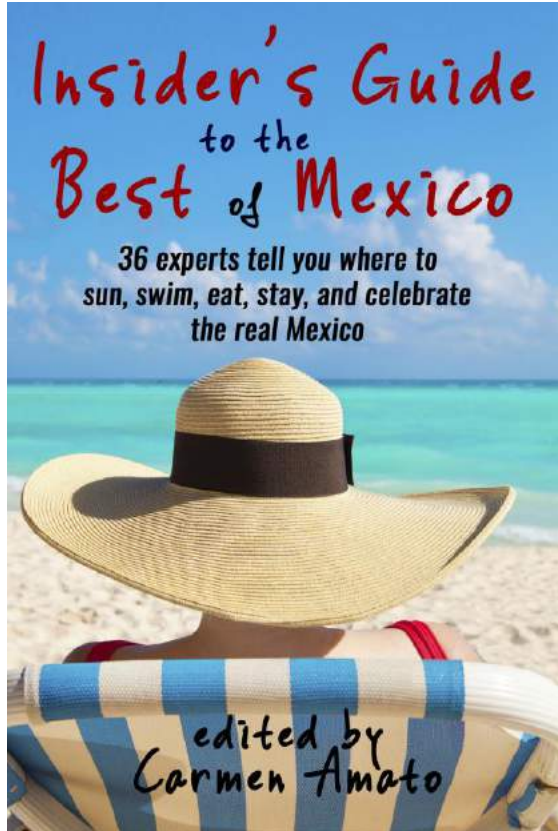


Foreword

On any given day, the news about Mexico is full of contrast. We can choose to learn about drug cartels or Cancun's best vacation deal. Corruption or culture.



But it is the insider who knows the real story of Mexico.

This is a collection of those essential insider stories. Writers, artists, educators, travelers, business owners and others shared their experiences inside today's Mexico. Most of those who contributed stories are expatriates living in Mexico who have found there both opportunity and inspiration.

These stories are neither formal guidebook, social commentary, nor a substitute for unbiased news. They are an effort to share a landscape and culture that have found a place in the hearts of so many.

Perhaps this is our attempt to find out why.

The dynamic and influential Mexico Writers group on Facebook was the springboard for this project. As a mystery

author with many books set in Mexico, I often work with other writers to brainstorm stories and develop blog projects. This has been far and away my favorite, thanks to the enthusiasm and professionalism of fellow Mexico Writers.

Whether you are contemplating your next vacation, retirement, work-related move to Mexico, or are simply an armchair traveler, we hope you enjoy these insider stories.

Hasta la proxima,

Carmen

Carmen Amato

carmenamato.net

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Art

The Otomí Embroidery of Hidalgo

The colorful embroidery work of Mexico's Otomí women has become a popular textile around the world. The cheerful combination of animals (birds, rabbits, deer, dogs, insects) with swirling flowers is frequently seen in many American design



magazines and can be used for bedspreads, tablecloths, headboard covers, wall hangings lampshades and other creative craft projects. These large textiles, known as "Tenangos" because of the region they come from in Hidalgo (Tenango de Doria), come in many different colors and a few standard sizes. The textile is not available as a bolt of fabric (as many people request) but in a few standard sizes.

Usually Otomi embroideries are done on an off-white muslin background, occasionally on black or gray cotton. The lore is that they are a

more recent development in the traditional arts of Mexico and some say they are based on some cave paintings in Hidalgo state. That's been hard to verify. Many of the small towns within the Tenango region are home to women's collectives who make and sell these beautiful works of art.

Each 6' by 6' piece is one-of-a-kind and takes a approximately three months to complete. The designs are drawn in water-soluble pencil or marker on off-white 100% cotton muslin and then hand-embroidered. Women often work together on a piece using their embroidery hoops and sitting and chatting.

The Otomí live in various regions of Mexico—Hidalgo, Puebla, Oaxaca, Mexico—and their textiles can be found throughout the country due to a very good distribution system. If you purchase an Otomí piece on a vacation to the coasts of Mexico be careful about the quality, for it can vary widely depending on the skill of the artisan. If you are interested in a high quality piece that has been personally selected, take a look at our current stock!

Anne Damon, Owner of Zinnia Folk Arts, www.ZinniaFolkArts.com

Art in Ajijic

I first visited the small village of Ajijic on Lake Chapala in 1980, looking for art. Ajijic had gained the reputation of being the artistic center of the Chapala Riviera. Over the years the village had attracted many foreign artists, including such famous names as Sylvia Fein and Charles Pollock (brother of Jackson). More recently, art education programs, now managed by the Lake Chapala Society, have helped stimulate a formidable pool of local talent.



Ajijic does have its studios and galleries, but much of the art on view today is public. Colorful murals and artwork provide interesting diversions on any stroll around the village. A large tree stump on the plaza has been given an extraordinary new lease of life by local sculptor Estela Hidalgo. The centerpiece of the Ajijic Cultural Center is a vivid mural by Jesús

López Vega telling the story of the lake's mythological fish-princess Teomichicihualli. More than a dozen other murals grace this lively artistic village, where the art scene today is even more vibrant and creative than ever before.

Tony Burton, author of [Western Mexico, A Traveler's Treasury](http://sombrobooks.com), and [Lake Chapala Through The Ages: an anthology of travelers' tales](http://sombrobooks.com), <http://sombrobooks.com>

Emilio Sosa Medina: Scary and Beautiful

Tucked into a small space near the corner of Hidalgo and López Mateos, sits an unassuming little store, Artesanías Glenssy. The walls are hung with brilliantly colored, very scary creatures.



The artist's name is Emilio Sosa Medina, and he was born in Yobain Yucatan in 1955. A political activist since he was a teenager, Emilio left his home town in 1974 to move to Isla Mujeres.

In 1986 Emilio took lessons at the local Casa de la Cultura to learn paper maché techniques and he was intrigued by the possibilities. Using up to 40 kilos (87 pounds) of newsprint for some of his larger sculptures Emilio creates supernatural

beings from Mayan mythology, plus his own fantastic monsters.

Crafting each intricate piece is a slow process. Layer upon layer of newsprint are carefully formed over a wire frame and left for several days to dry naturally in the warm Caribbean climate. Several coats of vivid acrylics, followed by a final glaze of clear polymer resin, give the paper maché vibrancy and character.

Even though Mexican mask folk art has been in existence for thousands of years, Emilio brings new life to the art form. His one-of-a-kind pieces enhance interior spaces in homes on Isla Mujeres, and around the world. His legacy of scary and beautiful sculptures will live on beyond his time.

Lynda Lock, author and blogger, www.amazon.com/author/lyndalock

Tonaltepec pottery

There is a place in the hills north of Nochixtlan, Oaxaca called Vista Hermosa Tonaltepec. Located about 9,000 ft up in the Mixtec Highlands, Tonaltepec is just a tiny hamlet pinned to the side of a mountain.



In this tiny hamlet they make a unique, wild, and gnarly style of pottery that they splash with liquid from boiled tree bark. Wherever the stain lands is what you get.

They make these vessels elongated and with a fluted top for transporting water. They tie the pots on to their burros and go down a ravine to get their supply of water for the day. The shape of the vessels limits how much water splashes out on the way back up.

They stain the pottery with the boiled bark liquid because "that's the way my mother did it."

Dean and Shari Miller, owner, Rancho Deluxe, Wimberley, TX

Basura Artist

There is a funny little orange-painted structure with a shaggy palapa roof on the Caribbean side of Isla Mujeres. The artisan who lives and works there is Antonio Fabre. Originally from Cuernavaca near Mexico City, Antonio has lived on Isla Mujeres for several years. He creates beautiful things from *basura*—trash in English—like local stone, tropical woods, recycled metals, old anchors and portholes, and other unusual items that attracts his eye.



Antonio trained as an architect in Mexico City for two years, then when the teachers went on strike he moved to Barcelona Spain to study photography. Dissatisfied with the flatness of photography he switched to creating beautiful three-dimensional treasures from wood, metal, stone, and glass. Pieces made by Antonio include individually designed furniture, hand carved signs for businesses or casas, lusciously painted decorating items, carved wooden fish that ‘swim’ on metal waves, and gorgeous multi-colored pendant lights. He is the Renaissance man of Mexico.

At times he is difficult to locate. He is often in Cancun, or Merida or other parts of the Yucatan buying materials for his current creations. Don't despair! It is well worth the effort. Antonio Fabre takes discarded items and turns them into beautiful works of art.

Lynda Lock, author and blogger, www.amazon.com/author/lyndalock

Retablos

After a few bites of the cake Raul seemed to realize that she was waiting. “He read about the United States and wanted to go. He tried to cross the desert but the Virgin abandoned him because what he was doing was wrong. He got lost and died in the sun.”

“I’m so sorry, Raul,” Luz said.

“His mother had a retablo made for the Virgin to have pity on his soul.”

“I’m sure his soul rests in peace.”

“When his mother died I had the retablo buried with her.” Raul continued to eat.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, Luz’s heart twisting in sadness. Retablos were primitive paintings of a scene of something that happened in a person’s life for which they were giving thanks to the Virgin. But not this time. The son had died trying to get to El Norte and the mother had probably died of a broken heart.

—Excerpt, The Hidden Light of Mexico City

The Catholic Church is a strong cultural and artistic influence in Mexico, and my books reflect that. *Retablos* are part of Mexico’s tradition combining art and faith, made all the more interesting to me because they are rustic folk art meant to capture a moment in time for which someone is giving thanks to God.



I bought two *retablos* in a small shop in Mexico City's Zona Rosa a couple of years ago. They are each about 5×7 inches, and painted on rusted steel. The edges are sharp. My guess they were cut from a barrel and done by the same person.

In one, thanks are given to the Virgin of Saint John of the Lakes for saving the school children from an ox (*el buey*) in

Jalisco. The other depicts the Virgin appearing and saving Jacinto from the black dog which appeared in the cemetery in Oaxaca. I don't know if this should be taken literally or is a reference to illness or the devil.

I wonder at the journey these *retablos* took from Perla and Jacinto, who were giving thanks to God some 50 years ago, all the way to that shop in Mexico City. Now they are part of my writing journey.

Just like you.

Carmen Amato, author of the *Detective Emilia Cruz* mystery series and other fiction, carmenamato.net

The Collective Muse

As an artist, I have found that I have become a much more enriched artist by travelling to Mexico. In fact, I can directly attribute my journey in expansion of



form from writing to painting to photography to my annual trips to Mexico. When you develop a passion for a place and for its people, you develop a way of seeing that culture in a way that you can't with that which has become familiar. You begin to appreciate differences, rather than sameness and you feel safe in this unfamiliarity. You are more willing to step outside of yourself and there is a natural sensation that is

triggered that requires one to have an appetite for more than just the local cuisine.

Language, skin color, mannerisms, landscape, design choices and leisure preferences all become intriguing and an inspiration for the development of new works of art. I have travelled the world and I have settled finally in a place with people and customs that I am so happy to collectively call my muse: Guayabitos, Mexico.

Kim Peto, painter and photographer, <http://fineartamerica.com/profiles/kim-peto.html>

Beaches

What is this Magical place they call CHACALA?

According to those that have discovered the "secret" beach halfway up the coastline of Riviera Nayarit, this little piece of paradise holds an air of something rather mystical. Could it be due to a vibe unfolding from the volcano located in the lush dense jungle high up on the south end? Is this why so many are attracted to hiking up this mountain for exploration? Possibly it explains why so many come to the yoga/healing center located just below. Or is it something else? The Huichol Indians seem to also feel these spiritual vibrations, as they perform many colorful ceremonies in the nearby mountains.



All magic aside, the fine sand that is nestled against the backdrop of the lush green jungle and hugged on the other side by the cleanest, sparkling swimming beach on the coastline is something in its own right to capture! Great pride is taken to sustain the "clean beach certificate" that has been awarded year after year.

If your timing is right, you may catch sight of the whales and dolphins daringly swimming in very close to shore, happily leaping in and out of the water—what better show can you ask for?! This is provided free of charge, compliments of Chacala! Possibly they are also feeling the magic as well. Many sailboats elect to stay for the night, or sometimes much longer as they take in the calm bay and spectacular scenery.

There is actually a little more to Playa Chacala than meets the eye, but the charm of this village is the low key image that it manages to sustain. In truth, there are more seafood restaurants dotting this beach than you will find in Sayulita, San Pancho and Lo De Marcos, all put together! There is also a medical center, 2 schools, an art gallery, a Saturday artesian market, and world class surfing close

by, as well as weekend workshops for spiritual guidance, the first class yoga retreat and much more.

The 5 mile drive in, once you leave the main highway, is breathtaking as you pass mango and banana orchards, a little lake and gorgeous terrain, before the sudden turquoise ocean view jolts you into the reality that you are about to reach the village and beach called CHACALA.

Lindy Laing, www.nayarit4fun.com

Playa Carrizalillo

A small bay that packs a big punch, Playa Carrizalillo is up there with my favorite beaches in the world. The bay is reached by a steep staircase. As you



climb down it starts to come into view and the vision of the turquoise ocean nestled among lush green foliage stops most visitors in their tracks.

This small bay has risen in popularity, along with Puerto Escondido in general, over the past few years but still retains a laid-back relaxed feel. The waves are big but the bay catches them in such a way that it is the perfect place for both swimming and learning to surf.

Sun loungers sprinkle the sand and can be rented in return for consuming food and drinks, so pick a palapa, order a fresh coconut water, some fish

tacos, and enjoy this corner of the Mexican Pacific.

Susannah Rigg, *freelance writer and founder of Mexico Retold*
<http://www.mexicoretold.com>

Simply Isla

“Last night I dreamed of La Isla ...” *Madonna, from “La Isla Bonita”*

Cozumel and Isla Mujeres are in Mexico, but are also genuine Caribbean islands. And “Isla” is the jewel, a laid-back paradise that’s really just a high place in a reef pierced by caves and flocked by beautiful fish and turtles.

Isla abounds with lovely beaches (including the Corona commercials strand) but my favorite is a nameless stretch just inside the Avalon bridge that I call “the world’s greatest swimming hole.” No waves, no game fish, no scuba diving, no boats ... but it’s been the center of my life on the island and I’m not the only one.

Water sloshes over the protective reef to generate a gentle current that cleanses the water and gives rides to floats. The sand slopes very gradually ... a safe haven for children of any age and you can walk all the way across. Fish swarm on the far side: perfect Snorkel Basic for kids and beginners.

And it's a "locals" beach—with taxi service—equally great for sun-tanning retirees, splashing youngsters, rapt toddlers, and newbie divers. It's a great beach, and not just for me ... for you, too.

Linton Robinson, author of novels about Mexico and Mexican Slang 101,
<http://linrobinson.com>

Isla Contoy

When you close your eyes and dream of a far-off paradise with palm trees and crystal waters, this is what you see. But when you open your eyes you're on Isla Contoy, and this is reality.

Just a little way out from the Yucatan coastline lays this tiny uninhabited island,



a perfect little pinch of beauty. It gives such an incredible sense of perspective, and an understanding of what it truly means to be a miniscule speck appearing in the middle of our planet's vast and majestic ocean. The lucid shallow waters are perfect for paddling, and regular dips paired with the cool Caribbean breeze are just enough to offset the sun's blissful tropical heat.

There's a quaint little educational center here on the island, and tour guides are incredibly well-informed on the island's wildlife and conservation. They're enthusiastic to express how precious the island is as one of Mexico's most valuable National Parks.

As the birds lounge in the mangrove and the rays glide casually past, you quickly realize that you are the wildlife here. This is peace, this is serenity.

Ellie Cusack, blogger at [Tea and Tacos](#)

Lovers' Beach, Cabo San Lucas

Mexico has a lot of world-class beaches by any measure: but how many beaches are on two seas at once?

"Lovers Beach" is the last beach in Baja, a pocket of gold sand separating the spine of the peninsula from final pinnacles of "The Capes." To the north, a sheer

cliff rises, wind-scoured into psychedelic patterns I have been dazzled by and climbed on. To the south is the iconic Cabo arch where I swam with seals. The west is pounded by Pacific waves, too rough for swimming, but I've seen many grey whales just offshore. A hundred yards east from the surf is a gentle beach lapped by wavelets of the Sea of Cortez, where I used to dive among clouds of moorish idols, striped wrasse, and other show-off fish.

You can reach the beach by climbing over the steep spires south of the Hotel Finisterra, swim out there from the gasoline dock (in shallow, crystalline turquoise water) or you can just grab a boat at the harbor docks and get dropped off in warm, welcoming water to walk ashore and explore a beach like none other, anywhere, ever.

Linton Robinson, author of novels about Mexico and Mexican Slang 101, <http://linrobinson.com>

Zipolite

I love San Diego. So how did I come to live over a thousand miles away in the sleepy Mexican beach town of Zipolite?

Unfortunately, I didn't salt enough money into my Social Security to survive in a city with such a high cost of living such as San Diego. When a friend told me about this hippy beach town in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca where wearing clothing on the beach is optional, I had to check it out and decided that this was where I wanted to retire. It isn't the end of the world and as they have Wi-Fi so I can still communicate with friends with email and Skype. There are also a number of other



writers living or visiting the area.

Zipolite was founded in the '60s by a few counter-culture hippies who wanted a place where they could hang out and do their own thing without being hassled.

Zipolite evolved into an offbeat place with middle-class Mexicans, retired expatriates, alternate lifestylers, and liberal tourists from all over the world. Everyone mingles together in harmony and helps each other. You can check out more on my website at: <http://bookwarren.com/zipolite>.

Sam Warren resides in Zipolite, Mexico, and publishes an online webzine at <http://SDWriteWay.org> and a column in <http://EastCountyMagazine.org>

Events

Merida Weekends

Mérida weekends are all about fun. The Plaza Grande is huge and inviting. Flanked by the oldest cathedral on mainland America, it's filled with covered



stands selling the colorful embroidered clothing of the region, toys, and musical instruments. Food stands ring the edges. The people of this region are the friendliest in all Mexico. Sunday is the day for people to bloom. It begins with everyone headed to church in puffy jackets, since the temperature can plummet overnight to 72° Fahrenheit.

On the Paseo Montejo, a Victorian promenade boulevard, white horse-drawn carriages beckon. When sisal fiber, a product of the agave plant, was developed for rope and clothing in the 1880s, the wealthy planters built their townhouses on this street. France offered design ideas, and the influence of the Second Empire was strong. Here their daughters were introduced into society, and their sons into business. This was the only period of great wealth the Yucatán ever had. When

artificial fibers came in, it was over within 75 years.

On Sunday, the Paseo's outbound direction is closed to traffic. It streams with families on foot and on bicycles. The greatest of these mansions, the Palacio Cantón, is now the Anthropology and History Museum, which houses a stunning collection of artifacts from the surrounding jungle cities.

John Scherber, author of the Paul Zacher mystery series and other books
www.sanmiguelallendebooks.com

San Blas Day, February 3

San Blas is a centuries-old west coast port town, rich in history and character but always struggling to outgrow its status as a second class tourist town. Still more

kin to Bogart's Casablanca than to contemporary Cancún, the town is too old to put on Riviera airs. Long accustomed to conquistadors, adventurers, and schemers, San Blas has come to comfortable terms with itself, past and present, mellow and wise with endurance, unimpressed with the slick and pretentious; a Mexican port town of hard-working fishermen, shopkeepers, and restaurateurs, not a resort catering to the pampered tourist.



Named after the martyr St. Blaise, fourth century physician and Bishop of Sebastia, Armenia, San Blas celebrates its namesake Feast Day on February 3 each year with religious processions, a parade of floats and local children in native costume, dances in the plaza, and the old-style firework tower

of screaming, smoking, whistling, whirring explosive madness that would cause strokes in State-side mothers and OSHA inspectors.

The fiesta highlight comes with a procession taking the saint's statue from the church, parading him through town with a brass band, then transporting him on a shrimp boat out the estuary to the Rock of the Virgin with all the local fishermen and their families following in a fleet of decorated boats.

On the open Pacific waters each boat passes under St. Blaise in the shrimp boat bow to receive blessing of sprinkled holy water and a prayer for year's bounteous catch.

Then there's fiesta.

Robert Richter, author of the [Cotton Waters mystery series](http://www.robertrichterauthor.com/),
<http://www.robertrichterauthor.com/>

Colonia Caracol, San Miguel de Allende

We live on the edge of the *barrio*, a chaotic collection of houses that climb the hill in Colonia Caracol. Generations of working class Mexican families inhabit houses painted turquoise, orange, red or not painted at all. Rebar sticks up through unfinished brick walls signaling hope for more cash to build, hope for a better future. The *barrio* is anchored by a *tapicería* on the right and a couple from



Oregon on the left who have built their house on sacred ground, agreeing that their garage will be used for indigenous ceremonies. Here is where our tightly knit neighborhood prepares for Fiesta Santa Cruz.

The Festival of the Holy Cross, celebrated throughout May, simultaneously venerates the Christian cross and

asks for enough rain to ensure a bountiful harvest. The day begins at 8:00 am with the creation of a colored sawdust religious “painting” in the street, followed by palm leaf arches and elaborate flower arrangements. By five o’clock, drumming and *cohetes* signal the arrival of Aztec dancers whirling their way down el Caracol in a cacophony of color, noise and music. Here we share the spiritual essence of Mexico, the celebration of its vibrant culture and its ancestral past.

Kristine Scherber lives in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato and enjoys the culture, people and language of this vibrant country. She is living her dream of horse ownership and can be found most mornings riding her Lusitano mare in Atotonilco.

Monumental Alebrije Parade

The story goes that *alebrijes*, colorful monsters with parts of various animals,



were first seen in the nightmares of *cartonería* (paper maché) artist Pedro Linares in the 1950s, who claimed they whispered their name to him.

True or not, this story is part of the lore that the creatures have as both scary and magical at the same time. Their allure in Mexico City and beyond has only grown over the

decades and can be credited with saving *cartonería*. In 2007, the Popular Art Museum (Museo de Arte Popular) decided to challenge artisans to create "monster-sized" versions which have over the years exceeded over two meters in height and five meters in length. My husband and I have been fortunate to work with this innovative museum and receive special permission to cover this event and others for Wikipedia and my blog.

The giant creatures are created as a labor of love, to appear only in one parade, taking months to make, not to mention many kilos of paper, paste, wire and more. Each year the *alebrijes* become more creative, both in design and the materials used, although *cartonería* is always the base. On the day of the parade in October, these creations are wheeled by their makers and others from the main square of Mexico City to the Angel of Independence monument. The event draws thousands of spectators as well as extensive local media coverage.

*Leigh Ann Thelmadatter, Professor in English as a Second/Foreign Language,
Tec de Monterrey, Campus Ciudad de México, Mexico City*
creativehandsofMexicodotorg.wordpress.com

Experiences

Returning to Mexico

I walked along Avenida Juarez, the main street that linked Juarez with downtown El Paso. A mariachi yelled out to me, “Hey Guero!” It was my nickname in Mexico, the literal translation “light-skinned guy”. He still remembered me, even after five or six years. He gathered up the others and they began to sing for me, “Amor Eterno” again. A tear rolled down my cheek. I thanked them, gave them a few dollars and stopped at a quaint bar on the corner.

It had been over a year since I had been to Mexico, my trips back ever fewer since I had moved to Dallas. I drank an ice cold Carta Blanca. Why it tasted different in Mexico than when I had found the same brand it in the United States, I could not say. I observed the patron's interactions with each other and the waitress, the flirting, the joking, and I smiled.

I felt the air of freedom that I always had felt crossing the border to Mexico, even as a boy, because although I live in a wonderful and free country, the freedom, like the beer, somehow always tasted different in Mexico.

Guillermo Paxton, author of [Cartel Rising and The Plaza](#)

Mexican Beetles



I am most fascinated by the number of VW Beetles in Cozumel, Mexico; you will see one on almost every street at any time of day either rented or owned—it’s fabulous.

There are quite a few car rental companies on the Island that rent out these beauties and most get modified into convertibles. But for me, the favorite ones are those you will find in the alleyways and streets in the residential areas of the locals. These Beetles have character, odd color combinations, personalized paintwork, battered and some simply plain.

Models from many different productions are evident, and I am very pleased to say that, even with some getting modified, they are generally still in their original shape and design. I came

across a real classic that is probably a 1965 (or thereabouts) model, and it is in immaculate condition. My favorite, however, is the pretty number in the photo.

If you have ever wondered what happened to all the VW Beetles of yesteryear, think upon it no longer, for they are all here on Cozumel Island in Beetle Heaven.

Aileen Friedman, author and missionary, <http://aileenfriedman.co.za>

Turkey Tales in the Yucatan

I fruitlessly searched for a crew filming turkey hunters on the Yucatan Peninsula during August. Starting near Merida I trailed them, asking directions in small villages, first south and then west. I lagged several days behind until their trail went cold and they disappeared. Most would be disappointed in failing to find their quarry, but squatting next to a small fire on the sandstone in the jungle my companion and longtime Yucatan resident related a great story local hunters tell around campfires. I'd normally say this was a tall tale, but this anecdote had the sound of truth.

In the early 1500s, the Conquistadores subdued the Yucatan. The Spanish Court and all Europe eagerly awaited reports on the exotic Maya, strange plants, and animals from the New World. The scribes recorded three species of turkey abounded on the Yucatan peninsula. Two were delicious and nutritious, but the third possessed a horrible taste. Sometime later, explorers with a bit more knowledge of birds updated the earlier reports. They decided Yucatan's buzzards weren't really a turkey species.

William B. Kalisher, author of Mexico by Motorcycle: An Adventure Story and Guide and over 600 magazine articles

Fun times and dental work.

It was a fun Sunday ball game in Mexico City, me sipping beer when Rita crunches down on a taco and like the crack of bat meets fastball, the first upper right molar splits in two. Our unforgettable molar which years earlier in Toronto, pain from improper filling led to emergency root canal and huge wallet hit.



Home in Taxco on Monday, our search for a dentist leads to a “*pueblo magico*” building tucked back between a quieting green park on the right and to the left, the spiritual uplift only open doors of an ancient church can provide. Perfect. I could run to offer prayers for Rita when the grinding of dentist machinery became unbearable.

Thorough examination, x-rays, full hour

assessing, another explaining the approach to be taken. Every piece of equipment new and top notch and the doctor was marvelous all week long.

On day two, the doctor was caring and deliberate through a six hour endurance test. Some discomfort, no trips to the church. A stack of girlie mags on the table to keep me entertained? We left with what remained of a tooth ground to a perfect circle peg, two posts screwed at calculated angles in to the jaw, with gums peeled back, molds taken for extended crowns and a temp molar in place.

By Friday Rita had new crowns fixed in place, laser cleaning done by the doc himself, and a final half hour lesson on proper brushing as Doc brushed his own.

Absolute satisfaction exactly as quoted, only US\$419.

D. Grant Fitter, author of City of Promises: a truer than fiction novel set in Mexico City of the 1940s, <https://dgrantfitter.net/>

Dancing horses, festival in Bucerias

Having grown up on a farm in Maine, some of my best moments were riding the horse. We could not teach the horse to do much besides jumping hay bales, so



seeing the best horsemen compete against each other with their horses dancing to music is truly something quite enjoyable to me. This takes place at a variety of festivals in Mexico but I saw this one in Bucerias in the month of February.

Algis Kemezys

Digging for Ice Cream

On the Malecon in Isla Mujeres, an island just a twenty minute ferry ride from



Cancun, locals and visitors can shop, eat or drink while strolling next to a spectacular beach overlooking Cancun and the blue waters of the Caribbean. The "Island of Women" has experienced increased tourism and is popular for a laid back island vibe. For younger visitors, the ice cream carts may be the best part of their trip.

David Steelman, expat and photographer living in Playa del Carmen, Mexico

Accidents Can Happen!

Last fall, my teenaged daughter was skateboarding along the sidewalk, hit some protruding rebar, and dislocated her elbow. My father- and mother-in-law and I raced her to Urgencias, where they X-rayed her and determined that she needed a cast. My father-in-law is a *sobador*, a magic hands healer, and he told the doctor that if they'd just anesthetize her, he'd take over from there and she wouldn't need a cast. The doctor told him to please take his cigarette outside and wait. Meanwhile, my irresistibly sweet mother-in-law had insinuated herself into the proceedings, wrapping the gauze for the doctor to cut, all the while regaling us with the story of the chicken with the broken leg that she had put a splint on, and when they finally got around to eating it, everyone was amazed at how well the legbone had healed up. The doctor cracked up, and told her if he ever found any crippled poultry he would send it her way. All ended well on a cheerful note, my brave little girl mended fast, and the grand total hospital bill came to just under 1000 pesos. I love Mexico!

EG Brady

Three Mayan Villages in Chiapas

Our first stop was at a town in the middle of its market day.

Nothing too unusual. We have seen several *mercados* since coming to Mexico. Except.

Except, something was different. Immediately different.

As we wandered the tiny pathways defining imaginary stalls, I began to watch the Maya faces. They looked at us with wonder, but more evident was their amusement. We became victims of their amusement, leaving behind a series of giggles and stifled laughter. We became their source of entertainment.

And I felt good for it.

It feels good to be laughed at in just this way.

We walked on, until a small procession approached us from the local church.



This day, I would come to feel how much the church pervades Maya life, but not at first. Mine was a gradual awakening. But ultimately, a revelation worthy of the day. The kind that transforms perspective.

One must first understand the role of Catholicism in Maya life, and only a simple metaphor can suffice: Catholicism is but a cast of characters with which to revisit Maya beliefs. A

new story to tell old truths. And man, do they tell a great story, one that I might – finally, at this old age – actually believe.

But for this, we moved on to the second town. And there, it was all about the church itself. The most incredible sanctuary I have ever seen; the most remarkable display of living spirituality I have ever experienced.

No photographs please.

Seriously. I could tell you a gruesome story about this, but I won't.

At last, my skills are needed. Only a writer can tell you about this place.

But be prepared. The local Maya ousted the role of the priest, they burned the confessional, and their altar is devoted to their most revered saint: Big John. Big John is John the Baptist, a shepherd like themselves, and, after all, bigger than Jesus because Big John baptized Jesus. And third, after Big John and Jesus, is little John ... because the Spaniards arrived with two differently sized statues.

Does this make you uncomfortable?

It certainly enraged the Spaniards.

I love it.

So, what you must realize before entering: this church belongs to the people.

The pews are also gone. No priest, no mass.

Seriously, there is only communing with the Saints.

Pine needles carpet the floor. It is like sitting in the forest to pray.

Candles light the sanctuary like a scene from Camelot.

And the people. My god, so many people. This is not a special day. This is not the Sabbath. This is an ordinary Saturday, around mid-day, but the church is filled with Maya sitting in small groups, facing and communing with a preferred or necessary saint (each installed like a Coney Island fortune teller in his own private, glass-enclosed booth.)

They drink '*pox*' (pronounced 'posh',) a rum made for religious purposes, but the point is to confess and commune and then to burp up the badness. Coca-cola is a better alternative, in some respects, especially for the kids.

If you are inclined to cynicism or ridicule, don't.

I swear to you, this was the most sacred place I have ever been.

And, people were smiling. Still smiling at us. Still giggling. And offering us *pox*.

How can I tell you about the live chicken, smudged over the candles and meant to absorb the animal spirit that is causing a spiritual sickness? How can I tell you the fate, right there in church, of that chicken? I cannot. Because, unless you were there, you would not understand the reverence involved.

But know this. I came out of that church a believer in the sacred once more.

So much more happened. So much laughter and smiling. So much community.

But there was a third stop.

The best of all.

At the end of the road, just before the dense forest, we stopped and entered a small adobe hut. Smokey and dark, confined and cool, occupied by two Maya women, old and young, tending a coal-burning fire, atop which a large round platter was baking bluish-black tortillas. We were invited to sit at a munchkin table with munchkin chairs, close to the cooking. In the coals, a small ceramic pot of beans was heating. On the table, a small packet of ground pumpkin seeds and a block of rock salt awaited. Dangling from a roof beam, a caged parrot expostulated his irritation. The women methodically pressed and cooked ground corn meal into perfect tortilla circles, placed several in a basket, and passed them on to us. We filled them with beans and pumpkin seed meal, but winced at how hot they remained. We were given roasted plantains, straight from the coals, and corn, also straight from the coals. We drank tiny cups of hibiscus wine, and felt satiated by their generosity.

I kept hearing that biblical injunction to entertain strangers for they may be angels. I looked at this pure simplicity of life and witnessed religion as a living force.

And I thought: Big John would be pleased.

Joel R. Dennstedt, author, <http://www.joelrdennstedt.com/>

Hidden in Plain Sight

Forget the scenery, climate, and costs. The best part of Mexico is the people. Yes, they are diverse with more languages than any other country, but they all have a common trait. It's love. As a people, their love of family and traditions shines above all else. The love shows in their treatment of children, and respect for all generations.



As a foreigner in Mexico I enjoy the open love that is displayed to all. Stop! You may think I am bonkers, but think, as a people they are patient and seldom get into disputes with businesses or service providers. Most are polite even when they have been wronged. You don't see road rage which has become so common north of the border. When a company will not make good on a

warranty; no lawyers, no guns, at the most a shrug.

It all boils down to love. For most Mexicans that is far more important than conflict, and they are absolutely right.

J. Lawrie Lock, blogger, [Notes from Paradise, Isla Mujeres QR](#)

Food

Comida Corrida

One of my favorite Mexican traditions is *comida*, the main meal of the day, eaten between two and four in the afternoon. Schools get out at two and many small businesses close. Lots of working people take couple hour breaks and go home to eat, returning to work from four until eight.



But for those who can't go home for this leisurely meal, there's the *comida corrida* which loosely means a place that sells an affordable, all-included homemade meal. Typically it's operated by a family in a modest structure.

It almost always includes a soup, followed by a main course—meat, chicken, fish, or enchiladas, often in a sauce, with beans and rice. In addition, there's a basket of tortillas, fresh salsas, and to drink: *agua fresca*, a sweet drink made from fresh fruit, hibiscus, or rice. You can expect the tortilla basket and your drink to be refilled as needed.

The cost for *comida corrida* these days is 40-60 pesos—at today's exchange, \$2.25-\$3.35 USD. Mexico is loaded with great cooks, so it's pretty hard to go wrong if you like Mexican food.

Cynthia Katz, author, blog: www.theveggiepost.blogspot.com

Street Food



The importance of street food in Mexico cannot be overstated. It is abundant, inexpensive, and often the best food you will find in any given locale. In Playa del Carmen, the local festivals held in the Plaza Municipal bring out dozens of food vendors who sell little plates of paradise to locals, expats, and the more savvy tourists.

As both a food lover and a photographer, this scene made my mouth water. Look closely and you'll see the quintessential elements of Mexican food.

Tortillas, rice, pork, tomatoes, avocados, *chorizo*, and onions you can almost smell cooking. Add to that the well worn cook/grandmother/proprietor, the brightly colored food and decorations, and aromatic smoke pouring from the grill, and you truly have a meal for the senses.

If you like food made in Mexico go to a restaurant; there are many. But if you love food made in Mexico, go find a street vendor. Look for long lines and satisfied smiles.

David Steelman, expat and photographer living in Playa del Carmen, Mexico

Carnitas Puro Michoacan

If it's Saturday, it's *carnitas*!

Picking up a kilo of *carnitas* on the weekend is a family tradition all over Mexico, but the tender pieces of pork known as *carnitas* (small meat) originated in the state of Michoacan.

Every Saturday morning, the irresistible aroma of pork and spices beckons



locals, tourists, and stray dogs alike.

Following our noses to pick up a half kilo for dinner, we're handed two tacos as an incentive to not jump the counter and attack the pile of steaming, savory pork under attack by a giant meat cleaver.

flour mix. When she throws them on a grill to bake, the sweet smell of tortillas



brings me back to Texas when, as kids, we'd slather them with butter and salt.

Want to make them at home? You'll need: a whole pig or two, a huge vat of lard for boiling said pigs, spices to taste, and four hours to simmer. Note: save the innards for chittlins and cracklins.

Not in Mexico? You can get them frozen at Costco; they're not as good, but better than no *carnitas*.

Jinx Schwartz, author of the Hetta Coffey Mystery Series,
<http://jinxschwartz.com>

Blissful Magic

Mexican food is one of the most popular kinds of food in the world. Its influence can be felt in nearly every kitchen, and ingredients like beans, tomatoes, peppers, chocolate, and vanilla have become a common household addition. Unfortunately, the true soul of Mexican cuisine is sometimes lost in translation, buried beneath piles of deep-fried tortillas and cheese.

One of my earliest and fondest memories is the smell of my grandmother's kitchen as she was cooking. The aroma of chiles, beans, tomatoes, and corn is ever



present in my imagination. Growing up, I spent countless afternoons sitting at the table with my family, enjoying the simple yet delicious dishes cooked up by my mother or my grandmother. Those recipes have been passed down for generations, just like in every Mexican home.

Real life, homemade Mexican food is an important part of my roots and identity. I have my own family now, and we also sit together every day to enjoy warm tortillas, creamy avocados, spicy salsa, and savory stew. This will probably be my most important legacy to my children—the enjoyment of a traditional Mexican meal.

Fabiola Rodriguez, Mexican mom, wife, blogger, ESL teacher, and translator

<https://myheartofmexico.wordpress.com/>

Vintango

The iron gate on a dirt backroad in the Valle de Guadalupe of the Baja peninsula announces “Vintango.” It’s a boutique vineyard that’s a marriage of passion for



wine and tango dancing.

In the middle of the 30-foot-tall room stands a tasting table cut from the heart of a tree, and polished to a beautiful honey-colored sheen.

“You like Chardonnay?” asks Jo Ann, the owner, extracting the cork from a chilled bottle. “Tell me what you think.”

I think its lightness seems just right for serving with appetizers.

“It's still young,” she tells us. “Now let's taste some reds.”

She draws a sample from a barrel of the 2013 vintage, then a 2012 Zinfandel. Her 2011 Nebbiolo labeled *Tango Passion* is our last taste.

The rich fruity taste and tartness hit my taste buds like trumpets heralding the arrival of royalty. I may not know a lot about wine, but I know what I like. I LOVE IT, and I want some more of it, but Maria reminds me I am driving. So I settle for a glass of water while we discuss wine making and tango dancing.

Excerpt from I Love Baja! By Mikel Miller, publisher and author,
<http://egretbooks.com>

Generosity

One time during a family road trip, we were looking to have breakfast at a small family eatery, the kind found on the sides of the highway all over Mexico. We left Mexico City early in the morning, and by 7:30 AM we could see the Teotihuacan Pyramids far off in the distance. We were already hungry when we found a place to eat. It was a cold morning, and the place was a mere wooden shack with no walls, sheltering a couple of tables and a fire cooking pit. The elderly couple there told us that they weren't ready to serve food yet, but if we waited a few minutes, they would take care of us. We waited only ten minutes, after which they had already served us coffee, warm corn tortillas, and a steaming bowl of lamb consomé. It was all heavenly,

especially the raw Xoconostle salsa. When I asked the woman how she made it, not only did she tell me, but she also gave me one of her own Xoconostle plants! When we left, I had a new recipe on my mind, and a feeling of gratitude for the great and kind people of my country.

Mely Martinez, Mexican food blogger,
MexicoinmyKitchen.com



History

The Irish in Mexico

In a quiet suburb of Mexico City is the tiny village of San Angel. On September 12th each year over a thousand people gather in the tree-bordered park which forms the central part of the Plaza San Jacinto. It was here on this day in 1847, that a group of Irish soldiers from the San Patricio Battalion were hanged. Most



Sundays it is a gathering place for artists and craftsmen who display their wares.

Occasionally, a tourist will stop in front of a shop where furniture is on display across the street from the park. On a stone wall outside the shop is a plaque. At the top is the Celtic cross of Ireland upon which perches the Mexican eagle, his wings embracing the arms of the cross, his eyes alert to any danger. Below the cross is an inscription in Spanish which reads: “In Memory of the Heroic Battalion of St. Patrick, Martyrs who Gave Their Lives for the Mexican Cause during the Unjust Invasion of 1847.” Below are the names of seventy-one soldiers, forty-eight with Irish surnames and thirteen with German surnames. Beneath the three columns of

names it reads: “With the gratitude of Mexico—112 years after their sacrifice. 1959.”

Michael Hogan, author of The Irish Soldiers of Mexico which inspired two documentaries and an MGM feature film, One Man's Hero, starring Tom Berenger. Hogan lives in Guadalajara with the textile artist Lucinda Mayo, and their dog, Molly Malone. <http://www.drmichaelhogan.com/>

The History Overwhelms

Everywhere you travel in this great country, you are reminded that this is an old and advanced culture, dating back thousands of years from the great pyramid of Chichén Itzá to the small pueblos hidden away off the beaten track, each with a

special secret. Mayan, Aztec and Olmec ruins abound in the most unlikely locations, even underneath Mexico City. With the advance in satellite surveying and photographs in more remote locations, mounds that were thought to be hills in the jungle have turned out to be a long forgotten cities and pyramids. New cultural treasures are being found even as the jungle tries to reclaim its dominance.



tries to reclaim its dominance.

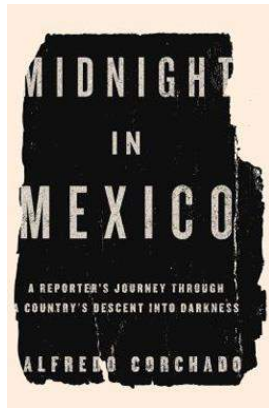
So, take that little side road to explore a recently discovered ruin, you will be blown away by what you see. Remember all of these magnificent structures were built before the introduction of tools, such as the wheel. Amazing. How did those huge blocks of stone get there?

The indigenous people of Mexico have a long history of art and architecture that we, as American or Canadian visitors, can only look upon in awe. While artistic and capable, the indigenous people of our countries did not come even close to the legacy that the ancient Mexican civilizations have left to us.

J. Lawrie Lock, blogger, <http://lynda-notesfromparadise.blogspot.com/>

Literature

Midnight in Mexico by Alfredo Corchado



What is it like to report on Mexico's corruption and violent drug gang war that has killed thousands, including dozens of reporters, when you yourself are a journalist on someone's hit list?

An American reporter will be shot to death within 24 hours, journalist Alfredo Corchado learns one day while reporting from Mexico City in 2007 – and the likelihood is that the person on the hit list is Corchado himself.

Corchado tells us about enduring the personal hell of wondering how his untimely violent end will come in his new book, “Midnight in Mexico: A Reporter’s Journey Through a Country’s Descent Into Darkness,” that reads like one of those

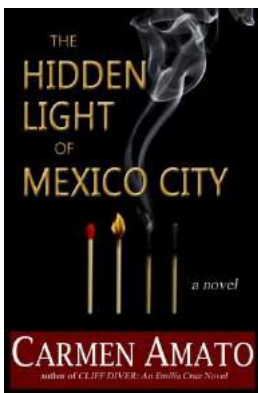
Cold War thrillers from another time – novels like Frederick Forsyth’s “The Odessa File” – that Hollywood turned into films.

But Corchado’s book is non-fiction, and this may be the best journalist’s book about a personal reporting adventure since Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein’s “All The President’s Men” in the 1970s.

The Huffington Post, 20 July 2013

The Hidden Light of Mexico City by Carmen Amato

Eddo Cortez Castillo, investigative attorney and head of Los Hierros, an elusive anti-corruption league, is determined to uncover the insidious links between the Minister for Public Security and the notorious drug cartel leader El Toro. Amato masterfully depicts life and society in Mexico City: the undercurrent of danger in a crowd, the bureaucratic entanglements of visa applications or license renewal, the highly stratified society made visible and reinforced by the wearing and display of designer clothes, the desperate poverty of the many and the eccentricities of the wealthy few. Unlike Eddo, who was born into tremendous wealth, Luz de Maria Alba Mora is a lowly *muchacha*, or resident domestic, that cleans the home of the supercilious Vega family . . .



Sketching on a bench, she encounters the enigmatic Eddo, and the two begin a passionate relationship. However, Eddo’s corruption investigation becomes increasingly dangerous—from a shootout at the northern town of Anahuac to

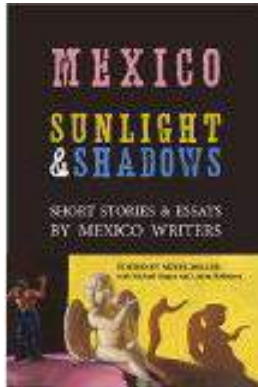
chillingly tense encounters with El Toro himself. Luz becomes caught up in the spiral of violence as she is abducted and threatened with torture in a nail-biting car chase.

The suspense is beautifully maintained as Eddo pursues El Toro to the island haven of Antigua and an unforgettable underwater fight scene ensues between the valiant Eddo and El Toro's sidekick, Chino. Amato combines marvelous detail about life in Mexico City with a poignant love story between the most unlikely of individuals, all of which is woven seamlessly into an enthralling political drama.

Verdict: a multilayered novel of love and drama set against the intriguing backdrop of Mexico City.

Literary Fiction Review, November 2014

Mexico: Sunlight and Shadows, edited by Mikel Miller with Michael Hogan and Linton Robinson



Over the past ten years I have published reviews of over a hundred books about, or set in, Mexico, and so I have discovered dozens of fine authors who, as I do, live here or spend lots of time here, and who indeed love Mexico.

Some of the books are outstanding. A few that come to mind immediately are: Linton Robinson's 21st century classic, *Sweet Spot*; Michael Hogan's moving collection of poetry, *In the Time of the Jacarandas*; Mikel Miller's *I Love Baja!*, a playful romp through Baja; C.M. Mayo's memorable historical novel, *The Last Prince of the Mexican Empire*; Robert Richter's "Something" thrillers—*Something for Nothing* is the latest; Judy King's *Living at Lake Chapala*, now a standard reference for those living at Lake Chapala (or anywhere else in Mexico for that matter); and of course John Scherber's books, especially his *Murder in Mexico* series, two recent ones being *The Girl from Veracruz* and *Angel Face*.

As it turns out, all of those authors I mentioned in the opening paragraph appear here. Checking my own collection, I personally own books by over a dozen of those 23 authors listed in the interactive Table of Contents. *Mexico: Sunlight and Shadows*, is, by and large, a collection of established authors, talented, professional, in love with Mexico (or at least committed to it) . . .

In the Preface, Mikel [Miller] writes that "the combined contributions convey a better understanding of life in villages and cities all across Mexico: the USA borderlands, the Baja peninsula, the mainland Pacific coast, the colonial highlands, the populous central heartland, and the Yucatan peninsula" . . .

A very stimulating collection of essays and stories, and at \$0.99 for the Kindle version, it basically costs nothing.

That Scherber piece has got me thinking: that plumber turned poet. I, on the other hand, have been a practicing poet for fifty years, and so perhaps it's time to reinvent myself here in Mexico as a plumber, maybe in a little village near the Pacific, where the plumbing struggles as hard as the rest of the pueblo. I do handle joints fairly well and so that might be a really fitting occupation for me. And who knows what twists and turns might be just around the corner... a señorita aging but lovely, in late afternoon waiting for me in the plaza, pliant as new putty in the Mexican sun.

As the sun goes down, the two of us will sip a little 7 Leguas tequila and fantasize about future plumbing delights. Later I'll settle back in my hammock and reread a favorite short story or essay from Mexico: Sunlight and Shadows. And then I'll probably doze off and wake up dreaming I was one of the contributors to this fine anthology.

James Tipton, mexconnect.com, 12 August 2015

The Eagle's Throne by Carlos Fuentes

An ailing Mexican president, two years into his mandated six-year term and manipulated by everyone around him, has banned oil exports to the U.S. and called for the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from occupied Colombia. In retaliation, American President Condoleezza Rice has, through the magic of an unimagined technology, shut down all of Mexico's telephone, fax and Internet communications. That's the fanciful but not entirely implausible futuristic backdrop for this corrosive political satire from Fuentes (*The Old Gringo*), considered Mexico's leading novelist (and one-time ambassador to France). His darkly comic tale of backbiting, double-crossing, murderous duplicity, sexual scheming and outright assassination is primarily epistolary, and it's a format that suits Fuentes's flowery prose style, though the voices of his various characters tend to blur into one another. Readers with even a smidgeon of familiarity with Mexico's unkempt political traditions will wallow in this caustic indictment.

Publisher's Weekly, 27 March 2006

Special Places

Parque Mirador

In the sprawling metropolis of Guadalajara, the second largest city in Mexico, lies my favorite retreat when I want to escape from the hustle and bustle and commune with nature. Parque Mirador is situated at the end of the Macrobus line making it easily commutable by public transportation as well as by private vehicles. Breathtaking and spectacular do not even begin to describe the beauty of this incredible creation by God. A delightful little restaurant offers the most amazing views of this canyon. I have spent many an hour gazing out at this view and contemplating life while sipping on a Negra Modelo. It is awesome that such a peaceful and tranquil area exists in a city resplendent with museums and art galleries. I have introduced many a local to Parque Mirador and they have been overwhelmed by the beauty.

Parque Mirador also has a playground for children and lots of greenery making it an ideal place for picnics and other family gatherings. A nominal admission fee of less than 50 cents American makes this a most affordable attraction. I have moved away from Guadalajara but always make Parque Mirador a priority when I return for a visit.

Karen Z. Hendin, author, [When Glad Becomes Sad](#) and [Alive Again](#), iamkaren23.wordpress.com

Salon Regis



Step over the line into Mexico, turn at the nondescript corner, walk down the unremarkable street, step inside a dark door, and leave the coat of what defines you on the hanger. Take a deep breath. You are in the Salon Regis in Nogales, Sonora—the best border cantina in Mexico.

The first thing you see (other than cowboy hats and smiling red lips) is a thirty-foot mirror in a mahogany frame behind the bar. It came from a luxury passenger ship in Guaymas. One family has owned the Regis for years. As you settle in, you feel as if you are part of the family. Between jokes, the bartender mixes an old fashioned margarita with

secret ingredients, and serves it to you in a metal shaker. I believe a prerequisite for the job of bartender is a sense of humor.

If you are a woman alone, no worry. Not only does the bartender shoo away any annoying situation, three musicians sing your favorite song. In the bohemian atmosphere of vintage lamps and a private room for bullfighters, this is my home away from home.

As strangers, we first enter the Regis with caution, but then comes the camaraderie, then the trust across cultures.

*Kathryn Ferguson, author of [The Haunting of the Mexican Border](http://www.thehauntingofthemexicanborder.com),
www.thehauntingofthemexicanborder.com*

Riviera Nayarit

My husband and I were fortunate enough to travel to the majestic Riviera Nayarit twice this past fall. We fell in love with everything about the region, from the stunning beaches and mountains to the wonderful people.



There are many wonderful places in the Riviera Nayarit, and it was remarkably easy to navigate much of the region with the public bus system. While on our first trip, we easily travelled from Nuevo

Vallarta to the peaceful towns of Bucerias and Sayulita. We walked along the beach in Bucerias for a good two miles or so and only came across two other people. It was like our own private paradise. We then boarded the bus to Sayulita, where we instantly fell in love with the town. Sayulita is an eclectic little surfing village filled with charming little shops and restaurants. The waves were made for surfing, and while we didn't surf ourselves, we enjoyed watching the surfers ride the waves with style!

On our second visit, we stayed a bit further north, near the tiny village of Higuera Blanca. We stayed in a newly developed community called Litibu. We walked and ran the lovely stretch of packed sand beach everyday, encountering almost no one except for a few locals who resided in Higuera Blanca. We were able to help a lovely local couple load some heavy pieces of wood onto their truck,

and they were so grateful for such a simple gesture. Mexico in general, and the Riviera Nayarit in particular, is a wonderful place filled with wonderful people.

Sara Sutter, fitness expert and travel enthusiast,
runtraveleatblog.wordpress.com

The Painted Ladies of Isla Mujeres

They are the grand old dames of Isla Mujeres, the painted ladies of *centro*—the one level wooden houses that are scattered throughout the downtown area of the island. Built back in the 1930's, they have survived hurricanes, infestations of wood-eating tropical bugs and progress.



Tablitas, also known as Hemingway's Bar, is probably the most popular of all of the buildings. Located on the corner of Matamoros and Guerro Avenues, it is a prime location for photographers to capture a bit of local history and a colorful background for a memorable picture.

Painted a cheerful combination of pink, yellow

and pale blue, another eye-catching building sits on the corner of Matamoros and Juarez. Built by Tony Garcia's grandfather Heriberto Delgado de Tejada, father to Guadalupe Delgado Diaz, the house now belongs to his auntie Apolonia Delgado Diaz.

On Juarez Avenue is our third favorite. It is divided by two fanciful paint jobs. The southern half is bright yellow with blue, red and white trim, while the northern half is a tropical orange with white trim.

Fingers-crossed, the painted ladies will survive for many more years, adding a bit of fun and character to the northern part of the island.

Lynda Lock, author and blogger, amazon.com/author/lyndalock

Lake Chapala: writers' muse for more than a century

I first stumbled across the varied English-language literature of Lake Chapala while researching early travel accounts of the area for my *Lake Chapala Through the Ages, an Anthology of Travelers' Tales*. I have now become obsessed with it, drawn by the realization that the lake's seductive beauty has been the muse for so many famous poets, writers and playwrights.

From novelists Charles Fleming Embree, Frank Herbert and D. H. Lawrence to poets Witter Bynner and Al Purdy, and playwright Tennessee Williams, my A-Z of these writers now has more than 300 entries!

Reading the period novels set at the lake brings you face-to-face with the numerous larger-than-life personalities who have made their home here. Today's writing scene is just as active as ever, adding to a library of fine works written beside the lake spanning more than a century.

Tony Burton, author of Western Mexico, A Traveler's Treasury and Lake Chapala Through The Ages: an anthology of travelers' tales,
<http://sombrobooks.com>

Mexico's Pyramids

What could be better than pyramids? From grandiose Aztec Teotihuacan in Mexico City to the southern jungles of Chiapas where the Maya ruins of Palenque dominate a misty forest landscape, pyramids are synonymous with Mexico.



First sightings can be a remarkable experience. Mine was at Chichén Itzá, long before it became one of the seven wonders of the modern world and a tourist mecca each spring and fall equinox when revelers watch the sun's shadow slither down its 365 stairs to the ground below. Early on you could climb to the top and descend through an interior stairway that spilled you out at the bottom.

After Chichén Itzá, I was on a quest. Next came ocean hugging Tulum, then Cobá, Uxmal's glorious light show, Labna, Sayil, lonely Ek Balam, the giant masks of Kohunlich, expansive Calakmul and Dzibanche. But mystical, jungly Palenque, where howler monkeys roar, stole my pyramid loving heart.

As an expat living on the Yucatan Peninsula I ventured to the sites often. Sundays were free and Cobá was a favorite, where I'd trek the tallest monument in the Maya world, then later on gaze at the lake and wait for lightning bugs to come out at night.

Jeanine Kitchel, author of travel memoir Where the Sky is Born: Living in the Land of the Maya, and Maya 2012 Revealed. www.jeaninekitchel.com

Valladolid

We had heard that Valladolid is one of Mexico's most impressively preserved colonial cities and had to see for ourselves. Hidden away in the heart of the Yucatan Peninsula we truly found a gem.



The location, just about 45 minutes from Chichén Itzá, makes it a perfect spot for base to explore the ruins. In fact the Mayan town of Zaci held claim here first, until the Spanish moved in and used the stones from the original settlement to build a new city named after the old capital of Spain.

As we explored, the city looked a bit like a time capsule kept intact since the Spaniards built the town nearly five hundred years ago. The square in front of the Cathedral of San Servacio o Gervasio seemed virtually unchanged and the church incorporated stones from the ancient Mayan structures when it was rebuilt in 1705.

The Cenote Zaci, which was the water supply for the original village, is only a few blocks from the square, and provided a refreshing dip on a hot afternoon.

Local specialties like banana leaf-wrapped *tamales* and pork *conchinita pibil* are dishes that trace their roots to Mayan culture and are not to be missed.

David & Veronica James, authors, Going Gypsy: One Couple's Adventure from Empty Nest to No Nest at All, www.gypsyneester.com

Lavanda Café San Miguel



You wake in San Miguel and want a great breakfast to start your day. Try my favorite place. Lavanda Café. I think it's the best in San Miguel.

The restaurant specializing in breakfast and lunch is on Hernandez Marcias #87 just south of Umaran.

Lavanda, Spanish for lavender, is a surprise. Its door, like so many places in beautiful San Miguel de Allende, reveals nothing of the inside. Just a small blue square sign on a yellow wall and a door framed the classical way in rough *cantara* marble. This morning many wait

to savor the French toast, and the eggs fixed in a lovely, humorous way, like little presents.

A back patio open to the sky in the tiny place is where an attentive staff serves many egg dishes for breakfast. My favorite is the Omelette Margarita. It is the closest you'll get to heaven. You will savor tomatoes, mozzarella, basil, and a sprinkle of pesto sauce perfectly wrapped inside an egg omelette. Caprese salad for breakfast. Yum! To satisfy your sweet tooth: Pan France, French toast dipped in coarse sugar with crispy bacon and fruit. Finish by liberally adding maple syrup.

Lavanda Café is open daily, except Tuesday, at 8:30.

Mike Landfair, [Freelance Writer](#) and blog writer for [Mover Mike](#), [Landfair on Furniture](#), and [Mexico Calling](#)

La Choza Restaurant - Authentically Mexican



La Choza in Cozumel is the ultimate in authentic Mexican food. Fabulous décor and substantially large, there's plenty space for all without feeling cramped.

Opened many years ago by the grandfather of the current owners I can only believe that it will still be open for generations to come.

The service is friendly and efficient and for foreigners they do speak English, the menu is posted on their Facebook site every day for convenience. A bowl of *totopas* and a salsa/sauce that has a little bit of a bite

gets refilled until your meal arrives. This salsa is only made at La Choza so you will not find it anywhere else on the island. I ordered the noodle soup, and chicken in cilantro sauce. Both dishes teased my taste buds. Then the dessert arrived and oh my goodness my senses did somersaults with delight over an avocado cheesecake with chocolate topping dusted with cinnamon. Yes, this may sound like a weird combination, but it was truly sensational.

I cannot recommend this restaurant enough. If you have not yet been there make a plan to go and you will be pleasantly satisfied.

Aileen Friedman, author and missionary, <http://aileenfriedman.co.za>

Tacos Rigo, Cancún City

The all-inclusive resorts along the beach in Cancún are fantastic, but it is possible to stay in one and barely even realize that you're in Mexico. Our cure for that is a trip to Cancún City, known locally as El Centro, just across the bridge.

The first stop has got to be Tacos Rigo. The menu includes some plates and



quesadillas, but for us, as the name implies, it's all about the tacos. They have all of the favorites such as *al Pastor*, *carnitas*, *pollo*, and *bistec*, which are incredible. However, it would be a shame not to try a one of the more exotic varieties.

Tacos Rigo specialize in *tacos cabeza*, or head tacos. The name comes from the preparation, which involves steaming a whole cow's head and removing certain parts. The most common are *sesos*

(brains), *trompa* (lips), *cachete* (cheek), *lengua* (tongue), and *ojo* (eyes).

We especially like the tongue and cheek, and we are definitely not saying that tongue in cheek, or even to be cheeky. When we are feeling particularly daring we have even tried an *ojo*. Can't say that it is a favorite, but it is fun to say "watch this" right before eating it.

David & Veronica James, authors, Going Gypsy: One Couple's Adventure from Empty Nest to No Nest at All, www.gypsynester.com

Hacienda los Laureles

This golden gem is a boutique hotel created from a colonial Spanish hacienda two miles outside of Oaxaca, in the historic community of San Felipe del Agua. It was a bit hard to find—we paid a taxi to lead us, caravan style—but as soon as I saw the stunning architecture I knew it was worth the effort.

We were among the first guests. After hard touring at Monte Alban and other



Oaxaca sites of wonder we'd spend twilight on our patio having bittersweet hot cocoa and watching the kids play in the courtyard.

One dinner at the restaurant and we forgot all the guidebook recommendations for eateries in Oaxaca. The owners did everything they could to ensure unforgettable meals and spoiled our children with

complimentary desserts and appetizers, including caviar. My daughter still recalls being called “*la princesa*” for a week.

Since that stay, Hacienda los Laureles has become the only 5-star AAA lodging in the Oaxaca area. More importantly, it inspired the fictional Palacio Réal hotel in my mystery series.

Some things you just can't make up.

Carmen Amato, author of the Detective Emilia Cruz mystery series and other fiction, carmenamato.net

Puerto Morelos (Riviera Maya)

Wanted: One sleepy fishing village on the Mexican Caribbean Coast. Must have white sand beaches, turquoise blue waters and *tranquilo* vibe. None others need apply.

I first stumbled onto Puerto Morelos, a dead ringer for the above, while traveling through Quintana Roo in 1985. My husband and I were one hour south of an emerging Cancun whose star was on the rise. But we were searching for something else—wide deserted beaches, small cantinas, and little contact with the outside world.



En route to the Cobá pyramids we met a man building a house in Puerto Morelos who invited us for a visit. That happy accident led to a string of adventures and to our eventual retirement in Mexico.

Now many years later, though the town has grown, the laidback vibe hasn't gone anywhere. Until recently called Cancun's best kept secret, Puerto Morelos is known for first class snorkeling and diving at

the world's second largest reef, just offshore. Friendly locals, affordable B and B's, palapa restaurants, and an annual fishing tournament make it easy to ignore the handful of all-inclusives now sharing beach space. And once there you just might think you found Margaritaville.

Jeanine Kitchel writes about Mexico, the Yucatan and the Maya. www.jeaninekitchel.com

San Blas/Matanchen Bay

The unique geography of the Matanchen/San Blas region of the Nayarit Pacific coast creates and perpetuates one of Mexico's most beautiful and dynamic

ecological treasures still unspoiled by tourist crowds. Situated half way between Puerto Vallarta and Mazatlan, San Blas and Matanchen Bay define a place where three different eco-systems clash and coalesce.



Coastal desert lowlands stretching south from Mazatlan end at San Blas in estuaries and tidal swampland of insects, crocodiles, and bird sanctuaries. In shallow, warm Matanchen Bay, southern Pacific currents mix with the warm flows of the Sea of Cortez, and whales nurture their young, schools of dolphin run the coastline, and hundreds of other species support the region's few and fast-fading fishing communities as they have for millennia.

Edging swampy San Blas and cupping Matanchen Bay, the northern-most spurs of the Sierra Madre Occidental plunge into the Pacific Ocean and thrust three thousand meters up into tropical mountain rain forest, source of 17% of Mexico's mango production and seasonal harvests of lemon, lime, avocado, yaki, banana, and more.

Rich in flora and fauna and ecological dynamics, three distinct geographical worlds meet in the San Blas/Matanchen region, still natural and raw and relatively unstressed by Mexico's modern tourism development.

*Robert Richter, author of the [Cotton Waters mystery series](http://www.robertrichterauthor.com/),
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