oh Yes

By Richard Basch



The stunning municipal theater in Alamos, Mexico, is one of the town's more important Spanish colonial historical landmarks

"Alamos, oh yes...northern Mexico's undiscovered colonial jewel." This was the comment of Jesus Burrola, managing director of Coldwell Banker's San Carlos branch. He continued: "it's quite fabulous...even before the Spanish conquest, indigenous people called it the garden of the gods." Not bad, I thought. I had been asked to go to Alamos to open an office for Coldwell Banker, and did not know what to expect.

An undiscovered colonial town? In Mexico? Frankly, it didn't seem possible. There are many lovely colonial towns scattered all over Mexico...but most seem to be well-known and I had never heard of anything significant in the north. And I am no stranger to Mexico...I have lived in beguiling San Miguel de Allende, seen glorious Zacatecas...but a colonial town in the north of Mexico, a day's drive from Nogales?

I was soon to find that Alamos is everything Burrola said, and more. The drive there is beautiful (try it someday)...from the U.S. – Mexico border at Nogales, I drove four hours to Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora, then an hour and fifteen minutes to Guaymas, where I turned south. Three hours later, I turned east off of highway fifteen for the final forty five minutes of my drive.

"I'm in renaissance Spain," was my first thought upon arrival. Alamos was built around 1635, and it resembles very much the kind of town established in San Miguel de Allende and Zacatecas. In fact, the look of the place is like something straight out of "Colonial Town Building 101" (must have been a required course for the *Conquistadores*). The guide books call Alamos "City of the Arches" because there are so many graceful arched facades.

The town square features a beautiful church, with grand houses lining the streets surrounding the square, and a quaint museum. And despite its beauty, Alamos is largely unknown. This wasn't always true, though. The Spanish heavily exploited the place and its silver stashes back in the day. I realized the extent of it while touring the city with Gael Cassidy, a woman who grew up in Spain. "So this is where it all came from," she told me. I must have looked non-plussed. "The

silver in all the churches in Spain," she explained. "In many of the churches where I grew up, there were walls of silver behind the altars. *Walls of it.*"

Alamos in its heyday was one of New Spain's most important outposts. It was the state capital of Occidente, a bastion of the Spanish Empire that encompassed all of modern-day Sonora and Sinaloa as well as a few U.S. states—Arizona, New Mexico, California, Nevada, Utah and half of Colorado.



The beautiful town square in Alamos is a great place to sit and observe village life

The land was rich and apparently there was more silver dug out of the ground in Alamos than any other place in Mexico. The local indigenous people were severely exploited for hundreds of years and made to work in the mines in very oppressive conditions. The mined silver was then transported over the Camino Real to Veracruz, where it would board galleons bound for Madrid.

Even after the Spaniards left, and Mexico became an independent state, the indigenous people were forced to work the mines. Finally, in the late 1800s, they began to rebel, eventually refusing to continue working. After the Mexican Revolution, the town was abandoned, the nearly-exhausted mines closed, and Alamos left to the ghosts.

Perhaps the years of obscurity allowed Alamos to heal a bit, after so much violence and exploitation. It remained a virtual ghost

town until 1944, when an American, Levant Alcorn, stumbled into Alamos. He found 200 impoverished citizens in a town with no infrastructure, no electricity and no roads to the outside world. Alcorn began buying buildings in the historic district, "some of which cost \$20, none more than \$100," said Jim Swickard, an expat living in Alamos. Apparently it took Alcorn ten years to track down all the owners.

Today's Alamos is a far cry from the 1940s specter that met Levant Alcorn. There is now an infrastructure like that of San Miguel de Allende (and electricity) and many gringos have discovered this north-Mexican secret. Interestingly, more than a few celebrities have spent time in Alamos. Actor Carroll O'Connor had a house here (a house which is currently on the market for \$695,000)...famous Western star John Wayne used to hang around the town, and Old Hollywood actress Mary Astor spent her dotage here.

Another 1950s actress—Geraldine Paige—owned a house here, and popular comedic actor Rip Torn still does. "Why is that?" I asked Tom Banks, the owner of local restaurant and bar, El Africano, a thatched roof affair reminiscent of Banks' days as a big game hunter in Africa. I loved his answer: "because here, we don't give a damn who you are."

There's meaning in that remark. There is a kind of *laissez faire* attitude among the expats, many of whom have led lives of some sway. For instance, I saw a house that had been on the market for several months—a 200 year old hacienda, with fruit orchard, pool, pool house, stable, two guest houses and servants' quarters, all walled off in secretive splendor. The owner? A former NATO official from Great Britain.

This manor is available for \$530,000 through Coldwell Banker Bahia...if it's too rich for your blood, you can buy two servant's houses and the stable (this land comes with the pool) for \$220,000...or opt for the main house and a single guest house for \$310,000. For the sheer size

and historical value, these are fantastic prices. The same house in San Miguel de Allende would cost 10 times that much.

The ghosts of Alamos

While in town, I had a chance to stay at Casa Maria Felix, named after the internationally celebrated Mexican movie star who lived there. The house was in ruins when in 1998, a Canadian named Lynda Barondes saw it. Barondes says she was walking along the street in the historic section when she saw a wraith...an unreal figure with whom Barondes wanted to speak. When she walked over to have a word, the figure seemed to dematerialize before her eyes. Deciding that there must be a reason for this experience, Barondes caught sight of the ruin before her, and decided to look into buying it.

As these stories go, Lynda Barondes eventually did buy Casa Maria Felix, and turned it into a seven-bedroom boutique hotel. During the building process, Barondes discovered that the property had been owned by the Felix family and that Maria Felix had been born and raised there. The builders working on the restoration began discovering artifacts, and Barondes decided to try and contact the former owner. Barondes had the great fortune of being able to speak to the actress, who was living out her last years in Guadalajara.

As a tribute, Lynda Barondes dedicated a large room to the actress, and filled it with the artifacts from the life of Maria Felix. Thus was born the Casa Maria Felix Inn and Museum. The hotel and the acre of property on which it sits (with licensed bar *and* Maria Felix collection) is now for sale for \$550,000 through Coldwell Banker.



The colorful interior of Casa Maria Felix evokes a very Mexican feel.

These high-end beauties aside, there are many houses to be had for less in Alamos. You can buy a home in the historic center for \$250,000, and smaller places cost even less. And you don't need a grand manor to get a bit of history. It seems everyone here has a ghost story; the town is chock-full of them (I have never been regaled with so many).

There's the story of soldiers who were fighting for the Mexican Revolution under Pancho Villa. The soldiers apparently came to Alamos to pillage the land. Legend has it these *bandidos* (i.e., "bandits") found their way to a rancho where tequila was made, and the boys began to sample their plunder. The locals watched and waited and, when things got quiet, killed and buried the men in an unmarked grave.

It was later learned that the men were in Alamos without permission from Pancho Villa, who had told many in his inner circle that Alamos was to be spared destruction. The town was so elegant that Villa wanted to retire there. He met his end before he could make good on that hope, though...one more ghost to wander the town.

Then, there is the story of the beautiful daughter of a mine administrator. Apparently, the family up and left the town, but the daughter wasn't in the entourage. It seems that no one quite knew what happened, until, some time later, repair work was done on the house. A worker stumbled

onto a sealed room, where he found the remains of a young, pregnant girl, who had starved to death there. In the 19th century this was how these things were handled. The house still stands today, behind the church in the town square.

Alamos today

The Governor of the Mexican state of Sonora, Eduardo Bours, is an Alamos native. One of his goals is to promote the town, and he is off to a good start. A new four-lane highway from Navajoa to Alamos will be finished early in the new year, making the trip shorter and easier. According to Jim Swickard, the Governor fought to have Alamos placed on the *Pueblos Magicos* list, a designation which will help preserve the look of the town in perpetuity (like San Miguel de Allende). The Governor is also having the telephone and electrical wires in the historic center placed underground, to make the town more inviting to movie crews and more true to its historic roots.

Also on Governor Bours' agenda: an extension of the University of Sonora Art School. With his foresight, Bours recognizes that art schools bring artists, and artists depict the places where they have sojourned. Soon, Alamos will hopefully benefit from the publicity that such artwork can generate. (This is a phenomenon I have witnessed in San Miguel de Allende).

The climate in Alamos is mild, with warmish summers. The population is around 15,000 (some 400 of which are foreigners). There is a small government airport, big enough for commercial jets and planes meeting international standards for private and charter flights.

Cost of living is lower than larger cities in the state (like Hermosillo and Guaymas/San Carlos) and *much lower* than Mazatlan to the south. Breakfast in a nice Alamos restaurant is around \$7 total, while a complete dinner can be easily had for \$20. The real estate prices are especially low...for example, an in-town lot (not in the historic center), can be found for less than \$10,000.



The elegant Hacienda de los Santos is owned by expat Jim Swickard

Alamos boasts a small hospital and plenty of doctors, and there is a new conference center which seats a thousand people. There is no expats association, per se, but one expat told me they all know and speak to each other. And there are a great deal of clubs....it seems these are very important to the Alamos crowd. These include a history club, a writing club, a garden drama club, various philosophy clubs, and yoga, Tai Chi and meditation clubs.

For those interested in philanthropy or self-improvement, *Friends for Education* holds garden tours and donates proceeds to educational programs, and *Los Compadres* is a charitable

organization that helps the poor. There is a local Kiwanis branch that focuses on children's needs, and the *Association for the Protection of Animals* protects (you guessed it) animals. There are even English-language AA meetings held twice a week.

One gets the impression that one can get along by going along. The atmosphere is one of unruffled feathers. Gringos have been here for a long time, and the locals seem to laugh off their peculiarities and scuttle to provide them with services.

As for the typical expat life...Lynda Barondes is very involved in a dog and cat rescue organization that takes up whatever free time she has from her hotel. Tom Banks sells real estate in addition to running his restaurant, El Africano (*below*). A good number of artists feed off of the intriguing atmosphere and the charm of the architecture.



So, Alamos with its cobblestone streets, haciendas, ghost stories and artists seems on the road to an illustrious future. It's a place where the real estate prices are stable for the present, but the market is poised to make a brilliant leap.

I left feeling that Jesus Burrola was correct: Alamos *is* an undiscovered colonial gem...classic, mysterious, legendary. However, with people like me visiting and writing stories about this great "secret", it won't be that way for long.

As a matter of fact, *Architectural Digest* recently did a feature story on Alamos landmark Hacienda de los Santos. It's a thoroughly elegant place, a five-star boutique hotel with spa, gourmet restaurant and hot-shot clientele, from CEOs of major corporations to movie crews that film historical dramas and lots and lots of pilots here. The hotel is pricey, but well worth the \$245 a night fee that increasing numbers of tourists are willing to pay. Don't you wait too long to experience Alamos for yourself.

Richard Basch can be reached at rb@richardbasch.com

Mexico's Best Winter Destinations

A Tale of Two Towns

By Jessica Ramesch

Winter...the best of times, the worst of times...right? That's how Charles Dickens' famous novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, begins...and I relate to good old Charles...because that's *exactly* how, every year, my winter begins. I love it, I hate it...I embrace the cold, crisp weather, and want to run away from it at the same time. Sound familiar? Well, just as *A Tale of Two Cities* is a story of transformation and renewal, so is my tale of winter escape...sometimes, when it comes down to fight or flight, the best thing you can do is *fly away*... to Mexico, of course.

And in true Dickensian spirit, my recommendation is twofold...a tale of two towns, if you will. One is a popular tourist destination (one you may not have known is *great* for long-term stays). The other, you may never have heard of, but merits a long, hard look (*and* a long vacation).

Cabo San Lucas – Get Recalled to Life

In the beautiful Mexican state of Baja California Sur, you'll find delightful Cabo San Lucas, where the Sea of Cortes and the Pacific Ocean meet at a point called Land's End. Cabo, as it has come to be called, is approximately 1,000 miles south of San Diego, just below the Tropic of Cancer. It is in the district of Los Cabos, which boasts an international airport that receives flights from a host of major U.S. and Mexican cities.

Airlines servicing Los Cabos International Airport include Aero Mexico, Alaska Airlines, America West, and Continental Airlines, to name a few. Even cruise lines such as Carnival Cruise Lines, often include Cabo as a port of call.

The climate

What makes Cabo such a fab winter getaway? It's all about the weather...Cabo has a nice year-round average temperature of 78° F. During the high season, which starts in October, and runs through the American winter, the temperature is typically around 80° F during the day and a cool 60° F at night. Perfect, as far as I'm concerned.

Cabo's climate is actually quite arid for a tropical city...and, get this, Cabo is usually blessed with over 300 days of sunshine. Another point to ponder: the storm season is from July to October, so snow birds escaping winter will also avoid storms and heavy rains. And the beaches are fabulous at this time of year, with an average water temperature of 72° F.



One of the most popular activities here is whale-watching...imagine seeing one of these mammoths up close!

If you'd like to drive to Cabo, hop on Highway 1 from the U.S. – Mexico border near Tijuana, and head down the peninsula. It's a long drive (over 22 hours), the roads are narrow, and yes, there are usually cows to dodge. You'll see some gorgeous scenery along the way but, if you're pressed for time, I recommend you fly instead (and get the vacation started a little sooner).

Once you get to Los Cabos International Airport, taxis are pretty much ubiquitous (though your best bet for a long vacation is to rent a car). A shared taxi-van from the airport into Cabo San Lucas is about \$12 per person. A private cab will take four people for a total of \$60 (each

additional person is \$5), and while most hotels offer shuttle services, they are not free (you will usually get a reduced rate, though).

A great tip from www.loscabosguide.com: get a limo (for six people) for just \$100...that's only \$30 more than a private cab would charge for the same amount of people (i.e., just an extra \$5 a piece) and the luxury ride includes a nice cool national beer per person. If planning to rent a car, you can pre-arrange airport or city pickup through one of the rental companies. Hertz Mexico offers weekly car rentals in Cabo for as little as \$190 a week (for a compact car) and you can book online at www.hertz.com (choose Mexico as your country of residence at the top of the screen).

The currency in Cabo is, of course, the Mexican Peso. Exchange rates at booths and hotels are slightly lower than banks, but banks are often more convenient (most are open weekdays from 9 a.m. to at least 4 p.m. and Saturdays from around 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.). Travelers checks are not accepted everywhere, so ask before getting in line. Remember, the ATMs dispense cash in pesos. VISA and MasterCard are the most widely accepted credit cards, though some places accept American Express (as far as I could tell, the Discover Card is not accepted anywhere).

The action

There is a United States of America Consular Agency right in Cabo: Address: Boulevard Marina, Local C-4, Plaza Nautica, Cabo San Lucas, Baja California Sur, Mexico. Telephone: +52 (624) 143-3566; Fax: +52 (624) 143-6750; E-mail: usconsulcabo@yahoo.com. About 20 minutes away, in San Jose del Cabo, you'll find a **Canadian Consulate**, too. Address: 9 Plaza Jose Green (Banamex), Boulevard Mijares, San Jose del Cabo, Baja California Sur, Mexico. Telephone: +52 (624) 142-4333; Fax: +52 (624) 142-4262.

At first glance, you may be fooled into thinking that Cabo is just like any other tropical vacation destination. There's plenty of action and fun pastimes run the gamut...you can take canopy tours, rent jet skis, go kayaking, try parasailing, take a glass bottom boat cruise, tour the town on moped, spend an hour horse back riding, swim with the dolphins, snorkel or dive into the underwater world, surf the Sea of Cortez, work in a hike, or charter a yacht or sailboat to go fishing or on a fun cruise.

However, this town stands out for more than the above. That is because the meeting of the Sea of Cortez with the Pacific makes for a hugely interesting and unique marine diversity. The Sea of Cortez itself is also renowned for the amazing coral and marine life. A young body of water (only about 5 million years old), this sea is

plankton-rich and full of life. Scientists estimate there are some 900 species of fish here and six types of whales. Commonplace? No way, *Jose*. I would say Cabo is blessed with a beyond-special location.

For true water-lovers, the Cabo San Lucas Marine Preserve is purportedly home to over 150 species of marine life, rock formations, and stunning coral. Divers and snorkelers are often lucky enough to see beautiful tropical fish, stingrays and sea lions, to name a few.

One of Cabo's most popular land activities (if not *the* most popular) is golf. The Los Cabos district is informally known as the golf capital of Mexico, as it boasts seven championship golf courses. One of the best (that's also close to town) is the Cabo del Sol Nicklaus and Weiskopf designed premier course (*right*). For landlubbers who don't fancy golf, never fear, *matey*, there much more to do than practice your put.



Feeling adventurous? There are “sky tour” companies that offer some high adventure (not for those with a fear of heights). You can appreciate the gorgeous Cabo landscape—desert and ocean views at once—on a low-speed hang glider. Spend 20 minutes aloft and take your very own aerial pics (to send home to your jealous, cold friends). If you’d like to make a day of it, there are local companies that boast small flights to otherwise hard to reach places...go whale watching, see aboriginal cave paintings, or visit Copper Canyon.

If you’d rather keep your feet on the ground, *Off Road Motorcycle Adventure* organizes fun-sounding tours through the desert or along the coast, through valleys or mountain terrain, to suit pretty much any preference. (You can find more information on their Los Cabos Guide webpage: <http://www.loscabosguide.com/bajaride/index.html>.)

Once you’ve gotten your fill of all Cabo’s great daytime activities, head out to sample Cabo San Lucas’ rich nightlife. First, watch the incredible Land’s End sunset, then head to one of the many superb restaurants. Dining in Cabo is an all-around great experience...you can go all out for a fine meal or spend next to nothing on a simply delicious fish taco (one of the local specialties).

One thing is certain—restaurants in this town take the culinary experience seriously. You’ll find specialized Mexican coastal fare (my absolute favorite), as well as Italian, Swiss, Japanese, Brazilian and Chinese food, to name a few. There’s even the Harley Davidson Los Cabos Bar & Grill, where you can rent a motorbike, listen to great music and enjoy Mexican snacks and drinks.

Some places are expensive (though worth every penny), but you don’t *have* to spend a lot for a flavorful, enjoyable meal. In fact, you can get tacos for two for about \$14 at just about any of the taco-specialty spots in the center—but I recommend you venture slightly out of the main strip to really save on great food.

Once you’ve lingered over your sumptuous dinner, it’s time to hit the scene. You can opt for nightclub Cabo-Wabo, which often features live music, or, for a slightly lower-key drink spot, check out the Iguana Bar & Grill. If you’d rather get your dancing shoes on, MamboCafe at El Tesoro Los Cabos Hotel has live salsa, mambo, and marimba. You can later drift to a party on the beach, at Nikki Beach lounge and club, where lounge music and sushi contribute to the contemporary feel. Finally, star-struck visitors to Cabo often try and spot celebs at the Meliá San Lucas and Zoo Bar & Dance.

Regardless of whether you’d like a quiet night or lively fun, you’re sure to find a place that suits your mood. Remember, all tequila is not alike, and Mexicans regard this fiery liquid with the seriousness of sommeliers. Ask your bartender to recommend something really good and sip it slowly to savor the flavor (I really like Herradura Reposado and Don Julio).

A “must see” if you’re in the area:

If you only make one day trip during your time in Cabo, I recommend you drive the 20 miles to San Jose del Cabo, an attractive colonial town that attracts sport-fishers. The small town has really retained its Spanish colonial flavor, and many of the lovely buildings are restored manors. Here, you’ll find some truly world-class restaurants just oozing with atmosphere, as well as small galleries featuring some of the excellent local art. Walk along the downtown strip and see the shops, the cathedral and the main plaza. Then drive to the beach area for dinner on the water. (A tip: taxis here don’t have meters, so tell your hotel concierge where you are going and ask what a reasonable fare is, then settle on the price with your cab driver before you get in. Cab drivers will normally charge you more if they pick you up at the hotel, so I always start walking and flag down a taxi on the road.)

The digs

Hotels in Cabo vary from the simple and inexpensive to the grand and luxurious. I'd recommend a mid-range hotel near Medano Beach, which is beautiful (*and safe for swimming*). For a long stay, consider the Bahia Condo Hotel (*below*), with in-room kitchenettes. Prices here are among the lowest for this quality of hotel...in season rates vary from about \$129 to \$149 per night (tax included) and off season, the rates go down to between \$95 and \$115 a night. Just three blocks from downtown Cabo San Lucas, the Bungalows Breakfast Inn is a great choice for B&B lovers, and rates are very reasonable, starting at just \$125 for two adults (in season). During the off season, these rates go down to a starting price of just \$78...and these prices *include* breakfast.



There are plenty of nice, clean motels and inns that offer bargain value (for those willing to forgo fancy décor). Hotel Posada Señor Mañana has a swimming pool and a community kitchen, and double rooms here go for just \$34 to \$67. Siesta Suites is in downtown Cabo (half a mile from the marina), has a pool and restaurant, and advertises rooms from \$60.

The air-conditioned Hotel Melida is just a block north of the Marina Boulevard, and rates here are between \$35 and \$55 (double-occupancy), but there are only 14 rooms, so reserve well ahead of time.

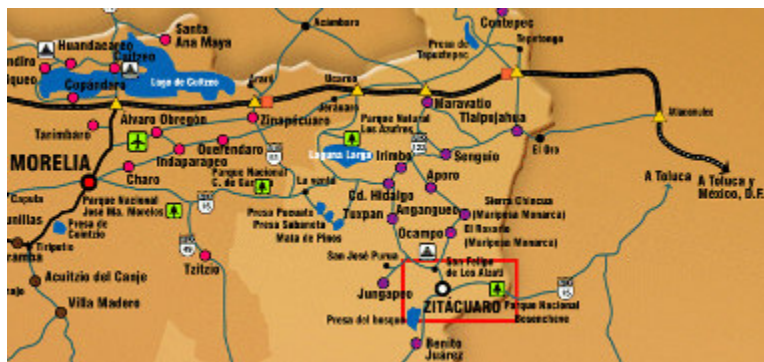
If you want to plan your vacation in earnest, you can get some help from the Los Cabos Board of Tourism (<http://www.visitcabo.com/>), which has offices in Cabo San Lucas and even an exterior office in Los Angeles, California.

Cabo San Lucas has a modern hospital and good medical and dental facilities. There's even a decompression chamber (for divers) in Cabo San Lucas' specialty hospital. A good many of the doctors speak English. These hospitals are not equipped for severe trauma cases, and thus sometimes a transfer is necessary. If you like to cover all your bases, ask the hotel to give you the name and number of an English-speaking doctor in Cabo, and keep the information handy.

Zitacuaro: Weave the Golden Thread

Although you may not have heard of it, the Zitacuaro region is well known in Mexico for its lush, colorful flora and fauna. The city of Zitacuaro makes for a fabulous winter destination for anyone who wants to get back to nature, in all its truth and simplicity (the golden thread indeed). It is also a great base from which you can depart for daily or weekend adventures.

Zitacuaro is in the Mexican state of Michoacan. You can fly into the international airport in Morelia, the state capital. This airport receives connections from major Mexican cities including the capital, as well as Zacatecas, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Tepic and Tijuana. Many of the direct U.S. flights come from California, especially Los Angeles, San Jose, San Francisco and Oakland. Zitacuaro is about 90 miles from the Morelia airport.



Can't get a flight into Morelia? Mexico City is only 103 miles away, and the international airport there is a bustling hub welcoming flights from all over the world. Whether you fly into Morelia or Mexico City, you can obtain ground transportation to Zitacuaro. A lot of hotels and tour companies will arrange the transfers for you at a reduced rate. That said, it is easier and much more pleasant to drive from Morelia rather than the sometimes confusing Mexico City.

The government of Michoacan has a cool virtual map showing all the highways in the region (check it out at www.michoacan.gob.mx). Most of the roads are in good shape and thus driving from town to town is easy.

A hero's city

Zitacuaro is known as the City of Independence due to its citizens' participation in the fight for independence from Spain (many Mexicans call Zitacuaro "a hero three times over" or "heroic Zitacuaro", as many of the Mexican Revolution's heroes hailed from here). It is also a super place to get special gifts, as Zitacuaro artisans are among the nation's best for fine wool products, clay pottery, gold filigree, *Huaraches* (Mexican leather sandals) and colorful wooden toys

One of my favorite things about Zitacuaro, though, is the food (of course). The state of Michoacan has a very unique, well-defined gastronomical tradition. Locals are big on lamb and typical dishes include lamb menudo (spicy lamb stomach soup), grilled white Patzcuaro fish, pozole soup (a hot concoction of pork and hominy), barbecued lamb, and, for dessert, capirotada, a pudding-like fantasy made with bread, honey, nuts, raisins and cheese.

Once your belly is properly full, though, you will want to spend the rest of the day (or two) visiting the sights. There are monuments, buildings and parks you must not miss. The old train station is certainly picturesque, and the nearby Station Park is a pleasant green area, perfect for a walk. Independence Hill is another fabulous spot to pull out the camera and take some family portraits. You can see almost all of Zitacuaro from atop the reforested hill (I recommend you take a mini-cooler filled with Modelo Negro beer and packets of the ubiquitous crunchy lemon-flavored tortilla chips...sit, have a snack and enjoy the view).



The beautiful town square in historic Zitacuaro

When you're ready to spend some time taking in the awe-inspiring architecture, head for the Church of the Remedies, the XIX century municipal building (with painted depictions of Zitacuaro's history), and the St. Francis of Asisi XVI century church.

Make sure you take a picture in front of the beautifully painted Zitacuaro wall, and then head for the heart of Zitacuaro: Plaza Benito Juarez. Here, hundreds of families spend Sunday afternoons, walking, talking, eating and playing. Finish up the day at "The Street of Hunger" (as if anyone could get hungry around here). This traditional snack spot is at the corner of Hidalgo and May 5th street, and it's the best place to get the Mexican version of *tapas* and watch the people go by.

A night's lodging

Hotels range from elegant and luxurious to small and quaint. You can stay at the stunning Rancho San Cayetano (*below*) for about \$380 a night if you're looking to pamper yourself. For something nice but not quite as expensive, the Hotel Villa Monarca Inn is pleasant and usually around \$98 per night (double occupancy). For a double room in Zitacuaro on a budget, the Cacique Inn is usually \$35 per night and Rosales del Valle hotel is around \$30 per night. If you go to one of the smaller inns, such as the Bosques del Valle motel, Marina San Jorge or the three-star Hotel America, you can spend under \$25 per night.



A wanderer's road trip

Zitacuaro has a lot to offer, but for a long vacation, I suggest you use it as a launch-point. Take one or two day trips to the best surrounding areas and explore all the state of Michoacan has to offer. The first spot on our list is just under eight miles away: Presa del Bosque. This great camping and water-sports spot is fun for grown-ups and kids. Just outside the camping center, a stunning waterfall nearly 300-feet high makes for some great vacation photos.

For your next road trip, head about 34 miles from Zitacuaro to Pucuato Dam, another primo camping spot popular with sports-fishing enthusiasts. The area is known for its dams and beautiful landscapes. The Pucuato Dam area is surrounded by forests and all kinds of wildlife abounds. Here, you can charter a fishing boat or take in what is known as the *corredor turístico* (tourist lane), which consists of the Pucuato, Sabaneta and Mata de Pinos dams.

Another noteworthy spot, about 36 miles from Zitacuaro: Tziranda Caves. The lookout point above the rocky cliffs is spectacular. You can go spelunking and see fossilized plant life and over 19 species of bats. Even if you are slightly squeamish, there's no need to worry...the caves are well-lit and local guides are more than happy to take you on a tour.

For those interested in indigenous villages, San Felipe de los Alzati is an Otomi indigenous reserve just five and a half miles north of Zitacuaro. The temple there, San Felipe, was built in the XVI century and features a beautiful atrium and monolithic cross. The nearby Candelaria Chapel, site of an ancient women's cult, boasts XVI century wood figures and several Spanish-style Virgins dressed in native Otomi garb. Just a few minutes out of town you'll find the Alzati archeological site, with its monumental ceremonial center. Definitely a sight worth seeing.

Ocampo is another 11 miles from San Felipe, but worth the drive and the view (the mountains are bursting with trees, especially cedar and pine. You should make time to visit the Santo Niño de Atocha (Holy Child of Atocha) temple and the Trojes hacienda, but the main attraction in this area is Mexico's largest Monarch sanctuary, Campanario hill. The sheer number of winged monarch butterflies that congregate here to mate is nothing short of a marvel.

There are quite a few tour companies that offer two-day Monarch tours with transportation from Morelia or Zitacuaro and hotel for as little as \$350 per couple (day tours cost around \$80 per person). Remember the monarchs fill the hillsides and trees from November to March...so if you arrive before then...be patient...they *will* come. For some really cool souvenirs and gifts, get Monarch-inspired crafts. Descend the Campanario hill to nearby Anganguero to go shopping (and check out the beautiful silver products while you're there.)

Once you've experienced the thrill of being surrounded by butterflies, plan a day of pampering at the thermal springs in Jungapeo. This is one of the state's prettiest areas, surrounded by cascades and unusual landscapes. Why not plan a day of relaxation and send the kids to nearby Contepec, where they can see the Tepuxtepec dam, go for a sail or rent jetskis.

For your final winter road trip, I recommend Los Azufres (*see picture, below*). Check out of your Zitacuaro digs once and for all, and drive the 35 miles to this popular tourist destination. Known to be one of the most beautiful places in the state, Los Azufres makes for a memorable camping weekend. Amid forest-lined lakes and cabins, you'll find camping areas and the famous sulfur-springs that are purported to have medicinal properties.



The surrounding mountains are densely populated with pines and balsam-firs, and feature geysers, lakes and waterfalls. The best camping spots are Laguna Larga and Los Azufres, both of which have cabins as well as campsites. If you're not a big camping fan, no need to rough it. There are plenty of really nice two- and three-star hotels that provide a pleasant stay without breaking the bank. For example, Hotel Real de San Pedro is just 15 minutes from the springs and costs

about \$36 a night. One last thing, make sure you order up a fresh trout *a la Michoacana* for dinner while you're there (most any restaurant around here does this dish well)...a perfect way to wrap up a perfect winter. *Buen provecho* (bon appetite).

* Information and photos courtesy of government of Michoacan: www.michoacan.gob.mx.

To enter Mexico you need to obtain a tourist card. Easy enough if you're flying, as you just fill out a card on the plane. If driving, you will be able to get one at the border immigration office. Of course, to get your Tourist Card you will need to show proof of citizenship. A passport is always best for this, according to the U.S. Embassy, as having one avoids delays and misunderstandings. Visit the U. S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs web site at <http://travel.state.gov/> for more information.

Oaxaca

By Jessica Ramesch

Oaxaca: it is the name of a Mexican state *and* its capital city. Oaxaca City is also the controversial site where five months of protests have garnered much international attention. Anyone following the news knows about the unrest in Oaxaca city...and probably thinks the town is a colossal mess. However, the teachers in Oaxaca (who started the protest) have achieved at least a partial victory, and agreed to go back to their jobs. The picturesque town has gone back to a semblance of normalcy.

In the past days, policemen who were called in to control the mobs found that, with the teachers giving up the strike, no extreme action was necessary. Locals and tourists have been able to return to the main square and just sit...a small pleasure they were denied for the past five months.

It will probably take a while until Oaxaca goes completely back to normal, but on the very day the protests ended, officials were having public areas repainted and things looked tidy. Once again, we see that Mexico's forte is taking extra care of its precious tourist destinations.

Protests and politics aside, I thought it would be interesting to tell you readers about Oaxaca...not the problems it faces; you've read all about those. No, I'd like to tell you why tourists still go there, why so many fall in love with it, and why it has historically been one of Mexico's top attractions.



Oaxaca's colorful strip is a feast for the eyes and a great place for a morning stroll

Once upon a time...

The unrest in Oaxaca may have seemed an exaggeration to some, but those that understand the area's history, and the fiery nature of Oaxaca's ancient residents, will also understand why today's Oaxacans are a passionate people. The Zapotecs, or the "people of the clouds", inhabited the region around 500 A.D. The Zapotecs followed the years and seasons on a 365-day solar calendar, but also held to a ritual calendar of 260-days. The ritual calendar helped them keep track of when the world was supposed to self-destruct and then be renewed in a pure state.

Toward the end of the VIII century, the Zapotecs abandoned or disappeared from their main center, and many other tribes came and went. Most notably, the Mixtecs dominated for a long period (over 700 years) and were then displaced by the Aztecs, who were present when the Spaniards first arrived in Oaxaca. The Aztecs were a fierce people; historical counts indicate that

the *conquistador* Hernan Cortes and his troops were twice driven out of the valleys occupied by ferocious indigenous tribes.

Nonetheless, colonial Oaxaca was an important jewel in the “New Spain” crown. The region’s wool became famous, the fertile soil yielded abundant sugar cane, the horses were known as the best in continent, and, most importantly, gold and silver were plentiful and mined heavily. Although many attempts were made to convert the indigenous populations to Christianity, they held to their beliefs while integrating only some symbols and practices of the new faith.

A fairytale-like beauty

The state of Oaxaca sounds unreal. It boasts 10,000-foot mountain peaks, some of the world’s deepest caverns, those sparkly Mexican beaches, lush jungles, and the thriving valleys that have hosted one fascinating tribe after another. Oaxaca is in the south-east portion of Mexico, bordered by Veracruz and Puebla to the north, Chiapas to the east, Guerrero to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the south. It has over three million inhabitants and is almost 5,000 feet above sea level. The unique topography makes for a wide-ranging climate—the average temperature varies from about 85 to 54 °F.

Overall, Oaxaca offers everything imaginable. There is the state’s wealth of natural resources, from beaches and spas to caves and caverns to dams and waterfalls, and then there are the man-made marvels—i.e., handicrafts, archeological sites, world-renowned architecture, complex gourmet cuisine, museums and indigenous villages.

Natural and synthetic wonders

Among the many natural attractions, Puerto Escondido beach elicits perhaps the most interest. It’s a magical place where every year, thousands of sea turtles come to lay their eggs. Oaxaca’s caves and caverns also deserve a mention, as they are among the world’s deepest. The cave at Apoala is known as the snake cave, due to its winding shape. It’s an amazing place to visit, as visitors entering the cave happen upon a large lagoon of unknown depth.



A Spanish colonial statue reminds one of Oaxaca’s illustrious past

In the human arena, Oaxaca’s many civilizations have contributed to making this state Mexico’s most diverse. Especially representative of Oaxaca is shiny pottery made with the region’s distinctive black clay. Pieces are usually fired in underground ovens and take over four days to make. Of course, in Mexico, a place this rich in culture is bound to feature more than a few archeological digs, and again, Oaxaca does not disappoint.

Monte Alban is the most important dig in Oaxaca, and the place to go if you’ve only got time to see one site. Scientists believe it was the capital of the great Zapotec nation, and one of the most populated cities of the time. The great square of Monte Alban is an impressive 650 square feet, and the ball court evokes images of proud natives playing the precursor to soccer. The pre-Hispanic and colonial treasures uncovered here are an archeologist’s dream, but laymen can certainly appreciate the singularity of the artifacts. And though the area may celebrate the past, it’s as modern as can be, with all the comforts of home (communications and transportation are quick and easy).

Of fiestas and foodies

There's more to do in Oaxaca than visit big digs and sandy beaches, though. The most Oaxacan celebration would have to be the Guelaguetza. Celebrated in July, Guelaguetza is a festival of sharing. Historically, Oaxacans did more than share their harvests of pineapple, mango, and coffee, though. They also helped each other by sharing their skills...for example, a wood carver might make an exchange with a blacksmith (say, a carving for a grill), thereby allowing both to have things they may not have normally been able to afford.

And the festivals would not be fun without the amazing food. Gourmands really get a kick out of Oaxacan food (literally). This state is famous for its seven mole sauces (*mole* is a splendid chocolate-based sauce that normally has over 30 spices). Foodies will also enjoy fresh curd cheese, meat baked in underground pits, hand-made chocolate and yellow corn bread, all of which are typical Oaxacan fare. And the food is beautiful as well as delicious...Oaxacans put flowers on just about anything. You'll find rose petals on ice cream, bean flowers in Mole, cocoa flowers in Tejate (a typical Oaxacan drink made of corn), and bougainvillea in Horchata (a drink made with almonds, rice, cinnamon, sugar and lime), to name a few.

Tejate is a very Oaxacan drink and thus hard to find outside the state. It is actually referred to as an energy drink or the "drink of the gods," as only high-level Zapotecs were served Tejate in the old days. Today, you can get Tejate in Oaxacan markets (it is usually not served in restaurants), where it is often presented in eye-catching, hand-painted gourds called *jicaras*. Like Oaxacan mole, Tejate has a long list of ingredients and is rather complicated to make. Corn, roasted cacao beans, cinnamon, and cocoa flowers all go into the fragrant concoction, which is usually mixed by hand.

Did you know?

Here's a little list of interesting facts about Oaxaca that are fun to know...especially if you're planning to visit:

- Oaxaca has not one, but two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Historical Center in Oaxaca city, and the Monte Alban archaeological site.
- Writer D.H. Lawrence lived in Oaxaca. He paid tribute to his adopted home in a book about human interaction, titled *Market Days in Oaxaca*.
- Anthropologists think the Valley of Oaxaca may have been the first place in America where corn was domesticated and cultivated.
- The name *Oaxaca* comes from the Nahuatl word *Huayacac*, which means "top of the acacias".
- Oaxaca is home to *sixteen* indigenous groups that speak *over 150 different dialects*.
- Oaxaca claims to have the oldest tree in the world, known as the Tule tree. The tree is over 137 feet in diameter and thought to be more than 2,000 years old.



Today's Currency Update

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Rates as of November 15, 2006

1 U.S. dollar equals 10.853 peso
1 peso equals .092 U.S. dollar



Mexico in the News

News from Mexico:

All about dollars and cents:

Will Mexico join Mercosur? President-elect Felipe Calderon is already looking into the possibility, but there are concerns:

http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/06/america/LA_POL_Brazil_Mexico.php

In the IMF's annual review of Mexico's economy, the international organization recommended that the new administration employ structural reforms to facilitate growth and macroeconomic stability. More on the recommendations here:

http://today.reuters.com/news/articleinvesting.aspx?type=bondsNews&storyID=2006-10-11T221941Z_01_N11309105_RTRIDST_0_ECONOMY-MEXICO-IMF-UPDATE-1.XML

Homebuilding in Mexico is at an all-time high...again. A front-runner in the business, Urbi D.U.S.A. plans to double profits in the next five years with an ambitious new business model:

http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=aHlx1L2j6Fq0&refer=latin_america

Bloomberg looks at rising prices for agricultural goods and inflation in Mexico. According to the publication, Mexico's inflation-linked bonds will outperform other securities in coming weeks:

http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=av8y9R0ShBjg&refer=latin_america

With easing concerns about possible hikes in U.S. interest rates, Mexican stocks rose to record-breaking levels on October 18. More on the report here:

http://today.reuters.com/news/articleinvesting.aspx?view=CN&storyID=2006-10-18T143356Z_01_N18420138_RTRIDST_0_MARKETS-MEXICO-UPDATE-1.XML&rpc=66&type=qcna

According to a new report by the Mexican Finance Ministry, the nation's economy will grow more than previously thought this year. The current estimate is 4.5%, up from the 4.2% estimate released earlier this year:

http://today.reuters.com/news/articleinvesting.aspx?type=bondsNews&storyID=2006-10-18T221743Z_01_N18561878_RTRIDST_0_ECONOMY-MEXICO-UPDATE-3.XML

Lately it seems like Mexico can't stop making economic news. The Latin American nation has just sold the first-ever 30-year peso bond and demand was extremely high:

http://today.reuters.com/news/articleinvesting.aspx?type=newIssuesNews&storyID=2006-10-24T190606Z_01_N24216485_RTRIDST_0_ECONOMY-MEXICO-BOND-UPDATE-1.XML

David Bohigian of the U.S. office of commerce said United States – Mexico border trade would likely to make progress with President-elect Felipe Calderon's administration:

http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/25/business/LA_FIN_Mexico_US_Trade.php

Mexico's leading mortgage lender has also posted a surge in net profit, thanks to the housing boom that has set the market afire. The surge was nearly 50%, owing in part to the Mexican President's program for low-income family housing:

http://today.reuters.com/news/articleinvesting.aspx?type=bondsNews&storyID=2006-10-25T230415Z_01_N25378984_RTRIDST_0_CONSTRUCTION-MEXICO-HOMEX-UPDATE-1.XML

It's no surprise (in light of Mexico's construction boom) that Ceis reporting strong sales. The Mexican company said revenues rose 8% to \$4.65 billion:

http://today.reuters.com/news/articleinvesting.aspx?type=marketsNews&storyID=2006-10-26T021346Z_01_N25342542_RTRIDST_0_CONSTRUCTION-MEXICO-CEMEX-UPDATE-2.XML

Everybody wants a piece of the Mexico tourism boom, and Alaska Air (AA) is doing as much as possible to benefit from good times. The airline will now be offering five more nonstop Mexico routes from the West Coast. AA will also increase frequency on existing routes:

<http://news.moneycentral.msn.com/provider/providerarticle.asp?feed=AP&Date=20061027&ID=6144828>

Seems consumer demand for Mexican products in the U.S. will continue to underpin growth there through the year-end. Mexico is set to expand this year at its fastest pace in the past six years and posted a record trade surplus with the U.S. in August. Meanwhile, central bank rates will probably remain at a two-year low for yet another month:

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=aNkFfmAM4au0&refer=news>

Housing, tourism and construction will be the focus for Mexican President-elect Felipe Calderon's new economic team. Public and private investment in these sectors, especially for infrastructure projects, is hoped to create jobs quickly and bolster the internal economy, thus aiding Mexico in attaining greater economic independence from the U.S.:

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=a9wg53D3v6sY&refer=news>

Mexico and the U.S., though friendly trade partners, have head-butted on the proposed U.S. – Mexico border fence. Now the two friendly nations will face one another once more, in the Copa America soccer match. You won't guess where (hint, it's a Latin American nation that is the bee in the United States' bonnet) :

<http://football.guardian.co.uk/breakingnews/feedstory/0,-6181503,00.html>

Business and politics:

In Mexico, Eduardo Perez has constantly emphasized the importance of diffusing monopolies. The Federal Competition Commission President's rules may be enforceable now:
http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/oct2006/gb20061006_350067.htm

Mexico's soon to be president, Felipe Calderon, completed a Latin American tour earlier this month. The purpose of the circuit was to develop regional contacts and solidify his standing, but U.S. foreign policy, immigration and the drug trade were hot topics:
<http://www.mexidata.info/id1087.html>

If you were wondering what new Mexican President Felipe Calderon is planning, this Washington Post article sums it up well. Topics including reform and sustainable development were at the fore:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/11/AR2006101100117.html>

Mexican President, Vicente Fox, met with top business leaders to brainstorm solutions to the emigration issue that causes the Latin country to lose so many workers to the U.S. Ideally, businesses would create enough jobs to stem the tide and offer potential émigrés a reason to stay home. But how to accomplish this? Read about the findings here:
<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/fn/4255142.html>

Can Mexican expats help the national government stem the flow of emigration? The Talent Network has met twice to discuss the issue and further aims to create well-paid jobs in Mexico:
<http://www.charleston.net/assets/webPages/departmental/news/Stories.aspx?section=businessreview&tableId=113259&pubDate=10/16/2006>

Mexican President-elect, Felipe Calderon, has named an IMF deputy managing director to his economic transition team. The new team-member—Agustin Carstens—is widely considered the front-runner to become Mexico's finance minister.
<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=aYoZcQaFKKYo&refer=news>

Seems the political left can't catch a break in Mexico these days. After finally conceding defeat in the Presidential election fiasco earlier this year, Manuel Lopez' party lost local elections in the demagogue's own state of Tabasco:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/16/AR2006101600710.html>

Some 300 jobs are to be created in Mexico when Nortel opens a call center next year. As to why the communications company chose this particular location, a rep said Mexico stood out because of its professionals, education and infrastructure:
<http://voipforenterprise.tmcnet.com/feature/service-solutions/articles/3124-nortel-open-38m-customer-service-center-mexico-city.htm>

Felipe Calderon, soon to be inaugurated as President of Mexico, will visit President Bush two days after the U.S. Congress elections. The issues up for discussion, of course, include immigration and the proposed U.S. – Mexico border wall:
<http://www.contracostatimes.com/mld/cctimes/news/politics/15798444.htm>

The historical Mexican state of Oaxaca has been besieged by protests for the past five months. Though teachers are agreeing to go back to work (even though they have not succeeded in ousting the governor) the senate recognized that conditions of "ungovernability" and a lack of confidence in state institutions would continue to present challenges:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6069020.stm>

Some 70,000 teachers in the state of Oaxaca will finally return to work. The decision comes after about five months of strikes. The protesters aimed to have the Oaxacan governor ousted, but the Mexican Senate refused:

<http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/ElFinanciero/Portal/cfpages/contentmgr.cfm?docId=25643&docTipo=1&orderBy=docid&sortBy=ASC>

The Mexican government is making good on their promise to approach the UN with regard to the proposed U.S. – Mexico border wall. Part of the Mexican argument is centered on the belief that the fence will not stop Mexicans from trying to cross illegally into the U.S.—it will only force them to do it in more dangerous locations and manners:

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/15833218.htm>

Felipe Calderon is Mexico's President-elect and he is taking a stance on the major issues plaguing his country. Calderon says his new 20-30 program will address socio-economic issues by seeking long-term solutions:

<http://www.mexidata.info/id1095.html>

Canada awaited Mexican President-elect Felipe Calderon last week for what promised to be a productive visit. Apparently, Mexican president-elects tend to visit Canada before the U.S. in order to prove that the U.S. does not dominate Mexican policy:

http://www.thestar.com/NASApp/cs/ContentServer?pagename=thestar/Layout/Article_Type1&c=Article&cid=1161775029248&call_pageid=968332188774&col=968350116467

You may not have heard of Oaxaca, Mexico—a small but quaint tourist destination—but a long-lived teacher protest recently put the place on the map. As more protesters joined the teachers' strike and events escalated, President Fox was finally forced to send in the troops. Now tourists have been spotted in the central plaza and this Bloomberg article reports that 60% of the city's schools have reopened:

http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=a8PSlp_chF6A&refer=latin_america

More on Mexican Pres-elect Felipe Calderon's plans for Mexico's economic future. Calderon, who says the securitization of infrastructure projects is fundamental to his plans, expects to attract private investment through something like a real estate investment trust (REIT):

<http://www.marketwatch.com/news/story/story.aspx?siteid=mktw&guid=%7B2C3D8089-0041-405A-BB2A-651FE44B90F5%7D>

In a two-day trade mission to Mexico, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger met with Mexican President-to-be, Felipe Calderon. The leaders spoke about spinach and the Latino vote, amongst other things:

http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/news/local/states/california/northern_california/15987994.htm

This *The Guardian* article paints a sorry picture indeed of outgoing Mexican President Vicente Fox and his "lame duck" final days. Read about the President's new woes, here:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1945252,00.html>

Now that five months of protests are over and done with in Oaxaca, the controversial governor is promising to implement a six-point plan to address the protesters' concerns:

http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/11/09/america/LA_GEN_Mexico_Oaxaca_Unrest.php

Cheerful news:

A few months ago, three humble fishermen made international news when they were rescued after nine months adrift. Now it seems the men are to be well-compensated for their suffering. Their story is the stuff of feature films:

<http://news.scotsman.com/index.cfm?id=1514342006>

Mexico will receive over \$49 million from the world bank to demonstrate solar thermal energy. Here's more about the new technology:

<http://www.infozine.com/news/stories/op/storiesView/sid/18213/>

Where on earth can you find a blue heaven? Mexico's Algarve district holds this claim...more on the town and the tasty tequila:

<http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/living/travel/15709573.htm>

In protecting Mexico's national heritage and world-famous archeological sites, the government must sometimes put the breaks on even the most interesting of projects. One such endeavor would have involved Yahoo! calling out to UFO's:

http://today.reuters.com/stocks/QuoteCompanyNewsArticle.aspx?view=CN&storyID=2006-10-11T222805Z_01_N11414699_RTRIDST_0_MEDIA-YAHOO-PYRAMID.XML&rpc=66

It is hard to imagine the wonders of Mexico's Sea of Cortez...but this Boston Herald article does a great job. Enter a wonder-world of dolphins and whales right here:

<http://theedge.bostonherald.com/travelNews/view.bg?articleid=162340>

Mexico's health reforms aim for universal coverage by the year 2010. According to the nation's Health Minister, this ambitious program may well serve as a model for other nations where the poor have inadequate access to health care:

<http://today.reuters.co.uk/news/CrisesArticle.aspx?storyId=L13214682&WTmodLoc=World-R5-Alertnet-6>

There are probably hundreds of interesting ways to see and tour Mexico...it's all about incorporating your special interests into the planning process. Now there's a great option for equestrians who'd also like to see Mexico's World Heritage site of Tequila:

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2006/10/prweb450889.htm>

Visiting Mexico City? The protests are over but watch out for the clowns:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/16/AR2006101601478.html>

It seems the U.S. can't get enough of Mexico these days. Following a deluge of similar announcements by other airlines, Denver's Frontier Airlines Holdings, Inc. announced the company was seeking authorization for new flights to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico:

<http://news.moneycentral.msn.com/provider/providerarticle.asp?feed=AP&Date=20061017&ID=6111078>

According to Frontier Airlines, the Denver-based company has benefited a great deal from increasing service to ever-popular Mexico. Read more on Frontier and Mexico right here:

<http://www.kansascity.com/mld/kansascity/business/15792229.htm>

A stirring tale about Mexico's Bald Mountain—a temporary resting place for millions of Monarch butterflies every spring. Read about what one tourist called “the eight wonder of the world” right here: http://www.sltrib.com/travel/ci_4529718

Here's a fun-story for Mexico enthusiasts...it involves over 13,000 chess players, a Russian giant and the Guinness Book of World Records:

http://today.reuters.co.uk/news/articlenews.aspx?type=topNews&storyID=2006-10-23T052445Z_01_N22299847_RTRUKOC_0_UK-LIFE-MEXICO-CHESS.xml

Ten tips on how to reap the most out of your next visit to Mexico's Puerto Vallarta:

<http://www.planetout.com/travel/article.html?sernum=10520&navpath=/travel/>

Mexico's national team is looking for someone strong to take over their national team now that coach Ricardo Lavolpe has moved to an Argentina team. Rumor has it Italy's Marcelo Lippi is high on the list:

http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/24/sports/LA_SPT_SOC_Mexico_Lippi.php

Football enthusiasts: stop worrying and go ahead with plans to move to Mexico. The NFL announced plans to schedule as many as two regular-season games outside the United States every year from 2008 to 2011, with a focus on Mexico, Canada and Europe:

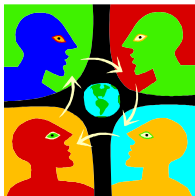
<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601079&sid=aeKCUsMNfJc&refer=home>

Increasing air traffic between the U.S. and Mexico has sparked talks between the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration and its Mexican counterpart. The discussions aim to better manage air space:

http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/11/01/america/LA_GEN_Mexico_US_FAA.php

The Mexico City Grand Prix on November 10-12, 2006 will feature Mexican David Martinez for Forsythe. In the 2005 Champ Car Atlantic Championship Martinez (then a rookie) claimed fifth—a feat he repeated again in 2006:

<http://www.motorsport.com/news/article.asp?ID=237655&FS=CHAMPCAR>



Upcoming Events

For information about any of our events, email events@internationalliving.com or call 1-866-381-8446 (USA and Canada toll-free) or +1-410-223-2688.

We're busy planning for 2007, so expect great things for the great new year.

We'll be posting the calendar for the new year as soon as we've finalized all the fantastic Mexico activities we have planned for you. Watch out for special emails and be sure to check the Events section in upcoming issues of *Mexico Insider*. Happy Holidays...

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