

Central North Mexico



The license plates of Chihuahua, Mexico's largest state, label it *Tierra de Encuentro* (roughly Land of Discovery), an apt description that also fits its southern neighbor, Durango – the other large, rural state covered in this chapter. Come here to encounter the sometimes surreal natural beauty: carpets of rainy-season wildflowers, spectacular thunderstorms and wide sweeps of cerulean sky. Come here to feel the vibe of *tranquilo* towns, to hear the call of ancient, vanished cultures and to see where many important moments of Mexican history happened.

In the Nahuatl language Chihuahua means 'dry and sandy zone.' The *Desierto Chihuahuense* (Chihuahuan Desert) that covers most of the state, and spreads well beyond, is North America's largest. The stark beauty of some of its mountain-lined desertscape defies description.

For many, the sandy expanses are all they know of the region, but in the west rise the mountains of the Sierra Madre Occidental, cradling fertile valleys and enigmatic archaeological ruins. Chihuahua, Hidalgo del Parral and especially Durango have inviting colonial cores, and history buffs can find museums about revolutionary hero Pancho Villa seemingly everywhere.

Why there are so few visitors here is a mystery. Ciudad Juárez sees some short-term borderhoppers and Chihuahua gets a few foreigners waiting to board the Copper Canyon trains, but most of the central north consists of quiet towns that haven't been spruced up for tourists.

Some folk pass through and wonder what the fuss is about. For others, the first visit becomes the beginning of a whole new journey, an intimate look at a different side of Mexico.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the pre-Hispanic cliffside dwellings in the mountains near Madera, like Cañón de Huápoca's **Cueva Grande** (p367)
- Soak up the colonial charm of **Durango** (p380)
- Shop for pottery in **Mata Ortiz** (p365)
- Get deep into **Mina La Prieta** (p376) in Hidalgo del Parral and **Mina Ojuela** (p380) near Mapimí
- Walk through the mysterious ruins of **Paquimé** (p363)



■ CHIHUAHUA JANUARY DAILY HIGH: 18°C | 64°F

■ CHIHUAHUA JULY DAILY HIGH 32°C | 89°F

History

This region of Mexico was the subject of many fierce battles during the Revolution, giving rise to Pancho Villa's División del Norte, and it will quickly become clear that Villa (see boxed text, p376) remains a revered hero in these parts.

You'll also encounter lingering evidence of the region's early wealth and importance to the power centers further south, whether it be the colonial towns of Chihuahua and Durango, the centuries-old mines around Hidalgo del Parral and Torreón or even the old railway station in Nuevo Casas Grandes. More recently the area was a Hollywood hot-spot, its still-pristine vistas making great backdrops for countless classic Westerns.

But the most interesting central north history harks back much further. The ruined city of Paquimé and ancient cliff dwellings like Cueva Grande and Cuarenta Casas are clear reminders that there were flourishing settlements of highly sophisticated peoples living here long before the Spanish arrived.

Climate

This entire region is hot and dry with summer temperatures over 40°C not uncommon. Chihuahua is a bit wetter and warmer than Durango. Snow is fairly common in the mountains in winter, especially around Madera, but it can fall anywhere in the region. Remember, even in the summer, deserts get chilly after dark.

Parks & Reserves

Though the area is very beautiful, there are few large protected places. The most famous is the Reserva de la Biosfera Bolsón de Mapimí (p380), a wild and remote desert. With most visitors bounding off to the Copper Canyon, Parque Nacional Cumbres de Majalco (p372) near Chihuahua is largely overlooked, but its eroded rocks offer good rock-climbing and hiking.

There are also beautiful mountain forests to explore around Madera (p366) and along Hwy 40 (p384) west of Durango.

Getting There & Around

Excellent bus service and good roads make traveling around this region very easy. It's often remote country, so if you're driving, don't set out beyond major highways without a full tank of gas.

WALK IN PANCHO VILLA'S FOOTSTEPS

This region is littered with sites made famous by the revolutionary Pancho Villa. His death is raucously marked each year by Hidalgo del Parral's **Las Jornadas Villistas** (p377). Try the following sites to stand in places where the man made his mark.

- **Quinta Luz** (Museo Histórico de la Revolución Mexicana, p368)
- **Canutillo** (p378)
- **Museo Francisco Villa** (p376)
- **La Casa de los Milagros** (p373)
- **Palacio Alvarado** (p376)

Most people heading into the region from the US cross at Ciudad Juárez (see boxed text, p363, for details). If your plans don't include Juárez you can bypass it (and the long waits) by using the hassle-free Santa Teresa crossing (open 6am to 10pm) in New Mexico, 12 miles northwest of downtown El Paso.

CIUDAD JUÁREZ

☎ 656 / population 1.3 million / elevation 1145m

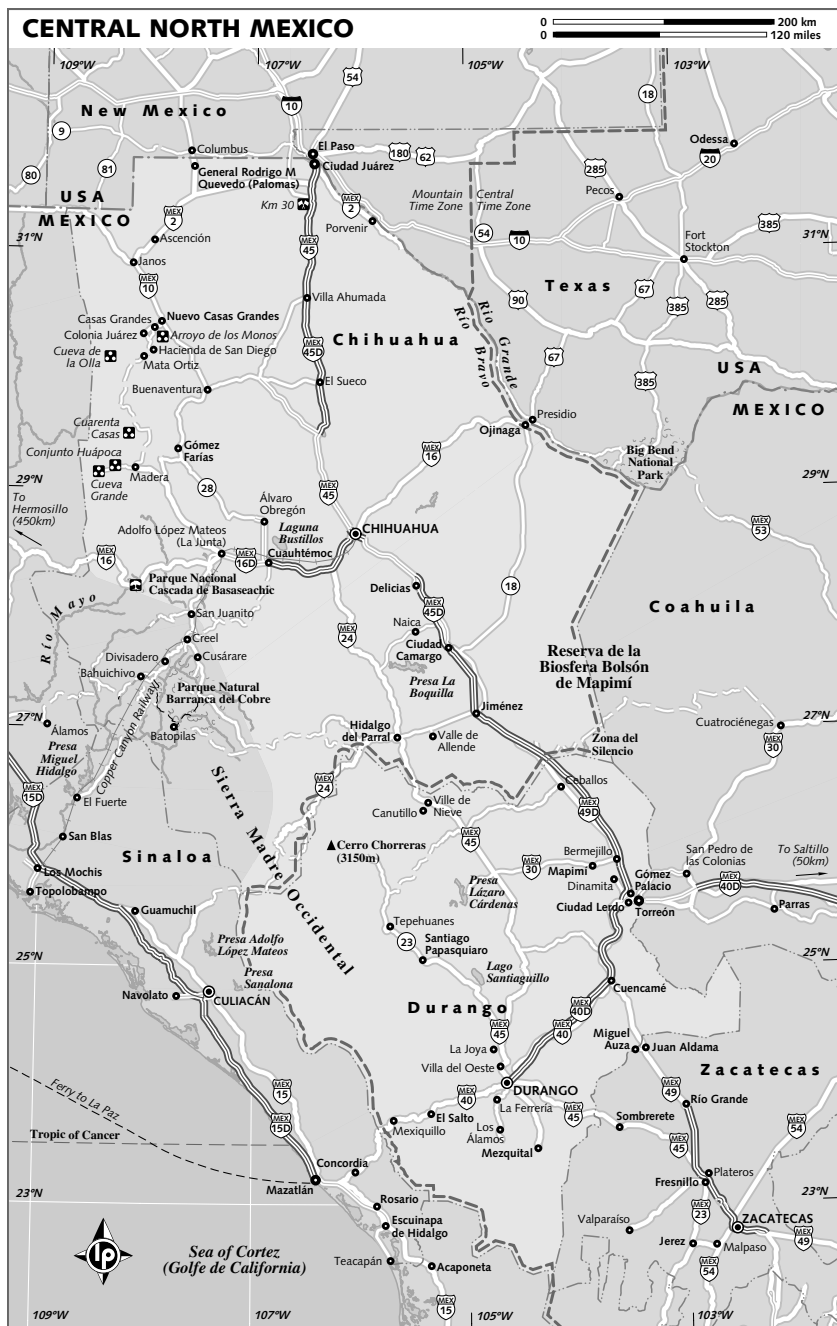
No doubt about it, Ciudad Juárez is an in-your-face kind of place. But, despite what you may have heard, it's really not all that bad. On the other hand, its modest roster of attractions isn't all that good, and it lacks the charm of many other northern cities. In fact, it lacks any real charm at all. What it does have, however, is energy.

Juárez, the second busiest port of entry on the US–Mexico border, relies heavily on the constant ebb and flow of goods and people from its cross-river mate El Paso, Texas. Trucks full of raw materials and finished goods roll in and out of the city's *maquiladoras* (foreign-owned assembly plants) and Texas day-trippers stream over for bargain shopping and medical care, or under-age drinking at the bustling cantinas and clubs.

Considering all the wonderful places waiting further south, the conventional wisdom – get out of town as quickly as possible – is not without merit, but odds are you'll enjoy a short stay here.

History

In 1598, Conquistador Don Juan de Oñate, known for his cruelty to the indigenous



populations, forded the Río Bravo here during his official expedition to colonize New Mexico. The crossing point he found became a vital stop on the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (Royal Road of the Interior), a 2560km trade route from Mexico City to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The Guadalupe Mission was founded in El Paso del Norte (as Juárez was then known) in 1659, and eventually a thriving Wild West town grew up around it. The name was changed in 1888 to honor President Benito Juárez who had fought the French occupation from here in 1865 and 1866.

In May 1911, during the Mexican Revolution, Pancho Villa (see boxed text, p376) stormed the town, forcing the resignation of the dictator Porfirio Díaz. After the 1913 coup against President Francisco Madero, Villa sought refuge in El Paso before crossing the river again with a handful of followers to begin another conquest of Mexico. Within months, he had recruited an army of thousands, known as La División del Norte, and in November he conquered Juárez for a second time.

The Revolution devastated the Mexican economy, but Juárez began its boom years around this time thanks to the USA's Prohibition era (1920–33). Thirsty Americans came from far and wide to enjoy Juárez' lively entertainment, both illicit and classy, and even when beer came back many Americans continued to live it up south of the border.

A second economic boom came after the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) in the mid-1990s as US manufacturers took advantage of low-cost labor in Mexico. The new jobs brought thousands of new people from across Mexico to work in the 400 *maquiladoras*. (Today only 40% of Juárez' residents were born here.) But the success hasn't spread evenly, and there are massive slums on the outskirts.

Juárez' most recent history has been rather inglorious. The city is a key transit point for illicit drugs entering the US, and there has been considerable violence between rival gangs. More disturbing are the deaths and disappearances of hundreds of young local women, many of them raped and tortured, since 1993. Dubbed the 'femicides,' the murders initially gained little attention from the local authorities or the media, and many critics have denounced both local and na-

tional authorities for their indifference and perhaps even culpability. Thankfully, the rate of incidences have declined significantly in recent years. Travelers should simply take the same precautions they would in any town.

Orientation

Ciudad Juárez sprawls south from the Río Bravo, but most places of interest are concentrated in the central area near the twin international bridges that connect Juárez to El Paso. Av Juárez is the main drag through Ciudad Juárez, but the mostly pedestrianized area south of the Plaza de Armas offers much more rewarding shopping and people-watching. East of the center is Zona Pronaf where well-heeled locals and tourists, mostly Mexican Texans, with money to burn come out to play. The main nightlife destinations line Av Lincoln.

Information

All businesses in Juárez accept US dollars, but it's usually better to pay in pesos. There are *casas de cambio* (exchange bureaus) all across the city, including many on Av Juárez, while banks are clustered along Av 16 de Septiembre. For emergency services, dial ☎ 060.

Comisiones San Luis (☎ 614-20-33; cnr Avs Juárez & 16 de Septiembre) Doesn't have the best rates for cash but it changes traveler's checks (US\$50 and US\$100 denominations only).

Compu-Rent (per hr M\$15) Main branch (cnr Av 16 de Septiembre & Villa) Speedy computers, private booths and a hip young vibe. There's a smaller branch at Av Juárez 243.

El Paso Tourist Information Center (☎ 915-534-0600; Santa Fe St at Main Dr; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun)

General Hospital (☎ 613-15-71; Paseo Triunfo de la República 2401) 24-hour emergency department.

Juárez Tourist Information Center (☎ 611-31-74; www.visitajuarez.com; Av de las Américas 2551; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) Bilingual staff; stocks brochures for Juárez and the rest of Mexico.

Post office (cnr Av Lerdo & Peña)

Dangers & Annoyances

Basic street smarts that might apply anywhere are applied in Ciudad Juárez, but the city's reputation is worse than its reality. Much of the crime is drug-related; tourists here for legitimate travel will find Juárez welcoming and friendly. The main drag along Av Juárez until it meets Av 16 de Septiembre is well lit and has a regular police presence so walking

around is fine until late at night – just don't stray down unlit side streets. East of Av Juárez is a seedy red-light district, which is best avoided. To the south and west many streets get eerily deserted very early in the evening; generally, however, it's safe to walk around them for the first few hours after dark. Don't walk over the Stanton St–Av Lerdo bridge at night.

Never accept 'free' offers (rides, drinks etc), as they're never free and can occasionally be dangerous.

Sights

Juárez' unique **cathedral** (cnr Av 16 de Septiembre & Mariscal; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–8pm Sat & Sun), built in 1935 and restored in 1976, is on the central Plaza de Armas. It has gorgeous stained-glass windows and an impressive neoclassical facade. Next door, the **Misión de Guadalupe** (☎ 7:30am–7pm, till 3pm Thu), completed in 1668, has an intricately carved wooden ceiling.

The city's grand old customs building now houses the **Museo Histórico de Ciudad Juárez** (Museo Ex-Aduana; ☎ 612-4707; cnr Avs Juárez & 16 de Septiembre; admission free; ☎ 9am–5pm Tue–Sun) with a few rather flat and unimpressive exhibits (labeled in Spanish) and some fantastic old photographs.

The conical **Museo de Arte** (☎ 613-17-08; Av Lincoln s/n; admission free; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun), in the Zona Pronaf, is an architectural curiosity. It's small, but the temporary exhibits can be good.

Sleeping

Be prepared for less than deluxe accommodations in Juárez, and be aware that most of the cheap hotels you pass as you walk around the center have 300% occupancy – that is, guests pay by the hour.

BUDGET

Hotel Correo (☎ 615-08-75; Av Lerdo 250 Sur; r from M\$130; ☎) The building, near the post office, is crumbling, but the rooms are scrubbed as clean as can be and this little TLC makes Correo one of the best bottom-budget bets in Juárez.

Gardner Hotel (☎ 915-532-3661; www.gardnerhotel.com; 311 E Franklin Av, El Paso; dm US\$20, r without/with bathroom from US\$35/55; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Some people prefer to visit Juárez as a daytrip from Texas before heading south, in which case this El Paso institution is an ideal base. The Gardner,

which opened in 1922 and oozes character and charm, offers both four-bed dorms (at the time of writing some two-bed dorms were planned) and single rooms. The cheapest are rather rough around the edges while others have been thoroughly fixed up: all pass the white glove test and have some original furnishings. Downstairs you'll find a big kitchen and common room with a free pool table. The owner, Joe, has a wealth of knowledge about the area, and leads tours to area attractions like Carlsbad Caverns (in New Mexico).

Hotel Imperial (☎ 615-03-23; Vicente Guerrero 206; r M\$300; ☎ ☎) This funky place, with its big orange wall of windows, isn't fancy, but its cozy rooms (much cheerier than the hallways) are good value for the price.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Monaco (☎ 617-17-30; www.hotelmonaco.com.mx; Paseo Triunfo de la República 3335; s/d M\$350/400; ☎ ☎ ☎) This motel-style place with large rooms is a very solid deal, even if you don't factor in its high-class Zona Pronaf locale.

Plaza Continental Hotel (☎ 615-00-84; Av Lerdo 112 Sur; s & d M\$370, tr M\$425; ☎ ☎) Decent carpeted rooms are large and clean. An impressive lobby and a funky late-night diner make this place a step up from other similar properties in the area.

Hotel Impala (☎ 615-04-31; www.hotel-impala.com; Av Lerdo 670 Nte; s, d & tr M\$380, q M\$440; ☎ ☎) Close to the border, near the Stanton St bridge, this old standby has basic but kind-of-cute rooms and firm beds. There's a restaurant (see p362) and a jolly, plant-filled lobby.

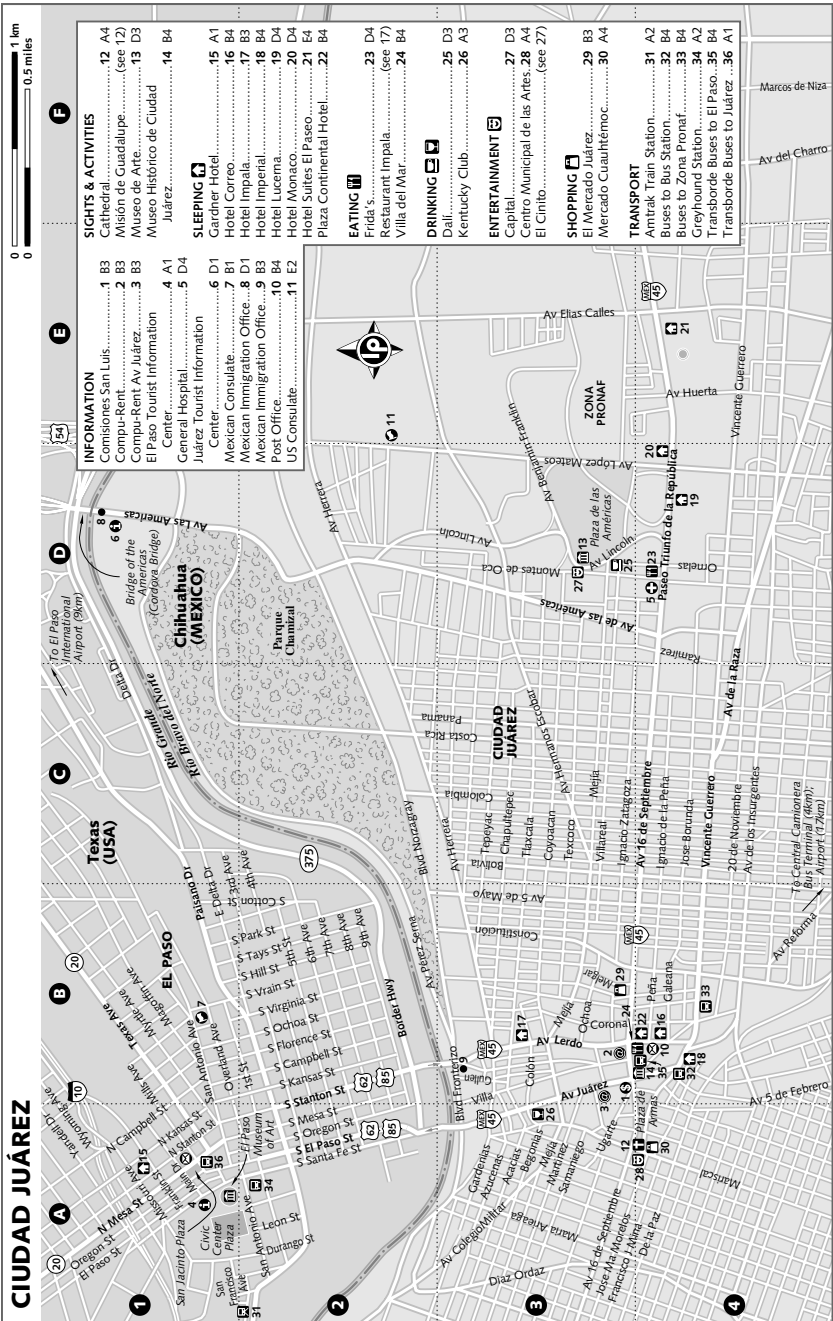
Hotel Suites El Paseo (☎ 611-50-00; www.suiteselpaseo.com; Paseo Triunfo de la República 4850; r from M\$594; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This colorful nouveau colonial-style spot is a top-end hotel with midrange prices. With fountains and statues around the grounds, it has more pizzazz than Juárez' more expensive hotels.

TOP END

Hotel Lucerna (☎ 629-99-00; www.lucerna.com.mx; Paseo Triunfo de la República 3976; s/d/stg M\$1480/1737/3318; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Catering to business-class travelers (weekend rates usually drop 15%), this luxurious option is a nice though pricey escape with a palm-studded pool area.

Eating & Drinking

For cheap eats, you can't beat the ramshackle roadside stalls where Villa meets Peña. The



fanciest options, as well as nearly all the international flavors (from Japanese to Lebanese) are in and around Zona Pronaf. And if you're just looking to get plastered, close your eyes and walk into the nearest doorway – there's a good chance it will be a bar. Bars open early (often at 8am!) and close at 2am.

Villa del Mar (☎ 612-58-90; Villa 130 Sur; mains M\$17-290) If you're downtown and ask a local where you should eat, many will point you to this simple seafood specialist, even if all you want is a taco.

Restaurant Impala (☎ 615-04-31; Av Lerdo 670 Nte; mains M\$20-140) The menu, with its cryptic English translations, covers all the usuals, but the massive breakfast platters (M\$59) with favorites from both sides of the border set this simple hotel restaurant apart.

Frida's (☎ 639-01-48; Paseo Triunfo de la República 2525; mains M\$80-268) Juárez' most beautiful dining room is full of art (including dozens of portraits of its namesake) and red velvet booths. The food, a mix of Mexican and Continental, probably won't wow you as much as the décor, but most people leave satisfied.

Dali (☎ 611-48-98; Mejía 3118; snacks M\$25-80; **V**) This *tranquilo* café–bar attracts a crowd of intellectuals for coffee, wine, mixed drinks and hookahs. Grab one of the pillow-covered corners and you'll melt right in.

Kentucky Club (☎ 632-61-13; Av Juárez 629; 11am-2am) This polished-wood bar is a fine place to sip a margarita. While the club's claim to have invented that particular cocktail sounds like a publicity ploy, they do make a great one. Classier than most other Av Juárez watering holes.

Entertainment

If you're hoping for fine arts, you'll likely be disappointed. Check the notably slim events calendar in *Juárez Life* magazine.

Students at the **Centro Municipal de las Artes** (CMA; ☎ 615-28-28; Mariscal 105; admission free) behind the cathedral perform folkloric dances every Sunday from 11am to 1pm. Other dance, music and theater performances are held occasionally.

For those who enjoy beer, wine, corndogs and art-house films, try **El Cinito** (The Little Cinema; ☎ 616-04-73; Av Lincoln 445; minimum purchase M\$40; 9pm Tue-Sun). At the same address is **Capital** (☎ 616-20-89; Av Lincoln 445; ☎ 9pm-2am Thu-Sun), the top spot at the moment for dancing. It hosts live

bands and DJs, the latter sometimes spinning on the outdoor deck.

Shopping

El Mercado Juárez (Av 16 de Septiembre 611; ☎ 9:30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5:30pm Sun) is a souvenir super-center. It's got endless rows of all the usual (blankets, jewelry, cheese, pottery, wrestling masks), but look long enough and you'll find some quality crafts.

Mexican tourists shop for crafts at the smaller **Mercado Cuauhtémoc** (cnr Guerrero & Mariscal; ☎ 9am-6pm).

Getting There & Away

AIR

The best option for international arrivals and departures is **El Paso International Airport** (ELP; ☎ 915-780-4749) where flights from most major US cities cost half of those to Ciudad Juárez.

Ciudad Juárez' **Aeropuerto Internacional Abraham González** (☎ 633-07-34) is just east of Hwy 45, 18km south of the center. Fares to Mexico City and Monterrey are available for as low as M\$1700 and M\$1400 respectively. You can buy tickets at most hotels.

BUS

In Ciudad Juárez, the **Central Camionera** (☎ 610-70-83; Teófilo Borunda) is 5km southeast of the center. See opposite for information on getting there. Destinations with frequent 1st-class departures include Chihuahua (M\$264, five hours), Mexico City's Terminal Norte (M\$1319, 24 hours) and Nuevo Casas Grandes (M\$161, four hours).

Autobuses Americanos (☎ 610-81-75) has buses direct to US cities (eg Albuquerque, Dallas and Denver) that are priced about the same as Greyhound's walk-up fares from El Paso.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If you're driving into the Mexican interior, you must obtain a vehicle permit (see p987). The only place to do so in the Ciudad Juárez area is at the major customs checkpoint at Km 30 on Hwy 45 south.

The highway to Chihuahua is in good condition, but it comes with a M\$159 toll. Hwy 2 to Nuevo Casas Grandes branches west at a traffic circle 20km south of town.

TRAIN

El Paso's **Amtrak train station** (☎ 915-545-2247; 700 San Francisco Av, El Paso) serves trains three times a

CROSSING THE BORDER

From El Paso you can walk across the Stanton St–Av Lerdo or Santa Fe St–Av Juárez bridges into Mexico (US\$0.35), but to return on foot you must use Av Juárez. By car, take Stanton St going south and Av Juárez going north. The vehicle toll is US\$2.25.

The easiest way to drive to Juárez is over the toll-free Bridge of the Americas (Cordova Bridge), about 4km east of the Santa Fe St–Av Juárez bridge. Tourist cards are available at the Mexican immigration offices at the ends of the Av Lerdo and Cordova bridges, but not Av Juárez. All three bridges are open 24 hours.

Transborde (US\$2; 🚌 7am–7pm Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm Sat, 9am–5pm Sun) buses shuttle between the cities' downtowns every half-hour. In Juárez they stop at the foot of the Av Lerdo bridge and at Av 16 de Septiembre and Villa. In El Paso you they stop by San Jacinto Plaza and along Stanton St. Also, an hourly bus connects the Juárez and El Paso bus stations between 6:30am and 9:30pm for US\$6.

A taxi over the border from the El Paso airport costs US\$40 to downtown or Zona Pronaf and US\$48 to the bus station.

week to Los Angeles (US\$97, 17 hours) and to New Orleans (US\$98, 30 hours). You can also get to Chicago (US\$113, 52 hours) if you change trains along the way.

Getting Around

Local buses (M\$4.50, 25 minutes) to the Juárez bus station leave from Guerrero, west of Villa; catch any green-and-white 'Permisionarios Unidos' bus or route 1A or 1B. From the bus station to the town center, step out to the highway and take any bus labeled 'Centro.' Inside the station, a booth sells tickets for authorized taxis into town (M\$85). You won't save money by walking outside and flagging one down, and you're unlikely to persuade anyone to take you *to* the station for that price.

Catch local buses labeled 'Plaza de las Americas' to Zona Pronaf along Guerrero or Corona; a taxi from Av Juárez will charge around M\$70 to M\$80.

NUEVO CASAS GRANDES & CASAS GRANDES

☎ 636 / combined pop 54,500 / elevation 1463m
Nuevo Casas Grandes, a four-hour bus trip southwest of Ciudad Juárez, is a sleepy, prosperous country town with wide streets and a vibe similar to dusty small towns in the US west. Its citizenry is a mix of working folk, farming families and Mormon settlers whose presence dates back to the late 19th century.

Although the town itself holds little of interest, the surrounding attractions, particularly the mysterious ruins of Paquimé in the nearby village of Casas Grandes and the

world-famous pottery center of Mata Ortiz, are wonderful enough that this ought to be a busy tourist center. As it is, only a slow trickle of visitors passes through, mostly on guided tours.

Information

You'll find banks with ATMs and several *casas de cambio* on Calle 5 de Mayo along both sides of Constitución (the street with railway tracks down the middle). The **post office** (Calle 16 de Septiembre 602) is a short walk southeast and the small **tourist office** (☎ 694-00-50; Av Juárez s/n; 🕒 10am–1pm & 3–6pm Tue–Sat) is inconveniently located 10 blocks north of the main plaza.

For internet access and international phone calls, there's **Copias Y Fax** (cnr Obregón & Calle 5 de Mayo; per hr M\$20; 🕒 8am–9pm).

Sights

The ruins of **Paquimé** (☎ 692-41-40; ruins & museum M\$43; 🕒 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) are what give Casas Grandes (Big Houses) its name. The maze-like, eroding adobe remnants are from what was the major trading settlement in northern Mexico from around AD 900 until it was invaded, perhaps by Apaches, and sacked in 1340. Excavation and restoration began in the late 1950s, and Unesco declared it a World Heritage Site in 1998, although only a small portion has been unearthed. Large plaques, in Spanish and English, describe the possible uses of some of the structures and discuss Paquimé culture; don't miss the clay parrot cages and the distinctive T-shaped door openings, both of which are still clearly visible. Video use costs M\$30.

The affiliated **Museo de las Culturas del Norte**, also with bilingual signage, has displays about many cultures from the greater desert region but mostly, of course, Paquimé. There's a scale model of the site at its prime, an explanation of how the canal system worked (quite an accomplishment here in the desert) and discussions of what is known about daily life in the village.

The Paquimé were great potters and produced pieces from black clay as well as cream-colored earthenware with striking red, brown or black geometric designs; some amazing original examples are on display in the museum. Copying their style has become a huge business in the area, and you can purchase pottery at the museum and many stores around Casas Grandes, as well as Mata Ortiz (opposite), where the revival began.

Sleeping

Alojamiento Fátima (☎ 661-43-54; alley btwn Constitución & Obregón; r M\$100) The city's cheapest hotel, in the blue building just north of Calle 5 de Mayo two blocks from the bus station, has run-down, noisy, cell-like rooms without fans, but it's safe and fairly clean. And the plants in the hallway show that the owners care.

Suites Victoria Casa Hotel (alley btwn Constitución & Juárez; r from M\$180; 📺) Although it has also seen better days, this little hotel just south of Calle 5 de Mayo gives you much more for your money than Fátima, including a TV, refrigerator and towel.

Hotel Piñón (☎ 694-06-55; www.hotelpinon.com; Av Juárez 605; s/d M\$335/385, tr & q M\$400; 📺 📺 📺 📺) On Av Juárez as you enter town from the north, this ultra-friendly lodge features comfy rooms behind a Paquimé-style facade. There's a restaurant offering hearty breakfasts and an outdoor pool. It's not the fanciest lodging in town, but it's only one small step down from the top for about half the price. They'll show you a room full of original Paquimé pottery (M\$20 for non-guests) if you ask.

our pick **Las Guacamayas B&B** (☎ 692-41-44; www.mataortizollas.com; s/d incl breakfast M\$535/640; 📺 📺 📺 📺) This precious lodge is a stone's throw from the entrance of the Paquimé site. The pink, adobe-style building has 15 charming rooms (sans TVs, though there's TV and wi-fi in the common area) with tiled floors, a lovely garden area with a hammock, and a gallery selling top-notch Mata Ortiz pottery. Breakfast is served in the owner's kitchen. (Note that the establishment uses US dollars.)

You can also spend the night at nearby Mata Ortiz (opposite) and Cueva de la Olla (opposite).

Eating & Drinking

Tortas Chuchy (☎ 694-07-09; Constitución 202; *tortas* M\$20; 🕒 8:30am-8pm Mon-Sat) Chuchy's classic lunch counter is the perfect place to enjoy cheap, filling fare, from *tortas* to *licuados*, plus a side of warm chat with Chuchy, the friendly old-timer who has owned the place for nearly three decades.

Constantino (☎ 694-10-05; cnr Juárez & Minerva; mains M\$20-110) Located off the corner of the main plaza, the popular Constantino has served fresh, tasty meals since 1954. The *enchiladas verdes* can't be beat.

Dinno's Pizza (☎ 694-02-04; cnr Minerva & Constitución; mains M\$25-120; 🕒 8am-9pm) In addition to its good pizzas and super breakfasts, this popular place offers strong coffee that men in cowboy hats are always lingering over.

Restaurante Malmedy (☎ 112-72-46; Av Juárez; mains M\$80-115; 🕒 1-9pm Tue-Sun) The biggest surprise in Nuevo Casas Grandes fills an 1896 brick house 3km north of town. The Belgian owner-chef cooks French and Mexican meals, plus a few combinations of the two, such as the beef filet with lime butter.

Chimenea's (☎ 694-06-55; Av Juárez 605) Nuevo Casas Grandes cantinas aren't as rough and tumble as those in the big city, but they're still generally sleazy. The Hotel Piñón's dark and cozy bar is a *tranquilo* exception. Guitarists serenade at weekends.

Getting There & Away

Nuevo Casas Grandes has no bus station; all long-distance services stop on Obregón at Calle 16 de Septiembre. There's frequent service to/from Ciudad Juárez (M\$161, four hours), Chihuahua (M\$206, four hours) and Tijuana (M\$880, 18 hours), plus two a day to Madera (\$174, four hours).

If you have a 4WD and a good command of Spanish, you could try heading to Madera on Hwy 11 through the mountains. The route is gorgeous but not well marked, so you'll need to stop often to ask ranchers for directions or reassurance.

Getting Around

Nuevo Casas Grandes is compact enough to walk almost everywhere, though a taxi to the outskirts will cost you only around M\$30.

To reach the ruins, take a 'Casas Grandes' bus (M\$6) from Constitución in the center of Nuevo Casas Grandes; they make the 7km run every 45 minutes during the day. You'll be let off at Casa Grandes' picturesque main plaza; from there signs direct you to the ruins, a 15-minute walk away. Local taxi drivers chat and play cards at Calle 5 de Mayo and Constitución in Nuevo Casas Grandes. They charge M\$100 to Paquimé with a 30-minute wait. For about M\$500 you can loop through Paquimé, Mata Ortiz, Hacienda de San Diego and Colonia Juárez.

AROUND NUEVO CASAS GRANDES

Southwest of Nuevo Casas Grandes are interesting little towns, cool forests and a variety of historic sites. You can combine several into a good daytrip.

The ancient petroglyphs along the rugged **Arroyo de los Monos**, 20km to the south, require some effort to reach. The road, Hwy 3, is in good shape up to the village of Colonia Madero, but the final 4km after it calls for 4WD (a car *might* make it). It's another 15 to 20 minutes on foot after that.

Down Hwy 4 past Paquimé is the Mormon village of **Colonia Juárez**, surrounded by apple orchards and with impressive school grounds at its heart, and the **Hacienda de San Diego** (☎ 636-1036004), a dilapidated 1902 mansion once owned by the Terrazas family, who controlled most of pre-revolutionary Chihuahua state. Descendants of a servant of the Terrazas still live there and for a small donation give quick tours. They'll also cook breakfast and lunch if you call ahead.

Mata Ortiz

At the foot of a short string of mountains 27km south of Nuevo Casas Grandes, Mata Ortiz, a tiny town with dusty, unpaved streets, loose chickens and unfinished adobe houses, has become a major pottery center. Artists here use materials, techniques and decorative styles like (or inspired by) those of the ancient Paquimé culture. Their work now attracts shoppers worldwide; the best pieces sell for over US\$10,000.

A local potters' association has opened a store (☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm) in the old train depot at the entrance to town, but you should also stroll through the village where you can see people working. The clay is shaped without a potter's wheel, and the

most historically authentic are painted with brushes made from children's hair. Dozens of families have turned their kitchens, living rooms and bedrooms into showrooms, and you might just purchase a pot sitting on someone's stovetop or stereo. Juan Quezada, credited with reviving the pottery tradition, is the most famous of the village's hundreds of potters. His well-marked workshop is a stone's throw from the depot.

Accommodation options include the wonderful **Casa de Marta** (☎ 636-661-71-32; per person incl 3 meals M\$375; ☒), a home-stay in the heart of downtown (no street signs) where you really are made to feel like part of the family. Even the locals will tell you how good Marta's cooking is. US currency is preferred here. A few other hotels are hidden around town.

There's no longer a bus service from Nuevo Casas Grandes. A taxi, including a one-hour wait, will cost you about M\$280.

Cueva de la Olla

Tucked away in the mountains west of Mata Ortiz is this unique ruin, named for its shape: a giant pot. Though beautifully preserved, little is known about this place, save that it was clearly connected to the Paquimé culture, as illustrated by the characteristic T-shaped doors. About 30 or 40 people probably once lived here, farming the fertile valley and storing their grain beneath these cliffside overhangs.

Getting here is half the fun. It's a beautiful, though challenging, drive that requires a high-clearance vehicle and rewards with wonderful views of the desert, valley, mountain forests and wildlife. It takes about 2½ hours each way from Nuevo Casas Grandes. **Diana Acosta** (☎ 636-1036004), an enthusiastic college grad who lives at Hacienda de San Diego (see left), has started leading tours here and can also arrange overnight accommodations in some cabins near the cave (US\$35 per person including breakfast and dinner).

MADERA

☎ 652 / pop 22,000 / elevation 2092m

The drive to Madera leaves the desert behind, twisting alternately through thick forests on the mountains and fertile plains between the hills. People come to the town for what's around it. The area is lush with mighty pine

trees, salmon-colored cliffs, waterfalls and a wealth of archaeological sites. The climate is refreshingly cool, and the town regularly gets winter snow.

There are a few banks and *casas de cambio* around the center. You can get on the internet at **Techno Ciber** (cnr Calle 3 & Morelos; per hr M\$10; ☎ 10am-9pm).

Sights

If you've got a little time to kill there are three 'museums' in town. You can see some ancient pottery, some stone tools and a roughly 1000-year-old mummy in the tiny **Museo Real del Bosque** (admission M\$5) at the hotel of the same name. Ask at reception for the key. There are a few rocks and old photos at the even smaller **Museo Anasazi** (cnr Calle 3 & Mina; admission free; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri). Minus the mummy, the most interesting collection of random old stuff is on the walls of **Restaurante/Museo Mariscos La Costa** (☎ 562-09-56; cnr Calle 7 & Independencia; ☎ 8am-10pm).

Madera's **cathedral** (cnr Calle 1 & Ojinaga; ☎ hours vary), built of stone, is also worth a minute of your time.

Sleeping & Eating

If you ask around town, people will put you in touch with the owners of cabins outside town. They tend to be expensive.

Hotel El Prado (☎ 572-04-92; Calle 5 No 2204; r from M\$160; (P)) These rooms, at the back of a little restaurant on the south side of town, were probably pretty nice at one time. In its current state, it's still a good budget option, and the women who run it are all smiles.

Hotel Alpino (☎ 572-03-29; cnr Calle 3 & Ojinaga; s/d M\$200/250; (P)) From the street, this bright green place looks closed, but once you find your way in you'll see large, good-value rooms.

Hotel Casa Grande Sierra (☎ 572-39-23; cnr Calle 27 & Internacional; s/d/tr M\$300/400/450; (P) (P) (Q)) In a quiet spot 800m west of the roundabout, Madera's newest hotel is as spic-and-span as you'd expect, and it's the only one with wi-fi.

Hotel Real del Bosque (☎ 572-05-38; s & d/ste M\$550/1100; (P) (P)) The fanciest place in town, the Real del Bosque is on the highway coming in from Chihuahua. Its rooms are spacious and carpet-free, with simple but effective decorative touches. The restaurant is decent and the bar *tranquilo*.

Cueva del Indio (☎ 572-07-11; cnr Calle 1 & Gonzales; mains M\$20-210) This lovely cave-themed spot

has a design inspired by the ancient structures around it, T-shaped door and all. Trout, served nine ways, is the specialty of the house, but you ought to consider ordering *vestigios de la cueva* (see boxed text, opposite).

Getting There & Away

Madera's little **bus station** (☎ 572-04-31; cnr Calle 5 & Mina) has services to Chihuahua (M\$190, five hours, hourly), Ciudad Juárez (M\$360, eight hours, two daily) and Nuevo Casas Grandes (M\$174, four hours, two daily).

Take care if driving to Madera during the night; there are some big cliffs and tight turns on the road coming up here.

AROUND MADERA

The following destinations have similar sites and scenery, but if you've got the time, it's well worth hitting both. Bring food and water.

Cuarenta Casas

The existence of cliff dwellings at **Cuarenta Casas** (Forty Houses; ☎ 9am-3pm) was known to the Spaniards as early as the 16th century, when explorer Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca wrote in his chronicles: '...and here by the side of the mountain we forged our way inland more than 50 leagues and found 40 houses.'

Last occupied in the 13th century, Cuarenta Casas was an outlying settlement of Paquimé (p363) and perhaps a garrison for defense of commercial routes to the Pacific. Today about two dozen adobe apartments remain on the west cliffside of a dramatic, highly eroded Arroyo del Garabato. A trail descends into the canyon and climbs the western slopes to the largest group of homes as **La Cueva de las Ventanas** (Cave of the Windows), which is well preserved. The 2km hike isn't easy and takes at least an hour for the round trip. Signs provide historical background along the way, and other homes are visible elsewhere in the canyon.

Cuarenta Casas is 43km north of Madera via a paved road (Hwy 11) through pine forest. From the turnoff, a good dirt road leads 1.5km to the entrance. An 11:30am bus (M\$50) from Madera goes by Cuarenta Casas en route to the town of Largo. In the reverse direction, it stops at the site at around 4pm, allowing enough time for a daytrip.

About 4km before the turn-off to Cuarenta Casas, through the gate near the lake (it's OK to open it), is **Cascada El Salto**, which flows mainly during the rainy season (July

EAT LIKE A CAVEMAN

Much is still not known about the ancient people who lived in the mountains around Madera, but one thing is clear: they ate well. Initially hunters and gatherers with no shortage of bounty in the valleys, they adopted agriculture (beans, corn, onions) after the Paquimé colonized them.

Madera's Cueva del Indio restaurant (see opposite) has taken their grotto theme beyond the aesthetics of the dining room and into the kitchen with their *vestigios de la cueva*, a delicious stew similar to food the original cliff dwellers would have eaten. Originally it would have been cooked in a clay pot buried in the ground with hot coals, but the restaurant's modern method uses a stovetop. If you'd like to try it at home, here's how:

- Boil 120g of pinto beans with a bit of onion and a slice of garlic over low heat. The beans are done when the water is thick and the same color as the beans; they should be tender, yet firm. It takes about two hours.
- Melt 100g of pork lard along with a quarter of a medium-sized onion in a frying pan. Continue for a few minutes until the onion gets some color.
- Add two dried red chili peppers and mix well, then stir in a few pinches of flour to thicken the broth.
- Add 150g of natural, salted dried meat (the ancients would have used deer, javalina, lizards, birds or other wild game; at the restaurant they use beef), pounding it until tender.
- Add the beans and mix for a few minutes before serving.
- A dash of paprika gives the dish a little color, but it's optional.

to September). If you have a high-clearance vehicle you can drive down this dirt road. Start listening for the falls after 1½km.

Cañón de Huápoca

This lovely valley west of Madera, thick with flowers August through October and birds year-round, holds more ancient adobe buildings. Head west on the unnamed, unpaved road from Madera's roundabout, taking the northern route at the fork. After 33km you'll come to the **Conjunto Huápoca** (☎ 9am-3pm; admission free), with trails to a triple set of cliff dwellings built about 800 years ago and abandoned 250 years later. You get only distant overlooks of the first two, **Cueva Nido del Águila** and **Cueva Mirador**, but you can enter houses in the **Cueva de la Serpiente**, so named because these restored adobe dwellings cut through to both sides of the cliff. It's down a steep, narrow canyon, and though there are steps it's not an easy walk. It's 2.5km round-trip to see them all.

Keep on down the dusty road and you'll pass **Balneario Huápoca** (admission M\$15), a family-friendly, developed set of hot springs at the 40km mark (any guide can lead you to natural hot springs hidden elsewhere around Madera), and then cross the **Puente Colgante** (Suspension Bridge) over the Río Huápoca.

Head up the other side of the canyon and turn off the main road at the sign for **Cueva Grande** (admission free; ☎ 9am-3pm) where three more ancient buildings sit dramatically behind a rainy-season waterfall. It's an easy 600m walk from the parking area.

The road is rough (it would be great fun on a mountain bike), but a car can make it. The last 3km to Cueva Grande are extra bumpy, however. Seek local advice during the rainy and snowy seasons. Camping is allowed, but not campfires. Operating out of Madera, **José Domínguez** (☎ 652-5722211) has been driving tourists around in his van for years and speaks some English. He charges M\$300 per person (minimum of two). Taxis, some of which are SUVs, will cost at least M\$900.

CHIHUAHUA

☎ 614 / pop 749,000 / elevation 1455m

Peaceful Chihuahua remains unfettered by the trappings of tourism. It has some beautiful parks and plazas, excellent restaurants, and a fine collection of cultural offerings. This capital city of Mexico's largest state has long been a prosperous city, as evidenced by the restored colonial buildings dotting downtown and the remains of the 5.5km-long early-18th-century aqueduct to the southwest. Its modern economic success is best demonstrated by the

CHIHUAHUAS

So what's the connection between Chihuahua and those nervous, yipping little dogs? The puny pups, averaging about 2kg in weight, were discovered in this area of Mexico around 1850. While their exact origins are a mystery, it's widely believed that they first came from Asia or Egypt, and were introduced to Mexico by Spanish settlers. The canines were once thought to be indigenous to Mexico because of similar creatures depicted in ancient Toltec and Aztec art and described by explorers, but there exists no archaeological evidence to support this belief. Those beasts, say experts, must have been rodents that disappeared from Mexico not long after the Spanish conquest in the 16th century.

Chihuahuas are popular pets in their eponymous state. Chihuahua city now features an annual **Dog Parade** with about three dozen fiberglass dogs painted by local artists and put on display along downtown streets from July to September.

flash shopping malls on its outskirts and the proliferation of public art.

The bulk of foreigners use the metropolis only as an overnight stop en route to the Barranca del Cobre railway, so most of the folks you'll encounter will be locals; a pleasing mix of professionals, working-class, students and dapper rancheros decked out in brightly colored cowboy boots. Many Mennonites and colorfully attired Rarámuri come to town too.

History

From the first few Spanish settlers in 1709, Chihuahua grew to become both an administrative center for the surrounding territory and a commercial center for cattle and mining interests. The city had a hand in many of Mexico's defining historical events. In the War of Independence, rebel leader Miguel Hidalgo, after being captured by the Spaniards, was brought here and shot. Chihuahua served as Mexico's capital city from 1864 to 1866 after President Benito Juárez was forced to flee northward by the French troops of Emperor Maximilian.

The Porfirio Díaz regime brought railways to the city and helped consolidate the wealth of the huge cattle fiefdoms that surrounded it. Luis Terrazas, onetime governor, held lands nearly the size of Belgium: 'I am not *from* Chihuahua, Chihuahua is mine,' he once said.

After Pancho Villa's forces took Chihuahua in 1913 during the Mexican Revolution, Villa established his headquarters here. He had schools built and arranged other civic works, contributing to his status as a local hero.

Orientation

Most areas of interest in Chihuahua are within walking distance of the central Plaza

de Armas. The Zona Dorada entertainment district, where most of the nightclubs are, is along Av Juárez at Av Colón, just northeast of the center.

Chihuahua uses a grid pattern (though it's very erratic) with Av Independencia serving as a 'zero' point for addresses. Parallel street names ascend by odd numbers (Calle 3, 5, 7, etc) to its north and by even numbers to its south.

Information

Most of the larger banks are around the Plaza de Armas. You'll find many *casas de cambio* on Aldama, southwest of the cathedral. There are many internet cafés in town, but most close fairly early. For late night access, try Mi Café (p373) or Hotel San Juan (p372). Ring ☎ 060 for ambulance, fire and police services.

Clínica del Centro (☎ 439-81-00; Ojinaga 816) Has a 24-hour emergency department.

Post office (Libertad 1700)

Rojo y Casavantes (☎ 439-58-58; www.rojocasavantes.com; Guerrero 1207) Books bus, train and plane tickets and is an agent for American Express.

State Tourist Office (☎ 429-35-96, 800-508-01-11; www.ah-chihuahua.com; cnr Aldama & Guerrero; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) On the ground floor of the Palacio de Gobierno, this information outlet has extraordinarily helpful, English-speaking staff.

Sights

MUSEO HISTÓRICO DE LA REVOLUCIÓN MEXICANA

Housed in Quinta Luz, a 48-room mansion and former headquarters of Pancho Villa, this **museum** (☎ 416-29-58; Calle 10 No 3010; admission M\$10; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) is a must-see, not only for history buffs but for anyone

who appreciates a good made-for-Hollywood story of crime, stakeouts and riches.

After his assassination in 1923, 25 of Villa's 'wives' filed claims for his estate. Government investigations determined that Luz Corral de Villa was the *generalissimo's* legal spouse; the mansion was awarded to her and became known as Quinta Luz. She opened the museum and the army acquired it after her death in 1981. You'll see many of Villa's personal effects plus weapons from his era, but everyone's favorite stop is the back courtyard where the bullet-riddled black Dodge that Villa was driving when he was murdered is on morbid display.

It's a pleasant walk from the center, or take any bus headed down Ocampo.

PLAZA DE ARMAS

Chihuahua's historic heart, with its mass of pigeons, shoe-shine boys and cowboy-hatted men sitting around the ornate iron bandstand (made in Belgium), is a simple but pretty place. Its majestic **cathedral** (☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm), built between 1725 and 1826, presides over the bustle. Behind its marvelous baroque facade is an altar of Italian marble and the original organ installed in 1796.

On the southeast side is the entrance to the small **Museo de Arte Sacro** (admission M\$15; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri), which displays dozens of religious paintings from the big names of the 18th century, including Miguel Cabrera, plus a chair used by Pope John Paul II during his 1990 visit.

CASA CHIHUAHUA

Chihuahua's former Palacio Federal is now a **cultural center** (☎ 429-33-00; Libertad 901; adult M\$40, child & student M\$20, Thu free; ☎ 10am-5pm) with several historical galleries and events every Thursday night. The most famous gallery is the **Calabazo de Hidalgo**, where Miguel Hidalgo was held prior to his execution. Then part of a Jesuit convent, the dungeon was incorporated first into the new Mint and later the present structure after each building was razed. The creepy quarters contain replicas of Hidalgo's crucifix and other personal effects, while outside a plaque recalls the verses the revolutionary priest wrote in charcoal on his cell wall in his final hours thanking his captors for their kindness. Upstairs are several rooms full of high-tech displays, from videos of Rarámuri dance to reproductions of an-

cient rock art, about the state of Chihuahua that might inspire you to prolong your travel time in the state.

The sound-and-light show from 7pm to 9:30pm Tuesday to Sunday behind the building at the **Fuentes Danzarinas** (Dancing Fountains) attracts many wide-eyed kids.

PALACIO DE GOBIERNO

The handsome, 19th-century **palace** (☎ 429-35-96; cnr Aldama & Guerrero; admission free; ☎ 8am-8pm) features fantastic murals by Aaron Piña Mora showing the history of Chihuahua (grab the little guide explaining each of the paintings from the tourist office) surrounding the classic courtyard. On one side of the courtyard is a small room with a flickering 'eternal flame' marking the place where Father Hidalgo (see boxed text, p629) was shot.

In back is a pair of small but good museums. The **Museo de Hidalgo** (admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) honors its namesake, while the **Galería de Armas** (admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) has a variety of guns and swords from the Independence era.

PLAZA MAYOR

Fronting the Palacio de Gobierno, this large square has many monuments including the **Ángel de la Libertad** statue representing the freedom of the Mexican people. A laser shoots out of its sword during special events.

The **Templo de San Francisco** (☎ 7:30am-1pm & 4:30-8pm), a simple white church at the foot of the square, is the city's oldest. Construction began in 1715. Hidalgo's decapitated body was interred here before being sent to Mexico City in 1827. Another 'eternal flame' marks the spot.

ART MUSEUMS

Manuel Gameros started building the bold, art nouveau **Quinta Gameros** (☎ 416-66-84; Paseo Bolívar 401; adult/child & student M\$20/10; ☎ 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) in 1907 as a wedding present for his fiancée. By the time it was finished, four years later, she had died, the Revolution had begun and the Gameros family had fled Mexico. Pancho Villa would later use it as offices. As if this story wasn't good enough, some tour guides tell that Gameros' fiancée fell for the architect, Julio Corredor of Colombia, and married him instead. Staff insist there's no truth to this tale. Today the house is gorgeously restored and filled with a mix of period

CHIHUAHUA

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furnishings and art from the Universidad de Chihuahua's permanent collection.

Filling a former railroad roundhouse, **Casa Redonda** (☎ 414-90-61; Escodero at Colón; admission M\$15; 🕒 10am-8pm Tue-Sun, closes 6pm Dec-Jan) now hosts the local museum of contemporary arts, which brings in art from around Mexico (there was a Diego Rivera retrospective last time we visited), and also a few train relics.

The less ambitious **Casa Siglo XIX** (☎ 439-80-80; cnr Calle 6 & Juárez; admission free; 🕒 9am-2pm & 4-7pm), a restored colonial gem of a building, has temporary galleries in the front and small-scale models of the massive metal sculptures by renowned Chihuahuan artist Sebastián, whose work rises in cities around the world, in back. You can see several of the real things around town, including one at the top of Parque el Palomar in the city's northwest.

MUSEO DE LA LEALTAD REPUBLICANA

Casa de Juárez, the home and office of Benito Juárez during the period of French occupation, now houses this **museum** (☎ 410-42-58; Juárez 321; adult/child & student M\$10/5; 🕒 9am-6pm Tue-Sun). It maintains an 1860s feel and exhibits documents signed by the great reformer as well as a replicas of his furniture and horse-drawn carriage.

MUSEO TARIKÉ

This seldom-visited **museum** (☎ 410-28-70; Calle 4 No 2610; adult M\$10, child & student M\$5; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) near Quinta Luz covers the history of the city. The old photos are generally more interesting than the exhibits (labeled in Spanish only), but the rolling toilet used by miners is alone worth the trip.

SCIENCE MUSEUMS

Chihuahua has two science museums that kids will enjoy, even though both have only Spanish signage. The **Museo del Mamuth** (☎ 415-73-78; Juárez 2506; adult M\$15, child & student M\$10; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-4pm Sun) is a so-so natural history museum with lots of rocks and fossils on display, including an 18,000-year-old mammoth and a giant grey whale skeleton. **Museo Semilla** (☎ 412-39-12; www.museosemilla.com.mx; cnr Calle 10 & Teofilo Burunda; adult/child M\$40/35; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, noon-7pm Sat & Sun) is an excellent hands-on science center that's often full of school groups.

LAS GRUTAS DE NOMBRE DE DIOS

This cool **cave** (☎ 400-70-59; adult/child M\$40/20; 🕒 9am-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) on the north side of town has some impressive stalagmites, stalactites and other rock formations, making the one-hour, 17-room underground journey fun, especially for kids. To get there take either a taxi (M\$70) or a 'Nombre de Dios Ojo' bus (M\$4.50) from the corner of Calle 4 and Niños Héroes. Ask the driver to tell you when to get off.

SANTA EULALIA & SANTO DOMINGO

Though it's just on the outskirts of Chihuahua, the historic hillside mining village of Santa Eulalia feels worlds away. The area's first silver was dug out of these mountains in the 17th century, and the mines are still going strong. The library (the new orange building) has a little **mining museum** (Av Zaragoza; admission free; 🕒 9am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri) but it's more interesting to look around Chino's **Rock Shop** (Av Juárez) just downhill from the church.

Santo Domingo, 3km uphill from Santa Eulalia, is an interestingly ugly town full of

DETOUR: CUEVA DE LOS CRISTALES

Deep under the mountains around the town of Naica, 130km southeast of Chihuahua, Cueva de los Cristales (Crystal Cave) is one of the most incredible, surreal places on earth. Discovered in April 2000 during routine excavations in the Naica-Peñoles silver, zinc and lead mine, the 30m-long cavity is a tangle of translucent beams of selenite (a form of gypsum), some stretching up to 14m long and 3m in diameter – among the largest crystals ever found.

If you want to see it for yourself, plan ahead. Industrias Peñoles has added lighting and leads free tours, but only on Saturdays. Last time we checked the waiting list was three months – you can ask about cancellations but don't count on it.

Not everyone will be up for the visit, since the combination of 50°C temperatures and complete saturation in the cave – emanating from magma down below – can prove fatal after less than 10 minutes. Visitors must be at least 15 years old and have no heart conditions. For reservation or information, call ☎ 621-476-00-56 or ask at the tourist office in Chihuahua (p368).

old mining buildings. Señor Oaxaca, whose father was a miner, leads five-hour **mine tours** (☎ 415-52-60, cell phone 614-1967689; 2 people M\$150) and has a big museum at his Bar-Restaurante Oaxaca. He provides hard hats and lanterns. The tourist office in Chihuahua (p368) can make arrangements.

To get to either town, catch a 'Francisco Portillo' bus (M\$9, 45 min) across from Hotel El Campanario on Díaz Ordaz in Chihuahua.

Tours

Conexión a la Aventura (☎ 413-79-29; www.conexionalaaventura.com; Miguel Schultz 3701, Colonia Granjas; ☎ 9am-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) offers numerous outdoor trips all over the region, including rock climbing and rappelling in Parque Nacional Cumbres de Majalco (M\$1120 per person, one day), kayaking the Río Conchos (M\$2990 per person, two days) and sandboarding at Samalayuca Dunes (M\$1380 per person, one day). A nine-day Copper Canyon trip with four days of burro trekking costs US\$1135 per person with four people.

Chihuahua's historic-looking **Trolley Turístico** offers a 45-minute narrated (in Spanish) peek at Chihuahua's main historic sights. It departs from Plaza Hidalgo every hour from 9am to noon and 3pm to 7pm, Tuesday to Sunday; buy tickets (adult/child M\$30/15) at the tourist office.

Sleeping

Chihuahua's cheapest places may be rougher than you're used to. It pays to look at the rooms before deciding. Most of the lodging west of Juárez and south of Montes is of the by-the-hour variety. All of the midrange and top-end hotels have wi-fi.

BUDGET

Casa de Huéspedes (☎ 410-53-61; Libertad 1209; s/d M\$80/100) The rooms at this unnamed place (Casa de Huéspedes simply means guest-house) are pretty old, but the flower-filled courtyard and no-nonsense *dueña* more than compensate. If you're an early-to-bed kind of person and don't need a TV, this is a steal.

Hotel San Juan (☎ 410-00-35; Victoria 823; s/d/tr/q M\$135/145/175/185; ☎ ☎) This was clearly a primo address back in the day. The decay adds charm to the tile- and arch-filled courtyard, while the rooms are just plain tired. The bars are, however, good for the price. The bar is

very loud, but you can't hear the music in the back rooms. There is 24-hour internet access (M\$10 per hour).

Casa de Chihuahua (☎ 410-08-43; www.casadechihuahua.com; Mendez 2203; dm/d M\$140/260; ☎ ☎ ☎) This new, well-run hostel facing the train station is a budding backpacker base, though a very tranquil one. It's for 'people who like to sleep,' as the Mexican-French couple who own it say, and no alcohol is allowed on the grounds. Features include a large common area with movies, a gym, a book exchange and free wi-fi throughout. Gay couples are requested not to show public affection.

Our pick Hotel Jardín del Centro (☎ 415-18-32; Victoria 818; r from M\$230; ☎ ☎ ☎) Cozy and modern rooms around a plant- and bird-filled courtyard make this one of the best bargains in the city.

Motel María Dolores (☎ 410-47-70; motelmadal@hotmail.com; Calle 9 No 304; s/d/tr/q M\$277/299/377/398; ☎ ☎ ☎) Just down from Plaza Mayor, this impeccably run motel's basic but modern rooms are a very good deal. They've even got wi-fi.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Santa Regina (☎ 415-38-89; www.hotelessanta-regina.com; Calle 3 No 102; r M\$310-520; ☎ ☎ ☎) Small decorative touches cover up the slightly institutional feel of this older but shipshape hotel. The cheapest rooms are a tad dour, but the rest are pretty snazzy. A favorite of Mexican business travelers, it's run like clockwork and has a great downtown location.

Hotel El Campanario (☎ 415-45-45; Díaz Ordaz s/n; s/d M\$490/520; ☎ ☎) Your standard type of spot - lacks style but it's a fine choice with large comfortable rooms and a nice lobby.

Posada Tierra Blanca (☎ 415-00-00; www.posadatierrablanca.com.mx; Niños Héroes 102; s & d M\$690, tr/q M\$725/760; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Despite the downtown bustle, this large motor lodge-style place with lots of flowers and trees on the grounds makes for a relaxing stay. The rooms are ready for a remodel, but they're large and comfortable. Check out the mural of world cultures in the back, even if you aren't staying here.

TOP END

Palacio del Sol (☎ 412-34-56; www.hotelpalaciodelsol.com; Independencia 116; r from M\$1200; ☎ ☎ ☎) This white cement high-rise looms over the low-level city. The rooms are positively luxu-

rious, and the doting service is welcome after a long, hot day. There's a small gym and a business center, and the bar has live music in the evenings.

Eating

Antojitos Pam-Pam (☎ 410-51-47; Carranza 1204; mains M\$15-83; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat) Nothing fancy, just great home-style cooking, which makes it a favorite with downtown workers at lunchtime. The *chile relleno* burritos are delicious and filling.

Nutry Vida (☎ 410-96-64; Victoria 420; mains M\$19-30; ☎ 8:30am-8:30pm; ☒ (V)) For vegetarians growing tired of cheese, this little natural-foods café and bakery is a welcome stop. You'll find salads, yogurts, veggie burgers (which aren't very good, frankly), fresh-squeezed juices and a variety of whole-wheat baked goods. Eat in or take out.

Il Punto 611 (Independencia 611; cappuccino M\$20; ☎ 8am-9pm) The coffees and teas here are very good, and the baked goods are even better.

Mi Café (☎ 410-12-38; Victoria 1000; mains M\$25-120; ☒) This American-style greasy-spoon diner caters both to travelers and local cowboys, serving up excellent breakfasts and coffee at big, comfy booths. *Chilaquiles montados con huevos* (corn tortillas with chili and eggs) is great way to start the morning or kick a hangover. Internet access (till 10:30pm) costs M\$15 per hour.

ourpick La Casa de los Milagros (☎ 437-06-93; Victoria 812; mains M\$40-98; ☎ 5pm-late) Who wouldn't love this place? Legend has it that Pancho Villa and his pals did, and you probably will too. Housed in a beautiful 110-year-old mansion featuring high ceilings, tiled floors and an open-roof courtyard, the food, cocktails list and colonial ambience at this stylish café all merge into a fantastic evening. The light-fare menu features a great selection of coffee drinks, fresh salads and *antojitos* like *quesadillas* filled with *huitlacoche* plus there are some steaks for heartier appetites. There's live music, usually *trova*, on weekends.

Drinking & Entertainment

The dive bar edging the front courtyard of the Hotel San Juan (opposite), open noon till 2am, attracts many Chihuahua hipsters. It has loud rock and metal on the jukebox yet maintains a mellow vibe, and there are usually as many women as men pounding back whiskey and beer.

ourpick Café Calicanto (☎ 410-44-52; Aldama 411; ☎ 4pm-late) Enjoy live jazz and *trova*, luscious cocktails, big sandwiches, light snacks and a very diverse crowd on the tree-lined patio of this intimate café.

Cervecería (cnr Juárez & Pacheco; ☎ 11am-midnight) While other Zona Dorada nightspots try to outdo themselves with flash and style, this drive-in, park-like spot guarantees its success with one simple hook: cheap beer. One liter is just 28 pesos. *Norteño* and country bands kick off around 9pm and the earthy crowd makes for great people-watching.

Cubo Bar Alive (☎ 410-68-65; Juárez 3114; cover M\$50; ☎ 10pm-2am Fri & Sat) Despite the competition elsewhere in the Zona Dorada, Cubo Bar Alive has been the spot to shake your thing for years. Live music gets the crowd crazy: not a chair, table or pole remains un-danced on.

Shopping

Cowboy-boot shoppers should make a beeline to Libertad between Independencia and Diaz Ordaz, where stores jammed with a flashy selection of reasonably priced rawhide, ostrich and lizard boots line the avenue.

Casa de las Artesanías del Estado de Chihuahua (☎ 410-60-73; Niños Héroes 1101; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) This state-run store has a good selection of *chihuahuense* crafts (including Mata Ortiz pottery) and food (pecans, *sotol*, Mennonite cheese), though prices can be high.

Mercado de Artesanías (Aldama 511; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) So overflowing with tacky crap (leather-clad shot glasses, Pancho Villa key chains, Jesus figurines in tequila bottles) you've just got to visit.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Chihuahua's **General Fierro Villalobos Airport** (☎ 446-82-33) has daily flights to Mexico City and major cities in northern Mexico (from around M\$1750), as well as Los Angeles, Phoenix, Houston and Dallas in the US.

BUS

Autobuses Americanos (☎ 800-500-0707) services depart daily for Phoenix, Los Angeles, Albuquerque and Denver. Chihuahua's **bus station** (☎ 420-22-86; Av Juan Pablo II), about 10km east from the center of town, is a major center for buses in every direction:

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency
Ciudad Juárez	M\$264	5hr	every 15min
Creel	M\$190	5hr	hourly
Cuauhtémoc	M\$64	1½hr	every 30min
Durango	M\$421	9hr	frequent
Hidalgo del Parral	M\$109	3hr	hourly
Madera	M\$190	5hr	hourly
Mexico City (Terminal Norte)	M\$1052	18hr	frequent
Monterrey	deluxe M\$675	11hr	2 daily
	1st class M\$546	11hr	12 daily
Nuevo Casas Grandes	M\$206	4hr	11 daily
Zacatecas	M\$596	13hr	frequent

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The easiest way in and out of Chihuahua to/from the south is along the canal (Av Teofilo Borunda), which has less traffic than Juárez or Aldama. Av Periférico Lombardo Toledano then gets you out to the freeway. Heading out of town to the west, take Cuauhtémoc to Zarco, where you pass many colonial mansions.

TRAIN

Chihuahua is the northeastern terminus of the *Barranca del Cobre* trains. Tickets are sold at the **station** (☎ 439-72-12; Mendez s/n; ☎ ticket window 5-7am & 10am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 5-7am & 9am-12:30pm Sat, 5-7am Sun). For more information see p341.

Getting Around

The bus station is a half-hour east of town along Av Pacheco. To get there, catch a 'Circunvalación 2 Sur' or 'Aeropuerto' (which does not go to the airport – no public bus does) bus (M\$4.50) on Carranza across the street from Plaza Hidalgo. From the bus stop in front of the station, the 'Aeropuerto' bus goes back to the center.

For the train station, take any bus headed down Ocampo or a 'Cerro de la Cruz' bus on Carranza by Plaza Hidalgo and get off at Iglesia Sagrado Corazón. It's a short walk past the medieval-looking prison. Heading toward the center, catch a 'Circunvalación 2 Sur' bus north on 20 de Noviembre to Plaza Hidalgo.

Taxis charge standard rates from the center to the train station (M\$35), bus station (M\$60) and airport (M\$100). Expect to pay more going from the train station.

CUAUHTÉMOC

☎ 625 / pop 99,000 / elevation 2010m

West of Chihuahua, prosperous Cuauhtémoc is the main center for Mexico's Mennonites

(see boxed text, opposite). The town itself bustles so much that it feels much bigger than it really is; however, once you start searching for things to see and do, its real size quickly reveals itself. Still, some good restaurants make a stopover pleasant, as do the shady town square and a small but stately cathedral.

There are many banks (with ATMs) and *casas de cambio* around the plaza, and the **Módulo de Información Turística** (☎ 581-34-88; Calle Morelos; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is in the plaza. To get online, try **IQ Computación** (Av Allende 373; per hr M\$10; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat).

Sights

The large **Museo y Centro Cultural Menonita** (☎ 586-18-95; Hwy 5 Km 10; adult/child M\$25/15; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) holds hundreds of household goods and farm tools. It's remarkable how similar things are to what you'll find in small-town historical museums in the American Midwest. A variety of crafts, cheeses and fruit preserves are sold here. A taxi from downtown will cost you about M\$200 with waiting time.

The new **Centro Cultural San Antonio** (☎ 590-4871; cnr Calle 5 & Juárez; admission free; ☎ 9am-3pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Sat & Sun) on the other side of the tracks hosts changing art exhibits. So does the **Centro Cultural Cuauhtémoc** (admission free; ☎ 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat), located in the hilltop **Parque Mirador**.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel San Francisco (☎ 582-31-52; Calle 3 No 132; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast from M\$170/180/250/260; P) Despite what you'd expect at these prices, the modern rooms at this serious bargain, one block off the plaza, sparkle.

Motel Tarahumara Inn (☎ 581-19-19; www.tarahumarainn.com; Av Allende 373; d/tr M\$710/760; P ☎ ☎) Rooms are a little more ordinary than you'd expect from seeing what's outside, but still plenty comfy. There are a restaurant, bar and small gym on the premises.

St Cruz Cafe (☎ 582-10-61; Hidalgo 1137; mains M\$25-72; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Sat, 4pm-midnight Sun) As upscale as Cuauhtémoc gets, this place has enchiladas and crepes with cappuccino, vodka tonics or white zinfandel. There's live music Thursdays to Saturdays from 9pm. A less artsy branch (open 4pm till midnight) is in the Parque Mirador.

Rancho Viejo (☎ 582-43-60; Av Guerrero 333; mains M\$44-165) Good ol' Mexican food: choose from shrimp, beef and other traditional options at

this homey log cabin. Apple pie finishes off the meal with style.

Getting There & Away

Frequent buses go to Chihuahua (M\$64, 1½ hours) and Creel (M\$124, 3½ hours). There's no terminal; buses stop at individual company offices. **Estrella Blanca** (☎ 582-10-18; cr Calle 9 & Allende) is the largest, and all others are nearby.

The train station (see p341 for travel details) can be reached from the end of Calle 3, but the bus is faster and more convenient.

From the town's west end, the Corredor Comercial Álvaro Obregón (Hwy 5) runs north through the principal Mennonite zone, with entrances to the numbered *campos* (villages) along the way.

HIDALGO DEL PARRAL

☎ 627 / pop 101,000 / elevation 1652m

Parral is a pleasantly mellow little town (its courteous drivers even come to complete halts

for pedestrians!) with some good museums and unique churches. Its biggest claim to fame is that it's the town where Pancho Villa (see boxed text, p376) was murdered on July 20, 1923, and buried with 30,000 attending his funeral. Soon after his burial, his corpse was beheaded by unknown raiders, and in 1976 his body was moved to Mexico City.

Founded as a mining settlement in 1631, the town took the Hidalgo tag later but is still commonly called just Parral. Throughout the 17th century, enslaved indigenous people mined the rich veins of silver, copper, quartz, lead and other valuable minerals from La Prieta mine, the installations of which still loom above town.

Orientation

Parral doesn't follow the standard grid-plan, which makes wandering the streets confusing but fun. Two main squares, Plaza Principal (home of the Templo de San José) and Plaza Guillermo Baca (fronting the cathedral) are

THE MENNONITES

In Cuahtémoc, Nuevo Casas Grandes and Chihuahua, you'll likely do a double take when you first encounter Mennonite men in baggy overalls and women in American Gothic dresses and black bonnets speaking a dialect of low German to blonde children.

The Mennonite sect, founded by the Dutchman Menno Simons in the 16th century, maintains a code of beliefs that puts it at odds with many governments, particularly an extreme pacifism and refusal to swear oaths of loyalty other than to God. And so, severely persecuted for their beliefs in Europe, many sect members moved to North America, including post-revolutionary Mexico, where thousands settled in the 1920s.

Even today, most Mexican Mennonites lead an isolated existence, speaking little, if any, Spanish, and marrying only among themselves. Unlike the Amish, with whom they are often confused, Mennonites embrace technology, and several factories produce stoves, farm equipment and other goods, while Mennonite cheese and cream are sold across Chihuahua state and beyond.

Mennonite villages are called *campos* and are numbered instead of named. The greatest number (around 150) are clustered around Cuahtémoc. It feels more like Iowa than Mexico here, with vast cornfields and suburban-type homes.

Most Mennonites remain firmly uninterested in pandering to shutter-clicking tourists. Don't expect cheerful conversations with gregarious Mennonites; most look at outsiders with disinterest or even disdain. But you can tour the *campos*.

Friendly **John Friessen** (☎ 625-5821322; irene@pjtrailers.com), in Cuahtémoc, has a wealth of information about the local area and is the only person who can arrange a tour in Spanish, English or German. The visits are personalized (so are the prices, but expect a half-day trip for two with John driving to cost around M\$500) but usually include a visit to a mission church, a small farm, a cheese factory and a restaurant for a meal of Mennonite sausages and baked goods. Friessen's connections to the Mennonites go back generations; his grandfather was excommunicated from the church for choosing to let his children get a different education.

If John is booked out, Cuahtémoc's *Módulo de Información Turística* (opposite) or Motel Tarahumara Inn (opposite) can get you a guide. There are never tours on Sundays, and Saturday tours miss out on some things as not all businesses will be open or in full production.

PANCHO VILLA: BANDIT-TURNED-REVOLUTIONARY

Best known as a hero of the Revolution, Francisco 'Pancho' Villa's adulthood was more given to robbing and womanizing than any noble cause, and even his admirers can't deny that for most of his days, he was simply a bad man. Though his life is obscured by contradictory claims, half-truths and outright lies, one thing is certain: Villa detested alcohol. In his *Memorias*, Villa gleefully recalled how he stole a magnificent horse from a man who was preoccupied with getting drunk in a cantina.

After his outlaw years, Pancho Villa had bought a house in Chihuahua. That spring, Chihuahua's revolutionary governor Abraham González began recruiting men to break dictator Porfirio Díaz' grip on Mexico, and among the people he lobbied was Villa. González knew about Villa's past, but he also knew that he needed men like Villa – natural leaders who knew how to fight – if he ever hoped to depose Díaz. Thus, González encouraged Villa to return to marauding, but this time for a noble cause: agrarian reform. The idea appealed to Villa, and he soon joined the Revolution, leading the famous División del Norte.

When rebels under Villa's leadership took Ciudad Juárez in May 1911, Díaz resigned. Francisco Madero, a wealthy liberal from the state of Coahuila, was elected president in November 1911.

But Madero was unable to contain the various factions fighting for control throughout the country, and in early 1913 he was toppled from power by one of his own commanders, General Victoriano Huerta, and executed. Pancho Villa fled across the US border to El Paso, but within a couple of months he was back in Mexico, one of four revolutionary leaders opposed to Huerta. Villa quickly raised an army of thousands, and by the end of 1913 he had taken Ciudad Juárez (again) and Chihuahua with the help of US-supplied guns. His victory at Zacatecas the following year is reckoned to be one of his most brilliant. Huerta was finally defeated and forced to resign in July 1914. With his defeat, the four revolutionary forces split into two camps: the liberal Venustiano Carranza and Álvaro Obregón on one side and the more radical Villa and Emiliano Zapata on the other, though the latter pair never formed a serious alliance. Villa was routed by Obregón in the Battle of Celaya (1915) and never recovered his influence.

roughly in a line along the north side of the river, linked by busy Av Mercaderes (also called Herrera). Both of these churches, like most in Parral, are decorated with stone in honor of the city's mining heritage. The bus station at the east end of town is connected to the town center by Av Independencia.

Information

The **Cámara de Comercio** (☎ 522-00-18; Colegio 28; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) functions as a tourist office, distributing maps and brochures. For financial needs, there are banks and *casas de cambio* around Plaza Principal, including HSBC, which stays open late. Try **SMAC-Line** (Av Mercaderes; per hr M\$10; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7:30pm Mon-Fri, 9:30am-7:30pm Sat), west of Plaza Baca, for internet access.

Sights

Built by a wealthy silver tycoon a block off Plaza Baca, the beautifully restored **Palacio Alvarado** (☎ 522-02-90; Riva Palacio s/n; adult/child M\$20/5; ☎ 10am-5pm) has pressed aluminum ceilings and other artistic flair, plus plenty of original furnishings. Lady Alvarado died

shortly before the house was completed. Her funeral wagon, later used for Pancho Villa, is on display.

The building from which Pancho Villa was shot and killed in 1923, just across the river on the west end of town, now houses the **Museo Francisco Villa** (☎ 525-32-92; cnr Juárez & Barreda; admission M\$10; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), with a small collection of photos, guns and memorabilia. Displays are in Spanish only. The best thing to do here is to listen to the often dubious stories the staff tell. The tale about Villa's body being switched with a decoy after the decapitation, and thus not actually being moved to Mexico City, however, may have some credibility. People still lay flowers at his tomb in Parral's cemetery.

Mina La Prieta (☎ 525-44-00; adult/child M\$25/15; ☎ 11am-4:30pm Tue-Sun) was opened in 1629 and closed in 1975, but today you can drop down 100m (you'll be at the same level as the city) in an original elevator and walk through a tunnel cut by hand around 1820. Except for scattered historical displays, which show the difficult and dangerous mining methods used throughout history, the pit still feels like it's being

Villa had expected the US to support his bid to become Mexico's next president, but when US President Wilson recognized Carranza's government, Villa decided to simultaneously discredit Carranza and seek revenge on Wilson by ordering his remaining men to attack Americans. This, he believed, would prompt Wilson to send troops into Mexico. In the early morning hours of March 9, 1916 Villa's men (Villa himself stayed safely several miles behind) sacked Columbus, New Mexico, home to both a US Cavalry garrison and Sam Ravel, who had once cheated Villa on an arms deal. Though around half of Villa's 500 militiamen died that day (there were 18 American deaths) and Ravel wasn't found (he was at the dentist in El Paso), the attack ended up a success for Villa because it did draw the US Army into Mexico in pursuit of the revolutionary. It also further boosted his legend because they never caught him.

In July 1920, after a decade of revolutionary fighting, Villa signed a peace treaty with Adolfo de la Huerta, the man who had been chosen as the provisional president two months earlier. Villa pledged to lay down his arms and retire to an hacienda in Canutillo (p378), 75km south of Hidalgo del Parral, for which the Huerta government paid M\$636,000. In addition, Villa was given M\$35,926 to cover the wages owed to his troops. He also received money to buy farming tools, pay a security detail of 50 of his former soldiers, and help the widows and orphans of the División del Norte.

For the next three years, Villa led a relatively quiet life. He bought a hotel in Parral and regularly attended cockfights. He installed one of his many 'wives,' Soledad Seañez, in a Parral apartment, and kept another at Canutillo. Then, one day while he was leaving Parral in his big Dodge touring car, a volley of shots rang out. Five of the seven passengers in the car were killed, including the legendary revolutionary. An eight-man assassin team fired the fatal shots, but just who ordered the killings remains a mystery. The light prison sentences the killers received leads many to the conclusion that the command came from President Obregón, though with all the enemies Villa made over the years, there are many suspects.

worked. At the top, some of the old buildings now contain a mining museum (M\$10). A taxi up the hill should cost about M\$25.

The 1953 **Santuario de Fátima** (Calle Jesús García), located on a hill just below La Prieta, was built from chunks of rock taken out of the mine, and bits of gold, silver, zinc and copper ore sparkle in the thick walls. Rather than pews, the congregation sits on short, pillar-like stools that represent the boundary stones that mark mining lands. The church is usually closed, but if you want to see inside, knock at the grey house on its west side and someone will unlock it for you.

Templo de San Juan de Dios, facing the cathedral across Plaza Baca, has a little **Museo de Arte Sacro** (Sacred Art Museum; ☎ 522-15-22; Mercaderes s/n; adult/child M\$5/2; 🕒 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat) with various objects, some made in Parral using Prieta silver.

Festivals

For one debauched week leading up to the anniversary of the death of Pancho Villa (July 20), the city, plus thousands of bikers who show up for the festival, celebrates **Las Jornadas**

Villistas. Hundreds of horseback riders make a six-day journey from the north, recalling Villa's famous marathons, and the gun-blazing assassination is re-enacted on the 19th and 20th. Hotels are booked far in advance.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Chihuahua (☎ 522-15-13; Colón No 1; r from M\$150) This simple but spic-and-span hotel sits between Fátima church and Plaza Baca.

ourpick Hotel Acosta (☎ 522-02-21; Barbachano 3; s/d/tr/q M\$235/295/365/455; 📺) From the ancient switchboard in the lobby to the original furniture in the rooms, the extremely friendly Acosta is a 1950s time warp. It's just off Plaza Principal and has great views from the roof.

Nueva Vizcaya (☎ 525-56-36; Flores Magon 17; s/d M\$350/450; 📺 📺 📺) This brand-new hotel north of the river is far from the most expensive in town, but there's none better. All rooms have kitchens and wi-fi, making this a heckuva bargain.

Restaurant La Fuente (☎ 522-30-88; cnr 20 de Noviembre & Colegio; mains M\$20-90) Happy yellow walls and big windows add to the warm ambience at this local favorite, where you'll find a

good range of dishes including steak, chicken, enchiladas and a fine garlic soup.

Kaleos Café (☎ 523-68-18; Plazuela Independencia 8; mains M\$22-48; 🕒 4:30-10pm Tue-Sun) Young and artsy describes both the space and the patrons at this great little place just across the bridge from Plaza Principal. It's got real coffee, good sandwiches and free wi-fi.

For a sweet treat, stop by any *dulcería* for some La Gota de Miel candy, made (usually *without* honey) in Parral since 1932.

Getting There & Around

The bus station, on the southeast outskirts of town, is most easily reached by taxi (M\$25 to M\$30); it's about 2.5km from the center. Frequent buses run to Chihuahua (M\$109, three hours), Torreón (M\$212, 4½ hours) and Durango (M\$257, six hours).

Hwy 45 to Durango is a long, lonely road. Keep a full tank of gas, and don't drive it at night.

AROUND HIDALGO DEL PARRAL

East of Parral, the village of **Valle de Allende** is lush with trees and offers a lovely look at a simpler life. Much of its early wealth came from walnut orchards. Transportes Ballezanos has hourly 2nd-class buses (M\$15, 30 minutes) from Av Flores Magón near 20 de Noviembre north of the river.

The dusty village of **Canutillo**, 75km south of Parral and just over the Durango state border, is where Pancho Villa, a Durango native, spent the last three years of his life. His decaying hacienda, given by the government in exchange for his promise never to take up arms again, is now a **museum** (admission free; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun). It houses a collection of photos, guns and various personal artifacts and is attached to a 200-year-old church. Any Durango-bound bus from Parral can drop you in Villa Las Nieves (M\$50, 75 minutes), from which it's a 6km taxi ride (M\$50 round-trip).

TORREÓN

☎ 871 / pop 549,000 / elevation 1150m

Torreón lies midway between Chihuahua and Zacatecas, in the east of Durango state, and that's the best reason to stop here. That, and to use it as a base to visit Mina Ojuela (p380). Despite an attractive Plaza de Armas with several fountains, lots of trees and frequent goings-on, overall this is one ugly city. To

be fair, several of its museums are excellent and the people are as pleasant as elsewhere in the north.

The 1911 battle for Torreón was Pancho Villa's División del Norte's first big victory in the Mexican Revolution, giving him control of the railways that radiate from the city. Villa personally led three later battles for Torreón over the next few years. During one, his troops, in their revolutionary zeal, slaughtered some 300 Chinese immigrants.

Orientation

Torreón is located in the state of Coahuila and is contiguous with the cities of Gómez Palacio and Ciudad Lerdo (both in Durango state); all three together are known as La Laguna (though the namesake lagoons around the area fill only in the rainy season). Torreón itself fans out east of the Río Nazas, with the Plaza de Armas at the west end of town. Avs Juárez and Morelos extend east from the plaza, past the main government buildings and several large shaded parks. The Torreón bus station is 7km east of the center on Av Juárez.

Information

You'll find most services you need, including banks with ATMS and internet cafés, on or near Plaza de Armas. Some staff members at **Coahuila Turismo** (☎ 732-22-44; www.ocvlaguna.com; Paseo de la Rosita 308D; 🕒 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat), 5km east of the center, speak English.

Dangers & Annoyances

The city center, particularly the Plaza de Armas, can get seedy after dark, so be careful if you're walking around after about 10pm.

Sights

Torreón's shiny new **Museo Arocena** (☎ 712-02-33; www.museoarocena.com; Cepeda 354 Sur; adult M\$30, child & student M\$10, Sun M\$10; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun, until 8pm Thu), just off the Plaza de Armas, has galleries of Mexican and Spanish art and a small city history exhibit, but the best part is the 4th-floor balcony, which traces the history of Mexico through its art, from Olmec masks to Octavio Paz's poetry. The auditorium shows art-house films (included in the ticket price) on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday (varying times). In front of the museum is an entrance to **Canal de la Perla**, a cool-to-walk-through former aqueduct recently rediscovered by accident.

The **Museo Regional de la Laguna** (☎ 713-95-45; cnr Juárez & Cuahtémoc; adult/child M\$37/free; ☎ 10am-6:30pm Tue-Sun), located inside Torreón's favorite park, known as El Bosque (The Forest), has excellent displays on pre-colonial desert cultures of the north, as well as other cultures from around the nation. The temporary art exhibits are hit or miss.

The key battles for Torreón, including Pancho Villa's escapades, are documented in the **Museo de la Revolución** (☎ 722-69-22; cnr Lerdo de Tejada & Calle 10; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), not far from the Laguna Museum. It's well presented, but you won't get much out of it if you can't read Spanish.

Torreón's municipal cultural office runs three museums. Three blocks off the plaza, the **Museo del Ferrocarril** (☎ 711-34-24; Revolución at Carrillo; adult/child M\$10/3, tr-entry ticket M\$15, free on Tue; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has half a dozen train cars and related tools in an old railway workshop. Six blocks west is the **Casa del Cerro** (☎ 716-50-72; Calzada Industria; adult/child M\$10/3, tr-entry ticket M\$15, free on Tue; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), the 'House on the Hill.' Of the three museums, this is the one that shouldn't be missed. Built in 1902 by engineer Federico Wulff, the mansion is gorgeous, and so are the original furnishings that fill it. Photos in the bathroom (why not?) show how much work went into restoring it. Surrounded by palm trees and a lush lawn, it's a freakish little oasis in this industrial city. Slip straight through Mercado Alianza and turn left toward the trees to reach the **Museo El Torreón** (☎ 716-36-79; cnr Juárez & Calle 5 de Mayo; adult/child M\$10/3, tr-entry ticket M\$15, free on Tue; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) preserving the facade of an hacienda. It only holds a few historical photos of the city and is home to its builder's grave, under the tower that gave the city its name.

The 20.8m-tall **Cristo de las Noas**, fronting the TV antennas south of the city, is the second-tallest Christ statue in the Americas.

Sleeping & Eating

You'll pass lots of four- and five-star hotels aimed at business travelers on your way into town.

Hotel Galicia (☎ 716-11-19; Cepeda 273 Sur; s/d M\$147/160) This 1930s inn is a study in faded elegance, with beautiful tiled halls, stained glass and battered furniture. The owners are very friendly, and the place has genuine character. Toilet seats are missing in most rooms.

Hotel Palacio Real (☎ 716-00-00; Morelos 1280 Pte; r incl breakfast M\$380-767; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎) There are several good midrange hotels downtown along Av Morelos, but this 1950s giant is the only one right on the plaza. It's a tad tired these days, but the rooms are large and so are the views.

Del Granero (☎ 712-91-44; Morelos 444 Pte; mains M\$20-48; ☎ 8am-9pm; ☒ (V)) Vegetarians and carnivores alike will love this bright café, which serves delicious meat-free, whole-wheat *gorditas*, burritos and *tortas*. The adjoining bakery also goes the whole-wheat route.

Fu-Hao (☎ 716-55-47; Cepeda 259 Sur; mains M\$25-150, buffet adult/child M\$78/45; ☎ 11:30am-10:30pm) Besides the ubiquitous buffet found in most Mexican Chinese restaurants, this Chinese-owned place on the plaza has a full menu. And the food is pretty good.

Getting There & Around

There are bus stations in both Torreón and Gómez Palacio, and long-distance buses usually stop at both. Torreón is a major transportation hub, with 1st-class buses departing regularly for the following:

Destination	Fare	Duration
Chihuahua	M\$313	6hr
Cuatro Ciénegas	M\$137	3½hr
Durango	M\$182	3½hr
Mexico City	M\$731	13hr
Saltillo	M\$192	3½hr
Zacatecas	M\$279	6hr

The tolls on the highway to Durango total M\$325; most vehicles take the slightly slower free road, unless traffic is really heavy.

Frequent city buses (M\$4.50) run up and down Juárez between the Plaza de Armas and the bus station. Buses heading to the center will be marked 'Centro.' To the bus terminal, catch a 'Central,' 'Campo Alianza' or 'División' bus. Taxis, which are metered, will cost about M\$30.

AROUND TORREÓN Mapimí & Ojuela

The deserts north of La Laguna are striking and hold many semiprecious stones for gem hunters. The village of **Mapimí**, founded in 1585, was once the center of an incredibly productive mining area and served the nearby Ojuela Mine between periodic raids by the Cocoyom and Toboso tribes. Benito Juárez

passed through Mapimí in 1864 during his flight from French forces. The house where he stayed, near the northwest corner of the plaza, is now the unremarkable **Museo Juárez** (admission free; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-6pm). Miguel Hidalgo was imprisoned here in 1811, and locals will be eager to show you that house too. The church tower still has bullet holes from battles during the Revolution.

At the end of the 19th century, the **Mina Ojuela** supported an adjacent town of the same name with a population of over 5000. Today, a cluster of abandoned stone buildings clings to a hillside as a silent reminder of the bonanza years. A precarious 315m-long suspension bridge, the **Puente Colgante de Ojuela** (adult/child M\$15/5; ☎ 9am-6pm), was built over a 100m-deep gorge to carry ore trains from the mine. Today you can walk over it. A site guide (M\$15) will lead you into the mine's maze of tunnels with hand-held oil lamps, showing you some mining equipment left behind, including a mummified mule, before taking you out the other side for a good view of the bridge. For an extra M\$100 you can return across the gorge on a zip-line.

To reach Mapimí from Torreón, go 40km north on Hwy 49 (stay on Hwy 49 when Hwy 49D splits off) to Bermejillo, then 25km west on Hwy 30. Second-class buses leave Torreón's bus station for Mapimí (M\$33, two hours) hourly. The well-signed turn-off for Puente de Ojuela comes 3km before Mapimí. From there a narrow and rough (but easily passable in a car) road winds 7km up to the bridge past a beautiful mountain known as La India. Depending on your bargaining prowess, taxi drivers in Mapimí will want at least M\$100 for the round trip with waiting time.

Reserva de la Biosfera Bolsón de Mapimí

Some 170km north of Torreón, where the states of Durango, Chihuahua and Coahuila converge, is a remote desert region known as **Zona del Silencio** (Zone of Silence), so called because of the widespread myth that conditions in the area prevent propagation of radio waves. Some also believe this to be a UFO landing site (thanks in part to a NASA test rocket crashing here in 1970 and the massive, secretive search that followed) while new-agers seek out supposed 'energy' sites. The Zone of Silence is just a small part of this striking biosphere reserve dedicated to the study of arid-region plants and animals,

including the very rare Bolson tortoise (or Mexican giant tortoise). You're very unlikely to spot the tortoise, but you could very well see a horned lizard, coyote or pronghorn antelope. There's no main road through the area, just a series of sandy tracks and, at the time of writing, access was restricted to help protect the preserve. **Aventura Pantera** (p382) leads tours and can fill you in on what to do if you want to visit on your own.

DURANGO

☎ 618 / pop 464,000 / elevation 1912m

Durango city is a mellow, pleasant cowboy town with a delightful Plaza de Armas, fine colonial architecture and a great selection of hotels and restaurants. It's a fun place to unwind, yet there's also plenty to do.

Founded in 1563 by conquistador Don Francisco de Ibarra, and named after the Spanish city of his birth, Durango is just south of the Cerro del Mercado, one of the world's richest iron-ore deposits. This was the basis for Durango's early importance, along with gold and silver from the Sierra Madre. Other local industries include agriculture and timber, but it's best known for its role in the movie business (see p383). Note that as you cross the border between Chihuahua and Durango states you enter a different time zone; Durango is one hour ahead of Chihuahua.

Orientation

Durango is a good city to walk around, and most interesting places to see and stay are within a few blocks of the two main squares, the Plaza de Armas and Plaza IV Centenario. Av 20 de Noviembre is the main street through town.

Information

Several banks with ATMs, as well as *casas de cambio*, are on the west side of the Plaza de Armas, including **HSBC** (Constitución s/n; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat), which cashes traveler's checks.

Boletín Durango Turístico (www.durangoturistico.com) An interesting and helpful Spanish website about Durango state.

Hospital General (☎ 811-91-15; cnr Av 5 de Febrero & Fuentes) For emergencies or walk-in medical care.

Ofinet (Calle Victoria s/n; per hr M\$10; ☎ 9:30am-9pm Mon-Sat) Fast connections and new computers.

Post office (Av 20 de Noviembre Ote 500B; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)



State Tourism Office (☎ 811-11-07; www.durango.turismo.com; Florida 1006; ☎ 8am-8pm) Has friendly staff, some of whom speak English. They can tell you if the Pancho Villa museum has finally opened.

Sights

The **Plaza de Armas** is one of the loveliest in this region, filled with fountains and flowers, and not a modern-looking building in site. The large band shell (the municipal band plays Thursdays at 6pm) has an *artesanía* shop below the stage. One of the reasons it's so pleasant to while away time in the plaza is the view of the impressive baroque facade of the **Catedral Basílica Menor** (☎ 7:30am-1:15pm & 4-9pm), constructed between 1695 and 1787. The vast Byzantine interior has fine sculptures and ceiling paintings.

Two other noteworthy buildings nearby are the **Palacio de Gobierno** (Av 5 de Febrero 97; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri), expropriated by the government from a wealthy Spanish mine-owner after the War of Independence and now featuring wonderful murals, and the striking neoclassical **Teatro Ricardo Castro** (☎ 811-46-94; crj Av 20 de Noviembre & Martínez; ☎ 9am-3pm), featuring decorative carvings in the lobby and bold murals inside.

The not-to-be-missed **Museo de Arte Guillermo Ceniceros** (☎ 825-00-27; Independencia 135 Nte; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) showcases the mysterious landscapes and feminine figures of its Durango-born namesake, who was profoundly influenced by his teacher, the formidable muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros. Temporary exhibitions feature international artists.

Most of the space at the bigger **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Ángel Zárraga** (☎ 825-55-30; Negrete 301 Pte; admission free; 🕒 9am-6pm Tue-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) is given over to temporary exhibitions of young local artists.

The **Museo de Arqueología de Durango Ganot-Peschard** (☎ 813-10-47; Zaragoza 315 Sur; admission M\$5; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun) is an innovative visual feast presenting the archaeological record of the region's indigenous cultures, from prehistoric times to the Spanish conquest, including skulls intentionally deformed through head binding. All descriptions are in Spanish.

Though poorly presented, the displays at the **Museo de las Culturas Populares** (☎ 825-88-27; Juárez 302 Nte; admission M\$5; 🕒 Tue-Sun 9am-6pm) offer an interesting look at the former lives of Durango's indigenous cultures. There is a small onsite craft shop.

Other than some Miguel Cabrera paintings, the **Museo Regional de Durango** (☎ 813-10-94; Victoria 100 Sur; admission M\$10, Sun free; 🕒 9am-4pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2:45pm Sun) has little you haven't already seen in the archeology and culture museums, but you should take a look at the French-style former mansion that now houses the museum.

The **Museo de Cine** (☎ 837-11-11; Florida 1006; admission M\$5; 🕒 9am-6pm, from 10am Sat & Sun) offers a pretty low-budget display, but if you can't make it out to the actual film sets (see opposite), this little museum will have to suffice.

For some greenery and a ton of fun for the little tykes, go to the extensive **Parque Guadiana** just west of the center.

Tours

Aventura Pantera (☎ 813-08-75; www.aventurapantera.com.mx; Pino Suárez 436 Ote; 🕒 10am-3pm Mon-Fri) is run by Walter Bishop, who has been called the 'Dean of Ecotourism in Northern Mexico.' English-speaking guides lead trekking, bird-watching, canyoneering, and mountain-biking trips into the Sierra Madre Occidental mountains and elsewhere. Ask about volunteer opportunities teaching environmentalism or planting trees.

Sleeping BUDGET

Hotel Buenos Aires (☎ 812-31-28; Constitución 126 Nte; r M\$140-220) The Buenos Aires has tidy little rooms, most free of peeling paint, though they can be very loud.

Hotel Durango (☎ 811-55-80; Av 5 de Febrero 103 Ote; s M\$199-285, d M\$259-350; 📞 📺 📺 📺) You can't escape the fact that the hallways feel hospital-like (the staff's white uniforms don't help) but the rooms, especially the remodeled ones at the top of the price range, are very cozy and have wi-fi. Some rooms have balconies, but the views are limited.

Hotel Plaza Catedral (☎ 813-24-80; Constitución 216 Sur; s/d M\$250/350; 📞) This cool, 200-year-old castle-like building is a labyrinth of stairways, arches and tile work. With some TLC this could be one of the best hotels in the city; as is, it's easily the best budget option.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Posada Santa Elena (☎ 812-78-18; Negrete 1007 Pte; r from M\$420; 📞) Friendly, small and quiet, this hotel is a find. It features 12 tastefully furnished rooms, some with their own petite courtyard. Beautiful sinks make shaving a luxury.

our pick Hotel Posada San Agustín (☎ 837-20-00; www.posadasanagustin.com; Av 20 de Noviembre 906 Pte; s M\$440-640, d M\$490-690; 📞 📺 📺 📺) Most of the 14 modern, well-appointed rooms here face a quiet old colonial courtyard where guests are drawn to lounge about.

Hotel Posada San Jorge (☎ 813-32-57; www.hotelposadasanjorge.com.mx; Constitución 102 Sur; s/d M\$450/500; 📞 📺 📺) In a handsome 19th-century building with 2nd-floor rooms around a courtyard, the San Jorge has larger rooms than the San Agustín, some with sofas and small balconies, making it one of Durango's finest hotels. The only possible downside is that the courtyard holds a colorful Brazilian restaurant – fine if you want some steak, but the noise can drift into the rooms.

TOP END

Hotel Gobernador (☎ 813-19-19; www.hotelgobernador.com; Av 20 de Noviembre 257 Ote; r M\$1350; 📞 📺 📺 📺) The Gobernador is the best hotel in town, featuring lush landscaped grounds and lots of colonial-style design features, including some enormous lamps. Weekend rates drop to M\$990.

Eating & Drinking

Durango boasts plenty of good restaurants and will provide a thrill for those craving a bit of variety. Constitución north of the cathedral and Av 20 de Noviembre (which becomes Florida) west of the Plaza de Armas are happy hunting grounds.

Gorditas Gabino (☎ 813-01-21; Constitución 100A Nte; gorditas M\$7, mains M\$20-80; ☎ 8am-8pm) A cheap-eats haven that bustles with people, all savoring the delicious *gorditas* stuffed with avocados, shredded beef in *salsa verde* and other tasty fillings. Finish things off with the creamy flan.

Cremería Wallander (☎ 813-86-33; Independencia 128 Nte; tortas M\$21-48; ☎ 8:30am-8:30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2:30pm Sun) You'll see trucks and motorcycles zipping all over town delivering these extraordinary *tortas*, made with cold cuts and cheese direct from the Wallander family farm on fresh-baked rolls. It's also a great place to stock up on baked goods, wine, yogurt, honey and granola.

Samadhi (☎ 811-62-27; Negrete 403 Pte; mains M\$25-50; ☎ ☑) The food and atmosphere won't knock your socks off, but it offers herbivores a good chance to try foods like *chorizos*.

Restaurant La Gloria (☎ 825-27-77; Martínez 315 Sur; mains M\$25-85; ☎ ☑) This simple but artsy spot is a nice place to linger. The large menu has good breakfasts, *antojitos*, coffees and salads.

ourpick Fonda de la Tía Chona (☎ 812-77-48; Nogal 110; mains M\$52-135; ☎ ☑) 5-11:30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5:30pm Sun) In a city full of classy dining options, none outshine this classic. It fills a gorgeously decorated old building full of nooks and crannies while the menu is dedicated to classic *duranguense* cuisine like the *caldillo* (beef stew).

Pizzaly (☎ 812-13-81; Av 20 de Noviembre 1004; medium pizzas from M\$95; ☎ ☑) 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) It lacks the romantic vibe of some of the city's other Italian restaurants, but this one gets it right where it counts: the pizza.

Da Vinci Café (Constitución 310 Sur; cappuccino with tequila M\$22; ☎ ☑) 9:30am-midnight Mon-Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun) A bohemian 2nd-story spot with good coffee and great views of Plaza de Armas. There's an art gallery and free wi-fi.

Au Pied de Chameau (☎ 825-05-50; Florida 1135-7; ☎ ☑) 2pm-1am, Mon-Sat 1-8pm Sun) You take your chances ordering food – a mix of *nueva cocina Mexicana* and international fusion dishes – but the gorgeous space covered in African and Asian art is great for after-dinner drinks.

Shopping

You can find just about anything in the jumbled maze of stalls at **Mercado Gómez Palacio** (Av 20 de Noviembre; ☎ ☑) 8am-8pm), including tacos, pottery, cowboy hats, saddles, dried herbs, flowers and Mennonite cheese.

Getting There & Away

Durango's **Aeropuerto Guadalupe Victoria** (☎ 11-870-12-13), 15km east from the city edge, has six daily flights to Mexico City and less frequent services to Mazatlán, Torreón, Monterrey, Guadalajara and Tijuana, plus US services to Houston, Chicago and Los Angeles.

Good, frequent bus connections are available from Durango to many of the places travelers want to go.

Destination	Fare	Duration
Chihuahua	M\$421	9hr
Hidalgo del Parral	M\$257	6hr
Mazatlán	deluxe M\$385 1st-class M\$296	8hr 8hr
Mexico City (Terminal Norte)	deluxe M\$846 1st-class M\$652	12hr 12hr
Torreón	M\$182	3½hr
Zacatecas	M\$202	5hr

The tolls on the highway to Torreón total M\$325; most vehicles take the slightly slower free road, unless traffic is really heavy.

Getting Around

The bus station is on the east side of town; buses (M\$5) labeled 'ISSSTE' or 'Centro' departing from the far side of the parking lot will get you to the Plaza de Armas. Taxis, which are metered, cost about M\$25 to the center.

To reach the bus station from downtown, catch buses labeled 'Camionera' along Av 20 de Noviembre anywhere near the plaza. Get off before the major intersection with the Pancho Villa monument and walk a short way northeast.

AROUND DURANGO

Movie Locations

From the 1950s to the 1990s, both Hollywood and the Mexican film industry made hundreds of movies in the unspoiled deserts and mountains just outside Durango. John Wayne, Clark Gable and Robert Mitchum spent many hours filming here. More recently, *Revenge* (1990), starring Kevin Costner, and *The Mask of Zorro* (1998), with Antonio Banderas, were shot here. The decline of the Western genre and tax breaks at other locations back in the US have largely ended the city's run as *La Tierra del Cine* (the Land of Cinema). *Bandidas* (2006), starring Salma Hayek and Penélope Cruz, was the last movie made here.

Many of the big-screen cowboys swaggered through **Villa del Oeste** (Hwy 45; admission M\$10, Sat & Sun adult/child M\$25/15; ☎ noon-6pm Tue-Fri, 11am-7pm Sat & Sun), 12km north of Durango. Today the set is a souvenir-drenched theme park with gunslingers shooting it out at weekends (2:30pm and 4:30pm on Saturdays, 1:30pm, 3:30pm and 5:30pm on Sundays) while the rest of the week it's empty. Either way, it's kind of fun. On weekends, a bus (adult/child M\$30/20 including admission) leaves from Durango's Plaza de Armas a half-hour before each show. To get there on weekdays, take any north-bound bus (M\$10, every 30 minutes) and remind the driver to drop you there. To get back you'll have to flag down a bus, but many won't stop, so expect to stand in the sun for a while.

Unfazed residents of the small village of **Chupaderos**, 3km north of Villa del Oeste, have moved right into their former set. Big screen-ready cowboys still ride past the saloon here, but they aren't actors.

Another Wild West set, **La Joya**, 44km north of Durango, was once owned by John Wayne. Though it's in a serious state of decay, dedi-

cated Western fans will enjoy it. If you have your own wheels, the tourist office can point you there, or you could take a taxi for around M\$375. Buses are not an option.

Durango to Mazatlán

Full of forested peaks and deep canyons, **Hwy 40** west from Durango to the coastal city of Mazatlán is one of Mexico's most scenic drives. Durango's tourist office has a list of mountain cabins for rent along the route and will make reservations for you. High in the mountains, the logging town of **El Salto** is a good place to break the journey. Mountain biking is big around town, and there are many waterfalls in the area. Another 48km west there's a beautiful waterfall, large canyon, odd rock formations and railroad tunnels (built for trains that never came) around **Mexiquillo**. About 165km from Durango is a spectacular stretch of road called **El Espinazo del Diablo** (Devil's Backbone).

You enter a new time zone when you cross the Durango-Sinaloa state border; Sinaloa is one hour behind Durango.

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