

Oaxaca State



The state of Oaxaca (wah-hah-kah) has a special magic felt by Mexicans and foreigners alike. Long isolated from other parts of the country by ranks of rugged mountains, it is a redoubt of a traditional, mysterious, strongly indigenous-influenced side to Mexican life that has almost vanished in more accessible regions. Oaxaca has Mexico's most vibrant and creative handicrafts scene, its artists are in the vanguard of Mexican contemporary art, its festivities are among the most colorful and alive in the country, and its uniquely savory, spicy cuisine is starting to combine with outside influences with some spectacular results.

At the center of the state in every way stands beautiful, colonial Oaxaca city, a fascinating and hospitable cultural, geographical and political hub. Around the city extend Oaxaca's three Valles Centrales (Central Valleys), always the center of civilization in this part of Mexico and today still full of bustling indigenous markets, spectacular pre-Hispanic ruins and villages full of creative artisans. North of here are the forested highlands of the Sierra Norte, scene of successful community-tourism ventures enabling visitors to hike, bike, climb rocks and ride horses amid some of Mexico's most unusual landscapes. To the south, across yet more mountains, is Oaxaca's fabulous coast, with its endless sandy Pacific beaches, waters full of dolphins, turtles and sport fish, and lagoons teeming with birds. Many of the beaches are completely empty, but there's also a handful of beach towns and villages that will make any traveler happy – Puerto Escondido with its world-class surf; the planned but beautiful and relaxed resort of Bahías de Huatulco; and the sybarite's delights of Puerto Ángel, Zipolite, San Agustín and Mazunte.

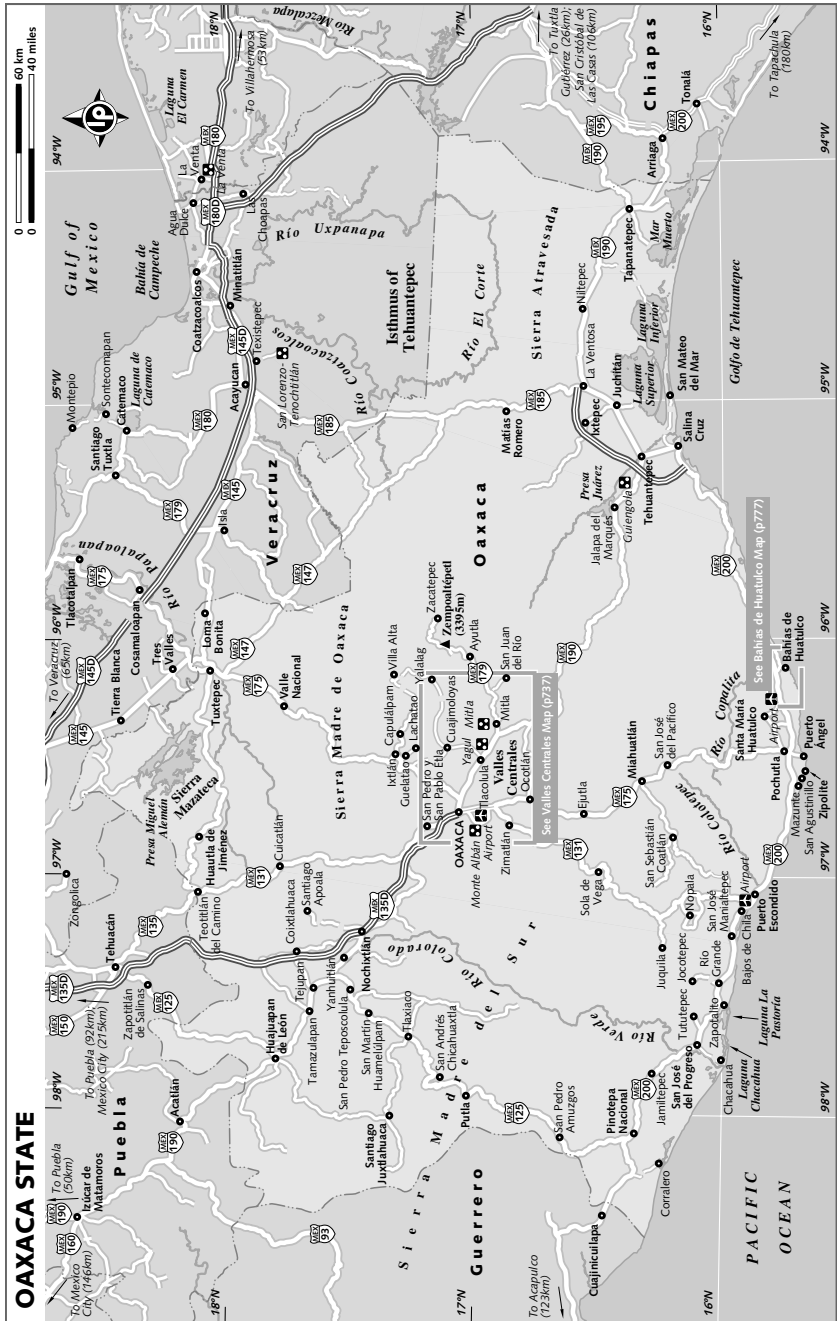
HIGHLIGHTS

- Indulge in the culture, color and culinary delights of colonial **Oaxaca city** (p713)
- Hike through otherworldly cloud forests between the remote villages of the **Pueblos Mancomunados** (p747)
- Soak up the surf scene of mellow **Puerto Escondido** (p752)
- Chill out for longer than you planned at fabled travelers' hangout **Zipolite** (p768)
- Get a feel for Zapotec village life at the markets and fiestas of the **Valles Centrales** (p736)



■ OAXACA CITY JANUARY DAILY HIGH: 25°C | 77°F

■ OAXACA CITY JULY DAILY HIGH: 28°C | 82°F



History

Pre-Hispanic cultures in Oaxaca's Valles Centrales (Central Valleys) reached heights rivaling those of central Mexico. The hilltop city of Monte Albán became the center of the Zapotec culture, conquering much of Oaxaca and peaking between AD 300 and 700. Monte Albán then declined suddenly, and from about 1200 the Zapotecs came under the growing dominance of the Mixtecs from Oaxaca's northwest uplands. Mixtecs and Zapotecs alike were conquered by the Aztecs in the 15th and early 16th centuries.

The Spaniards had to send at least four expeditions before they felt safe enough to found the city of Oaxaca in 1529. The indigenous population quickly took a disastrous drop in numbers: the population of the Mixteca in the west is thought to have fallen from 700,000 when the Spanish arrived to about 25,000 by 1700. Unsuccessful indigenous rebellions continued into the 20th century.

Benito Juárez, the great reforming leader of 19th-century Mexico, was a Zapotec from the Oaxaca mountains. He served two terms as Oaxaca's state governor then as president of Mexico from 1861 until his death in 1872 (see p722). Juárez appointed Porfirio Díaz, son of a Oaxaca horse trainer, as Oaxaca state governor in 1862. Díaz rose to control Mexico with an iron fist from 1877 to 1910, bringing the country into the industrial age but also fostering corruption, repression and, eventually, the Revolution in 1910.

After the Revolution about 300 *ejidos* (communal landholdings) were set up in Oaxaca, but land ownership and wealth distribution remain sources of conflict today. Tourism thrives in and around Oaxaca city and in a few places on the coast, but underdevelopment still prevails in the backcountry. The violent confrontations between the authoritarian state government and opposition organizations in Oaxaca in 2006 and 2007 highlighted the gulf between Oaxaca's rich, powerful minority and its poor, disempowered majority.

Climate

The Valles Centrales are warm and dry, with most rain falling between June and September. On the coast and in low-lying areas it's hotter and a bit wetter. The average high in Oaxaca city ranges from 25°C in December and January (when lows average about 8°) to about 30° in March through May.

Parks & Reserves

Combining both dry and damp mountain ranges with low-lying northern, eastern and southern fringes, Oaxaca has greater biological diversity than any other state in Mexico, but little of this is under official protection. Two smallish national parks – 142-sq-km Parque Nacional Lagunas de Chacahua (p763) and 119-sq-km Huatulco (p776) – protect coastal areas. The Reserva de la Biosfera Tehuacán-Cuicatlán spreads over the semiarid tropical ecosystems of northwestern Oaxaca and adjacent southeast Puebla state.

Dangers & Annoyances

Buses and other vehicles traveling isolated stretches of highway, including the coastal Hwy 200 and Hwy 175 from Oaxaca city to Pochutla, have occasionally been stopped and robbed. Though incidents have decreased in recent years, it's still advisable not to travel at night.

Getting There & Around

Continental Airlines flies direct from Houston to Oaxaca and Bahías de Huatulco. There are also flights to both these airports and Puerto Escondido from Mexico City; Oaxaca also has air connections with other Mexican cities. Small planes hop from Oaxaca to Puerto Escondido and Huatulco.

Oaxaca city has good bus links with Mexico City and Puebla to the north and a few daily services to/from Veracruz, Villahermosa, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, San Cristóbal de las Casas and Tapachula. Suburban-type vans provide the most effective service between Oaxaca and Pochutla (the transportation hub for the central Oaxaca coast) and Puerto Escondido, via Hwys 175 and 131 respectively.

Plenty of buses travel along coastal Hwy 200 into Oaxaca from Acapulco and Chiapas.

OAXACA

📞 951 / pop 268,000 / elevation 1550m

Welcome to one of Mexico's most beautiful and vibrant cities. A colonial city with a lovely, tree-shaded central square, El Zócalo, Oaxaca is the heart of a region whose highly creative populace produces the country's finest range of crafts and some of its most exciting contemporary art. Artists and artisans alike are inspired by the state's deep-rooted

TOP THREE THINGS TO DO WITH TIME ON YOUR SIDE IN OAXACA (APART FROM CHILLING AT THE BEACH)

- Hike from village to village through the forests of the **Sierra Norte** (p747).
- Ride a bike from Oaxaca to Puerto Escondido with **Bicicletas Pedro Martínez** (p723).
- Spend a few days at Teotitlán del Valle's **Casa Sagrada** (p741), riding horses, hiking, watching birds, learning Oaxacan cooking and taking a *temascal*.

indigenous traditions and by its bright southern light. Oaxaca has top-class museums, lovely architecture, charming inns and hotels and its own flavorsome version of Mexican cuisine. The easygoing southern pace breaks out into frequent lively fiestas, and there's some event going on in the streets or plazas almost every day.

The city is surrounded by fascinating archaeological sites and by colorfully traditional villages and small towns. The dramatic valley and mountain landscapes provide abundant opportunities for hiking, biking, horseback riding and climbing, and good active-tourism operators and successful rural tourism programs make it easy for visitors enjoy these experiences.

Despite its cultural riches, Oaxaca is one of Mexico's poorest states, and the city is the stage on which many of the unresolved tensions between the largely *mestizo* ruling elite and the largely indigenous poor are acted out. The city's fringe settlements of migrant villagers are as impoverished as any in Mexico, and the violent confrontations between the state government and protestors here in 2006 highlighted Oaxaca's deep economic and political divide. The troubles wiped out the city's important tourist industry for more than a year, but by late 2007 calm, and the tourists, had returned.

HISTORY

The Aztec settlement here was called Huaxyácatl (meaning 'In the Nose of the Squash'), from which the word 'Oaxaca' is derived. The Spanish laid out a new town around the existing *Zócalo* in 1529. It

quickly became the most important place in southern Mexico.

In the 18th century Oaxaca grew rich from exports of cochineal (a red dye made from tiny insects living on the prickly pear cactus) and from the weaving of textiles. By 1796 it was probably the third-biggest city in Nueva España, with about 20,000 people (including 600 clergy) and 800 cotton looms.

In 1854 an earthquake destroyed much of the city. It was several decades before it began to grow again, but by the 1890s the population passed 30,000. Another earthquake in 1931 left 70% of the city uninhabitable.

Oaxaca's major expansion has come in the past 25 years, with tourism, new businesses and rural poverty all encouraging migration from the countryside. The population of the city proper has almost doubled in this time, and together with formerly separate villages and towns it now forms a conurbation of perhaps 450,000 people.

ORIENTATION

Oaxaca centers on the *Zócalo* and the adjoining Alameda de León plaza in front of the cathedral. Calle Alcalá, running north from the cathedral to the landmark Iglesia de Santo Domingo, is closed to traffic most of the way.

The main road from Mexico City traverses the northern edge of central Oaxaca as Calz Niños Héroes de Chapultepec then heads on east toward Mitla and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The 1st-class bus station is just off this road, 1.75km northeast of the *Zócalo*. The 2nd-class bus station is almost 1km west of the center, near the main market, the Central de Abastos. Oaxaca airport is 6km south of the city, 500m off Hwy 175. See p735 for details on getting to/from the city center.

The blocks north of the *Zócalo* are smarter, cleaner and less crowded with traffic and people than those to the south. The commercial area occupies the blocks southwest of the *Zócalo*.

INFORMATION

Bookstores

Amate (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-69-60; www.amatebooks.com; Plaza Alcalá, Alcalá 307-2; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 2-7pm Sun) Probably the best English-language bookstore in Mexico, stocking almost every Mexico-related title (in print) in English.

Librería Universitaria (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-42-43; Guerrero 104; 🕒 10am-3pm & 4:30-8:30pm Mon-Sat)



2006: PROTEST IN OAXACA

Small-scale strikes by Oaxaca state's school teachers have long been a ritual part of their annual pay negotiations with the state government. It took an authoritarian and unpopular state governor – Ulises Ruiz, of the PRI party – to turn the 2006 Oaxaca teachers' pay round into the biggest political protest Mexico has seen in years. That year, Ruiz refused to make any significant concessions to the teachers, and the annual strike escalated into a bigger protest that saw thousands of teachers setting up encampments in Oaxaca's city center. On June 14 Ruiz sent in thousands of police to smash the teachers' encampments and barricades, but the protestors retook the Zócalo within hours – and the violence of the police action transformed the protest into a much wider movement whose main goal was to force Ruiz' resignation. A broad grouping of political and social groups came together to form APPO, the Asamblea Popular del Pueblo de Oaxaca (Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca), which took over the city center with camps, barricades, bonfires, graffiti and frequent marches hundreds of thousands strong. The summer's main touristic event, the Guelaguetza dance festival, was canceled. Frequent outbreaks of violence resulted in 23 deaths (all protestors or bystanders) by late October, when the federal government sent in heavily armed riot police to retake the city center. It's widely believed that President Fox's refusal to act against Ruiz was part of a deal struck by Fox's PAN party to win the PRI's support for PAN legislation in the national congress.

APPO continued to stage protests and marches demanding Ruiz' resignation and the release of those jailed during the protests. There was more violence before the Guelaguetza in 2007, though the festival went ahead. To outward appearances the city had more or less returned to normality by late 2007, and the important tourism business, which had ground to a halt for over a year, revived. But political opinion in Oaxaca has been radicalized, Ulises Ruiz is in office until 2010, and the social tensions and inequities that the protests highlighted have not gone away.

Sells some English-language books about Oaxaca and Mexico, as well as some maps.

Emergency

Ambulance, Fire & Police (☎ 066)

Ceprotur (Centro de Protección al Turista; Map pp720-1; ☎ 502-12-00; Murguía 206; 🕒 8am-8pm) Ceprotur, at the state tourist office, exists to help tourists with any legal problems, complaints, lost documents and the like.

Internet Access

They're everywhere!

Fray-Net (Map pp720-1; Murguía 309A; per hr M\$5;

🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat)

Inter@ctive Internet (Map pp720-1; Alcalá 503; per hr M\$10; 🕒 8:30am-10pm) Good connections.

Interactu@ndo (Map p715; Pino Suárez 804; per hr M\$6; 🕒 9am-9pm Mon-Sat) Wi-fi access is free if you have a drink or snack at the café here; if you don't, it's M\$10 per hr.

Nred@t (Map pp720-1; Morelos 600; per hr M\$10; 🕒 8:30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) Upstairs place with amiable staff & good connections.

Laundry

Same-day wash-and-dry service is available at several laundries.

Lava-Max (Map pp720-1; ☎ 545-87-46; cnr Bravo & Tinoco y Palacios; wash & dry per kg M\$11, minimum 3kg; 🕒 8am-8:30pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun) Also has self-service machines (wash per 4kg M\$18, dry per 8kg M\$12).

Lavandería Antequera (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-56-94; Murguía 408; wash & dry per kg M\$20, 3kg M\$50; 🕒 8am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat) Also does ironing and dry cleaning, and offers free delivery to hotels in the area.

Libraries

Biblioteca Circulante de Oaxaca (Oaxaca Lending Library; Map pp720-1; ☎ 518-70-77; www.oaxlibrary.com; Pino Suárez 519; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Sizable collection of books and magazines on Oaxaca and Mexico in English and Spanish; visitor membership (per one/two months M\$100/150) allows you to borrow books, DVDs and CDs.

Media

Go-Oaxaca (www.go-oaxaca.com) Excellent bilingual (English and Spanish) website and free paper normally published monthly. Both contain a lot of interesting articles and useful practical information on the state and city of Oaxaca, plus details about cultural events and small ads.

Notice boards Check these for rental apartments and houses, classes, medical services, English-teaching work

and other interesting stuff. There are useful boards in the language schools and the Biblioteca Circulante de Oaxaca (opposite).

Planeta.com (www.planeta.com) This ecotourism website has tons of info on Oaxaca, where its founder lives.

Medical Services

Clínica Hospital Carmen (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-00-27; Abasolo 215; ☎ 24hr) One of the city's best private hospitals, with emergency facilities and English-speaking doctors.

Money

There are plenty of ATMs around the center, and several banks and *casas de cambio* (exchange houses) will change US-dollar cash and traveler's checks.

Banorte (Map pp720-1; García Vigil 103; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat)

Consultoría Internacional (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-91-92; Armenta y López 203C; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Also changes cash euros, yen, pounds sterling, Canadian dollars and Swiss francs.

HSBC (Map pp720-1; Guerrero 117; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat)

Post

Main post office (Map pp720-1; Alameda de León; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat)

Telephone & Fax

Telmex card phones are available around the Zócalo and elsewhere. Many call offices are scattered around town.

Ti Yara (Map pp720-1; Calle 20 de Noviembre 402)

Cheaper than pay phones for national long-distance calls and calls to Europe; offers fax service as well.

Interactu@ndo (Map p715; Pino Suárez 804; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat) Calls cost M\$4 per minute to the US, M\$8 to the rest of world.

Tourist Information

City Tourism Office (Map p715; Hidalgo 1415) At the time of writing, this was due to open in 2008.

Sectur (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-01-23; www.oaxaca.travel; Murguía 206; ☎ 8am-8pm) The Oaxaca state tourism department usually has someone in attendance who can speak English, but workers are often student volunteers with limited knowledge. Also has desks at the Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños (p719), the 1st-class bus station and the airport.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

It's best not to go up on Cerro del Fortín, the hill with the Guelaguetza auditorium, except for special events such as the Guelaguetza festival. It's a well-known haunt for robbers.

Oaxaca's political disturbances in 2006 scared away tourism until late in 2007, long after the troubles had subsided. Unless there is a revival of confrontation, visitors have nothing to worry about on this score now.

SIGHTS

Zócalo & Alameda

Traffic-free, shaded by tall trees and surrounded by *portales* (arcades) with numerous cafés and restaurants, the Zócalo is the perfect place to soak up the Oaxaca atmosphere. The adjacent Alameda, also traffic-free but without the cafés, is another popular local gathering place.

On the south side of the Zócalo stands the former **Palacio de Gobierno** (State Government Palace; Map pp720-1), now being converted into a museum. Its stairway mural by Arturo García Bustos depicts famous Oaxacans and Oaxaca history, including Benito Juárez and his wife, Margarita Maza, and José María Morelos, Porfirio Díaz, Vicente Guerrero (being shot at Cuilapan) and Juana Inés de la Cruz, a 17th-century nun and love poet.

Oaxaca's **cathedral** (Map pp720-1), begun in 1553 and finished (after several earthquakes) in the 18th century, stands just north of the Zócalo. Its main facade, facing the Alameda, features fine baroque carving.

Around the Zócalo

Fine, carved facades adorn the colonial **Iglesia de La Compañía** (Map pp720-1; cnr Trujano & Flores Magón; ☎ 7am-12:30pm & 5-8:45pm) and **Iglesia de San Juan de Dios** (Map pp720-1; cnr Aldama & Calle 20 de Noviembre). The latter is a beautiful small 17th-century church, on the site of Oaxaca's first church (which was built in 1526). The 18th-century baroque **Templo de San Felipe Neri** (Map pp720-1; cnr Independencia & JP García) is where Benito Juárez and Margarita Maza were married in 1843; Margarita was the daughter of Antonio Maza, an Italian immigrant merchant who took in the young Benito when he arrived in Oaxaca as a boy.

The **Teatro Macedonio Alcalá** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-83-44; Independencia 900; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm) was built in 1903 in the elaborate French style that was fashionable under Porfirio Díaz. It has a marble stairway and a five-tier auditorium holding 1300 people.

Calle Alcalá

Pedestrian-only for three blocks, with most of its colonial-era stone buildings cleaned

CHAMPION OF OAXACA'S TREES

More things happened to Francisco Verástegui in his first couple of decades than would happen to most of us in several lifetimes. Francisco was born into a well-to-do Mexico City family in the 1950s, his father an army general and his mother an antiquarian and art restorer. As a child, he was given a paintbrush by the great David Alfaro Siqueiros with the words 'Art is a weapon for attacking social injustice.' When Francisco was in his teens, his parents, his brother and their driver were all killed in a mysterious car crash. Subsequently Francisco gambled away his house in Mexico City's select Condesa neighborhood.

In the 1980s he found refuge among friends in Oaxaca and has lived in the city ever since, developing his own art, which has a strong anarchist dimension (see www.artedeoaxaca.com), and working as a cartoonist and writer for the newspaper *Noticias*.

Fate launched its latest twist to Francisco's story on April 18, 2005, when Oaxaca's city authorities began without public consultation to 'remodel' the Zócalo, the city's beloved central plaza, which is shaded by tall, centenarian Indian laurel trees. As bulldozers moved some of the paving stones, one of the venerable laurels toppled sideways against the Palacio de Gobierno. Francisco was among many who hurried to the Zócalo to see what was happening, and he was one of a handful who decided to stay for a nocturnal vigil. When a team of workers accompanied by police arrived to chop down the leaning tree at about 2am, he took the lead in successfully dissuading them. Thus began a movement of popular protest that saw a 20,000-signature petition raised against cutting the Zócalo trees. The authorities never made their intentions clear, and the Zócalo was fenced around so that no one could see what was happening for five months. When the screens came down, about 10 trees had been removed and the attractive green-stone paving had been replaced with dull gray stone. It seems likely that something much more drastic would have happened if Francisco and others hadn't intervened.

Restless Francisco was inspired to study the history of Oaxaca's trees. He discovered that many were very ancient and had links with famous figures. Ash and fig trees around El Llano park were planted by José María Morelos. A tall 15th-century *ahuehuete* at Oaxaca's train station may have been planted by Aztec invaders. Francisco compiled his findings in a guide-map, *Árboles Históricos y Notables de la Ciudad de Oaxaca* (Historic and Notable Trees of the City of Oaxaca), and in 2007 his work on protecting Oaxaca's trees and raising awareness of the urban environment brought him the Colibri Ecotourism Award, which is presented to 'a leading catalyst working toward responsible travel and ecotourism in Mexico' (see www.planeta.com/colibri.html).

Now there are plans for Oaxaca's historic trees, instead of being demolished, to be marked by official plaques and given protective fences. Francisco leads fascinating historic-tree walks on a private basis, and moves are afoot to train other guides to lead them on a regular public basis – for latest information ask at Oaxaca tourist offices or check www.planeta.com.

up and restored, and strung with interesting shops and galleries, **Calle Alcalá** (Map pp720–1) makes for an obligatory stroll between the Zócalo and the Iglesia de Santo Domingo.

Iglesia de Santo Domingo

Four blocks north of the cathedral, gorgeous **Santo Domingo** (Map pp720–1; cnr Alcalá & Gurríón; ☎ 7am–1pm & 4–8pm except during Mass) is the most splendid of Oaxaca's churches. It was built mainly between 1570 and 1608 as part of the city's Dominican monastery, with the finest artisans from Puebla and elsewhere helping in its construction. Like other big buildings in this earthquake-prone region, Santo Domingo has immensely thick stone walls.

Amid the fine carving on the baroque facade, the figure holding a church is Santo Domingo de Guzmán (1172–1221), the Spanish monk who founded the Dominican order. The Dominicans observed strict vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and in Mexico they protected the indigenous people from other colonists' excesses.

Nearly every square inch of the church's interior is decorated in 3-D relief: elaborate colored and gilt designs swirl around a profusion of painted figures. An elaborate family tree of Santo Domingo adorns the ceiling immediately inside the main entrance. Most elaborate of all is the decoration in the 18th-century Capilla de la Virgen del Rosario

(Rosary Chapel) on the south side of the nave. The whole church takes on a magically warm glow during candlelit evening Masses.

Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca

The beautiful monastery buildings adjoining the Iglesia de Santo Domingo house this not-to-be-missed **museum** (Museum of Oaxacan Cultures; Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-29-91; cnr Alcalá & Gurrion; admission M\$48; 🕒 10am-7pm Tue-Sun). One of the best regional museums in Mexico, this takes you right through the history and cultures of Oaxaca state up to the present day. Explanatory material is in Spanish, but you can rent good audio guides in English for M\$50. Also here is a good book and souvenir shop.

A gorgeous green-stone cloister serves as antechamber to the museum proper. The museum emphasizes the direct lineage between Oaxaca's pre-Hispanic and contemporary indigenous cultures, illustrating continuity in such areas as crafts, medicine, food, drink and music. The greatest highlight is the Mixtec treasure from Tumba 7 at Monte Albán, in Room III. This treasure dates from the 14th century, when Mixtecs reused an old Zapotec tomb to bury one of their kings and his sacrificed servants. With the bodies they placed a hoard of beautifully worked silver, turquoise, coral, jade, amber and pearls, finely carved bone, crystal goblets, a skull covered in turquoise and a lot of gold. The treasure was discovered in 1932 by Alfonso Caso.

The museum's first four rooms are devoted to the pre-Hispanic period, the next four to the colonial period, the following five to Oaxaca in the independence era and after, and the final room (14) to Santo Domingo Monastery itself. At the end of one long corridor, glass doors give a view into the beautifully ornate choir of Santo Domingo Church.

Museo Rufino Tamayo

This top-class **pre-Hispanic art museum** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-47-50; Morelos 503; admission M\$35; 🕒 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) was donated to Oaxaca by its most famous artist, the Zapotec Rufino Tamayo (1899-1991). In a fine 17th-century building, the collection focuses on the aesthetic qualities of ancient artifacts and traces artistic developments in pre-conquest times. It has some truly beauti-

ful pieces and is strong on the Preclassic era and lesser-known civilizations such as those of Veracruz and western Mexico.

Art Museums & Galleries

In the vanguard of Mexican art, Oaxaca attracts artists, dealers and buyers from far and wide.

MUSEO DE LOS PINTORES OAXAQUEÑOS

Housed in a spacious two-story downtown building, the **Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños** (Museum of Oaxacan Painters, MUPO; Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-56-45; Independencia 607; admission M\$20; 🕒 10am-8pm Tue-Sun), stages changing exhibitions of work by the state's best artists.

MUSEO DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO DE OAXACA

Occupying a handsome colonial house built around 1700, Oaxaca's **contemporary art museum** (MACO; Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-22-28; www.museomaco.com; Alcalá 202; admission M\$20; 🕒 10:30am-8pm) exhibits contemporary art from Oaxaca, Mexico and around the world.

INSTITUTO DE ARTES GRÁFICAS DE OAXACA

Almost opposite Santo Domingo, in a beautiful colonial house donated by artist Francisco Toledo, this **institute** (Oaxaca Graphic Arts Institute, IAGO; Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-69-80; Alcalá 507; admission free; 🕒 9:30am-8pm Wed-Mon) offers changing exhibitions of graphic art as well as a superb **arts library** (🕒 9:30am-8pm Mon-Sat).

CENTRO FOTOGRÁFICO ÁLVAREZ BRAVO

This good **photo exhibition center** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-98-00; www.cfmab.blogspot.com; Bravo 116; admission free; 🕒 9:30am-8pm Wed-Mon) occupies a space that was very nicely rehabilitated in 2005.

COMMERCIAL GALLERIES

Admission to all these is free:

Arte Contemporáneo Manuel García (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-10-93; Portal Juárez 110; 🕒 11am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat) Exhibitions of delightfully avant-garde stuff by Mexican and international artists.

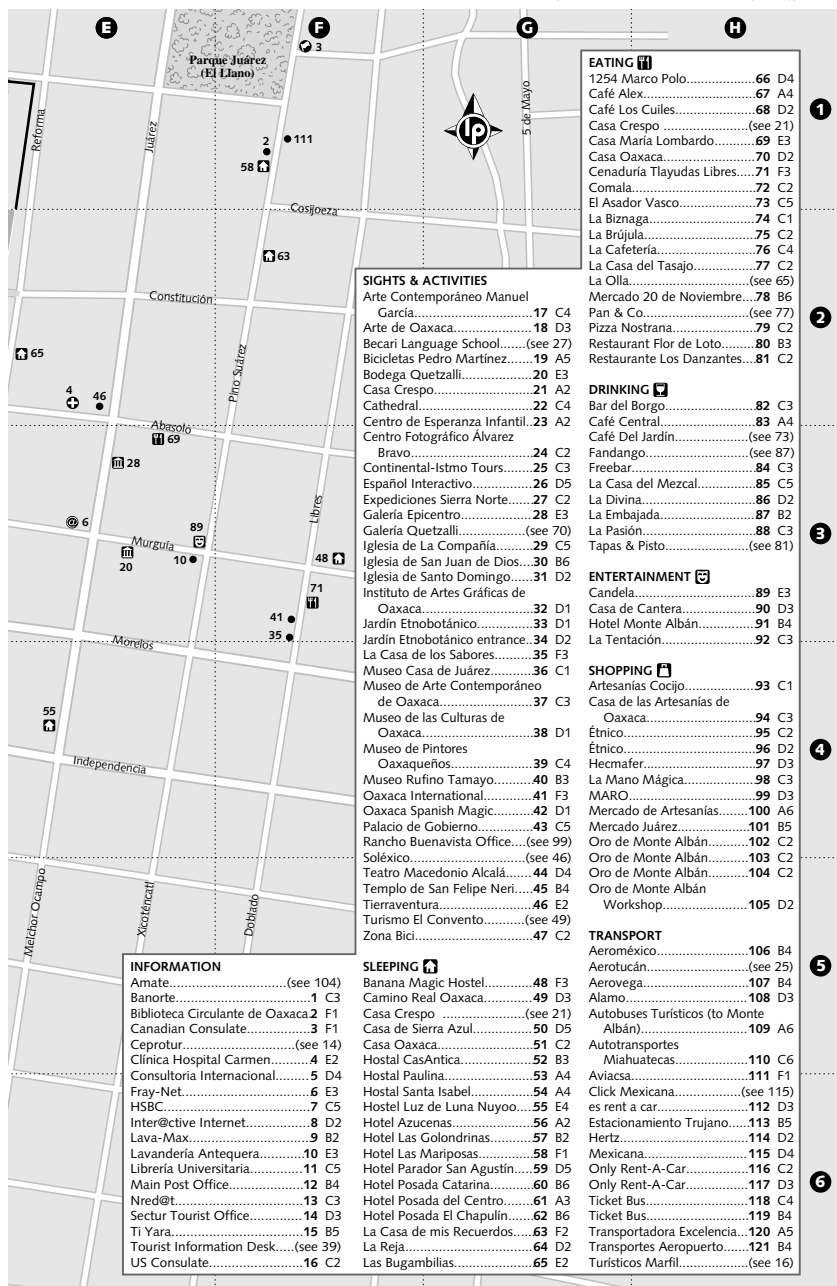
Arte de Oaxaca (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-15-32; www.artedeoaxaca.com; Murguía 105; 🕒 11am-3pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat) This sophisticated gallery provides a beautiful setting in which to enjoy a wide range of contemporary Oaxacan art. It includes a room devoted to Rodolfo Morales' work.

Bodega Quetzalli (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-62-68; Murguía 400; 🕒 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat) This

CENTRAL OAXACA CITY



0 200 m
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**EATING**

1254 Marco Polo.....	66 D4
Café Alex.....	67 A4
Café Los Cuiles.....	68 D2
Casa Crespo.....	(see 21)
Casa María Lombardo.....	69 E3
Casa Oaxaca.....	70 D2
Cenaduría Tlayudas Libres.....	71 F3
Comala.....	72 C2
El Asador Vasco.....	73 C5
La Biznaga.....	74 C1
La Brújula.....	75 C2
La Cafetería.....	76 C4
La Casa del Tasaño.....	77 C2
La Olla.....	(see 65)
Mercado 20 de Noviembre.....	78 B6
Pan & Co.....	(see 77)
Pizza Nostrana.....	79 C2
Restaurant Flor de Loto.....	80 B3
Restaurante Los Danzantes.....	81 C2

DRINKING

Bar del Borgo.....	82 C3
Café Central.....	83 A4
Café Del Jardín.....	(see 73)
Fandango.....	(see 87)
Freebar.....	84 C3
La Casa del Mezcal.....	85 C5
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CONTEMPORARY ART IN OAXACA

Inspired by diverse influences ranging from the area's contrasting landscapes to indigenous mythology and contemporary globalization, Oaxaca state's talented artists continue to produce some of the country's most vibrant and pioneering art. Many now spend time, exhibit and sell their work in Mexico City, the United States and elsewhere, but Oaxaca city is still by far the best place to get a feel for their great creativity and imagination.

A delight in color and light and a dreamlike feeling are recurring qualities of much Oaxacan art. The Oaxacan artists who laid the basis for today's flowering of art in their homeland were the great muralist and explorer of color and light, Rufino Tamayo (1899–1991), and Francisco Gutiérrez (1906–44). The next generation was led by three artists. The colorful, dreamlike art of Rodolfo Morales (1925–2001) from Ocotlán, with its trademark childlike angel figures, has deep local mythical roots. Rodolfo Nieto (1936–85) populated his work with vividly colorful fantasy animals and dream figures. Francisco Toledo (b 1940), from Juchitán, still a prominent figure in Oaxacan life and tireless worker for the arts, works in many media; his always arresting art often has grotesque or imaginary beasts for its subject matter.

A series of annual workshops for young Oaxacan artists organized by Tamayo in the 1970s encouraged such now highly successful talents as Abelardo López, Arnulfo Mendoza, Ariel Mendoza, Alejandro Santiago and Felipe de Jesús Morales – in part by helping them find markets for their art. Their work is highly varied, but fantasy, landscape, imaginary animals, indigenous roots and that persistent dreamlike quality run consistently through much of it. More or less contemporary are Sergio Hernández, whose limitless imagination melds the figurative with the abstract and the fantastic with the concrete, and Marco Bustamante with his oddly haunting hyper-realist images.

Today, the latest generation of Oaxacan artists seeks to reject the 'folkloric' imagery of its predecessors in a diversity of ways. They may look far beyond Oaxaca to international subjects and themes, and artists such as Demián Flores Cortés and Soid Pastrana often reject representation in favor of almost cartoon-like compositions designed to provoke and make us ponder.

Today any art lover can happily spend days browsing Oaxaca's art museums and quality commercial galleries and, with luck, attending the odd opening, seminar or other art community event at places like La Curtiduría (below) or Café Central (p731).

very large, open space features roughly one artist, usually avant-garde, per month.

Galería Epicentro (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-80-72; www.marcoabustamante.com; Juárez 300; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat) Gallery belonging to artist Marco Bustamante displaying his and others' work.

Galería Quetzalli (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-00-30; Constitución 104; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat) Oaxaca's leading serious gallery, handling some of the biggest names such as Francisco Toledo and Sergio Hernández.

La Curtiduría (Map p715; ☎ 951-1199952; lacurtiduria@yahoo.com; 5 de Mayo 307, Colonia Jalatlaco; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Fri) A diverse cultural center founded in an old tannery by artist Demián Flores Cortés, La Curtiduría stages and facilitates contemporary art exhibits, classes, community projects and assorted events (including films and live music and dance), and runs an artist-in-residence program. Drop by or look for flyers.

Also check out La Mano Mágica (p734). Chiefly a classy crafts store showcasing the weavings of its owner, Arnulfo Mendoza,

the Magic Hand also has some art, including prints by the likes of Tamayo and Toledo.

Jardín Etnobotánico

In former monastic grounds behind the Iglesia de Santo Domingo, this **garden** (Ethnobotanical Garden; Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-79-15; cnr Constitución & Reforma; two-hr tours in English M\$100, one-hr tours in Spanish M\$50; ☎ English tours 11am Tue & Thu, Spanish tours 10am, noon & 5pm Mon-Sat) features plants from around the state, including a staggering variety of cactuses. Though it has been growing only since the mid-1990s, it's already a fascinating demonstration of Oaxaca's biodiversity. Visits are by guided tour only; for the English-language ones it's a good idea to sign up a day or two beforehand.

Museo Casa de Juárez

One of the few Mexican national heroes with an unsullied reputation, the great reforming president Benito Juárez (1806–72) was born

a humble Zapotec villager in Guelatao, 60km northeast of Oaxaca (p748). His parents died when he was three. At the age of 12, young Benito walked to Oaxaca and found work at the house of Antonio Salanueva, a bookbinder. Salanueva saw the boy's potential and decided to help pay for an education he otherwise might not have received. Salanueva's simple house is now the interesting little **museum** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-18-60; García Vigil 609; admission M\$35, free Sun; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun). The binding workshop is preserved, along with memorabilia of Benito.

Juárez later started training for the priesthood, but he abandoned this career to work as a lawyer for poor villagers. He rose to become Oaxaca's state governor from 1848 to 1852, during which term he opened schools and cut bureaucracy, and then justice minister in Mexico's new liberal government of 1855. His Ley Juárez (Juárez Law), which transferred the trials of soldiers and priests charged with civil crimes to ordinary civil courts, was the first of the Reform laws, which sought to break the power of the Catholic Church. These laws provoked the War of the Reform of 1858 to 1861, in which the liberals eventually defeated the conservatives.

Juárez was elected Mexico's president in 1861 but had been in office only a few months when France invaded Mexico and forced him into exile. In 1866-67, with US support, Juárez ousted the French and their puppet emperor, Maximilian. One of Juárez' main political achievements was to make primary education free and compulsory. He died in 1872, a year after being elected to his fourth presidential term. Today countless Mexican streets, schools, villages, towns, bus companies and even mountain ranges preserve his name and memory, and his sage maxim *'El respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz'* ('Respect for the rights of others is peace') is widely quoted.

Basilica de la Soledad

The image of Oaxaca's patron saint, the Virgen de la Soledad (Virgin of Solitude), resides in the 17th-century **Basilica de la Soledad** (Map p715; Independencia), 3½ blocks west of the Alameda. The church, with a richly carved baroque facade, stands where the image is said to have miraculously appeared in a donkey's pack in 1543. The Virgin was later adorned with enormous worldly riches – but lost her 2kg gold crown, a huge pearl and several hundred

diamonds to thieves in the 1990s. The shady plaza **Jardín Sócrates** (Map pp720-1), just east of the basilica, is full of *neverías* (sorbet stands) and makes a pleasant place in which to relax and observe Oaxacan life.

ACTIVITIES

Oaxaca has become one of Mexico's foremost centers for active tourism. It has several well-established outfits with a sustainability ethic that will take you hiking, biking, climbing, birdwatching or horseback riding amid the spectacular mountains and valleys of Oaxaca state, or welcome your help with the city's impoverished street children.

Bicicletas Pedro Martínez (Map pp720-1; ☎/fax 514-59-35; www.bicicletaspedromartinez.com; Aldama 418; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun), run by an amiable Mexican Olympic cyclist, offers a variety of unique, mostly off-the-beaten-track bike rides, with van support to cut out the less interesting bits. One-day rides in the Valle de Tlacolula or Sierra Norte cost M\$1100 per person for two people or M\$900 per person for four. A two-day jaunt runs from Nochixtlán to Santiago Apoala (p750) then across part of the Tehuacán-Cuicatlán biosphere reserve to Cuicatlán on Hwy 135. The four-day Ruta Los Coatlanes, best for intermediate or advanced-level riders, takes you right down to Puerto Escondido on the Pacific coast, crossing the backcountry of the Sierra Madre del Sur. For a minimum of three people, this costs M\$5000 (M\$4500 with your own bike) including accommodation (one night is camping) and meals.

The **Centro de Esperanza Infantil** (Oaxaca Streetchildren Grassroots; Map pp720-1; ☎ 501-10-69; www.oaxacastreetchildrengrassroots.org; Crespo 308; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) is a nonpolitical, nonreligious center that sponsors and cares for kids who, without assistance, could not attend school. Many of these children shine shoes or sell gum to help with their families' daily survival. The center has a dining room, library, computers, classrooms and a small kindergarten, and has helped some kids continue education right through to university. The staff does a great job and welcomes donations, sponsors, volunteers and visitors. Volunteers can help with meals, the on-site medical center, admin work and classes such as art, crafts and English, and even a half-day of assistance is helpful.

Expediciones Sierra Norte (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-82-71; www.sierranorte.org.mx; Bravo 210; ☎ 9am-7pm

Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) is a well-run and successful rural community organization that offers walking, mountain biking, horseback riding and accommodations in the beautiful, mountainous Pueblos Mancomunados, northeast of the city. See p747 for more information.

Very well organized **Tierraventura** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 501-13-63; www.tierraventura.com, www.tierraventura.wordpress.com; Abasolo 217; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri), run by a multilingual Swiss and German couple, offers a big variety of trips and activities focused on hiking, nature, meeting locals, traditional indigenous medicine and cooperating with local community tourism projects. Local guides accompany travelers wherever possible. Tierraventura can take the logistical work out of visiting places like the Pueblos Mancomunados (p747) and also offers rare opportunities to learn about traditional medicine through its cooperation with CECIPROC, an NGO working to improve indigenous health and the traditional medicine center at Capulálpam (p749). On most trips prices range between M\$700 and M\$1100 per person per day.

Zona Bici (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-09-53; www.oaxacawebs.org/zonabici; García Vigil 406; ☎ 10:30am-2:30pm & 4:30-8:30pm Mon-Sat) takes easy to moderate four-hour mountain-biking trips in the Valles Centrales for M\$400 per person (minimum two people). The Italian owner will set a more strenuous pace if you want.

Based at a ranch west of Monte Albán (Map p737), Mexican- and Italian-run **Rancho Buenavista** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 501-22-82; 951-5696773; www.ranchobuenavista.com.mx; 5 de Mayo 204; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri) is perfect for travelers who like to spend their time being as active as possible. The main activities are rock climbing, mountaineering, hiking and mountain biking, with varied grades of difficulty. Durations are from half a day up, and the guides are professional, friendly, qualified and experienced. Activity locations range from the Valles Centrales to the Sierra Norte, Santiago Apoala and Salina Blanca (a community-run climbing, hiking, swimming and rappelling venue near San José de Gracia on Hwy 190, about 110km southeast of Oaxaca). Buenavista also takes mountaineering expeditions to Pico de Orizaba, La Malinche and Iztaccihuatl. There's accommodation for 20 people at the Rancho in solar-powered brick cabins with private bathrooms and communal kitchen, costing M\$180 per person including continental breakfast. Most

half-day activities cost M\$500 to M\$600, one-day outings are around M\$600 to M\$800, and two days' hiking, biking or climbing around Apoala is M\$1100 to M\$1400.

Ecoturixtlán (Map p715; ☎ 951-514-11-04; Rayón 608; ☎ 8am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) is the community tourism organization of the small town of Ixtlán (p748) in Oaxaca's Sierra Norte. The Oaxaca office provides information and reservations for comfortable forest cabañas, guided hikes and other activities.

Travelers are welcome at the yoga, meditation and tai chi classes (up to M\$50) at the Casa del Ángel (p730). Yoga classes are given at least three times daily except Saturday; other activities are a few times weekly.

For bird-watching, Oaxaca Birding Tours in Teotitlán del Valle (see p741) is recommended. The best riding stable in the area is at Casa Sagrada (p741) in Teotitlán – you can make reservations in Oaxaca at La Mano Mágica (p734).

COURSES

Oaxaca is a very popular place for travelers and visitors to learn some Spanish language or Mexican cooking (see boxed text, p726).

Language Classes

The city has several well-established language schools, and new ones keep popping up. All offer small-group instruction at a variety of levels, and most emphasize the spoken language. Most also offer extra activities such as dance, weaving or cooking classes, movies, lectures, trips and *intercambios* (meetings with local people for conversation). At most schools you can start any Monday. Most can also provide individual classes and a range of special subjects and packages. Textbooks and other materials are an additional cost at some schools.

Schools generally offer to arrange accommodations for you in hotels or apartments or with families. Family accommodation normally costs US\$16 to US\$22 a day with breakfast, US\$20 to US\$25 with two meals, or US\$21 to US\$27 with three.

Amigos del Sol (Map p715; ☎ 520-01-18; www.oaxaca.news.com/amigosdelsol.htm; Pino Suárez 802; 15hr per week US\$105) Good-value school popular with travelers. Start any weekday – call the director's cell (☎ 951-1968039) between 2 and 4pm or after 8pm the day before you want to start. No minimum duration and no registration charge.

Becari Language School (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-60-76; www.becari.com.mx; Bravo 210; 15/20/30hr per week US\$120/160/240) Medium-sized school where you can start any Monday morning. Walk-ins are forgiven the US\$70 registration fee. Optional extras include classes in slang, Zapotec language and woodcarving, and volunteering.

Instituto Cultural Oaxaca (Map p715; ☎ 515-34-04; www.icomexico.com; Juárez 909; main program per 1/2/3/4 weeks US\$160/265/365/465) ICO's popular seven-hour-a-day program includes *intercambios* and workshops in arts, crafts and culture; many classes are held in the school's spacious gardens and terraces. US\$55 registration fee.

Oaxaca International (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-73-24; www.oaxacainternational.com; Libres 207; 15/20/30hr per week US\$105/140/210) Prices include a wide range of workshops. Classrooms are set round a pleasant patio. The basic course focuses on conversation while the more intensive courses include some literature and more grammar.

Soléxico (Map pp720-1; ☎/fax 516-56-80; www.soléxico.com; Abasolo 217; 15/25hr per week M\$120/198) Professionally run school with branches in Playa del Carmen and Puerto Vallarta, so students can split time between locations. Can arrange language study combined with local volunteering (mainly with children). Walk-ins are excused the US\$80 registration fee. Also recommended:

Academia Vinigúlaza (Map p715; ☎ 513-27-63; www.vinigulaza.com; Abasolo 503; 15/20hr per week US\$105/140)

Español Interactivo (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-60-62; www.studyspanishinoaxaca.com; Armenta y López 311B; 15/20/30/40hr per week US\$120/160/240/320)

Oaxaca Spanish Magic (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-73-16; www.oaxacaspanishmagic.com; Berriozábal 200; 15/20hr per week US\$95/120)

TOURS

If you're short on time, a guided trip can save hassles and be fun. A typical four-hour small-group trip to El Tule, Teotitlán del Valle and Mitla, or to Arrazola, Cuilapan and Zaachila, costs around M\$180 per person, as do trips to Monte Albán. Longer trips – for example to El Tule, Teotitlán del Valle, Mitla, Hierve El Agua and a *mezcal* distillery – are around M\$280 to M\$300. Admission fees and meals are usually extra. You can book these tours at many hotels, or direct with such agencies as **Turismo El Convento** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-18-06; www.oaxacaexperts.com; Camino Real Oaxaca, 5 de Mayo 300) and **Continental-Istmo Tours** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-96-25; Alcalá 201).

Academic Tours in Oaxaca (Off map p715; ☎ 518-47-28; http://academicitoursoaxaca.com; Nieve 208A, Lomas del Crestón) offers recommended customized tours geared to clients' personal interests, with full-day trips for two to four people typically costing US\$240 to US\$280.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

All major national festivals are celebrated here, and Oaxaca has some unique fiestas of its own, the biggest and most spectacular being the Guelagueta (see boxed text, p727).

Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead) November 2 is a big happening here, with events starting several days in advance. These include music and dance at the main cemetery, the Panteón General (off Map p715). Some guesthouses and agencies arrange tours to village events.

Posadas Nine nighttime neighborhood processions symbolizing Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem take place between December 16 and 24.

Día de la Virgen de la Soledad Processions and traditional dances, including the *Danza de las Plumas*, take place at the *Basílica de la Soledad* (Map p715) on December 18.

Noche de los Rábanos (Night of the Radishes) On December 23 amazing figures carved from specially grown giant radishes are displayed in the Zócalo.

SLEEPING

Accommodations range from bargain-priced hostels to luxury hotels in historic colonial buildings. There are plenty of charming mid-range hotels and comfy B&Bs. Some places (mostly midrange and top-end) raise rates for four peak seasons: *Semana Santa*, *Guelagueta*, *Día de Muertos* and *Christmas*–*New Year*.

Budget

Oaxaca may have more backpacker hostels than any other city in Mexico. Hostels in the following listings all have, unless stated, shared bathrooms and kitchens where you can cook up your own meals.

Hostal Pochón (Map p715; ☎ 516-13-22; www.hostalpochon.com; Callejón del Carmen 102; dm M\$90, d M\$230-340, all incl breakfast; ☒ ☑) Popular Pochón provides five small dorms and four private rooms with comfortable beds, a full kitchen, good common areas and no curfew. It also offers self-guided bike tours, cooking classes, luggage storage, cheap phone calls and free internet access.

Mezkalito Hostel (Map p715; ☎ 514-30-01; www.mezkalitohostel.com; Independencia 101; dm M\$90, d with/without private bathroom M\$300/270, all incl breakfast; ☒) The facilities are good at this relaxed,

specially converted, newer hostel. The dorm bunks have thick mattresses, the bathrooms are good and clean, there's a raised back terrace as well as the main courtyard for hanging out in. Luggage storage available too.

La Villada Inn (Off map p715; ☎ 518-62-17; www.lavillada.com; Felipe Ángeles 204, Ejido Guadalupe Victoria; dm M\$97, s/d with shared bathroom M\$118/238, s/d/tr/q with private bathroom M\$238/300/356/475; P, ♿, 🚰) Though set on the far northern edge of the city, La Villada offers superb facilities and friendly, helpful, English-speaking attention in a tranquil location. The public areas include a **restaurant** (🕒 8am-8pm; dishes M\$28-40), a bar with pool table, and an excellent swimming pool. There's no kitchen. Rooms boast art, artisanry, cable TV, and good wooden furniture and private bathrooms. A taxi from the city center should be M\$45, but the hostel will pick you up free from the 1st-class bus station between 8am and 8pm. Reservation by internet recommended.

Hotel Posada El Chapulín (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-16-46; hotelchapulin@hotmail.com; Aldama 317; r M\$200-250, tr/q M\$280/360; ♿) Small, family-run Chapulín, perennially full of international backpackers, features a graffiti-daubed entrance hall and a roof terrace with a fine view of Monte Albán. The eight rooms are smallish and multicolored, with fan, TV and hot-water bathrooms.

There are plenty of other budget places: **Hostel Luz de Luna Nuyoo** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-95-76; www.geocities.com/luznuyoo; emayoral71@hotmail.com; Juárez 101; dm M\$70, d with shared/private bathroom M\$180/200; ♿) Inexpensive, sociable hostel providing fairly basic facilities, with separate bunk rooms for women, men and couples set around a wide patio. **Hostal Santa Isabel** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-28-65; hostalsantaisabeloax@hotmail.com; Mier y Terán 103; dm M\$70, d M\$170; ♿) A calm, friendly place with bunk dorms (one for women only) and varied bedrooms around two patios with plants. If you want a private room, go for the airier upstairs ones.

COOKING THE OAXACAN WAY

Oaxaca has its own spicy take on Mexican cuisine, based on its famous seven *moles* (sauces usually served over chicken or pork). Other local specialties include *tasajo* (slices of pounded beef), *tlayudas* (big crisp tortillas with varied toppings, sometimes labeled 'Oaxacan pizza'), *memelas* (thick tortillas topped with cheese, beans, chili sauce and sometimes more), *quesillo* (stringy cheese) and *chapulines* (grasshoppers! – usually fried with chili powder, onion and garlic). Several of Oaxaca's best cooks regularly impart their secrets to visitors, making the city one of the best places in the country to learn Mexican cooking. The following recommended classes are (or can be) held in English, and include market visits to buy ingredients.

Seasons of My Heart (☎ 951-5080469; www.seasonsofmyheart.com; group day class incl transportation per person US\$75, longer courses & tours from US\$1495) This cooking school at a ranch in the Valle de Etla is run by American chef and Oaxacan food expert Susana Trilling. It offers classes in Mexican and Oaxacan cooking, from one-day group sessions (most Wednesdays) to weeklong courses, plus fascinating culinary tours around Oaxaca state and other Mexican regions.

La Casa de los Sabores (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-57-04; www.laolla.com.mx; Libres 205; per person US\$65) Pilar Cabrera, owner of La Olla restaurant, gives classes from 9:30am to 2pm on Tuesday and Thursday at her guesthouse in central Oaxaca. Participants (minimum four, maximum eight) prepare and eat one of 15 five-course Mexican or Oaxacan menus on offer, usually including some vegetarian dishes.

La Casa de mis Recuerdos (☎ 515-84-83; www.almademitierra.net; Pino Suárez 508; per person US\$65) Nora Valencia, from a family of celebrated Oaxacan cooks, conducts four- to five-hour classes for a minimum four people at her family's charming B&B (see p729) or her nearby home; 48 hours' notice is needed. You go to market, prepare a Oaxacan lunch, then sit down to eat it.

Casa Crespo (☎ 514-11-02; www.casacrespo.com; Crespo 415; per person US\$60) Amiable Óscar Carrizosa gives classes for small or large groups at his guesthouse (see p728) at 10:30am daily. Options include pre-Hispanic cooking, colonial cooking and festival food. Normally you'll plan a menu with six dishes and two drinks, buy the ingredients at market, then cook and eat your meal – four to five hours total.

Other places you can take cooking classes include the Learning Center (opposite; veg meals), Rancho Buenavista (p724), Hostal Pochón (p725) and Casa Sagrada (p741) in Teotitlán del Valle.

GUELAGUETZAS LARGE AND SMALL

The Guelaguetza is a brilliant feast of Oaxacan folk dance staged on the first two Mondays after July 16. (The only time the dates vary is when July 18, the anniversary of Benito Juárez' death, falls on a Monday. Guelaguetza then happens on July 25 and August 1.) The main event takes place from 10am to 1pm in the open-air Auditorio Guelaguetza (Map p715) on Cerro del Fortín: magnificently costumed dancers from the seven regions of Oaxaca state perform a succession of dignified, lively or comical traditional dances, tossing offerings of produce to the crowd as they finish. Excitement climaxes with the incredibly colorful pineapple dance by women of the Papaloapan region; and the stately, prancing Zapotec *Danza de las Plumas* (Feather Dance), which re-enacts, symbolically, the Spanish conquest. The Guelaguetza period also sees many other colorful events celebrating regional culture in Oaxaca, and many thousands of people flock into the city for the festivities (including visiting pickpockets, so stay alert).

Seats in the amphitheater (which holds about 10,000 people) are divided into four areas called *palcos*. For *Palcos A* and *B*, nearest the stage, tickets (around M\$400) go on sale from about April from tourist offices in Oaxaca. They're also available through some accommodations and usually **Ticketmaster** (www.ticketmaster.com.mx) and **Go-Oaxaca** (www.go-oaxaca.com). The two bigger rear *palcos*, *C* and *D*, are free and fill up early – if you get in by 8am you'll get a seat, but by 10am you'll be lucky to get even standing room. Wherever you sit, you'll be in the open air, with no shelter, for hours, so equip yourself accordingly.

The Guelaguetza celebrations have their origins in a colonial fusion of indigenous rites with Christian celebrations for the Virgen del Carmen. Reacting to what is seen as pervasive control and exploitation of the official Guelaguetza by the local political powers-that-be, some people now prefer to attend smaller Guelaguetzas in other towns and villages, such as Zaachila, Cuilapan, Tlacoahuaya and Reyes Etlá. These are usually held on the same days and also often on hilltops or hillsides, and can make a refreshing change from the hubbub and crowds of Oaxaca.

Banana Magic Hostel (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-76-67; www.magichostel.com.mx; Murguía 601A; dm M\$70, s/d/tr M\$170/200/270; ☑) Another relaxed and social hostel with a comfy sitting area and roof terrace with bar and barbecue. One dorm is women-only.

Hostal Paulina (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-20-05; www.paulinahostel.com; Trujano 321; dm/s/d/tr/q incl breakfast M\$125/280/300/450/600; ☑) Impeccably clean and efficiently run, this 92-bed hostel provides rooms and dorms for four to 11 people, but no cooking facilities. Get a place away from the very noisy street corner.

Midrange

Oaxaca boasts some delightful hotels and B&Bs, many of them in colonial or colonial-style buildings.

Hotel Posada Catarina (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-42-70; www.hotelesdeoaxaca.com; Aldama 325; r M\$350-450, q M\$600; (P) ☑) The Catarina is on a busy street southwest of the Zócalo, but inside it's spacious and elegant with small garden patios and a dramatic roof terrace. Rooms are clean and comfortable with telephone, cable TV and old-style wooden furniture. Prices include an hour's internet use.

Hotel Posada del Centro (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-18-74; www.mexonline.com/posada.htm; Independencia 403; s/d with

shared bathroom M\$200/300, r with private bathroom M\$450; (P) Posada del Centro is arranged around two large verdant patios. The 22 rooms are a touch spartan but comfortable enough, with fans and pleasing Oaxacan artisan work. Staff are young, bright and helpful.

Learning Center (Map p715; ☎ 515-01-22; www.learningcentrooaxaca.com; Murguía 703; s/d incl breakfast US\$35/45, apt per month US\$700; ☑) The Learning Center is a successful, non-profit tutoring center for young villagers who need help in continuing their education or developing careers. What guests pay for the two neat B&B rooms and attractive guest apartment here provides a valuable contribution to running costs. All accommodations have fans, phones, good bathrooms and DSL internet connections.

Hotel Las Mariposas (Map pp720-1; ☎ 515-58-54; www.lasmariposas.com.mx; Pino Suárez 517; s/d M\$450/500, apt s/d M\$500/550, all incl breakfast; ☒) Las Mariposas offers six studio apartments with small kitchens, and seven rooms. All are large, spotlessly clean and simply but prettily decorated. It's a tranquil, friendly and very secure place. Free wi-fi, a kitchen for guests, luggage storage and a good breakfast are among the extras that make this a good deal.

Casa Los Arquitos (Map p715; ☎ 132-49-75; www.casalosarquitos.com; Tamayo 818; s M\$400-650, d M\$500-750, all incl breakfast; 🏠) A friendly little B&B on a picturesque lane near the arches of a 400-year-old aqueduct. Los Arquitos offers four spotless rooms with good hand-made furnishings and varied *artesanías*. The 'energetic' breakfast is made with organically grown ingredients. Two rooms have small kitchens.

ourpick Hotel Las Golondrinas (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-21-26; hotellasgolondrinas.com.mx; Tinoco y Palacios 411; s M\$480, d M\$520-600, tr M\$600; ☎ 🏠) Lovingly tended by friendly owners and staff, this superb small hotel has about 30 rooms around three beautiful, leafy labyrinthine patios. It's often full so you should book ahead. None of the rooms is huge, but all are tastefully decorated and immaculately clean. Good breakfasts (not included in room rates) are served in one of the patios. A very good value!

ourpick Hotel Azucenas (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-79-18, 800-717-25-40, in the US & Canada 800-882-6089; www.hotelazucenas.com; Aranda 203; s/d M\$500/550; ☎ 🏠) The Azucenas is a friendly, very well run, Canadian-owned hotel in a beautifully restored century-old house. The 10 impeccably clean, cool, tile-floored rooms have ample bathrooms, and a buffet breakfast (M\$44) is served on the lovely roof terrace.

Hotel Casa Arnel (Map p715; ☎ 515-28-56; www.casaarnel.com.mx; Aldama 404, Colonia Jalatlaco; s/d M\$165/275, with private bathroom from M\$440/550; 🏠) A time-honored travelers' haunt, the family-run Casa Arnel is five minutes' walk from the 1st-class bus station. The clean, smallish, well-kept rooms surround a big, leafy courtyard, and the upstairs common areas have some great views. Rooms with private bathroom have recently been remodeled. Arnel offers many travelers' services, including breakfast, car rental and bus-ticket reservations.

Hotel Cazomalli (Map p715; ☎ 513-86-05; www.hotelcazomalli.com; El Salto 104; s M\$470, d M\$550-600, tr/q M\$650/720; 🏠) The welcoming Cazomalli, decked with tasteful Oaxacan artwork including spectacular carved and painted headboards, is five minutes' walk from the 1st-class bus station, in quiet Colonia Jalatlaco. The 18 rooms all have safe, fan, phone, bottled drinking water and hair dryer, and the roof terrace has lovely views. Breakfast is available from 8 to 10am.

Casa de la Tía Tere (Map p715; ☎ 501-18-45; www.casadelatiaterre.com; Murguía 612; r incl breakfast M\$600-700,

q M\$850; 🏠 🏠 🏠) Tía Tere is one of the few midrange accommodations with a swimming pool. Some of the 20 large, mostly bright rooms have balconies, and all boast good showers. The four around the rear swimming pool and lawn have their own kitchens, and two of them are two-bedroom with sitting-dining areas. Tere also offers a large, clean kitchen and dining room, plus free coffee and internet.

Casa Adobe (☎ 517-72-68; www.casaadobe-bandb.com; Independencia 11, Tlalixtac de Cabrera; s/d incl breakfast US\$47/57, apt US\$65) Eight kilometers east of the city on a quiet lane in Tlalixtac de Cabrera (see map p737), this Mexican- and American-run house is a charming rural retreat. It's 80% built of adobe bricks and full of lovely art and *artesanías*. The three fan-cooled rooms are set round a beautiful little patio, and there's a nice roof terrace. The owners will pick you up on arrival in Oaxaca and offer a free ride to town on your first day (otherwise a M\$70 taxi ride or M\$7 in a *colectivo*). There's a minimum stay of two or three days, depending on when you go.

ourpick Las Bugambilias (Map pp720-1; ☎ /fax 516-11-65, in the US 877-629-2272; www.lasbugambilias.com; Reforma 402; s US\$50-95, d US\$65-105, incl breakfast; ☎ 🏠 🏠) This delightful B&B has nine rooms decorated with inspired combinations of antiques and folk and contemporary art. Some have air-con and/or a balcony; all have tiled bathrooms and fans. A big treat here is the gourmet two-course Oaxacan breakfast. Further attractions include high-speed internet, free phone calls to the US and Canada, and an inviting roof terrace with fantastic views. There's a 10% discount for cash.

Hotel Parador San Agustín (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-20-22, 800-507-34-09; www.mexonline.com/sanagustin.htm; Armenta y López 215; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast M\$650/750/850/950) A 16th-century mansion with a beautiful, pillared, green-stone courtyard has been converted into this attractive 16-room hotel. Rooms have an appealing Oaxacan atmosphere and are equipped with phone, fan, cable TV and ample bathrooms.

La Reja (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-59-39; www.hospederia.lareja.com.mx; Abasolo 103; r incl breakfast M\$750-850) A lovely small hotel with tasteful, comfy rooms in oranges, yellows and pink tones, around a tranquil patio with tropical plants.

Casa Crespo (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-11-02; www.casacrespo.com; Crespo 415; r incl breakfast US\$90) The two large, luxurious rooms at this welcoming B&B are

done in a mix of classical, Zapotec and Mixtec styles, with some fascinating original art and artifacts. The house has a beautiful courtyard, and you can also take cooking classes and, some nights, dine on Oaxaca's most original food (p731). No kids under 12.

La Casa de mis Recuerdos (Map pp720-1; ☎ 515-56-45; www.misrecuerdos.net; Pino Suárez 508; s US\$50-75, d US\$90-100, all incl breakfast; ☒ ☑) A marvelous decorative aesthetic prevails throughout this 10-room guesthouse. Old-style tiles, mirrors, masks and all sorts of other Mexican crafts adorn the walls and halls. The best rooms overlook a fragrant central garden; two have air-con and two have a shared bathroom. The large breakfast, a highlight, is served in a beautiful dining room. Host Nora Valencia also offers cultural tours and cooking classes. There's a minimum stay of three nights. The owners also offer B&B with similarly excellent breakfasts in two beautifully decorated smaller houses not much further from the center – **Encanto Jalatlaco** (Map p715; Niños Héroes 115; s/d incl breakfast US\$90/120; ☒) and **Estancia de Valencia** (Map p715; Maza de Juárez 207; s/d incl breakfast US\$90/120; ☒).

Top End

The best top-end accommodations exude colonial atmosphere.

Hostal CasAntica (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-26-73; www.hotelcasantica.com; Morelos 601; r M\$990-1190; ☑ ☒ ☓) You'll get a friendly welcome at this comfortable hotel, part of which occupies a 200-year-old former convent. The rooms have lots of exposed stone or brick and are furnished in colonial style and equipped with phone, cable TV and wi-fi access. Most have safes. The front courtyard houses a good restaurant and bar, and there's a nice heated pool in the rear courtyard.

Casa de Sierra Azul (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-84-12; www.hotelcasadesierrazul.com.mx; Hidalgo 1002; r M\$1000-1310; p) The Sierra Azul is a 200-year-old house converted into a beautiful small hotel, centered on a broad courtyard with a fountain and stone pillars. The good-sized, tasteful rooms have high ceilings, old-fashioned furnishings, attractive tiled bathrooms and a mix of old prints and modern art.

our pick Casa Oaxaca (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-41-73; www.casaoaxaca.com.mx; García Vigil 407; s US\$177, d US\$254-278, ste US\$278-354, all incl breakfast; ☑) The seven large rooms and suites in this converted 18th-century house are in stunning contem-

porary Oaxacan style with original art and *artesanías*. There's a lovely pool in the rear patio, and a small restaurant (open to non-guests only by reservation) for breakfast and dinner. Children under 12 not admitted.

Camino Real Oaxaca (Map pp720-1; ☎ 501-61-00, 800-9012300, in the US & Canada 800-722-6466; www.caminoreal.com/oaxaca; 5 de Mayo 300; r M\$3540, Club r/ste incl breakfast M\$4545/5200; ☐ ☒ ☑ ☓) Built in the 16th century as a convent, the Camino Real later served time as a prison, and was converted into a gorgeous hotel in the 1970s. The old chapel is a banquet hall; one of the five attractive courtyards contains an enticing swimming pool; and beautiful thick stone walls help keep the place cool and add to the considerable atmosphere. The 91 rooms are well decorated in colonial styles, and have marble sinks, safes and good bathrooms. Call the hotel or check the website for special rates, which can cut costs by about 40% in some seasons.

EATING

Oaxaca offers an eclectic bunch of restaurants, serving up favorite local dishes as well as other Mexican and international fare. Top of the list for originality are the handful of terrific fusion restaurants.

Around the Zócalo

All the cafés and restaurants beneath the Zócalo arches are great spots for watching Oaxaca life, but quality and service vary.

Mercado 20 de Noviembre (Map pp720-1; btwn Cabrera & Calle 20 de Noviembre; mains M\$20-35) Cheap *oaxaqueño* meals can be had in this market south of the Zócalo. Most of the many *comedores* (small eateries) serve up local specialties such as chicken in *mole negro* (cooked in a very dark sauce of chilies, fruits, nuts, spices and chocolate). Pick a *comedor* that's busy. Many stay open until early evening, but the food is freshest early in the day.

La Cafetería (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-76-16; Portal de Flores 3; dishes M\$26-70) La Cafetería has a good position near the northwest corner of the plaza, and serves reliable Oaxacan dishes.

El Asador Vasco (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-47-55; Portal de Flores 10A; mains M\$90-160; ☎ 1:30-11:30pm) Upstairs at the southwest corner of the Zócalo, the Asador Vasco serves up good Oaxacan, Basque and international food. It's strong on meat, seafood and Oaxacan specialties. For a table overlooking the plaza on a warm evening, reserve earlier in the day.

North of the Zócalo

BUDGET

Pan & Co (Map pp720-1; ☎ 501-16-72; Allende 107B; pastries M\$10, bread M\$25-35; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat) This European-style bakery turns out delicious baked goods, including multigrain and fruit breads, real croissants and Danish pastries.

La Brújula (Map pp720-1; García Vigil 409D; breakfasts, sandwiches & salads M\$15-45; ☎ 8am-9:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) A great stop for good coffee, fruit smoothies, breakfasts (including waffles with fruit), salads, and home-baked bread, cakes and cookies. It's endowed with free wi-fi and is popular among artists and expats.

our pick Café Los Cuiles (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-82-59; Plazuela Labastida 115-1; salads, soups & snacks M\$18-45; ☎ 8am-10pm) Los Cuiles is a lovely spot for breakfast and for good light eats (including organic salads) or drinks such as mango lassi or organic coffee at any time of day. Popular with visitors and local students alike, it has a handy central location, free wi-fi and a spacious lounge-gallery feel.

Casa del Ángel (Map p715; ☎ 518-71-67; Dalevuelta 200; sandwiches, salads & burgers M\$20-30; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sun; ▼) This small, quiet café adjoins a yoga studio and health-food store near El Llano park. It serves salads, veggie burgers, juices, teas (including Indian chai), good breakfasts and very good whole-wheat sandwiches.

Cenaduría Tlayudas Libres (Map pp720-1; Libres 212; tlayudas around M\$30; ☎ 9pm-4:30am) Drivers double-park along the entire block to eat here. The filling, tasty *tlayudas* are large, light, crisp, hot tortillas folded over frijoles, *quesillo* and your choice of salsa. Half the fun is taking in the late-night scene as motherly cooks fan the streetside charcoal grills, raising showers of sparks. Sit on benches around the range or at tables in the adjacent building.

Restaurant Flor de Loto (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-39-44; Morelos 509; mains M\$35-55; ▼) Flor de Loto takes a pretty good stab at pleasing a range of palates, from vegan to carnivore. The chicken brochette (M\$48) is large and tasty, while vegetarian options include spinach burgers, meatless *enchiladas* and *verduras al gratin* (vegetables with melted cheese).

Comala (Map pp720-1; Allende 109; dishes M\$40-60; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Sat) This neat and trendy café, with a gently revolutionary theme, serves up tasty and satisfying salads, burgers, sandwiches, egg dishes and Oaxacan specialties including *tlayudas* and *enfrijoladas*, *entomat-*

adas and *enchiladas* (corn tortillas in bean/tomato/chili sauce with assorted fillings).

Pizza Nostrana (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-07-78; Alcalá 501A; mains M\$55-100; ☎ 1-11pm) Small, popular Nostrana is always a sound bet for pizzas and pasta. The entrance is actually on Allende, just off Alcalá.

María Bonita (Map p715; ☎ 516-72-33; Alcalá 706B; breakfast M\$35-60, mains M\$55-110; ☎ 8:30am-9pm Tue-Sat, 8:30am-5pm Sun) Come here for economical and tasty traditional Oaxacan food. Precede your fish, steak or *mole* with a good appetizer or soup, such as the *sopa Xóchitl* (squash, squash blossom and sweet corn). There's a good breakfast range too. The old building is on a noisy corner, but the tasteful art and relaxed service make it all OK.

our pick La Olla (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-66-68; www.laolla.com.mx; Reforma 402; breakfasts M\$55-80, mains M\$55-120; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat; ▼) This excellent little restaurant and café produces marvelous Oaxacan specialties from cactus tacos to *camarones a la diablo* (prawns in a hot chili-and-tomato sauce) and good rye-bread tortas, juices, and salads, all with an emphasis on organic and local ingredients. Breakfasts are excellent.

MIDRANGE

La Casa del Tasajo (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-98-24; Allende 113; mains M\$70-90; ☎ 1-10pm Tue-Sat, 1-8pm Sun) The bright courtyard here is a fine spot to enjoy Oaxaca's beef specialty, *tasajo*. It comes with rice and frijoles in a variety of original ways, including on a spit with onions, green peppers and bacon.

Casa María Lombardo (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-17-14; Abasolo 314; mains M\$70-140; ☎ 1:30-11pm) Thick white walls give a suitable ambience for the well-prepared Mediterranean food here. The wood-oven pizzas and the chicken, steak and salmon grills are all good choices. Sit in the front room to watch the chef tossing the pizza bases for extra elasticity.

our pick La Biznaga (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-18-00; www.labiznaga.com; García Vigil 512; mains M\$70-150; ☎ 1-10pm Mon-Thu, 1-11pm Fri & Sun) The work of two brothers from the Distrito Federal, La Biznaga composes terrific fusion dishes – the choices are written up on boards above the spacious courtyard, which is ringed with slick art. You might go for a salad of spinach, grapefruit, bacon and walnut to start, followed by beef-steak with *pasilla* chilies, plums and *mezcal*. There's a good-value set lunch for M\$80.

La Toscana (Map pp715; ☎ 513-87-42; 5 de Mayo 614, Jalatlaco; mains M\$75-150; 🍷 2-11pm Mon-Sat, 2-6:30pm Sun) Oaxaca meets Tuscany at elegant La Toscana, occupying a beautiful, white-pillared, art-hung courtyard in Colonia Jalatlaco. The delicious dishes on offer run from beef medallions in Gorgonzola sauce to prawns with pineapple purée and a ginger-and-chili sauce.

1254 Marco Polo (Map pp715; ☎ 513-43-08; Pino Suárez 806; breakfast M\$36-39, mains M\$90-155; 🍷 8am-6pm Wed-Mon) Marco Polo's popular Pino Suárez branch occupies a long, shady, garden patio, with attentive waiters and good-value food. The large breakfasts come with bottomless cups of coffee; from noon until closing, *antojitos* (tortilla-based snacks like tacos), ceviches and oven-baked seafood are the main draws. The downtown branch (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-43-60; open 8am to 10:30pm Monday to Saturday) at 5 de Mayo 103 has the same excellent menu and good service.

TOP END

Restaurante Los Danzantes (Map pp720-1; ☎ 501-11-84; Alcalá 403; soups, starters & pasta M\$50-90, mains M\$125-160; 🍷 2:30-11:30pm) Delicious Mexican fusion food and a spectacular architect-designed setting make Los Danzantes one of Oaxaca's most special dining spots. An old colonial patio now sports high patterned walls of adobe brick and cool pools of water in a highly contemporary configuration, half open to the sky. Welcoming young staff serve up a small but first-class selection of food: try one of the excellent duck dishes. The only gripe is that servings are not on the generous side. Desserts are very good too, and the restaurant has its own brand of *mezcal*.

Casa Oaxaca (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-88-89; Constitución 104A; mains M\$120-230; 🍷 1pm-10pm Mon-Sat) This restaurant run by the Casa Oaxaca hotel works magic combining Oaxacan and European ingredients and flavors: witness the crispy duck tacos with red *mole*, or the isthmus-style venison *tamales*. Presentation is outstanding, and all is enhanced by the courtyard setting and a good selection of wines.

Casa Crespo (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-11-02; Crespo 415; dinner M\$400; 🍷 7-10pm) The 'Teatro Culinario' (Culinary Theater) dinner in the lovely patio of this guesthouse – by reservation only – is an incredible experience of approximately seven dishes in which ultra-creative chef José-Luis turns local ingredients into amazing works of

art with unique flavors and textures. Drinks are included in the price.

West of the Zócalo

Café Alex (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-07-15; Díaz Ordaz 218; dishes M\$35-50; 🍷 7am-10pm Mon-Sat, 7am-1pm Sun) Airy, full of people, clean and comfortable, Alex is a great place to fill up on good cheap food. The breakfast combinations (M\$38 to M\$48) are a good value and so is the M\$50 lunchtime *comida corrida* (set menu).

DRINKING

Apart from the more obvious cafés and bars, a good number of arty and bohemian hangouts are scattered around central Oaxaca. If you're into liquors, Oaxaca is the place to sip some of that now-fashionable spirit, *mezcal*. The world's best *mezcal* is made in Oaxaca state, especially around Santiago Matatlán and the Albarradas group of villages, south and east of Mitla. Just like its cousin tequila, *mezcal* is distilled from agave plants and is usually better when *reposado* or *añejo* (aged). Undiluted white *mezcal* is the most common type, but there are also varieties flavored with herbs or fruit. *Mezcal* bottles may or may not contain a *gusano* (worm) from the agave plant, which some claim is an aphrodisiac.

our pick **Café Central** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-20-42; Hidalgo 302; 🍷 approx 9pm-2am Wed-Sat) The social hub of Oaxaca's artsy, bohemian, alternative scene, the Café (or Bar or Colectivo) Central is owned by one of Oaxaca's innovative painters, Guillermo Olguín. It hosts rarely seen live music acts (often on Thursdays), dance and independent films, and uses its wall space as an alternative gallery for celebrated and unheard-of artists. On Friday and Saturday it leans toward a nightclub with an unpredictable, eclectic music mix. There are cover charges for a few events.

Café Del Jardín (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-20-92; Portal de Flores 10) The Jardín has a peerless position beneath the arches at the southwest corner of the Zócalo. In the evening you're likely to be serenaded by one of the funkiest marimba (wooden xylophone) ensembles in the country.

Freebar (Map pp720-1; Matamoros 100C; 🍷 9pm-3am Tue-Sun) Freebar hosts a young and vibrant international crowd that doesn't mind being rammed together to soak up beer and the atmosphere. There's space to dance if the crowd isn't too dense.

OAXACA'S FAVORITE HOT DRINK

Chocolate is an ancient Mexican treat and a Oaxacan favorite. A bowl of steaming hot chocolate to drink, with porous sweet bread to dunk, is the perfect warmer when winter sets in 1500m above sea level. The mix, to which hot milk or water is added, typically contains cinnamon, almonds and sugar as well as ground-up cocoa beans. The area around the south end of Oaxaca's Mercado 20 de Noviembre has several shops specializing in this time-honored treat – and not just chocolate for drinking but also chocolate for *moles* (dishes with chili-based sauces). You can sample chocolate with or without cinnamon; light or dark chocolate with varying quantities of sugar; and many other varieties at any of these places. And most of them have vats where you can watch the mixing.

Bar del Borgo (Map pp720-1; Matamoros 100B; ☎ 10am-1am) A very small but neatly arranged space, next door to Freebar, the Borgo offers some unique street views and a jazzy, arty, almost publike atmosphere. Check it out!

La Casa del Mezcal (Map pp720-1; Flores Magón 209; ☎ 10am-1am) Open since 1935, this is one of Oaxaca's most atmospheric bars, 1½ blocks south of the Zócalo. It's a cantina, but a reasonably respectable one. One room has a large stand-up bar and shelves full of *mezcal*; the other room has tables where *botanas* (snacks) are served. Most, but not all, customers are men.

La Embajada (Map pp720-1; Porfirio Díaz 503; ☎ 6pm-1am) One of a trio of interconnecting bars in a corner building known as La Casa de los Perros (House of the Dogs), La Embajada is popular with a student and international crowd for its rock music, magazine-style montage décor and drinks from tea, coffee and chocolate to beer, *mezcal* and wine.

Fandango (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-95-84; Porfirio Díaz 503; ☎ 8am-2am) Fandango, next door to La Embajada, has a more retro style with a long bar serving cocktails (M\$50 to M\$60) as well as a small stage for bands.

Tapas & Pisto (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-40-93; Alcalá 403; ☎ 7pm-2am Tue-Sun) Upstairs from Los Danzantes restaurant and in keeping with its sensuous theme, T&P's main bar is a teens and 1920s haunt with black light and loud music. Its contrastingly quiet rooftop **terrace** (☎ 6pm-1am Tue-Sun) offers fabulous views to Santo Domingo Church.

La Pasión (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-61-13; Alcalá 302; ☎ 8am-2am) This smart contemporary cantina has half a dozen screens for music and sports, and a section of sofas and easy chairs at one side. Live Latin music from 9pm Thursday to Saturday. Enter through the Mayordomo restaurant.

La Divina (Map pp720-1; ☎ 582-05-08, Gurrion 104; ☎ 2pm-1am Tue-Sun) La Divina, facing Santo Domingo Church, has a disco-esque interior and music from salsa to house to trance to reggae. There's live rock a few nights a week and early-evening (6pm) movies on other nights. As the evening progresses the crowd may generate a warm enough atmosphere to spill out into the street.

Comala (p730) and Café Los Cuiles (p730) are two further popular spots for evening drinks.

ENTERTAINMENT

Free **concerts in the Zócalo** are given by the Oaxaca state marimba ensemble, the state band or other groups every evening except Friday, at 6 or 6:30pm, and at noon or 12:30pm on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. For further live music, check some of the bars listed under Drinking (p731).

Guelaguetza Shows

If you're not lucky enough to be in Oaxaca for the Guelaguetza itself (see boxed text, p727), it's well worth attending one of the regular imitations. The classy Camino Real hotel (see p729) stages a highly colorful three-hour Guelaguetza show (M\$340 including buffet dinner) in what used to be a convent chapel, 7pm on Fridays.

Casa de Cantera (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-75-85; Murguía 102; admission M\$150; ☎ 8:30pm) A lively mini-Guelaguetza is staged here nightly, in colorful costume with live music. To make a reservation, phone or stop by during the afternoon.

Hotel Monte Albán (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-27-77; Alameda de León 1; admission M\$90; ☎ 8:30pm) This hotel presents a 1½-hour version nightly, usually to recorded music.

Dancing

our pick **Candela** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-20-10; Murguía 413; admission M\$50; ☎ from 10pm Thu-Sat) Candela's

writhing salsa, *cumbia* and merengue band and beautiful colonial-house setting have kept it at the top of the Oaxaca nightlife lists for years. It's open as a restaurant from 7pm, so arrive fairly early for a good table, and either learn to dance (free classes from 10 to 11pm) or learn to watch.

La Tentación (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-95-21; Matamoros 101; admission M\$40; 🕒 10pm-3am Tue-Sun) Foreigners and residents alike have a great time when this venue gets up a head of steam – best on Friday and Saturday, when you can move to live salsa, merengue and *cumbia*.

Cinemas

Cineclub El Pochote (Map p715; ☎ 514-11-94; www.elpochote.blogspot.com; García Vigil 817; admission free, donations accepted; 🕒 screenings usually 6pm & 8pm Tue-Sun) El Pochote shows independent, art-house and classic Mexican and international movies (the latter in their original languages with Spanish subtitles). There's usually a different theme each month. To find it, duck under the old aqueduct into Parque El Pochote.

SHOPPING

The state of Oaxaca has the richest, most inventive folk-art scene in Mexico, and the city is its chief marketplace. You'll find the highest-quality crafts mostly in the smart stores, but prices are lower in the markets. You may not pay more for crafts purchased in the city (rather than in the villages where most of them are made), but a lot of your money may be going to intermediaries. Some artisans have grouped together to market their own products directly (see Craft Shops, right).

Oaxacan artisans' techniques remain pretty traditional – back-strap and pedal looms, hand-turning of pottery – but new products frequently appear in response to the big demand for Oaxacan crafts. The colorful wooden fantasy animals known as *alebrijes* were developed within the last 20 years from toys that Oaxacans had been carving for their children for centuries.

Other special products to look for include the distinctive black pottery from San Bartolo Coyotepec; blankets, rugs and tapestries from Teotitlán del Valle; *huipiles* (women's sleeveless tunics) and other indigenous clothing from anywhere in the state; the creative pottery figures made in Ocotlán and Atzompa; and stamped and colored tin from Oaxaca city

itself. Rugs or blankets with muted colors are less likely to have been made with synthetic dyes than some of the more garish offerings. Jewelry is also made and sold here – you'll find pieces using gold, silver or precious stones. Many shops can mail things home for you.

Just as fascinating as the fancy craft stores, in its own way, is Oaxaca's bustling commercial area stretching over several blocks southwest of the Zócalo. Oaxacans flock here, and to the big Central de Abastos market, for all their everyday needs.

La Cava (Map p715; ☎ 515-23-35; Gómez Farías 212B; 🕒 10am-3pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) This shop sells particularly high-quality *mezcal* from Santiago Matatlán (up to M\$600 a bottle). Several shops southwest of the Zócalo, on streets such as Aldama, JP García and Trujano, also specialize in *mezcal*. Around M\$100 will certainly buy you a decent bottle.

Markets

Mercado de Artesanías (Crafts Market; Map pp720-1; cnr JP García & Zaragoza) This indoor crafts market is strong on *alebrijes*, stamped tin ware, embroidered textiles and tablecloths. As you walk through you're likely to see some of the vendors passing the time by plying their crafts, such as weaving or embroidering.

Central de Abastos (Supplies Center; Map p715; Periférico) The enormous main market is a hive of activity every day, with Saturday the biggest day. If you look long enough, you can find almost anything here. Each type of product has a section to itself, and you can easily get lost in the profusion of household goods, CDs and *artesanías* and the overwhelming quantities of fruit, vegetables, sugarcane, maize and other produce that's grown from the coast to the mountaintops.

Mercado Juárez (Map pp720-1; btwn Flores Magón & Calle 20 de Noviembre) This indoor market, a block southwest of the Zócalo, sells a diverse mixture of food, flowers, clothes, hats, sandals and leather belts and bags. Women hawk mounds of grasshoppers on the street outside the Flores Magón entrance.

Craft Shops

MARO (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-06-70; 5 de Mayo 204; 🕒 9am-8pm) This rabbit warren of a store offers a big range of good work at good prices, all made by the hundreds of members of the MARO women artisans' cooperative around Oaxaca state. Whether you buy a stamped tin

mirror or a woven-to-order rug, you know your money is going direct to the makers.

La Mano Mágica (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-42-75; www.lamanomagica.com; Alcalá 203; ☎ 10:30am-3pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat) You'll find some wonderfully original and sophisticated craft products at this shop and gallery, including work by one of its owners, the masterly Teotitlán del Valle weaver Arnulfo Mendoza. Some Mendoza pieces go for tens of thousands of dollars, and when you see them you'll understand why.

Instituto Oaxaqueño de las Artesanías (Map p715; ☎ 514-40-30; García Vigil 809; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Government-run IAO offers a good variety of beautiful craft items, including ceramics, *alebrijes* and some gorgeous textiles.

Casa de las Artesanías de Oaxaca (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-50-62; www.casadelasartesanias.com.mx; Matamoros 105; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) This store sells the work of 80 family workshops and craft organizations from around Oaxaca state. Its patio is surrounded by rooms full of rugs, ceramics, tinware, *alebrijes* and other crafts.

Oro de Monte Albán (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-45-28, www.rodemontealban.com; Gurrion C) This firm's metal-smiths craft beautifully worked jewelry in gold, silver and semiprecious stones, including copies of pre-Hispanic jewelry and pieces inspired by colonial-era designs. The interesting free workshop tour (in Spanish) at the Gurrion branch includes a demonstration of the pre-Hispanic lost-wax casting technique. Other branches are along Alcalá.

These other craft shops (all shown on Map pp720-1) are well worth a look:

Hecmafer (☎ 516-32-58; 5 de Mayo 301) Assorted very high-quality goods.

Étnico (☎ 516-07-34) Allende (Allende 113; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat); Gurrion (Gurrion 104; ☎ 10:30am-8pm) Has a very attractive line in patchwork bedspreads and cushions made from pieces of *huipil*.

Artesanías Cocijo (Plazuela del Carmen Alto) A particularly good selection of masks.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Direct flights to/from Mexico City (one hour) are operated by Mexicana at least five times daily, Click Mexicana and Aeroméxico Connect twice, and Aviacsa once. Continental flies to/from Houston, Texas, four times weekly. Click Mexicana also has a daily flight to Tuxtla Gutiérrez and Mérida. Avolar flies daily

to Cuernavaca and Tijuana; Alma de México flies to Guadalajara and Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

For the spectacular half-hour hop over the Sierra Madre del Sur to Puerto Escondido or Bahías de Huatulco on the Oaxaca coast, Aerotucán flies a 13-seat Cessna daily to/from both destinations, and Aerovega, with its seven-seater (there may be no copilot), flies daily to/from Puerto Escondido and will go via Huatulco if there is a minimum of three passengers going there. One-way fares to Huatulco are around M\$1300; to Puerto Escondido it's M\$1000 with Aerovega and M\$1200 with Aerotucán.

AIRLINE OFFICES

Aeroméxico & Aeroméxico Connect (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-10-66; Hidalgo 513; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat)

Aerotucán (Map pp720-1; www.aerotucan.com.mx; ☎ 501-05-30; Interior 204, Alcalá 201; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun)

Aerovega (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-49-82; www.oaxaca-mio.com/aerovega.htm; Alameda de León 1; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat)

Aviacsa Airport (☎ 511-50-39); Centro (Map pp720-1; ☎ 800-284-22-72; Pino Suárez 604)

Mexicana & Click Mexicana (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-73-52; Fiallo 102) Also sells Alma de México tickets.

Bus & Van

The **Terminal de Autobuses de Primera Clase** (1st-class bus station; Map p715; ☎ 502-05-60; Calz Niños Héroes de Chapultepec 1036) is 2km northeast of the Zócalo. Also known as the Terminal ADO, it's used by UNO and ADO GL (deluxe service), ADO and OCC (1st class) and Cuenca (2nd class). The **Terminal de Autobuses de Segunda Clase** (2nd-class bus station; Map p715; Las Casas) is 1km west of the Zócalo; the main long-distance companies using it are **Fletes y Pasajes** (Fypsa; ☎ 516-12-18) and **Estrella del Valle/Oaxaca Pacífico** (EV/OP; ☎ 514-07-76). The 2nd-class companies Sur and AU use the **Sur Bus Station** (Map p715; ☎ 514-44-86; Periférico 1014), 500m south of the main 2nd-class terminal. Unless otherwise noted, buses mentioned in this section use one of these three main terminals.

It's advisable to buy your ticket a day or two in advance for some of the less-frequent services, including buses to San Cristóbal de Las Casas. **Ticket Bus** (Map pp720-1) has two branches in the city center: one at Calle 20 de Noviembre 103 (☎ 514-66-55; open 8am to 10pm Monday to Saturday and 8am to 4pm Sunday) and the other at Valdivieso 2 (☎ 516-38-20; open 8am to 10pm Monday to

Saturday, 8am to 9pm Sunday). Both sell tickets for trips with UNO, ADO, ADO GL, OCC, Cuenca, Sur and AU throughout Mexico.

OAXACA COAST

Buses from the 1st-class bus station to the towns on the Oaxaca coast take a long route via Salina Cruz. Unless you're liable to travel sickness on winding mountain roads, it's more convenient to use one of the comfortable van or microbus services that go directly to Puerto Escondido by Hwy 131 and Pochutla by Hwy 175. Both these routes are now well paved. For Puerto Escondido (M\$130, six hours), **Express Service** (Map p715; ☎ 516-40-59; Arista 116) departs nine times daily, 5am to 10pm; and **Transportes Villa del Mar** (Map p715; ☎ 951-1165622; Galeana 322A) goes six times between 6:30am and 5pm.

OTHER DESTINATIONS

Daily bus departures include the following:

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency (daily)
Mexico City (mostly TAP0)	M\$344-584	6-6½hr	37 from 1st-class terminal
	M\$290	6½-7hr	8 from Sur terminal
Puebla	M\$256-304	4½hr	9 from 1st-class terminal
	M\$224	5¼hr	3 from Sur Terminal
San Cristóbal de Las Casas	M\$344-412	11-12hr	3 from 1st-class terminal (7 to 9pm)
Tapachula	M\$306	13½hr	1 from 1st-class terminal (7pm)
Tehuantepec	M\$152	4½hr	15 from 1st-class terminal
	M\$95	5hr	6 from Sur terminal
	M\$90-95	5hr	10 Fypsa from 2nd-class terminal
Tuxtla Gutiérrez	M\$306-368	10hr	4 from 1st-class terminal (7 to 10:30pm)
	M\$196-220	11hr	6 Fypsa from 2nd-class terminal
Veracruz	M\$338	6-7hr	3 from 1st-class terminal
Villahermosa	M\$434	12hr	4 from 1st-class terminal (5 to 9:30pm)

To Pochutla (M\$120, six hours), **Autoexpres Atlántida** (Map p715; ☎ 514-13-46; La Noria 101) runs 14-seat air-conditioned vans nine times daily, 4:30am to 11:30pm; and **Autotransportes Miahuatecas** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 951-1065373; Arteaga 108) goes seven times between 5am and 5:30pm.

A dozen slower 2nd-class EV/OP buses run to Pochutla (M\$76 to M\$91, six to seven hours) by Hwy 175 from the 2nd-class bus station, and a handful from the **Armenta y López terminal** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 504-18-67; Armenta y López 721), 500m south of the Zócalo. From the 2nd-class bus station **Estrella Roja del Sureste** (☎ 516-06-94) runs seven buses daily to Puerto Escondido (M\$110, 6½ to seven hours) by Hwy 131. Also from the 2nd-class bus station, EV/OP runs one bus each to Bahías de Huatulco (M\$111, 7½ hours, 10pm) and Puerto Ángel (M\$76, seven hours, 11:15pm).

OCC and ADO GL run a total of four buses daily by the longer Salina Cruz route to Bahías de Huatulco (M\$216 to M\$256, eight hours).

Car & Motorcycle

Hwy 135D branches off the Mexico City–Veracruz highway (150D) to make a spectacular traverse of Oaxaca's northern mountains en route to Oaxaca city. Tolls from Mexico City to Oaxaca on these highways total M\$326; the trip takes five to six hours. For some reason the 135D is also numbered 131D in some stretches. Toll-free alternative Hwy 190, via Huajuapán de León, takes several hours longer.

Walk-in car-rental prices in Oaxaca start around M\$500 a day with unlimited mileage.

Alamo Airport (☎ 514-85-35; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-7pm Sun); Center (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-85-34; 5 de Mayo 203; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-7pm Sun)

es rent a car (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-56-53; 5 de Mayo 315)

Hertz Airport (☎ 511-54-78; ☎ 7am-7pm); Center (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-24-34; Plazuela Labastida 115; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat, 9am-5pm Sun)

Only Rent-A-Car (Map pp720-1; www.onlyrentacar.com; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) Alcalá (☎ 516-32-13; Alcalá 401) 5 de Mayo (☎ 514-02-55; 5 de Mayo 215A)

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

The Transportación Terrestre ticket-taxi desk at the south end of the airport terminal charges M\$35 per person to anywhere in the city center in a van, or M\$148 for a whole cab.

You can book a van seat from the city to the airport a day or more ahead at **Transportes Aeropuerto** (Map pp720-1; ☎ 514-43-50; Alameda de León 1G; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat). A taxi from the center to the airport should cost M\$120.

Bicycle

Two full-service shops, **Bicicletas Pedro Martínez** (p723) and **Zona Bici** (p724), rent out good mountain bikes. Both also offer bike tours besides selling bikes and equipment.

Bus

Most points of importance in the city are within walking distance of each other, but you may want to use city buses (M\$3.50) to go to or from the bus stations.

From the 1st-class bus station a west-bound 'Juárez' bus will take you down Juárez and Melchor Ocampo, three blocks east of the Zócalo; a 'Tinoco y Palacios' or 'JP García' bus will take you down Tinoco y Palacios, two blocks west of the Zócalo. To

return to the bus station, take an 'ADO' bus north up Pino Suárez, four blocks east of the Zócalo, or up Crespo, three blocks west of the Zócalo.

Buses between the 2nd-class bus station and the center crawl along congested streets – it's almost as quick to walk. 'Centro' buses head toward the center along Trujano, then turn north up Crespo.

To the 2nd-class bus station, 'Central' buses go south on Tinoco y Palacios, then west on Las Casas.

Car & Motorcycle

There are several guarded parking lots in the city center.

Estacionamiento Trujano (Map pp720-1; Trujano 219; per hr M\$12, overnight M\$50; ☎ 6am-11pm)

Taxi

A taxi anywhere within the central area, including the bus stations, costs M\$35 to M\$40.

VALLES CENTRALES

MARKET DAYS

Markets in the towns of the Valles Centrales offer all manner of foodstuffs and produce, as well as handicrafts, cookware, recorded music and sundries of all sorts, many of which are cheap imports these days. The scene is not to be missed; markets draw buyers and sellers from near and far, and bombard the senses with colors, sounds and smells.

At markets with plastic tarps set up for shade, taller visitors will find themselves constantly ducking under guy ropes, iron bars and hanging merchandise, but it's a small price to pay to see the continuation of a ritual that has been taking place for many hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

Markets are at their busiest in the morning, and most of them start to wind down in the early afternoon. The region's main markets:

Sunday Tlacolula

Tuesday Atzompa

Wednesday San Pedro y San Pablo Etna

Thursday Zaachila and Ejutla

Friday Ocotlán and San Bartolo Coyotepec

Saturday Mitla

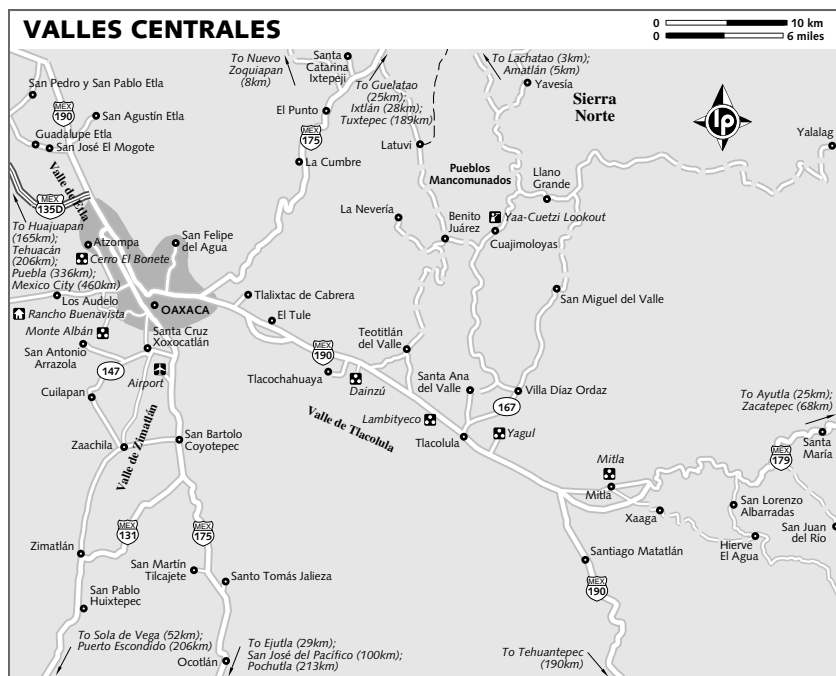
The countryside, villages and towns around Oaxaca are a big part of the city's appeal. Oaxaca stands at the meeting point of three valleys that have been the regional center of civilization since pre-Hispanic times: the Valle de Tlacolula, stretching 50km east from the city; the Valle de Zimatlán, reaching about 100km south; and the Valle de Etna, stretching about 40km north.

Today these Valles Centrales (Central Valleys), with a population that's mostly indigenous Zapotec, are full of fascinating archaeological sites and traditional villages and small towns that stage bustling weekly markets, produce fine specialty *artesanías* and celebrate their own colorful local fiestas. All these are within easy day-trip distance of Oaxaca city.

Getting There & Away

Many of the Valles Centrales' most interesting places are visited by daily tours run by Oaxaca travel agencies (p725).

There's also plenty of public transportation. Details on bus services are given later in this section. An alternative to traveling by bus, costing about twice as much (but still cheap!), is to take a *colectivo* (shared) taxi. These run



to places north of Oaxaca in the Valle de Etla from Trujano on the north side of the 2nd-class bus station; and to places east and south, in the Valles de Tlacolula and Zimatlán, from Prolongación Victoria just southeast of the Central de Abastos market.

They leave when they're full (five or six people).

MONTE ALBÁN

☎ 951

The ancient Zapotec capital of **Monte Albán** (☎ 516-12-15; admission M\$48; ☎ 9am-5pm) stands on a flattened hilltop 400m above the valley floor, just a few kilometers west of Oaxaca. It's one of the most impressive ancient sites in Mexico, with the most spectacular 360-degree views. This strategic position was doubtless one of the reasons why the ancient Zapotecs chose this site for their capital. Its name, Monte Albán, means White Mountain.

At the entrance to the site are a good museum (explanations in Spanish only), a café and a bookstore. Official guides offer their services outside the ticket office

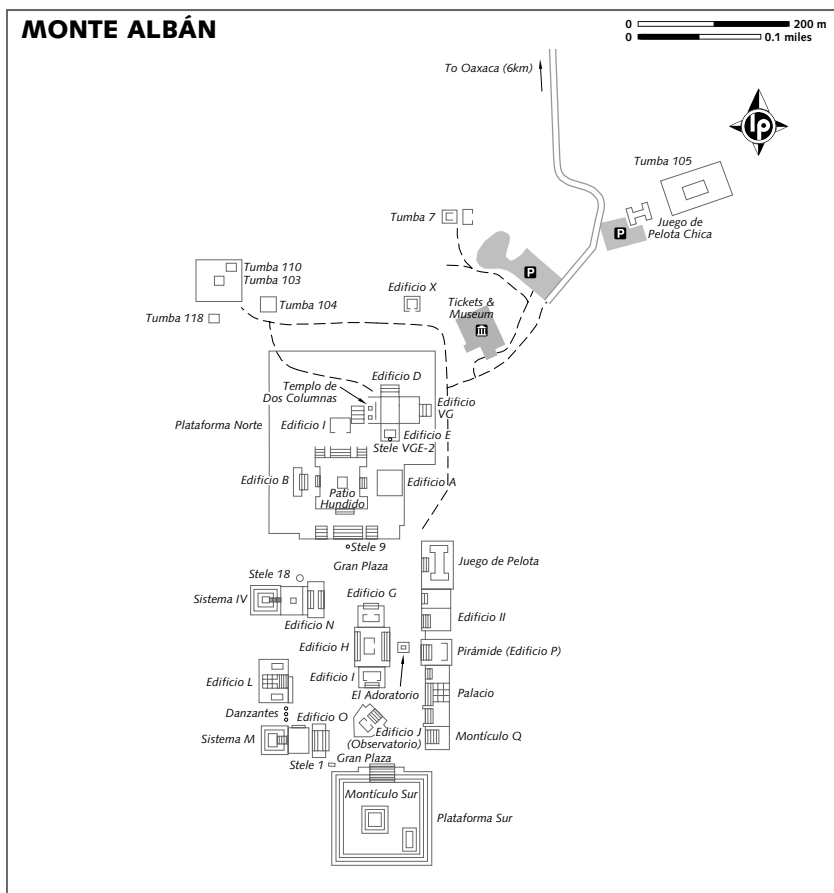
for tours in Spanish, English, French and Italian (around M\$200 for a small group). Portions of the site are wheelchair-accessible, via a lift and special walkways. Explanatory signs are in Spanish, English and Zapotec.

History

Monte Albán was first occupied around 500 BC, probably by Zapotecs from the start. It likely had early cultural connections with the Olmecs to the northeast.

Archaeologists divide Monte Albán's history into five phases. The years up to about 200 BC (phase Monte Albán I) saw the leveling of the hilltop, the building of temples and probably palaces, and the growth of a town of 10,000 or more people on the hillsides.

Hieroglyphs and dates in a dot-and-bar system carved during this era may mean that the elite of Monte Albán were the first people to use writing, and a written calendar, in Mexico. Between 200 BC and AD 300 (Monte Albán II) the city came to dominate more and more of Oaxaca.



The city was at its peak from about 300 to 700 (Monte Albán III), when the main and surrounding hills were terraced for dwellings, and the population reached about 25,000. Most of what we see now dates from this time.

Monte Albán was the center of a highly organized, priest-dominated society, controlling the extensively irrigated Valles Centrales, which held at least 200 other settlements and ceremonial centers.

Many Monte Albán buildings were plastered and painted red, and *talud-tablero* architecture (a stepped building style with alternating vertical and sloping sections) indicates influence from Teotihuacán. Nearly 170 underground tombs from this period have

been found, some of them elaborate and decorated with frescoes.

Between about 700 and 950 (Monte Albán IV), the place was abandoned and fell into ruin. Phase Monte Albán V (950–1521) saw minimal activity, except that Mixtecs arriving from northwestern Oaxaca reused old tombs here to bury their own dignitaries.

Sights

GRAN PLAZA

The **Gran Plaza**, about 300m long and 200m wide, was and is the center of Monte Albán. Some of its structures were temples, others were elite residential quarters. Many of them are now cordoned off to prevent damage by too many visitors' feet.

The stone terraces of the deep, I-shaped **Juego de Pelota** (Ball Court), constructed about 100 BC, were probably part of the playing area, not seats for spectators. It's thought they were covered with a thick coating of lime, meaning the ball would roll down them. The **Pirámide** (Edificio P) was topped by a small pillared temple and was probably an observatory of some sort. Next to it, the **Palacio** (Palace) is topped by a patio surrounded by the remains of typical Monte Albán III residential rooms.

The big **Plataforma Sur** (South Platform), with its wide staircase, is still good for a panorama of the plaza and the surrounding mountains, and has some carvings at the foot of its northeast corner. **Edificio J**, an arrow-head-shaped building constructed about 100 BC and riddled with tunnels and staircases (unfortunately you can't go inside), stands at an angle of 45 degrees to the other Gran Plaza structures and was an observatory. Figures and hieroglyphs carved on its walls record Monte Albán's military conquests of other towns.

Edificio I is an amalgam of the Monte Albán I building that contained the famous Danzante carvings and a later structure built over it. The **Danzantes** (Dancers), some of which are seen around the lower part of the building, are thought to depict leaders of conquered neighboring people.

Carved between 500 and 200 BC, they generally have open mouths (sometimes downturned in Olmec style) and closed eyes. Some have blood flowing from where their genitals have been cut off. Hieroglyphs accompanying them are the earliest known examples of true writing in Mexico.

Sistema IV, the twin to Sistema M at the south end of the plaza, combines typical Monte Albán II construction with overlays from Monte Albán III.

PLATAFORMA NORTE

The **North Platform**, over a rock outcrop, is almost as big as the Gran Plaza, and offers the best views, overall. It was rebuilt several times over the centuries. Chambers on either side of the main staircase contained tombs, and columns at the top of the stairs were part of a roofed hall. On top of the platform is a ceremonial complex built between AD 500 and 800; it includes the **Patio Hundido** (Sunken Patio),

with an altar at its center, **Edificios D, VG** and **E** (which were topped with adobe temples) and the **Templo de Dos Columnas**. **Stele VGE-2**, on the southern side of Edificio E, shows members of Monte Albán's ruling class of around AD 800 – four women and a young man represented by a jaguar.

TOMBS

To help preserve them, most of Monte Albán's ancient tombs are usually closed to visitors. But if you're lucky you may be able to peer into one of the following.

Tumba 104

Tomb 104, behind Plataforma Norte, is part of a necropolis in the northwest of the site that dates from AD 500 to 800. Above its underground entrance is an urn in the form of Pitao Cozobi, the Zapotec maize god, wearing a mask of Cocijo, the rain god (whose forked tongue represents lightning). The walls are covered with colorful Teotihuacán-style frescoes. The figure on the left wall is probably the Zapotec god of spring, Xipe Tótec; on the right wall, wearing a big snake-and-feather headdress, is Pitao Cozobi again.

Tumba 7

This tomb, just off the main parking lot, was built around AD 800, beneath a dwelling. In the 14th or 15th century it was reused by Mixtecs to bury a dignitary, two sacrificed servants, and one of the richest ancient treasure hoards in the Americas – the famed Mixtec treasure, now in the Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca (p719).

Tumba 105

Tomb 105, behind the Juego de Pelota Chica (Small Ball Court), features decaying Teotihuacán-influenced murals of a procession of figures. The figures may represent nine gods of death and their female consorts. It lies beneath one of Monte Albán's biggest palace-residences, built between AD 500 and 800.

Getting There & Away

Autobuses Turísticos (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-53-27) runs buses to the site from Hotel Rivera del Ángel, at Mina 518 in Oaxaca, six blocks southwest of the Zócalo. The buses leave every hour from 8:30am to 3:30pm, and start back from the site between noon and 5pm (schedule details

PEOPLES OF OAXACA

Much of Oaxaca's special creativity and unique atmosphere owes itself to the indigenous population, who comprise about a third of the state's 3.5 million people. With their deep-rooted, pre-Hispanic-influenced traditions in festivals, handicrafts, cuisine and clothing, Oaxaca's 15 indigenous peoples are the driving force behind the state's fine *artesanías* and unique festivities, and a main inspiration of its booming art scene and its amazing output of creative cuisine.

Each of the 15 groups has its own language, customs and colorful traditional costume (though most of their members also speak Spanish and many wear mainstream clothing). These groups form a strong presence throughout the region.

The people you will probably have most contact with are the Zapotecs, approximately 500,000 strong, who live mainly in and around the Valles Centrales and on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. About 500,000 Mixtecs are spread around the mountainous borders of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla states, with more than two-thirds of them in Oaxaca. The state's other large indigenous groups include 160,000 or so Mazatecs in the far north, 100,000 Mixes in the mountains northeast of the Valles Centrales, and 100,000 Chinantecs around Valle Nacional in the north.

In Oaxaca city you may well see Triquis, from western Oaxaca; the women wear bright red *huipiles* (sleeveless tunics). The Triquis are only about 15,000 strong and have a long history of violent conflict with mestizos and Mixtecs over land rights.

change from time to time). The M\$38 fare includes a return trip at a designated time, giving you about three hours at the site. If you want to leave earlier, you must hope for a spare place on an earlier return bus.

Turísticos Marfil (Map pp720-1; ☎ 516-81-36; www.turísticosmarfil.com; Local 25, Plaza Santo Domingo, Alcalá 407) offers an alternative with its Monte Albán Shuttle Service (round-trip M\$50) departing five times daily. You'll probably see its flyers around town. It also picks up passengers at Mezkalito Hostel.

VALLE DE TLACOLULA

Most of the following places in the Valle de Tlacolula, east of Oaxaca, are within walking distance of the Oaxaca–Mitla road, Hwy 190. Transportes Oaxaca-Istmo buses to Mitla, running every 15 minutes (6am to 5pm) from Oaxaca's 2nd-class bus station, will drop you anywhere along this road. There are further services to some specific towns and villages.

El Tule

pop 7800 / elevation 1550m

The village of El Tule, 10km east of Oaxaca along Hwy 190, draws crowds of visitors for one very good reason: **El Árbol del Tule** (The Tree of El Tule; admission M\$3; ☎ 9am-5pm), which is claimed to be the largest tree in the world. In trunk thickness (it's about 11m in diameter) this claim is probably true. This vast *ahuehuete* (Montezuma cypress), 42m

high, dwarfs the pretty, 17th-century village church in whose churchyard it towers. Its age is equally impressive: the tree is at least 1500 years old, which means it was already growing when the ancient city of Monte Albán was at its peak. A park created in the 1990s stretches out in front of the churchyard.

Long revered by Oaxacans, the *Árbol del Tule* is under threat from local urban growth and irrigated agriculture that tap its water sources. Local campaigners say some of its aquifers must be restored if it is to survive, and are trying to win Unesco World Heritage status for the tree.

Autotransportes Valle del Norte buses go to El Tule (M\$45, every 10 minutes) from the 2nd-class bus station in Oaxaca.

Dainzú

Twenty-one kilometers from Oaxaca along the Mitla road, a track leads 1km south to the small but interesting **ruins of Dainzú** (admission M\$29; ☎ 8am-5pm). To the left as you approach is the pyramid-like Edificio A, 50m long and 8m high, built about 300 BC. Along its bottom wall were some 50 bas-reliefs of feline figures, masks and heads, mostly related to the ball game; they're now gathered under a corrugated metal roof. Among the ruins below Edificio A are a partly restored ball court from about AD 1000 and a sunken tomb (inside Edificio B) whose entrance is carved with a representation of a crouching jaguar.

In the scrub on the hilltop behind the site are more rock carvings similar to those of Edificio A, but you'll need a guide to find them (ask the caretaker).

Teotitlán del Valle

☎ 951 / pop 4900 / elevation 1700m

This famous weaving village is 4km north of Hwy 190, about 25km from Oaxaca. The weaving tradition here goes back to pre-Hispanic times: Teotitlán had to pay tributes of cloth to the Aztecs. Quality today is high, and traditional dyes made from cochineal, indigo and moss have been revived. The variety of designs is enormous – from Zapotec gods and Mitla-style geometric patterns to contemporary imitations of paintings by Rivera and Picasso.

Blankets and rugs wave at you from many houses and showrooms along the village streets. From Av Juárez (the street along which you enter Teotitlán from the highway), signs point to the central **Mercado de Artesanías**, where yet more are on sale. Around 150 Teotitlán families specialize in weaving; many of their showrooms are workshops too, and the weavers are usually happy to demonstrate their techniques and their methods of obtaining natural dyes.

Facing the Mercado de Artesanías on the central plaza is the **Museo Comunitario Balaa Xtee Guech Gulal** (☎ 524-44-63; admission M\$10; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), with local archaeological finds and displays on local crafts and traditions (in English as well as Spanish and Zapotec). Here, with a day's notice, you can organize a guided walk up **Cerro de Picacho**, a sacred hill just outside the village, for M\$10 per person. From the plaza, steps rise to a fine broad churchyard with the handsome 17th-century **Templo de la Virgen de la Natividad** (☎ 6am-6pm) in one corner. The church's altar area and transept are adorned with colorful 18th-century frescos. It was built atop a Zapotec ceremonial site, many of whose carved stones can be seen in the church walls; look especially in the inner patio.

English-speaking Roque Antonio Santiago of **Oaxaca Birding Tours** (☎ 524-43-71; www.mexonline.com/oaxacabirdingtours.htm; Cuauhtémoc 5) leads highly recommended bird-watching outings in the Valles Centrales, the nearby Sierra Norte cloud forests and beyond. A surprising number of species can be seen in the environs of Teotitlán alone. A day's outing costs around M\$750 per person.

SLEEPING & EATING

Calle 2 de Abril No 12 (☎ 524-41-64; Calle 2 de Abril 12; s/d/tr incl breakfast M\$250/350/500), a house belonging to friendly, English-speaking Elena González, has weaving looms in the courtyard and three bright, clean and cool upstairs rooms, each with fan and bathroom with hot water.

our pick Casa Sagrada (☎ 516-42-75; www.casa.sagrada.com; s US\$120-150, d US\$180-240, all incl breakfast & dinner; ☎) is the beautiful home and guest-house of Arnulfo Mendoza, Teotitlán's most celebrated weaver, and his multitalented Canadian wife Mary Jane Gagnier, who also own La Mano Mágica (p734) in Oaxaca. Set on the hill at the top of the village, with panoramic views, this is a great place to stay for a few days and enjoy a combination of relaxation, good food and local activities. The 12 comfortable, tile-floored rooms are decorated with vintage *artesanías*, and most have a patio or terrace with hammocks. Casa Sagrada has a stable of fine horses on which you can take two-hour or half-day rides or treks of several days. Other activities on offer include hiking, bird-watching, cooking classes, temascal sessions, and yoga and writers' retreats. There's a two-night minimum stay, and you should reserve at least one day ahead.

Restaurante Tlamanalli (☎ 524-40-06; Av Juárez 39; mains M\$70-180; ☎ 1-4pm Tue-Sun) The traditional Oaxacan dishes here are superbly prepared. Some of them are based on pre-Hispanic recipes, and vegetarian options are offered. Exhibits on weaving add to the interest of lunching here.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Autotransportes Valle del Norte buses run to Teotitlán (M\$10, 50 minutes, hourly 7am to 9pm Monday to Saturday) from Oaxaca's 2nd-class bus station; the last one back to Oaxaca leaves the village about 7pm. Alternatively, get any Mitla-bound bus to the signposted Teotitlán turnoff on Hwy 190, then a *colectivo* taxi (M\$5) to the village.

Tlacolula

pop 12,000 / elevation 1650m

Tlacolula, 31km from Oaxaca, holds one of the Valles Centrales' major **markets** every Sunday, with the area around the church becoming a packed throng. Crafts, foods and plenty of everyday goods are on sale. It's a

OAXACA'S COMMUNITY MUSEUMS

Oaxaca state is in the forefront of Mexico's admirable community museums movement. More than 100 villages around the country have set up these small museums to foster their unique cultures and keep their archaeological and cultural treasures 'at home,' and at least 14 are scattered around Oaxaca.

The **Unión de Museos Comunitarios de Oaxaca** (☎ 951-2045690; www.museoscomunitarios.oaxaca.org; 5 de Febrero 301A, Colonia Cinco Señores) in Oaxaca city has full information on these small but often fascinating museums. The English-speaking office offers organized trips to various museum villages, including San José El Mogote (p746; per person M\$300), Santa Ana del Valle (below; M\$360) and San Martín Huamelúlpam (p751; M\$670). The prices here are per person for groups of five; they drop significantly for groups of 10. The excursions include traditional local meals and visits to local artisans, healers, archaeological sites and so on. At San Martín Huamelúlpam for example you'll get four meals and a night's lodging, as well as a demonstration of traditional medicine practices and – usually – a *temascal*. If you're up for an off-the-beaten-track adventure, consider visiting the Museo Comunitario La Mina (p749) at Natividad in the Sierra Norte, with a re-creation of an important old gold and silver mine, or the community museum at San Miguel Tequixtepec (p750) near Coixtlahuaca, with fascinating pre-Hispanic material in the restored 16th-century house of a *cacique* (regional strongman). At most of the museums, local guides can be found to show you other local places of interest, and several villages have cabin accommodation for visitors.

treat for lovers of market atmosphere. Inside the church, the domed 16th-century **Capilla del Santo Cristo** is a riot of golden, indigenous-influenced decoration comparable with the Capilla del Rosario in Oaxaca's Iglesia de Santo Domingo. Among the ceiling ornamentation are plaster martyrs who stand holding their severed heads in their hands.

Transportes Oaxaca-Istmo and Fletes y Pasajes buses run to Tlacolula from Oaxaca's 2nd-class bus station (M\$10, one hour, every few minutes).

Santa Ana del Valle

☎ 951 / pop 2000 / elevation 1700m

Santa Ana, 4km north of Tlacolula, has a time-honored textile tradition. Today it produces woolen blankets, sarapes and bags. Natural dyes have been revived and traditional designs – flowers, birds, geometric patterns – are still in use. On the central plaza are the richly decorated 17th-century **Templo de Santa Ana** (🕒 hours vary), a small **Mercado de Artesanías**, and the **Museo Comunitario Shan-Dany** (☎ 562-17-05; admission M\$10; 🕒 10am-2pm & 3-6pm), a good little community museum with exhibits on local textiles, history, archaeology (it has some fine pre-Hispanic ceramic pieces), and the Zapotec *Danza de las Plumas*, which is danced in Santa Ana during the Fiesta de Esquipulas (January 12–14), on July 26 and during the fiesta de Santa Ana (11–13 August), usually around

noon. The museum is a good place to ask about textile workshops that you can visit.

English-speaking **Aristeo Gutiérrez Sánchez** leads interesting tours on which you'll visit an old gold mine near the village, learn about the plants from which vegetable dyes and traditional medicines are obtained, and witness a dye-making demonstration. Ask for Aristeo at the museum or the shop opposite. The tours can be done on foot (M\$200 per small group), bicycle (add M\$30 per bike) or horse (add M\$100 per horse).

Buses and minibuses run frequently from Tlacolula to Santa Ana until about 7pm (8pm on Saturday and Sunday).

Yagul

The **Yagul ruins** (admission M\$35; 🕒 8am-5pm) are finely sited on a cactus-covered hill, 1.5km north of the Oaxaca–Mitla road. The sign-posted turnoff is 34km from Oaxaca. Unless you have a vehicle you'll have to walk the 1.5km: lone women shouldn't risk this as we have received a report of a sexual attack on this isolated road.

Yagul was a leading Valles Centrales settlement after the decline of Monte Albán. Most of what's visible was built after AD 750. **Patío 4**, down to the left as you reach the main part of the site, was surrounded by four temples. On its east side is a carved-stone animal, probably a jaguar. Next to the central platform is

the entrance to one of several underground **Tumbas Triples** (Triple Tombs).

The beautiful **Juego de Pelota** (Ball Court) is the second-biggest in Mesoamerica (after one at Chichén Itzá – see p938). To its west, on the edge of the hill, is **Patio 1**, with the narrow **Sala de Consejo** (Council Hall) along its north side. The labyrinthine **Palacio de los Seis Patios** (Palace of the Six Patios) was probably the leader's residence. Its walls were plastered and painted red.

It's well worth climbing the **Fortaleza** (Fortress), the huge rock that towers above the ruins. The path passes **Tumba 28**, made of cut stone. Several overgrown ruins perch atop the Fortress – and the views are marvelous.

Mitla

☎ 951 / pop 7700 / elevation 1700m

The stone 'mosaics' of ancient Mitla, 46km southeast of Oaxaca, are unique in Mexico. Today they are surrounded by a modern Zapotec town.

ORIENTATION

If you tell the bus conductor from Oaxaca that you're heading for *las ruinas*, you should be dropped at a Y junction (*la cuchilla*). From here it's about 1.5km to the ruins' ticket office: go north along Av Morelos, and continue through the plaza and along Calles 5 de Febrero and Reforma toward the three-domed Iglesia de San Pablo. The ticket office is behind this church.

RUINS

The **ruins** (☎ 568-03-16; admission Grupo de las Columnas & Grupo del Norte M\$35; 🕒 8am-5pm) date mostly from the final two or three centuries before the Spanish conquest. At this time Mitla was probably the most important of the Zapotec religious centers, dominated by high priests who performed heart-wrenching human sacrifices. It's thought that each group of buildings we see at Mitla was reserved for specific occupants – one for the high priest, one for lesser priests, one for the king and so forth.

The **Grupo de las Columnas** (Group of the Columns), the major group of buildings, is just south of the Iglesia de San Pablo. It had two main patios, the Patio Norte and Patio Sur, each lined on three sides by long rooms. Along the north side of the Patio Norte is the **Sala de las Columnas** (Hall of the Columns), 38m

long with six massive columns and unusual, very big one-piece lintels over doorways. At one end of this hall, a passage (still bearing traces of original plaster and red paint) leads into **El Palacio**, which holds some of Mitla's best stonework 'mosaics.' Each little piece of stone was cut to fit the design, then set in mortar on the walls and painted. The 14 different geometric designs at Mitla are thought to symbolize the sky and earth, a feathered serpent and other important beings. Many Mitla buildings were also adorned with painted friezes. The Patio Sur holds two underground tombs.

The **Grupo del Norte** (North Group) is similar to the Grupo de las Columnas but less well preserved. The Spaniards built San Pablo Church over one of its patios in 1590.

The **Grupo del Arroyo** (Stream Group), which you pass on Calle 5 de Febrero, is the most substantial of the other groups of ruins in Mitla. There are the remains of forts, tombs and other structures scattered for many kilometers around.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel La Zapoteca (☎ 568-00-26; 5 de Febrero 12; s/d/tr/q M\$200/250/350/450; 📞) Between the main plaza and the ruins is this modest, reasonably clean hotel, with a restaurant (and hot water for only a few hours a day).

Hotel Don Cenobio (☎ 568-03-30; www.hoteldoncenobiocom; Av Juárez 3; r M\$580-790; 📞 📺) Set on the central plaza, this is the town's classiest hotel. The 18 themed rooms are spectacularly decorated with multicolored, carved headboards and furniture, from Guadalajara. They're comfortable and fan-cooled, with phone, good bathrooms and in many cases balconies. The hotel has a grassy central garden with pool, with its restaurant and bar just off it.

Restaurant Doña Chica (☎ 568-02-25; Av Morelos 41; mains M\$50-60; 🕒 9am-11pm) Less than 100m from *la cuchilla*, spick-and-span Doña Chica serves straightforward but delicious Oaxacan dishes such as *moles*, *enchiladas* and *tasajo*. Good soups, *antojitos*, and salads cost M\$30 to M\$50.

The **restaurant** (mains M\$70-120; 🕒 8am-6:30pm) at Hotel Don Cenobio serves mainly Oaxacan and Mexican fare but gets less favorable reports.

SHOPPING

Mitla's streets are sprinkled with shops selling local *mezcal*. Many of them will invite you to

taste a couple of varieties – as will some of the small-scale *mezcal* distilleries along the road toward Oaxaca. Many other shops, and the large **Mercado de Artesanías** near the ruins, sell local textiles. Some of the tablecloths are attractive buys.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Transportes Oaxaca-Istmo buses to Mitla (M\$15, 1¼ hours, every few minutes from 5am to 7pm) leave from Oaxaca's 2nd-class bus station. The last one back to Oaxaca leaves Mitla at about 9pm. A taxi from *la cuchilla* to the ruins costs M\$20.

Hierve El Agua elevation 1800m

At Hierve El Agua, 13km southeast of Mitla, bubbling **mineral springs** (admission M\$15; ☎ 8am–6pm) run into bathing pools with a dramatic cliff-top location and expansive panoramas. Hierve El Agua means 'the Water Boils' but the mineral-laden water is actually cold. Water dribbling over the cliff edge for millennia has created mineral formations that look like huge frozen waterfalls. Altogether the pools here make for a unique bathing experience.

Hierve El Agua is a popular destination for *oaxaqueños* on their days off. Above the pools and cliffs are a number of **comedores** (antojitos M\$20–35) and half a dozen **cabañas** (cabins; per person M\$70) providing simple rooms with cold-water bathrooms (one bathroom per two rooms).

The area is dotted with maguey fields: villages such as San Lorenzo Albarradas and San Juan del Río produce some of Oaxaca's finest *mezcal*.

Hierve El Agua is on the itinerary of some day tours from Oaxaca. Public transportation is only by *camioneta* (pickup truck) from the street outside Mitla bus station (M\$25, one hour). These leave when they have six or seven people, and are infrequent except on Saturday and Sunday. Alternatively, take a taxi from Mitla.

If you're driving, take the 'Hierve El Agua' exit from the highway that bypasses Mitla to the south. This passes through tiny Xaagá, from which an unpaved, very scenic road (steep in parts) leads 11km to the site.

VALLE DE ZIMATLÁN

South from Oaxaca, Hwy 175 goes through San Bartolo Coyotepec, Ocotlán and Ejutla. Hwy 147 goes to Cuilapan and Zaachila.

San Bartolo Coyotepec

☎ 951 / pop 3200 / elevation 1550m

All the polished, black, surprisingly light pottery, called *barro negro*, that you find around Oaxaca (in hundreds of shapes and forms – candlesticks, jugs and vases, decorative animal and bird figures) comes from San Bartolo Coyotepec, 11km south of Oaxaca. To head to the pottery's original source, look for the signs to the **Alfarería Doña Rosa** (☎ 551-00-11; Juárez 24; ☎ 9am–7pm), a short walk east off the highway. It was Rosa Real Mateo (1900–80) who invented the method of burnishing the *barro negro* with quartz stones for the distinctive shine. Her family *alfarería* (potters' workshop) is now the biggest in the village, and demonstrations of the process are given whenever a tour bus rolls in (several times a day). The pieces are hand-molded by an age-old technique that uses two saucers functioning as a rudimentary potters' wheel. They are fired in pit kilns and turn black from smoke and from the iron oxide in the clay.

There are plenty of other blackware shops and workshops around town today, including several on the same street as Alfarería Doña Rosa. The **Plaza Artesanal de Barro Negro**, 300m north off Juárez, has many stalls.

San Bartolo also has an excellent, modern, folk art museum, the **Museo Estatal de Arte Popular de Oaxaca** (☎ 551-00-00; admission M\$35; ☎ 10am–7:45pm Tue–Sun), on the south side of the main village plaza, across the highway from the church. It's very nicely done and features folk art from around Oaxaca state, including ceramics, baskets, knives, wood sculptures, rugs, masks, tinwork and more. Changing exhibitions spotlight various towns, and the stuff upstairs is for sale at good fixed prices.

Buses from Oaxaca to San Bartolo (M\$5, 20 minutes) leave every few minutes from the terminal at Armenta y López 721, 500m south of the Zócalo.

San Martín Tilcajete & Santo Tomás Jalieja

San Martín Tilcajete (population 1600), 1km west of Hwy 175, 24km south of Oaxaca, is the source of many of the bright copal-wood *alebrijes* (imaginary animal figures) seen in Oaxaca. You can see and buy them in makers' houses, many of which have 'Artesanías de Madera' (Wooden Handicrafts) signs outside.

The women of Santo Tomás Jalieja (population 1000), on the east side of Hwy 175, 2km

south of the Tilcajete turnoff, weave high-quality textiles on back-strap looms. A permanent **Mercado de Artesanías** in the village square sells tablecloths, table mats and embroidered dresses as well as more traditional weavings. It opens daily but is busiest on Friday to coincide with the Ocotlán market.

Ocotlán-bound buses from Oaxaca will drop you at the turnoffs to these two villages. *Colectivo* taxis run from Ocotlán itself.

Ocotlán

pop 14,000 / elevation 1500m

Ocotlán, 31km south of Oaxaca, was the hometown of the artist Rodolfo Morales (1925–2001), who turned his international success to the area's benefit by setting up the **Fundación Cultural Rodolfo Morales** (Morelos 108), which is headquartered in his old family home less than a block north of the central plaza. This foundation works to promote the arts, heritage, environment and social welfare locally and has done some marvelous restoration work on village churches – including the handsome 16th-century **Templo de Santo Domingo** just off Ocotlán's main plaza, which now sports beautiful, colorful paintwork inside and out. The foundation also turned the adjoining **Ex-Convento de Santo Domingo** (admission M\$15; ☎ 9am–6pm), previously a dilapidated jail, into a first-class art museum, including several of Morales' own canvases and a room of folk art dominated by Ocotlán's most renowned artisans, the Aguilar sisters. Morales' ashes are interred here, too. For information on the foundation, see www.artedeoaxaca.com.

The four Aguilar sisters and their families create whimsical, colorful pottery figures of women with all sorts of unusual motifs. Their houses are together on the west side of the highway as you come into Ocotlán from the north – spot them by the pottery women on the wall. Most renowned is the family of **Guillermina Aguilar** (Morelos 430), who turn out, among other things, miniature 3-D re-creations of Frida Kahlo works.

Most visitors come to Ocotlán on Fridays, when its weekly market sprawls around the central plaza. This ancient market is one of the biggest in the Valles Centrales. The covered Mercado Morelos, on the west side of the plaza, is worth a look any day of the week.

Estrella del Valle/Oaxaca Pacifico runs buses to Ocotlán (M\$10, 45 minutes, every

15 minutes from 5am to 9:30pm) from the terminal at Armenta y López 721 in Oaxaca. **Automorsa** (☎ 514-79-27; cnr Cabrera & Zaragoza) operates a similar service, 6am to 8pm.

San José del Pacífico

☎ 951 / pop 500 / elevation 2750m

The small mountain village of San José del Pacífico, 100km south of Ocotlán, is just outside the Valles Centrales on Hwy 175 heading toward the coast. The scenery is spectacular here, and San José is a good base for walks through the cool mountain pine forests to waterfalls. This area is also famed for its magic mushrooms. **Café Express** (internet per hr M\$10; ☎ 8am–10pm), on the highway in the village, provides internet access, has a good topo map of the area on its wall, and sells warm woolly jumpers, scarves and gloves.

Cabañas y Restaurante Puesta del Sol (☎ 951-1008678; www.sanjosedelpacifico.com; r M\$300, r/q with fireplace M\$400/500; ☎), beside Hwy 175, 1km north of the village, offers superb views and beautiful rooms in well-built wooden cabins set in spacious hillside grounds. All have hot showers and TV. A decent restaurant serves *antojitos* and omelettes for M\$25 to M\$30 and meat dishes for M\$40 to M\$50. Cheaper, more basic rooms are available in the village itself (look for signs).

All Hwy 175 buses between Oaxaca and Pochutla stop at San José, as do Autoexpres Atlántida vans (M\$65 from Oaxaca).

San Antonio Arrazola

pop 1000 / elevation 1600m

Below the west side of Monte Albán and 4km off the Cuilapan road, Arrazola produces many of the colorful *alebrijes* that are sold in Oaxaca. You can see and buy *alebrijes* in many artisans' workshops, stores and homes.

Cuilapan

pop 11,000 / elevation 1570m

Cuilapan, 9km southwest of Oaxaca, is one of the few Mixtec towns in the Valles Centrales. It's the site of a beautiful, historic Dominican monastery, the **Ex-Convento Dominicano** (admission to doister M\$27; ☎ 9am–6pm), whose pale stone seems almost to grow out of the land.

In 1831 the Mexican independence hero Vicente Guerrero was executed at this monastery by soldiers supporting the rebel conservative Anastasio Bustamante, who had just deposed the liberal Guerrero from the

presidency. Guerrero had fled by ship from Acapulco, but the ship's captain put in at Huatulco and betrayed him to the rebels. Guerrero was then transported to Cuilapan to die.

From the monastery entrance you reach a long, low, unfinished church that has stood roofless since work on it stopped in 1560. It has big, stately arches and some detailed stone carving. Beyond is the church that succeeded it, which contains the tomb of Juana Donají (daughter of Cosijoeza, the last Zapotec king of Zaachila) and is open only for Mass (usually 7am to 8am and 5pm to 6pm). Around the church's right-hand end is a two-storey renaissance-style cloister: some rooms here have faded 16th- and 17th-century murals; and a painting of Guerrero hangs in the small room where he was held. Outside a monument marks the spot where he was shot.

From Oaxaca, **Zaachila Yoo** (Bustamante 603) runs buses to Cuilapan (M\$5, 20 minutes, every 10 minutes from 6:30am to 9:30pm).

Zaachila

☎ 951 / pop 12,000 / elevation 1520m

This part-Mixtec, part-Zapotec town, about 6km beyond Cuilapan and 4km west of San Bartolo Coyotepec, has a large, busy Thursday market. Zaachila was a Zapotec capital from about AD 1400 until the Spanish conquest. Its last Zapotec king, Cosijoeza, died in the 1520s.

Behind the village church overlooking the main plaza, a sign indicates the entrance to Zaachila's **Zona Arqueológica** (Archaeological Zone; admission M\$29; ☎ 8am-5pm), a small assortment of mounds where you can enter two small tombs used by the ancient Mixtecs. Tumba 1 retains sculptures of owls, a turtle-man figure and various long-nosed skull-like masks. Tumba 2 has no decoration but in it was found a Mixtec treasure hoard that's now in the Museo Nacional de Antropología (p153) in Mexico City. When Mexican archaeologists first tried to excavate these tombs in the 1940s and 1950s, they were run off by irate Zaachilans. The tombs were finally excavated under armed guard in 1962. You can see photos of some of the objects that were carted off to Mexico City.

Zaachila Yoo buses to Cuilapan (see above) continue to Zaachila (M\$5, 25 minutes from Oaxaca).

VALLE DE ETLA

Atzompa

pop 14,000 / elevation 1600m

The potters of Atzompa, 6km northwest of Oaxaca and now joined to it by urban sprawl, produce very attractive, colorful animal figures, pots, plates, lamps and more. Much work is sold at excellent prices in the **Mercado de Artesanías** (Crafts Market; Av Libertad 303; ☎ 9am-8pm), on the main street that enters Atzompa from Oaxaca. Some of the ceramics bear Atzompa's traditional green glaze; others are in more colorful, innovative styles. Restaurante El Patio at this market is good for a moderately priced snack or lunch.

From the church up in the village center, a 2.5km road (mostly dirt) leads south up **Cerro El Bonete**. The road ends a few minutes' walk before the top of the hill, which is dotted with unrestored pre-Hispanic ruins.

Buses to Atzompa (M\$3, 20 minutes) leave Oaxaca's 2nd-class bus station about every 15 minutes. If driving yourself, follow División Oriente northwest out of Oaxaca, go left along Calz Tecnológico (signposted 'Monte Albán') from a big intersection on the fringe of town, then go right at traffic signals after 1.5km.

San José El Mogote

pop 3000 / elevation 1600m

Fourteen kilometers northwest of central Oaxaca on Hwy 190, a westward turnoff (signposted 'Nazareno') leads 1.5km to San José El Mogote. Long ago, before even Monte Albán became important, Mogote was the major settlement in Oaxaca. It was at its peak between 650 and 500 BC, and flourished again between 100 BC and AD 150, with a main plaza that was almost as big as Monte Albán's. The major surviving structures (partly restored) are a ball court and a sizable pyramid mound behind the primary school in the village center.

The **Museo Comunitario Ex-Hacienda El Cacique** (admission M\$10; ☎ 10am-6pm) is in the former landowner's hacienda next to the primary school. The museum has interesting material on the villagers' 20th-century struggle for land ownership; an archaeological highlight is 'El Diablo Enchilado', a pre-Hispanic brazier in the form of a bright red grimming face. If you find the museum closed, ask anyone to point your way to the nearby house of the *encargado* (keeper).

Colectivo taxi (p736) is the simplest way to get to Mogote.

San Agustín Etla

☎ 951 / pop 3100 / elevation 1800m

Pretty San Agustín sits on the eastern slopes of the Valle de Etla, 18km northwest of Oaxaca. Its large, early-20th-century textile mill has been superbly restored as the **Centro de las Artes de San Agustín** (☎ 521-30-43; www.centrodelasartesdesanagustin.com; Independencia s/n; admission free; ☞ 8am-6pm), a spectacular arts center with two long, large halls. The lower hall is used as a gallery for often wonderful craft or art exhibitions; the upper one is a setting for concerts, conferences and other events. The center also hosts courses and workshops in a great variety of arts and crafts. Pools surrounding the building are part of a gravity-powered water system that cools the roof and also supplies a paper-making workshop down the hill.

The turnoff for San Agustín from Hwy 190 is on the east side of the road, signposted 'Vista Hermosa' and 'La Capellania' – 1km past the Nazareno turning on the west side. Head up from the highway for 3km till you arrive by San Agustín's church, which is beside the arts center. You can get here by *colectivo* from Trujano in Oaxaca.

SIERRA NORTE

The mountains separating the Valles Centrales from low-lying far northern Oaxaca are called the Sierra Juárez, and the more southerly parts of this range, closest to Oaxaca, have become known as the Sierra Norte. These beautiful, well-forested highlands are home to some successful community ecotourism ventures that provide comfortable accommodations and a wonderful opportunity to get out on foot, mountain bike or horseback into some of Mexico's loveliest landscapes. The area's natural diversity is amazing: over 400 bird species, 350 butterflies, all six Mexican wild cats and nearly 4000 plants have been recorded in the Sierra Norte. The variety of wildflowers here is astonishing, too. Be prepared for cool temperatures: in the higher, southern villages temperatures sometimes fall below freezing in winter. The rainiest season is from late May to September, but there's little rain from January to April.

Scenic Hwy 175 crosses the *sierras* en route to Tuxtepec (population 97,000), the main town in the far north of the state.

PUEBLOS MANCOMUNADOS

The Pueblos Mancomunados (Commonwealth of Villages) are eight remote Zapotec villages in the thickly forested highlands north of the Valle de Tlacolula. For centuries, in a unique form of cooperation, the villages have pooled the natural resources of their 290-sq-km territory, which include extensive pine and oak forests, sharing the profits from forestry and other enterprises. Today seven of the villages (the exception is Yavesía) also cooperate in an excellent ecotourism program that offers plain but comfortable lodgings and walking, horseback riding and mountain biking along more than 100km of scenic tracks and trails. Elevations range from 2200m to over 3200m, and the landscapes, with their canyons, caves, crags, waterfalls and panoramic lookouts, are spectacular. The villages themselves are mostly simple but picturesque places, and have unique relics of local history or culture to show off.

The ecotourism program's office in Oaxaca is Expediciones Sierra Norte (p723). Several Oaxaca active-tourism agencies (see Activities, p723) offer trips to the Pueblos Mancomunados, from one to several days long, and will provide transportation to the area and take the organizational legwork out of your visit. But you can do it independently, and cheaper, by dealing direct with Expediciones Sierra Norte. The office has English-speaking staff and copious information on trails, villages, accommodations, transportation and how to prepare, and will make reservations. It also sells a very useful guide-map for M\$50.

Trained local guides are available for all excursions. They will almost certainly only speak Zapotec and Spanish but are knowledgeable about the plants, wildlife and ecology of these *sierras*. You can head off without a guide, but trail marking is less than perfect. For accommodations and meals, each village has *cabañas* (mostly with hot-water bathrooms and fireplaces), a designated camping ground, and at least one *comedor* serving cheap, good local meals from 8am to 8pm.

Below is a guide to prices for visiting the Pueblos Mancomunados:

- Guide for up to eight people: M\$120 to M\$200 per day
- Cabaña: M\$130 per person (shared); M\$450 for up to four people (private)
- Camping: M\$40 per person (bring your own tent)

- Meals: M\$30 to M\$40 each
- Bicycle: M\$100/150 per three hours/one day (available in all villages)
- Horse: M\$100 per hour (available in some villages)
- *Huientzee* (contribution to maintenance costs): M\$50 per person

Routes

You can easily spend several days walking or riding the many scenic tracks and trails. The most common starting villages are Cuajimoloyas, Llano Grande and Benito Juárez, all at the higher, southern end of the Sierra Norte: walks or rides starting here will be more downhill than up.

It's also possible to base yourself in one village and take local walks or rides from there. Each participating village has an information office where you can find out about local routes and organize services.

Some superb lookout points are accessible from the southern villages, such as El Mirador, a 2.5km walk from Benito Juárez, or the 3200m-high Yaa-Cuetzi lookout, 1km from Cuajimoloyas. From Yaa-Cuetzi in clear weather you can see such distant mountains as Pico de Orizaba and Zempoaltepétl. Within a couple of hours' walk of Llano Grande is Piedra Larga, a rocky crag with superb views. From La Nevería additional walking routes have recently been developed, which will take you through the forests to La Cumbre on Hwy 175, or right down to Tlalixtac de Cabrera in the Valle de Tlacolula by an old donkey trail heading for Oaxaca city.

One special highlight walk is the beautiful Latuvi-Lachatao canyon trail, which follows a pre-Hispanic track that connected the Valles Centrales with the Gulf of Mexico and passes through cloud forests festooned with bromeliads and hanging mosses. Lachatao is one of the most atmospheric villages, with a huge 17th-century church (fruit of the riches produced by nearby colonial gold mines); and the food at Magdalena's *comedor* there is particularly good! From Lachatao or nearby Amatlán you can visit the old mines and the remains of a colonial textile mill.

Getting There & Away

Cuajimoloyas and Llano Grande have the area's best bus links with Oaxaca: five or more daily buses (to Cuajimoloyas M\$25, two hours; to Llano Grande M\$30, 2½ hours)

from the 2nd-class bus station with **Flecha del Zempoaltepétl** (☎ 951-516-63-42). **Transportes Ya'a-Yana** (Niño Perdido 306, Colonia Ixcotel, Oaxaca) runs buses to some of the other villages, but these services are occasionally interrupted, so it's worth checking first with Expediciones Sierra Norte. The stop is next to a Pemex gas station on Hwy 190, a couple of kilometers east of Oaxaca's 1st-class bus station. Ya'a-Yana schedules:

Amatlán (M\$25, 2¼ hours) Departs Oaxaca 4pm daily; departs Amatlán for Oaxaca 5:15am.

Benito Juárez (M\$25, two hours) Departs Oaxaca 4pm (5pm during daylight saving) Tuesday, Friday and Saturday; departs Benito Juárez for Oaxaca 5am Tuesday, Friday and Saturday, and 3pm Sunday.

Lachatao (M\$30, 2½ hours) Departs Oaxaca 4pm daily; departs Lachatao for Oaxaca 5am.

Latuvi (M\$30, 2½ hours) Departs Oaxaca 4pm Friday; departs Latuvi for Oaxaca 4am Friday.

Another way to reach Benito Juárez is to take a Cuajimoloyas-bound bus to the Benito Juárez turnoff (*desviación de Benito Juárez*), 1¼ hours from Oaxaca, then walk 3.5km west along the unpaved road to the village.

From Ixtlán, *camionetas* leave for Amatlán (M\$15, 45 minutes) and Lachatao (M\$15, one hour) at 8am, noon and 3pm.

Important: unlike Oaxaca, the Pueblos Mancomunados does not observe daylight saving time (see p978) – so triple-check all bus departure times for your return trip!

GUELATAO

pop 500 / elevation 1900m

On Hwy 175, 60km from Oaxaca, little Guelatao village was the birthplace of national hero Benito Juárez. By the pretty lake at the center of the village are a statue of young Benito as a shepherd and a replica of the adobe house where he lived as a boy. Among the adjacent municipal buildings are two statues of Juárez and a small exhibition, the **Sala Homenaje a Juárez** (admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Wed-Sun).

Buses heading to Ixtlán will stop at Guelatao en route.

IXTLÁN

☎ 951 / pop 7200 / elevation 2035m

Ixtlán, 3km beyond Guelatao on Hwy 175, is a friendly and often wet little town with a busy Monday market. Benito Juárez was baptized in Ixtlán's **Templo de Santo Tomás** (☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm). This finely carved 17th-century baroque church stands just above the central plaza. On the plaza is the office of the enthusiastic local

community tourism operation, **Ecoturixtlán** (☎ 553-60-75; www.ecoturixtlan.com; cnr 16 de Septiembre & Revolución; ☞ 9am-8pm). The unusual feature of the Ixtlán area is that elevations range from as low as 1200m to more than 3000m, which makes for much biological diversity. You can traverse seven different ecosystems, from low-land deciduous forest to cloud forest, in one excursion. Guides for three- to five-hour walks cost M\$100 to M\$200, plus forest admission fees of M\$30 to M\$60 per person. Vehicle support is available (and can be welcome in this hilly terrain) for up to M\$600 per outing. Ecoturixtlán's **cabañas** (d/q M\$450/650) are in the forest 5km from town, just off the Capulálpam road (free transportation is provided). They're well built of mud-brick and wood, with tile floors, fireplaces and hot-water bathrooms. You can also camp here (per person M\$40; tent rental 1/2 people M\$100/150), and at or around the same site are a restaurant (breakfast/lunch/dinner M\$40/70/35), zip-line, cave, waterfall, hanging bridge, trout farm, bike trail, and horses (per hour M\$100) and mountain bikes (per hour M\$30) for rent. It's a little bit like a woodland holiday camp but is still pretty quiet during the week. You can obtain information and make reservations at Ecoturixtlán's Oaxaca office (p724).

Eight daily Cuenca buses depart Oaxaca's 1st-class station for Ixtlán (M\$40, 1¼ hours). For M\$10 less, the companies **Benito Juárez** (☎ 951-516-57-76) and **Flecha del Zempoaltepétl** (☎ 951-516-63-42) run nine daily buses from Oaxaca's 2nd-class bus station.

CAPULÁLPAM

☎ 951 / pop 1300 / elevation 2000m

The pretty, flower-bright village of Capulálpam is located 9km southeast of Ixtlán, with gorgeous views and a large stone church at its center. It's a tranquil mountain retreat with another community ecotourism program, **Ecoturismo Comunitario Capulálpam** (☎ 539-20-40; www.capulalpam.com.mx; Miguel Méndez 1). Also here is a center for traditional indigenous medicine (based on healing properties of plants and the subject's internal energy balance), where practitioners meet to exchange knowledge and carry out cleansings and healings. You can organize a *temascal* (M\$150) or a *limpia* (cleansing; M\$30) through Ecoturismo Comunitario, or come for an indigenous medicine program with Tierraventura (p724).

One kilometer from the village on the Ixtlán road is the turning to Capulálpam's ecotouristic installations, the **Centro Recreativo Los Molinos** (cabañas per person M\$150; meals M\$50-80; ☞ restaurant 10am-6pm). This offers a zip-line, hanging bridge, bikes for rent, guided trail walks, a restaurant in a verdant riverside site about 1km off the road, and mud-brick *cabañas* on a hilltop about 1.5km from the restaurant. In the village itself, **Posada El Mirador** (☎ 539-20-95; Brasil 1; per person M\$100) offers plain, clean rooms with shared bath, plus meals and great views.

A few kilometers beyond Capulálpam, at Natividad, the **Museo Comunitario La Mina** (☞ 10am-2pm Tue-Sun) re-creates the village's important old gold and silver mine.

Benito Juárez (☎ 951-516-57-76) runs five daily buses to Capulálpam (M\$35, 2½ hours) from Oaxaca's 2nd-class bus station. There is *colectivo* taxi service from Ixtlán.

WESTERN OAXACA

Western Oaxaca is dramatic, mountainous country with a fairly sparse population and some thick forests as well as overfarmed, eroded and deforested areas. The region offers a chance to get well off the beaten track, enjoy hiking, biking or climbing in remote areas and see some outstanding colonial architecture and little-known pre-Hispanic sites. Guided trips are available from Oaxaca with operators such as Tierraventura, Bicicletas Pedro Martínez and Rancho Buenavista (see Activities, p723) and the Museos Comunitarios (boxed text, p742).

Western Oaxaca (along with adjoining bits of Puebla and Guerrero states) is known as the Mixteca, for its Mixtec indigenous inhabitants. It was from here in about the 12th century that Mixtec dominance began to spread to the Valles Centrales. The Mixtecs were famed workers of gold and precious stones, and it's said that Aztec emperor Moctezuma would eat only off fine Mixteca-Puebla ceramics. In pre-Hispanic times the Mixteca was relatively heavily populated, but today it's one of Oaxaca's poorest regions, with very high emigration rates.

You can visit the Mixteca in a long day trip from Oaxaca, but basic hotels or *casas de huéspedes* are available in places such as Nochixtlán, Coixtlahuaca and San Pedro

Teposcolula, while Tlaxiaco and Huajuapán de León have better lodgings. In Huajuapán, a good inexpensive choice is **Hotel Colón** (☎ 953-532-08-17; Colón 10; r M\$250; (P)), a clean, friendly, motel-style place with two floors of small, fan-cooled rooms around a courtyard.

Getting There & Away

Transportadora Excelencia (Map pp720-1; ☎ 951-516-35-78; Díaz Ordaz 304, Oaxaca) runs comfortable large vans to Teposcolula and Tlaxiaco (M\$65, three hours) every half-hour from 6am to 9pm. Other daily departures from Oaxaca city:

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency (daily)
Coixtlahuaca	M\$61	2hr	10 from 2nd-class terminal (Fypsa)
Huajuapán de León	M\$51	3½hr	3 from Sur terminal
Nochixtlán	M\$72	1½hr	6 from 1st-class terminal
	M\$28	2hr	3 from Sur terminal

Santiago Apoala has a bus connection with Nochixtlán on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday (normally leaving Apoala at 8am and starting back from Nochixtlán at noon or 1pm). You can also reach Apoala by taxi or *camioneta* from Nochixtlán.

Buses run from Mexico City's TAPO to several Mixteca towns. Several buses a day head south from Tlaxiaco to Pinotepa Nacional.

SANTIAGO APOALA

pop 200 / elevation 2000m

This small village lies in a stunning green valley flanked by cliffs, 40km north of Nochixtlán, and is a great base for hiking, biking and climbing. In traditional Mixtec belief, this valley was the birthplace of humanity. A community tourism scheme provides accommodation, meals and guides. It's easiest to come with an agency from Oaxaca, though you can arrange an independent visit by contacting the village's **Comité de Turismo** (Tourism Committee; ☎ 55-51519154).

The journey from Nochixtlán, via unpaved roads, can take up to two hours. The scenery around Apoala is spectacular, with the 60m waterfall Cascada Cola de la Serpiente and the 400m-deep Cañón Morelos among the highlights. Trips with agencies from Oaxaca are typically of two days, with a three-hour

walk through the canyon to the village on the first day, and a walk to the waterfall (where you can usually swim) the next day.

The tourism committee has a comfortable three-room guesthouse, the **Parador Turístico** (campsites per 4 people M\$30, s/d/tr/q M\$90/180/250/330, 4-person tent rental M\$120, sleeping bags M\$20). Meals here cost around M\$35 each (you should phone ahead to check availability, and take some supplies in any case); mountain-bike rental is M\$100 per day and each group of five people has to pay a M\$50 access charge. Guides are M\$120 per day for groups of up to six.

YANHUITLÁN, COIXTLAHUACA & SAN PEDRO TEPOSCOLULA

The beautiful 16th-century **Dominican monasteries** in the three Mixteca villages of Yanhuitlán, Coixtlahuaca and San Pedro Teposcolula rank among Mexico's finest architectural treasures. The existence of such large establishments testifies to the size of the indigenous population when the Spanish arrived. The monasteries' restrained stonework fuses medieval, plateresque, renaissance and indigenous styles, and all three have ornate interior decoration, including enormous gilded wooden *retablos* (altarpieces).

Coixtlahuaca, currently undergoing restoration, is perhaps the most interesting of the group. The village is 4km east of the Coixtlahuaca tollbooth on 135D, about 30km north of Nochixtlán. The renaissance-style, white-stone main facade of the church is magnificent, and the graceful, ruined *capilla abierta* (open chapel, used in early Mexican monasteries for preaching to crowds of indigenous people) bears Mixtec religious symbols, most notably serpents and eagles. No admission charge is levied while restoration work proceeds. If you find the church open, you will probably be able to climb to the 2nd floor and roof for views of the rocky landscape. As you approach Coixtlahuaca from Hwy 135D, signs point to **San Miguel Tequixtepec**, 13km away, which has a good community museum with local archaeological finds and crafts in a 16th-century house, and a couple of cheap but quite comfy *cabañas* for visitors.

Yanhuitlán monastery (admission M\$29; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat), built atop an important Mixtec religious site, towers beside Hwy 190, 14km northwest of Nochixtlán. The carving on its north and west facades is beautiful, and inside are valuable works of art. A fine Mudejar ceil-

ing is suspended beneath the choir loft, which has an impressive pipe organ.

About 30km southwest of Yanhuitlán, on Hwy 125, is the relaxed, friendly town of San Pedro Teposcolula, where **Teposcolula monastery** (admission M\$29; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat) has a particularly stately *capilla abierta* with several beautifully carved arches; the adjacent monastic buildings contain a sizable collection of early colonial art. Buildings around the town plaza are painted a lively red and white, and you'll find good accommodation in the clean, tiled rooms of **Hotel Juvi** (☎ 953-518-20-64; 20 de Noviembre 18; s/d/tr M\$180/200/225; 📍), opposite the monastery.

SAN MARTÍN HUAMELÚPAM

☎ 951 / pop 130 / elevation 2235m

The turnoff for San Martín is 22km south of San Pedro Teposcolula, and the village itself lies 1km off Hwy 125. The friendly, tranquil community and its piney surrounds are home to practitioners of traditional medicine renowned for their powers. The **Museo Comunitario Hitalulu** (☎ 510-49-49; Plaza Cívica; admission M\$10; ☎ 9am-6pm) has one wing focusing on the healers and the plants they use. The other wing holds some excellent artifacts from ancient Huamelúpam, a Mixtec ceremonial center of about AD 400 to 600 that is spread around the hills to the north and east of the central Plaza Cívica. Explanations are all in Spanish.

The main restored section of ancient Huamelúpam is 200m east of the plaza, behind a small church. It's built on several levels and includes a ball court, two broad plazas, an altar and a temple whose lower chambers are thought to have been a holding for sacrificial victims. As you pass the church, note the carved figures of skulls that were taken from the site and incorporated into the church's arch and side wall.

TLAXIACO & BEYOND

About 18km south of Huamelúpam on Hwy 125, lively, friendly Tlaxiaco (population 15,000) is the focus of a large rural region, with a huge Saturday **market** around its main plaza. An enormous colonial church with gothic rib vaulting stands beside a second plaza just 100m away. On the main plaza is **Hotel del Portal** (☎ 953-552-01-54; Plaza de la Constitución 2; r M\$210-250; 📍), with clean, quiet rooms out the back and a decent, moderately

priced restaurant in an atmospheric old courtyard in the front.

South of Tlaxiaco, Hwy 125 winds through the remote Sierra Madre del Sur to Pinotepa Nacional, on coastal Hwy 200. The route's major town is Putla, 95km from Tlaxiaco.

OAXACA COAST

Oaxaca's spectacular Pacific coast really has everything any traveler needs for a great time by the ocean. With half a dozen relaxed beach destinations each offering their individual take on the coast's manifold attractions, and the near-empty shoreline between them strung with long, long golden beaches and lagoons full of animal life, it's hard to go wrong. Offshore, you can sail in search of dolphins, turtles and whales, or go diving, snorkeling or sportfishing – not forgetting some of the best surfing swells in North America and plenty of gentler beaches where beginners can learn to surf. In the inland mountains, visit an organic coffee farm, raft white-water rivers or ride horses along jungle trails.

In this tropical climate, the pace of life is never too hectic and the people are welcoming. In the center of the coast sits the small fishing port and beach town of Puerto Ángel. Just to its west are strung three beach villages – Zipolite, San Agustínillo and Mazunte – that are perfect havens for just taking it easy, with a laid-back traveler vibe and plenty of good-value accommodations and food. Further west lies Puerto Escondido, a bigger fishing and market town with a succession of great beaches (including Playa Zicatela, home to the pumping surf of the Mexican Pipeline) and a range of appealing sleeping, eating and nightlife options for all budgets. Toward the eastern end of the coast is Bahías de Huatulco, a modern beach resort along a string of idyllic bays that mostly retains a pleasantly low-key atmosphere.

The spectacular coastline is one of the world's most important sea turtle nesting areas, and the many lagoons behind it are full of birdlife that will delight wildlife lovers. The coastal plain is backed everywhere by dramatic, forested mountains – and the trip down to the coast from Oaxaca city is a spectacular experience in itself, whether you go by bus, car or light plane.

Most of the year's rain here falls between June and September, turning everything

green. From October the landscape starts to dry out, and by March many of the trees are leafless. May is the hottest month. A great information website for this coast is the **Pacific Coast of Mexico** (www.tomzap.com).

PUERTO ESCONDIDO

☎ 954 / pop 30,000

The 'Hidden Port' has blossomed into one of the most enjoyable spots on the whole of Mexico's Pacific Coast. Still very much a fishing and market town, Puerto Escondido is famed above all for the legendary surf break known as the Mexican Pipeline. Along with its surf scene, Puerto has several calm beaches good for swimming, tanning and snorkeling. Offshore you can go diving, sportfishing or looking for turtles, dolphins and even whales. There's a great café and restaurant scene, a spot of good nightlife and live music, and plenty of attractive and well-priced accommodations. Within easy day-trip reach are the coastal lagoons of Manialtepec and Chachahua, teeming with birdlife. Best of all is that development here has remained low-key and on a human scale. Puerto's new smattering of imported sophistication has not dented the laid-back charm of the Mexican fishing port and beach town that it has always been. Leave it off your itinerary at your peril!

Orientation

The center of town rises above the small Bahía Principal. Hwy 200, here called the Carretera Costera, runs across the hill, dividing the upper town – where buses arrive and depart and most locals live and work – from the lower, touristic part. The heart of the lower town, referred to as El Adoquín, is the pedestrianized (from 5pm) section of Av Pérez Gasga (*adoquín* is Spanish for paving stone). The west end of Av Pérez Gasga winds up the slope to meet Hwy 200 at an intersection known as El Crucero.

Playa Zicatela, hub of the surf scene, stretches 3km southeast from the east end of Bahía Principal. Most of the action at its northern end, where there are loads of places to stay and eat. Other accommodations and eateries cluster further down the beach in Colonia Brisas de Zicatela, especially at Punta Zicatela, at its south end.

About 1km west of El Crucero, the area above Playa Carrizalillo has a few places to stay, restaurants and services. The airport is

3km west of the center on the north side of Hwy 200.

Information

BOOKSTORES

PJ's Book Bodega (☎ 541-00-36-56; Calle del Morro s/n, Zicatela) A large collection of new and used books in English, Spanish and other languages.

INTERNET ACCESS

The standard rate is M\$15 per hour.

Copa Cabana Internet (Av Pérez Gasga 705)

Internet Acuario (Calle del Morro s/n, Zicatela) At the front of the Hotel Acuario building; air-conditioned.

LAUNDRY

Lava-Max (☎ 540-16-17; Av Pérez Gasga 405A;

☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-4pm Sun) Self-serve costs M\$13 per washer load (plus M\$8 for detergent and M\$14 for dryer); complete wash and dry service costs M\$10 per kg.

MEDIA

El Sol de la Costa (www.elsoldelacosta.com) Free monthly paper in Spanish and English, full of information about what's on and what to do.

MEDICAL SERVICES

English-speaking GP **Dr Mario de Alba** (☎ 954-5884018) can normally be contacted through **Farmacia San Antonio** (Av Pérez Gasga s/n).

MONEY

Banks and *casas de cambio* will generally exchange US-dollar traveler's checks and cash US dollars and euros.

Banamex (Av Pérez Gasga s/n; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) Currency exchange & ATM.

HSBC (Calle 1 Norte btwn Calles 2 & 3 Pte; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat) One of several banks offering currency exchange in the upper part of town.

HSBC ATMs Adoquín (Av Pérez Gasga s/n); Zicatela (Calle del Morro s/n)

Money Exchange (Av Pérez Gasga 905; ☎ 10am-3pm & 5:30-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) You can exchange cash US or Canadian dollars, euros, pounds sterling, Swiss francs or yen here, plus US- or Canadian-dollar travelers checks.

Money Exchange (Calle del Morro s/n, Zicatela; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon, Tue, Thu-Sat, 8am-6pm Wed, 9am-5pm Sun) At the front of Hotel Acuario, this *casa de cambio* changes euros and Canadian and US dollars in cash or traveler's checks.

TELEPHONE & FAX

You'll find Telmex card phones and a couple of telephone *casetas* on the Adoquín, and

more card phones along Calle del Morro on Zicatela. **Cyberplaya** (Calle del Morro s/n, Zicatela) offers cheap long-distance and international phone calls.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist information kiosk (☎ 582-11-86; ginain puerto@yahoo.com; cnr Av Pérez Gasga & Marina Nacional; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Conveniently placed at the west end of El Adoquín. Gina Machorro, the energetic, multilingual information officer usually found here, happily answers your every question.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Viajes Dimar (www.viajesdimar.com) Adoquín (☎ 582-02-59; Av Pérez Gasga 905B; ☎ 8am-9:30pm); Zicatela (☎ 582-23-05; Calle del Morro s/n; ☎ 8am-2pm & 6-9pm) You can buy air and bus tickets, rent cars and book excursions here.

Dangers & Annoyances

To minimize any risks, avoid isolated or empty places and stick to well-lit areas at night (or use taxis). Some residents say the greatest danger on the beach at night is the local cops: drinking, peeing or even making out beachside can invite a shakedown.

Beaches

PLAYA ZICATELA

Long, straight Zicatela is Puerto's happening beach, with enticing cafés, restaurants and accommodations as well as the waves of the legendary Mexican Pipeline, which test the mettle of experienced surfers from far and wide.

Nonsurfers beware: the Zicatela waters have a lethal undertow and are definitely not safe for the boardless. Lifeguards rescue several careless people most months (their base, the Cuartel Salvavidas, is in front of Restaurante El Jardín).

BAHÍA PRINCIPAL

The central beach is long enough to accommodate restaurants at its west end, a fishing fleet in its center (Playa Principal), and sun worshipers and young body-boarders at its east end (called Playa Marinero). Pelicans wing in inches above the waves, boats bob on the swell, and a few hawkers wander up and down. The smelly water sometimes entering the bay from inaptly named Laguna Agua Dulce will put you off dipping away from Playa Marinero.

BAHÍA PUERTO ANGELITO

The sheltered bay of Puerto Angelito, about 1km west of Bahía Principal (a 20- to 30-minute walk from El Adoquín), has two small-ish beaches. The western one, Playa Angelito, has lots of *comedores* and is very busy with Mexican families at weekends and holidays. Playa Manzanillo, the eastern one, is inaccessible to vehicles but can still get crowded at weekends.

PLAYA CARRIZALILLO

Just west of Puerto Angelito, small Carrizalillo beach is in a rockier cove reached by a stairway of about 170 steps. It's OK for swimming, snorkeling, body-boarding and surfing, and has a bar with a few *palapas* (thatched-roof shelters).

Activities

SURFING

Puerto Escondido has surfable waves most days of the year. The Pipeline near the north end of Playa Zicatela is a world-class beach break, normally at its biggest (it can reach 12m or more) between May and July. Even when the Pipeline is flat, the point break down at Punta Zicatela works almost day in, day out. Playa Carrizalillo has good beginners' waves. Several shops and schools offer surfing lessons (held wherever the waves are suitably small) or rent boards. Some teachers make a 'no stand, no pay' promise. Long- or short-board rental is typically M\$100/30 per day/hour; body boards with fins are normally M\$50/20 per day/hour.

Oasis Surf Academy (☎ 104-23-30; www.oasisurf factory.com; Blvd Juárez 2; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat), in the Rinconada area above Playa Carrizalillo, offers classes of 1½ to two hours with experienced and qualified local teachers, for M\$300. It's associated with Oasis Surf Factory, run by local pro surfer and board maker Roger Ramírez.

Another good rental and tuition place is **Central Surf** (☎ 582-22-85; www.centuralsurfshop.com; Calle del Morro s/n, Zicatela; 2-hr class M\$600), where classes are given by brothers René and David Salinas, from a well-known local surfing family.

Further classes for around M\$300 to M\$350 per hour are offered by **Carrisurf** (☎ 954-1005638; Blvd Juárez 14), near Playa Carrizalillo, and **Delapoint Surf Shop** (☎ 582-26-69, 954-5888058) at Punta Zicatela. Delapoint rents boards too, as do **Surface** (☎ 954-1091405; Bajada de las Brisas s/n; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun), **Silver Surf** (Calle del Morro s/n)

PUERTO ESCONDIDO



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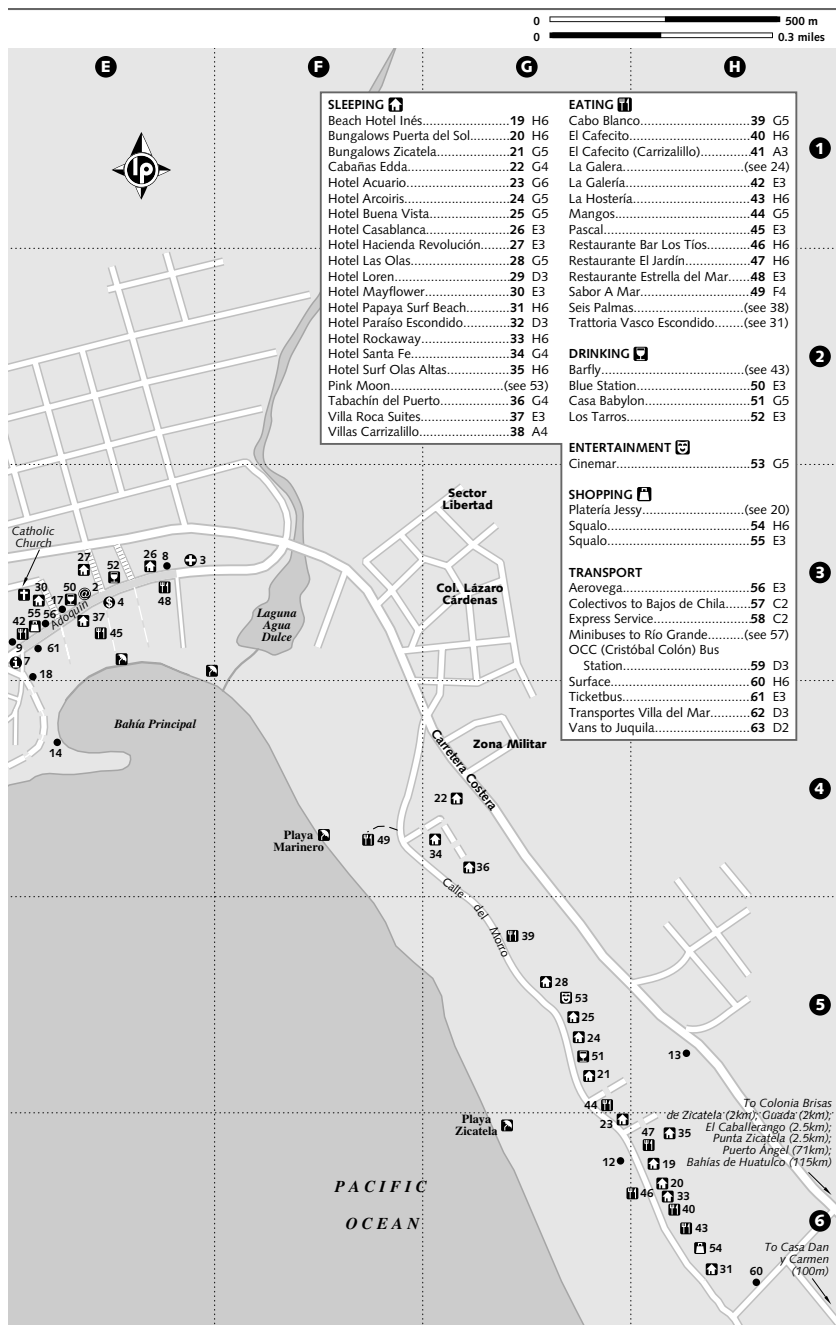
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and **PJ's Book Bodega** (☎ 541-00-36-56; Calle del Morro s/n), all on Zicatela. Surface has board storage facilities too.

TURTLE- & DOLPHIN-SPOTTING

Lanchas (fast, open, outboard boats) will take groups of four people out for an hour's turtle-spotting (and, in winter, sometimes dolphin-spotting) for around M\$300. *Lancha* owners have formed the **Sociedad Cooperativa Turística Nueva Punta Escondido** (☎ 582-16-78; <http://tomzap.com/pe-coop.html>) and you can contact them at Restaurant El Pescador or the *lancha* kiosk, both at the west end of Bahía Principal. Boats also wait at Playa Angelito. Omar Ramírez of **Omar Sportfishing** (☎ 954-5594406; <http://tomzap.com/omar.html>; Playa Angelito) specializes in dolphin and even whale-spotting trips, at M\$1500 for up to four people for four hours. There's an 80% to 90% chance of seeing dolphins from October to March.

FISHING

Local fishers will take two to four people fishing for marlin and sailfish for three hours for M\$900. Contact boat owners as for turtle-spotting trips. The price includes cooking some of the catch for you at one of the town's seafood restaurants.

DIVING & SNORKELING

You can dive year-round here. Average visibility is around 10m, rising to as much as 30m between May and August. The reefs are of volcanic rock, with plenty of marine life including big schools of fish, spotted eagle rays, sting rays and turtles. Most dive sites are within a 15-minute boat ride of town. Puerto has three dive outfits, all offering two-tank dives for around M\$650 and a variety of courses including the two-day Discover Scuba (M\$750 to M\$850):

Puerto Dive Center (☎ 954-1027767; www.puerto-divecenter.com; Andador Libertad) American owned, with its shop just off the Adoquín; offers night dives for M\$500 and snorkel trips; also conducts a wide range of NAUI and PADI courses.

Aventura Submarina (☎ 582-23-53; asubmarina@hotmail.com; Av Pérez Gasga 601A) PADI instructor Jorge Pérez Bravo has 30 years' experience in local waters.

Deep Blue Dive (☎ 582-07-92; lorenzo@escondido.com.mx; Calle del Morro s/n, Zicatela) Based in Beach Hotel Inés; the instructor here is also PADI-certified.

Capitán Francisco Prado (☎ 954-5592059) has a booth on Playa Manzanillo and specializes

in snorkeling day trips to Roca Blanca, an offshore islet about 30km northwest of PE, at M\$1600 for up to four people. You can lunch at one of the rustic *comedores* on the nearby beach.

HORSEBACK RIDING

The well-run stable **El Caballerango** (☎ 582-34-60; Nayarit 334, Colonia Brisas de Zicatela; 1/2/3hr rides M\$200/300/350) offers morning and evening rides to rivers and beaches south of town; a little riding experience is advisable.

For a one-hour sunset beach ride (M\$120), just wait for the guys to appear with horses on Playa Zicatela at 5pm.

Courses

Learning Spanish is increasingly popular here. Schools generally accept students starting any day of the week and for any length of time, in private or small-group classes, and offer optional homestay accommodation for M\$1250 to M\$1500 per week, including at least some meals.

Instituto de Lenguajes Puerto Escondido (☎ 582-20-55; www.puertoescondido.com; Carretera Costera, Zicatela; group/private classes per person per hr M\$80/120) Offers good language classes taught by native Spanish speakers, with an emphasis on conversation skills, plus a variety of complementary activities, including surfing, cooking and salsa lessons.

Oasis Language School (☎ 104-23-30; www.oasis-languageschool.com; Blvd Juárez 2; 2hr private class M\$150) Offers a variety of levels, mostly with one-to-one tuition. Playa Carrizalillo is nearby, and Oasis Surf Academy is next door, so you can easily double-task here!

Tours

Rutas de Aventura (☎ 582-01-70, 954-1082074; www.rutasdeaventura.com.mx; Hotel Santa Fe, cnr Blvd Zicatela & Calle del Morro) offers flexible active trips with an emphasis on sustainability and well-informed, English-speaking guides. Possibilities include early morning kayaking and bird-watching at Laguna Manialtepec (p762) and visits to **Finca Las Nieves** (www.fincalasnieves.com.mx), an organic coffee plantation in the lush inland hills near San Juan Lachao, where you can bike, hike, watch birds, learn about coffee production and the local ecosystem, and sleep in comfortable rooms and bungalows.

Viajes Dimar (p753) does a good range of day trips with English-speaking guides for M\$300 to M\$500 per person (excluding meals; minimum two or four people).

Festivals & Events

Several surf contests are held most years at Playa Zicatela. In recent years the surf event of ESPN's X Games (the 'Olympics' of extreme sports) has happened here in July, and the Association of Professional Towsurfers has staged tow-in events when the Pipeline is at its biggest (12m-plus) between May and July. A longboard contest organized by Puerto's celebrated masked surfer, Ángel Salinas, usually happens in late September or early October – as does a kids' surf festival on Playa Carrizalillo in May or June.

Puerto Blues Some top Canadian and US blues musicians hit Puerto in January and February for this event, usually playing at Club de Playa Belmar on Zicatela with an admission charge of M\$60.

Fiestas de Noviembre These last all November with many varied events including concerts by big-name Mexican musical acts, the four-day Festival Costeño de la Danza (a fiesta of Oaxaca coastal dance), an international sailfish contest (www.pescandopuertoescondido.com) and usually the PXM International Surf Tournament, which is Mexico's No 1 regular surf competition. Program information is available at www.elsoldelacosta.com and www.oaxaca.travel.

Sleeping

The two main accommodation zones are the central Av Pérez Gasga area and the surf beach of Playa Zicatela. Zicatela has overall the most appealing surroundings, with great places to eat as well as sleep. The only drawback is that you can't swim there.

Rates given here are those that apply most commonly at each place. Some hotels raise their prices significantly during the Christmas–New Year and Easter holidays (when prices can as much as double) and/or for a few weeks in July and August. Budget places are more likely to stick with the same prices year round.

In the peak seasons the most popular places will often be full, especially on Zicatela. Your best bet, if you haven't reserved ahead, is to ask about 9am or 10am.

BUDGET

Cabañas Edda (☎ 582-23-22; Carretera Costera s/n; camping per person M\$30, cabañas s/d M\$50/100, with private bathroom M\$75/150; (P)) Though it's not actually a beach place, Edda's extensive grounds and basic lodgings above Zicatela are well kept, and all guests can use the common kitchen and laundry. All rooms have fans and

screens or nets. Some units are rather close to the highway.

Hostal Buena Onda (☎ 582-16-63; buenaondazicatela@hotmail.com; Av Cárdenas 777; camping or hammock per person M\$40, dm M\$70, r M\$130, cabañas M\$150) Down in the Punta Zicatela area, the Buena Onda is one of Puerto's most popular hostels. It's set about a palm-shaded central courtyard, with a beachfront *palapa* hangout area. The 10 *cabañas* are equipped with mosquito nets and hammocks, and there are adequate bathrooms and kitchen.

ourpick Casa de Dan y Carmen (☎ 582-27-60; www.casadanycarmen.com; Jacaranda 14, Colonia Santa María; r M\$200-400; (P) (☎) (📺)) This excellent place offers 13 self-contained units of varying size, with fully equipped kitchens, terraces and attractively tiled bathrooms. Everything is set around verdant patios and gardens, and there's a terrific extra-long lap pool as well as a terrace with a perfect view of the Zicatela surf. Dan and Carmen's is up the paved street just south of Hotel Papaya Surf Beach, then right across a small bridge. Weekly and monthly rates are available, and reservations are essential because it's usually full.

ourpick Hotel Buena Vista (☎ 582-14-74; www.prodigyweb.net.mx/buenavista101; Calle del Morro s/n; r M\$200, with air-con or kitchen M\$300, with air-con & kitchen M\$350; (📺)) The well-built Buena Vista, set above Playa Zicatela and reached by a steep flight of steps up from Calle del Morro, is an excellent value. Rooms are not fancy but are big and spotlessly clean, all with two beds, mosquito screens or nets, and hot-water bathroom. And many have breezy balconies, some with great views.

Hotel Rockaway (☎ 582-06-68; www.hotelrockaway.com; Calle del Morro s/n; s/d cabaña M\$120/200, air-con M\$300/400; (P) (📺) (📺)) A long-time popular surfers' haunt run by the friendly Rock, the Rockaway provides some of Zicatela's most economical lodgings. Its solid wood-and-thatch *cabañas* have fan and bathroom and can hold four people. The air-con rooms, with cable TV, will hold up to six. Everything is set around a spacious courtyard with pool and bar.

Hotel Mayflower (☎ 582-03-67; www.hotelmayflower.net; Andador Libertad s/n; dm/s/d/tr/q M\$90/220/300/360/400; (📺)) The popular and friendly Mayflower, beside a flight of steps leading up from El Adoquín, is a sociable hotel-cum-hostel and all kept very clean.

The nine fan-cooled dorms each hold four to seven people (in beds and bunks), and there are 16 attractive private rooms with bathrooms and small balconies. Rates include use of a kitchen with fridge and microwave. There are semi-open sitting areas, a billiard table, lockers and luggage storage facilities. An HI card brings a 10% discount.

Other recommended Zicatela budget places:

Pink Moon (☎ 954-1036341; <http://zicatela.org/luna rosa>; Calle del Morro s/n; dm M\$100, r M\$250) Women-only hostel with good terrace areas.

Hotel Papaya Surf Beach (☎ 582-11-68; www.papayasurf.com; Calle del Morro s/n; s/d with fan M\$150/250, air-con M\$250/350; ☎ ☎) Good-value Italian-run spot.

Hotel Las Olas (☎ 582-09-19; www.hotel-lasolas.com; Calle del Morro s/n; d M\$250-350; ☎) Most rooms have balconies overlooking the beach.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Casablanca (☎ 582-01-68; www.ptohcasablanca.com; Av Pérez Gasga 905; s/d/tr/q M\$280/400/500/600; ☎ ☎) The friendly Casablanca is right at the heart of things on the inland side of El Adoquín, and it fills up quickly. It has a small pool and 21 large, clean, tile-floored rooms with fan and cable TV. Some have fridges; the best are streetside with balconies.

Hotel Loren (☎ 582-00-57; fax 582-05-91; Av Pérez Gasga 507; d/tr/q with fan M\$400/500/600, with air-con M\$500/600/700; ☎ ☎) A minute uphill from El Adoquín, this hotel is painted lobster and sky-blue outside, and violet and pink inside (maybe that's what lobsters' insides are like). It's a friendly place with bare, spacious rooms, all equipped with two or three (somewhat springy) double beds, cable TV and balconies; some catch a sea view. There's a nice pool, and it's a fair value.

Hotel Hacienda Revolución (☎ /fax 582-18-18; www.haciendarevolucion.com; Andador Revolución 21; r/casita M\$400/500) On a flight of steps leading up from El Adoquín, this Revolution-themed spot has some 15 colorful accommodations facing a garden-courtyard with a central fountain. Most have a patio and hammock.

Bungalows Puerta del Sol (☎ 582-29-22; bungalowspuertadelsol@hotmail.com; Calle del Morro s/n; d M\$300-650; ☎ ☎) This friendly, very clean Zicatela place has a small pool and a communal kitchen either side of a nice green courtyard; and 16 spacious, solid rooms with balcony, hammock and cheerful art. Weekly and monthly rates available.

ourpick Beach Hotel Inés (☎ /fax 582-07-92; www.hotelines.com; Calle del Morro s/n; r M\$250-1200; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) German-run Inés has a wide range of bright, cheerful *cabañas*, rooms, apartments and suites. All have safes, good mosquito screens and fans, most have wi-fi, and some come with kitchens or air-con. Lovely art and *artesanías* abound, and other pluses include a sauna, sundeck, spa and a relaxed, shaded pool area with a café serving good food. You can arrange horseback riding and scuba here as well.

Bungalows Zicatela (☎ 582-07-98; www.bungalowszicatela.com.mx; Calle del Morro s/n; s/d M\$300/400, r with air-con M\$600; ☎ ☎) Straightforward Zicatela has a good and sociable pool area, and all of its 40-odd accommodations are a good size, solidly built and with good beds and bathrooms and mosquito-netted windows. Most have cable TV.

Hotel Acuario (☎ /fax 582-10-27; www.hotelbungalowsacuariozicatela.com.mx; Calle del Morro s/n; s M\$300-750, d M\$350-800; ☎ ☎ ☎) The 30 or so accommodations here range from drab rooms to wooden *cabañas* and spacious upstairs suites with terrace and Zicatela beach view. Some have air-con, some have kitchenettes and all share a pleasant central swimming pool. Decor is tired, but it's clean and well located.

Villa Roca Suites (☎ 582-35-25; www.villaroca.mx.vg; Av Pérez Gasga 602; d/tr/q M\$600/800/900; ☎) A pleasing mix of Mexican artifacts and tasteful color-schemes mark out this small hotel with the best rooms on El Adoquín. There are just six rooms, all with air-con, TV and balcony – the two top-floor rooms enjoy good sea views.

Hotel Paraíso Escondido (☎ 582-04-44; www.hotelpe.com; Unión 10; r M\$650, ste M\$750; ☎ ☎) Rambling, neocolonial Paraíso is one of Puerto's most original lodgings, decorated with stained glass, pretty *artesanías* and curious stone sculptures. There's an attractive bar-pool area plus 20 rooms with good bathrooms and small terraces – plus five new top-floor suites that enjoy kitchen use and the best bay views.

ourpick Tabachín del Puerto (☎ 582-11-79; www.tabachin.com.mx; behind Hotel Santa Fe, Zicatela; d incl breakfast US\$65-85, per additional person M\$15; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Tabachín's gracious and erudite owner offers six studio-rooms in varying sizes (including enormous) and interesting, tasteful styles (folksy to regency), all of them recently renovated. All have kitchen, TV, air-conditioning, phone, safe, balcony access and

views of varying expansiveness. The excellent breakfasts, served from 8am to 11am, include good vegetarian choices and organically grown coffee and fruits from the owner's farm in Nopala. They're open to nonguests as well (dishes M\$45 to M\$80) and are always lively occasions.

Hotel Arcoiris (☎ /fax 582-04-32; www.oaxaca-mio.com/arcoiris.htm; Calle del Morro s/n; r M\$700-900, tr M\$750-950, q M\$800-1000; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) Attractive, neocolonial Arcoiris is a perennial favorite. Most of its 35 big, clean rooms have balconies or terraces looking straight out to the surf, and there's a large pool plus a good, breezy, upstairs restaurant-bar. Most rooms have two double beds and terraces or balconies, and some have a kitchen.

TOP END

Hotel Santa Fe (☎ /fax 582-01-70, 800-7127057, in the US 888-649-6407; www.hotelsantafe.com.mx; cnr Blvd Zicatela & Calle del Morro; s/d US\$110/126, junior ste US\$162; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) Neocolonial Santa Fe has more than 60 well-designed rooms set around two good pools in palm-shaded garden courtyards. Rooms vary in size and view, but all have air-con, attractive colonial-ranch-style furnishings and safes. It's a well-run hotel with a good, mainly vegetarian restaurant.

Hotel Surf Olas Altas (☎ 582-23-15; ☎ /fax 582-00-94; www.surfolasaltas.com.mx; Calle del Morro 310; r M\$1200-1450; P ✂️ ♻️ 🚰 🚿) This modern, three-storey, 61-room Zicatela hotel has less character than some smaller places, but the rooms are spotless and ample, and set well back from the street. Most have two double beds, coffee-maker, cable TV – and a book of the Buddha's teachings for you to ponder.

Villas Carrizalillo (☎ 582-17-35; www.villascarrizalillo.com; Av Carrizalillo 125, Carrizalillo; apt US\$147-230; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) Sublimely perched on the cliffs above the Playa Carrizalillo, Villas Carrizalillo has lovely air-conditioned apartments for two to six people, nearly all with fully equipped kitchens and private terraces. A path goes directly down to Playa Carrizalillo, and the hotel has boards, bikes and snorkel gear for rent. Discounts are available if you pay cash. The excellent Seis Palmas restaurant is here too.

Eating

Puerto Escondido has a great selection of eateries, from solidly satisfying Mexican/international places to a handful of enticing new fusion eateries. You'll eat some of the freshest

fish and seafood you've ever had, and most places are at least partly open-air. There is also some good vegetarian fare.

PLAYAS ZICATELA & MARINERO

Hostal A La Casa (☎ 954-5443322; Av Cárdenas; dishes M\$30-60) The best meals at Punta Zicatela are found at this hostel right next door to Hostal Buena Onda. The fare is a well-priced Italian–Mexican mix.

our pick El Cafecito (☎ 582-05-16; Calle del Morro s/n; breakfast M\$28-40, lunch & dinner dishes M\$30-80, cakes & pastries M\$12-20; ☎ 6am-10pm) It sometimes seems as if the whole town is here for breakfast, and with good reason as the combinations (Mexican and international) are tasty and filling, the Zicatela view great and the coffee cups bottomless. The Cafecito also serves up great cinnamon rolls, carrot cake and juices, and tasty lunch and dinner dishes from vegetarian lasagne to Mexican *antojitos*.

Restaurante Bar Los Tíos (☎ 582-28-79; Calle del Morro s/n; dishes M\$30-90; ☎ 9am-10pm Wed-Mon) Right on Zicatela beach, 'the Uncles' serve great *licuados* and fresh juices to go with their tasty egg dishes, *antojitos* and seafood. It's very relaxed and popular with locals.

Restaurante El Jardín (☎ 582-23-15; Calle del Morro s/n; dishes M\$45-95; ☎ 8am-10:30pm; ♻️) This *palapa* restaurant serves very good vegetarian dishes, from *gado-gado* (vegetables in peanut sauce) and many salad varieties to tempeh and tofu offerings. The menu also includes plenty of seafood, pizzas and pasta, and a good, long juice list.

Mangos (Calle del Morro s/n; dishes M\$45-100; ☎ 7am-midnight; ♻️) Palm-roofed Mangos is good for anything from breakfast combinations (M\$25 to M\$45) to smoothies to meat or fish meals. Dishes are well prepared and the service friendly.

Trattoria Vasco Escondido (Calle del Morro s/n; mains M\$50-120; ☎ 9am-11pm) Enjoy a friendly welcome and terrific Italian and Mexican fare prepared by your Italian host Vasco at this little spot in front of Hotel Papaya Surf Beach.

La Hostería (☎ 582-00-05; Calle del Morro s/n; mains M\$50-150; ☎ 8am-12:30am; ♻️) The Hostería is an Italian labor of love, from its gleaming kitchen (with computerized wood-fired pizza oven) to the Talavera-tiled bathrooms. A broad selection of delicious Italian, Mexican and international dishes – including many veggie selections – is paired with a great wine list, and the espresso is one of the best in town.

La Galera (☎ 582-04-32; Hotel Arcoiris, Calle del Morro s/n; mains M\$70-110, menú del día M\$60) The breezy upstairs restaurant at Hotel Arcoiris is always a good place to eat, with tasty mixed Mexican and international fare. Main dishes focus on fish and meat, but the three-course *menú del día* has vegetarian options.

Cabo Blanco (☎ 582-03-37; Calle del Morro s/n; mains M\$60-170) A great Zicatela spot for prawns, fish steak or *arrachera*, cooked in the open, street-side kitchen – or burgers or *tlayudas* for tighter budgets. It has light and dark beers on tap, too.

ourpick Guadua (☎ 954-1079524; www.guadua.com.mx; Tamaulipas s/n, Colonia Brisas de Zicatela; mains M\$75-150; ☎ 1-11pm Tue-Sun; (V)) There's nothing quite like Guadua on the Oaxaca coast. A solid wooden deck sits about halfway along Zicatela beach, its thick *palapa* roof supported by bamboo poles. The delicious and attractively presented food is a Pacific-Mediterranean-Asian-Middle Eastern fusion with dishes like shrimp coconut curry, cashew couscous and seared tuna with teriyaki sauce. Guadua is also a hip beach lounge, with a good bar, music from bossa nova to dub to electronica (live Wednesday to Saturday evenings), and quirkily constructed loungers out on the sands in front. And it recycles waste water and trash.

Sabor a Mar (Playa Marinero; mains M\$80-130; ☎ 8am-11pm) Tucked under the rocks at the southeast end of Playa Marinero, this little al fresco spot serves probably the best seafood in town.

The airy restaurant at Hotel Santa Fe (p759) looks down on the west end of the Pipeline. Sink into a comfy leather chair and choose from the list of inspired vegetarian and vegan (M\$55 to M\$95) or seafood (M\$100 to M\$185) meals. Service is excellent.

AV PÉREZ GASGA

Restaurante Estrella del Mar (mains M\$50-110; ☎ 8am-11pm) The pick of the smattering of Mexican restaurants on El Adoquín itself, with good seafood cocktails and *antojitos* as well as seafood main dishes.

La Galería (☎ 582-20-39; mains M\$60-120) At the west end of El Adoquín, La Galería is one of Puerto's best Italian spots, with art on the walls and tasty fare on the tables. The pizza and home-made pasta dishes are original and flavorful, and the jumbo mixed green salad (M\$49) is a treat.

ourpick Pascal (☎ 954-1030668; Playa Principal; mains M\$60-150; ☎ 6pm-midnight) Right under the

palms on the Playa Principal sands, Pascal from France prepares original and delicious seafood, meat and home-made pasta dishes with rare flair. You might go for the ravioli with ham, peanuts and ricotta, or the shrimp with orange and tequila. There's a choice of tasty sauces for all pasta dishes, and the seafood is fresh as can be. Your visit might coincide with the occasional live music or trapeze entertainment.

CARRIZALILLO

El Cafecito (☎ 582-34-65; Local 10-11, Blvd Juárez; ☎ 6am-9pm Mon-Sat, 6am-6pm Sun) The Cafecito's Carrizalillo branch has the same great menu as the Zicatela one (p759) even if it can't match the ambience.

Seis Palmas (☎ 582-09-95; Villas Carrizalillo, Av Carrizalillo 125; mains M\$70-140; ☎ 8am-11pm Fri-Wed) The fantastic ocean sunsets from this Carrizalillo cliff-top perch are the perfect backdrop for the inventive and delicious Californian-Oaxacan dishes arriving at your table. You might start with green-bean tempura with mustard, and follow it with a grilled whole snapper with grilled veggies and caramelized onions.

Drinking

Casa Babylon (Calle del Morro s/n; ☎ 10:30am-2pm & 8pm-late) This cool little Zicatela travelers' bar has a great Mexican mask collection and a big selection of books to exchange. There's live music or a DJ several nights a week. The owner prides herself on her *mojitos* and *caipirinhas*.

Barfly (Calle del Morro s/n; ☎ from 10pm) The rooftop bar above La Hostería restaurant, with video screens, plenty of drink mixes and good music under the stars, draws a lively crowd every night.

Rival drinking dens with loud music on El Adoquín are **Blue Station**, with its upstairs balcony, and **Los Tarros**. They may hold happy hours from 9pm to 10pm, but don't expect much action before 11pm.

Entertainment

LIVE MUSIC

Puerto has a good live music scene combining the talents of locals and expats with sounds ranging from salsa and Mexican folk to jazz, rock and blues. There's usually a band on somewhere several nights a week at bars and restaurants such as Casa Babylon, Pascal, La Galería, Seis Palmas, Guadua and Kahlo at

Punta Zicatela. The scene tends to be busiest from around Christmas to March when visiting musicians from the US, Canada and Europe add their input. Look out especially for gigs by local Latin singer Mayca, who did much of the music in the film *Puerto Escondido*, and the Latin-rock-blues band La Viuda de Romero.

CINEMA

Cinemar (Calle del Morro s/n; admission with popcorn & drink M\$50; 🎬 films 7 & 9pm) This air-conditioned mini-cinema, in the PJ's Book Bodega building, shows films ranging from the best Mexican movies to latest general releases in Spanish and English.

La Hostería (Calle del Morro s/n; admission free; 🕒 6pm) The Hostería restaurant shows the 1993 Italian travel-and-crime movie *Puerto Escondido* nightly. This film (directed by Gabriele Salvatores) has attracted thousands of Italians and others to Puerto and is worth seeing, even if it makes the town seem more remote than it really is.

Shopping

The Adoquín has a couple of interesting surfwear, jewelry and craft shops among its tacky souvenir stores. On Zicatela, several surf shops sell Brazilian and Mexican surf fashions and a few boards. Mexican company **Squalo** (www.squalo.com) has shops on El Adoquín and Calle del Morro with some funky home-grown Mexican surf designs. **Platería Jessy** (☎ 954-1004606; Calle del Morro s/n) has the best designs in silver.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aerotucán (☎ 582-34-61; airport) and **Aerovega** (☎ 582-01-51; Av Pérez Gasga 113; 🕒 9:30am-2pm & 5:30-8pm Mon-Sat) fly to/from Oaxaca – see p734 for details. **Click Mexicana** (☎ 800-112-54-25; www.click.com.mx) flies nonstop to and from Mexico City daily. **Magnicharters** (☎ 800-201-14-04; www.magnicharters.com.mx) flies to/from Mexico City at least twice a week, sometimes via Huatulco.

BUS & VAN

The **OCC bus terminal** (☎ 582-10-73; Carretera Costera btwn Av Oaxaca & 1 Poniente), just west of El Crucero, is used by OCC 1st-class and Sur 2nd-class services. Other long-distance bus lines, including Estrella Blanca (EB) and Turistar, with deluxe and 1st-class services, use the

Central Camionera (☎ 582-00-86), in the upper part of town between 3 and 4 Poniente, north of 10 Norte. You can buy OCC, Sur, Estrella Blanca and Turistar tickets at **Ticketbus** (☎ 800-702-80-00; www.ticketbus.com.mx; Av Pérez Gasga; 🕒 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Fri). Viajes Dimar (p753) sells tickets to Oaxaca and Mexico City.

Keep an eye on your belongings going to or from Acapulco or Oaxaca, and get a ticket for any bags placed in the baggage hold.

Oaxaca

The most convenient way of traveling to Oaxaca is in the comfortable van service via Hwy 131 (M\$130, six hours), offered by at least two companies. **Express Service** (☎ 582-08-68; Hotel Luz del Ángel, cnr 1 norte & Av Oaxaca) departs nine times daily, 6am to 10pm; and **Transportes Villa del Mar** (☎ 954-1033134; Av Hidalgo btwn Av Oaxaca & 1 Poniente) goes eight times between 5am and 6:30pm. Second-class La Solteca and Estrella Roja buses (M\$110, seven hours) from the Central Camionera take the same route, departing four times between 7 and 10:45am and eight times between 9:30 and 11pm. OCC's 1st-class buses (M\$242, 10 hours, three daily) take a long route via Salina Cruz and Hwy 190.

Other Destinations

For Mexico City, the Estrella Blanca and Turistar services via the outskirts of Acapulco are much quicker than OCC, which goes via Salina Cruz. Daily bus departures include the following:

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency (daily)
Acapulco	M\$238-249	8hr	10 (EB & Turistar)
Bahías de Huatulco	M\$82	2½hr	9 (EB & Turistar)
	M\$35-76	2½-3hr	34 from OCC terminal
Mexico City (Terminal Sur or Norte)	M\$493-667	12hr	5 6:30-8:30pm (EB & Turistar)
	M\$604	18hr	2 (OCC)
Pochutla	M\$53	1½hr	9 (EB & Turistar)
	M\$25-46	1½hr	34 from OCC terminal
San Cristóbal de las Casas	M\$396	11½-13hr	at 6:30 & 9:30pm (OCC)
Tehuantepec	M\$170	5½hr	4 (OCC)
Tuxtla Gutiérrez	M\$344	12hr	at 6:30 & 9:30pm (OCC)

THE OAXACA WETLANDS NETWORK

The **Red de los Humedales de la Costa de Oaxaca** (Oaxaca Coast Wetlands Network; www.humedalesoaxaca.org.mx) is a young grouping of 20 community organizations spread right along the lagoon- and estuary-studded Oaxaca coast that are working to conserve the coastal wetlands and promote sustainable development. The coast has scores of turtle-nesting beaches, is a key bird habitat and is also home to diverse other wildlife including river crocodiles and white-tailed deer. The network's objectives include reforestation, development of crafts and ecological products, protection of turtles and other wildlife, and community tourism. There are opportunities for volunteer work at some of the communities.

The network's membership includes groups in places already frequented by tourists, such as Bahía San Agustín (p778), La Ventanilla (p774), Zapotalito (opposite) and Chacahua (p764), but also organizations that can offer new experiences. **Escobilla** village, between Puerto Escondido and Mazunte, has built comfortable new *cabañas* and is launching a scheme to guide visitors to nearby Playa Escobilla for the mass arrivals of olive ridley turtles there. Around 700,000 olive ridleys come ashore on Playa Escobilla in several massive waves between May and January each year.

For further information ask at the Puerto Escondido tourist information kiosk (p753), or try the Wetlands Network's **office** (☎ /fax 954-582-35-40; 5 Norte 207) in Puerto Escondido.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Budget (☎ 582-03-12; Blvd Juárez), opposite the tourist office, charges walk-ins almost M\$1000 a day for its cheapest cars, with unlimited kilometers and insurance. You may get better rates reserving by internet. **Viajes Dimar** (p753) and **Hotel Santa Fe** (p759) have cars from around M\$700 for a day.

Getting Around

Ticket taxis from the airport (M\$35 per person) will drop you anywhere in town. You might find a whole cab for a similar price on the main road outside the airport. Taxis from the Central Camionera cost M\$20 to El Adoquín or M\$22 to Zicatela.

If you don't want to walk between the central Av Pérez Gasga–Bahía Principal area and the outlying beaches, taxis are the only available transportation – they wait at each end of El Adoquín. The standard fare to or from Playa Zicatela is M\$25.

There are *colectivo* taxis (M\$4) and microbuses (M\$3) to Brisas de Zicatela and Punta Zicatela. They are marked 'Zicatela' and run frequently from the Mercado Benito Juárez, down 3 Poniente then east along the Carretera Costera.

Surface (☎ 954-1091405; Bajada de las Brisas s/n; ☎ 11am–6pm Tue–Sun), just off Calle del Morro on Zicatela, rents mountain bikes for M\$100 per day and gearless beach cruiser bikes for M\$60 per day. It's also an open-air café–lounge with free wi-fi.

WEST OF PUERTO ESCONDIDO

Bajos de Chila

The Mixtec ball game of *pelota mixteca* – a five-a-side team sport descended from the pre-Hispanic ritual ball game – is played every weekend in the village of Bajos de Chila, 10km west of Puerto Escondido along Hwy 200. Games usually begin at 5pm on Saturday or Sunday – check with the tourist information kiosk in Puerto Escondido – and the playing field, called the *patio* or *pasador*, is easy to find in the village (though you'll probably notice a lot more soccer being played than *pelota*). *Colectivos* to Bajos de Chila (M\$5, 15 minutes) leave from the corner of Calles 2 Nte and 3 Pte in Puerto Escondido every 30 minutes. For more on the ball game, see the boxed text on p73.

Laguna Manialtepec

This 6km-long lagoon, beginning 14km west of Puerto Escondido along Hwy 200, is a paradise for bird enthusiasts and a fascinating place for anyone interested in nature. Among others, ibises, roseate spoonbills, parrots, pelicans, falcons, ospreys, egrets, herons, kingfishers and several types of hawk and iguana call Manialtepec home for at least part of the year. The best months for observing birds are December to March, and they're best seen in the early morning. The lagoon is mainly surrounded by mangroves, but tropical flowers and palms accent the ocean side, and the

channel at the west end winds through mangroves to a pristine sandbar beach.

Several restaurants along the lagoon's north shore (just off Hwy 200) run two-hour trips in shaded boats, costing M\$700 for up to seven people. They also offer *colectivo* services (M\$80 per person) from about 8am to 5pm during tourism high seasons: these are geared more toward locals who just want to get to the other end of the lagoon than to serious nature observers. Some of the restaurants also rent kayaks and canoes, which are ideal for those with sufficient energy who want to get right in among the lakeside vegetation and side-channels. A rare and magical Manialtepec phenomenon is the appearance of phosphorescent plankton for several days three or four times a year. At these times sunset boat tours are offered, and on the return trip after dark you can swim or trail your hand in the water to activate the strange phosphorescent glow.

To reach the lagoon from Puerto Escondido, take a Río Grande-bound minibus from the corner of 2 Norte and 3 Poniente in the upper part of town, leaving every half-hour from 6am to 7pm (M\$9).

Restaurant Isla del Gallo (☎ 954-1009258; www.laisladelgallo.com.mx; seafood M\$70-120; ☎ 8am-6pm), about halfway along the lake, offers boat trips that go right through the mangrove channel to the beach, and the boatmen, some of whom speak English, know their birds. One-person kayaks and three-person canoes are for rent at M\$50 and M\$100 per hour respectively. Good grilled fish and seafood are served at the restaurant.

Restaurante La Puesta del Sol (☎ 954-5883867), toward the west end of the lake, is another recommended embarkation point. It has a bird field guide, and guide Modesto knows the birds' English names. They have two-person kayaks (M\$100 per hour) and four-person canoes (M\$50) for rent as well. Most dishes in the restaurant here cost M\$60 to M\$80.

Several early-morning or sunset tours (four to five hours including road time) can be booked from Puerto Escondido. Not all of them include English-speaking guides.

Hidden Voyages Ecotours (www.pelleewings.ca; tours for 4-10 people per person M\$400-450) offers highly recommended three- to 3½-hour boat trips from about mid-December to mid-March, with binoculars and bird checklists provided. Morning tours (departing Puerto Escondido at 7am Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and

Saturday) are led by knowledgeable Canadian ornithologist Michael Malone. Book at Viajes Dimar in Puerto Escondido (p753), which also offers year-round trips (per person M\$350) with local bird guides who have worked with Hidden Voyages.

Lalo's Ecotours (☎ 954-588-91-64; www.lalo-eco.tours.com; Las Negras Manialtepec; tours per person US\$35) is run by a lagoon local who has worked for Hidden Voyages and knows his birds. Tours are year-round, with binoculars included. Lalo speaks some English and also leads morning nature hikes, guided kayak and canoe trips, and nighttime boat trips during the periods of phosphorescence. He will arrange transportation from Puerto Escondido, or you can seek him out in the small village of Las Negras toward the lagoon's western end.

Parque Nacional Lagunas de Chacahua

Heading west from Puerto Escondido toward Acapulco, Hwy 200 wends near a coast studded with lagoons, pristine beaches and prolific bird and plant life. Settlements in this region contain many descendants of African slaves who escaped from the Spanish.

The area around the coastal lagoons of Chacahua and La Pastoría forms the beautiful Parque Nacional Lagunas de Chacahua, which attracts migratory birds from Alaska and Canada in winter. Mangrove-fringed islands harbor roseate spoonbills, ibises, cormorants, wood storks, herons and egrets, as well as mahogany trees, crocodiles and turtles. El Corral, a mangrove-lined waterway filled with countless birds in winter, connects the two lagoons. The boat trip along the lagoons is fabulous, and at its end Chacahua village sits upon a gorgeous beach curving at least 20km eastward, inviting you stop for a meal or a night in rustic *cabañas*.

The starting point for boat trips is the small fishing village of Zapotalito, at the eastern end of Laguna La Pastoría. Two or three boat cooperatives here offer *lancha* service to Chacahua village. There are two basic options, 'terrestre' and 'por agua'. *Terrestre* means you go by boat across the lagoon from Zapotalito to meet a *camioneta* that then makes a half-hour trip to Chacahua along the spit of land between lagoons and ocean. *Por agua* means you go all the way to Chacahua by boat, usually with halts at various islands and channels where a Spanish-speaking guide will point out the birds. A four-hour return *por agua* return

trip, including two hours at Chacahua village, generally runs around M\$800 for up to 10 people. The *terrestre* variation is about M\$500. For a one-way trip to Chacahua, expect to pay about M\$400 for a boat all the way. When there is sufficient traffic, *colectivo* services are operated for M\$50 per person each way *por agua*, or M\$30 *terrestre*. Check return times before you settle in at Chacahua for the day!

CHACAHUA

Chacahua village straddles the channel that connects the west end of Chacahua lagoon to the ocean. The ocean side of the village, fronting a wonderful beach, is a perfect place to bliss out. The waves here (a right-hand point break) can be good for surfers, including beginners, but there are some strong currents; check where it's safe to swim. The inland half of the village contains a **crocodile-breeding center** (admission free; ☹️ erratic) with a rather sorry collection of creatures kept for protection and reproduction: Chacahua's wild croc population (not human-eating) has been decimated by hunting.

TOURS

Good day trips from Puerto Escondido are offered by **Hidden Voyages Ecotours** (www.peleewings.ca; tours Thu only, approx mid-Dec to mid-Mar, minimum 6 people, per person M\$575), which operates with an English-speaking naturalist guide. Book at Viajes Dimar in Puerto Escondido (p753), which also offers its own trips year-round (per person M\$450; minimum 4 people) with local guides.

SLEEPING & EATING

Restaurante Siete Mares (☎️ 954-540-69-03; cabañas s or d M\$100-250, tr or q M\$200-250; dishes M\$30-90) At the west end of Chacahua beach, Siete Mares prepares excellent fish and seafood meals. It also has some of Chacahua's better *cabañas*, some by the restaurant, some further along the beach and some by the lagoon. The best have two double beds, fans, nets, electric light and clean bathrooms. The señora here will lock up your valuables.

More basic *cabañas* along the beach generally cost M\$80 to M\$100 for two people. They normally share bathrooms and showers and may have sand floors. Most of these places are attached to *comedores* offering egg, pasta and seafood dishes for around M\$25 to M\$70. You can usually sleep in a hammock or camp for free if you eat at a particular establishment. Theft is a risk, though.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

To reach Zapotalito from Puerto Escondido you first have to get to the town of Río Grande, 50km west of Puerto on Hwy 200. Río Grande-bound minibuses (M\$15, one hour) leave from the corner of 2 Norte and 3 Poniente in Puerto, about every half-hour from 6am to 7pm. Most Acapulco-bound Estrella Blanca buses stop at Río Grande, too. From the minibus stop in Río Grande, cross the dirt road and get a *colectivo* taxi (M\$10) to Zapotalito, 13km southwest.

If you're driving, the turning to Zapotalito is marked by a military checkpoint on Hwy 200, 8km west of Río Grande. The 5km approach to Zapotalito is poorly paved.

Ocho Venado

This **community tourism scheme** (☎️ 954-541-02-05; <http://ochovenado.wikispaces.com>) offers the chance to experience village life in the forested hills behind the Lagunas de Chacahua. This is an opportunity to see a little-visited part of the coastal region, take guided walks, eat home-cooked local food and join in whatever the villagers are doing when you visit. The two main bases, both with comfortable, well-built *cabañas* (per person M\$150), are Jocotepec and Tututepec. Jocotepec has deer and wild-boar farms and a hilltop sacred site where locals still go for rain and harvest ceremonies. Tututepec was capital of a coastal Mixtec kingdom that fought off the Aztecs in the 15th century. There are pre-Hispanic carvings in the yard of Tututepec's 17th-century church and a community **archaeological museum** (☎️ 954-541-03-10; ☹️ 10am-5pm). It's a good bird-watching area, too.

The tourist information kiosk in Puerto Escondido can help you make contact and tell you about transportation.

Pinotepa Nacional

☎️ 954 / pop 26,000

This is the biggest town between Puerto Escondido (140km east) and Acapulco (260km west). Pino's shops, commerce and big market (by the main road about 1.5km west of the central plaza) make it the focus for a large area with many indigenous villages, which are famous for crafts such as wooden masks and colorfully embroidered traditional garments.

Hotel Carmona (☎️ 543-22-22; Porfirio Díaz 127; s/d M\$225/320, with air-con M\$330/450; ☎️ ☹️ ☹️), on the main road 500m west of the main plaza, is

clean, well run and fairly quiet. Rooms have hot-water bathroom and TV.

The **bus terminal** (☎ 543-31-94) is 1km west of the central plaza. Estrella Blanca and Turistar provide daily buses to Puerto Escondido (M\$70 to M\$81, three hours) and Acapulco (M\$123 to M\$140, six hours). First-class OCC buses and 2nd-class Fypsa buses travel north on Hwy 125 through the Mixteca, some reaching Oaxaca (1st-class M\$228, 10 hours).

POCHUTLA

☎ 958 / pop 13,000

Bustling, sweaty Pochutla is the market town, banking center and transportation hub for the central part of the Oaxaca coast, which includes the nearby beach spots of Puerto Ángel, Zipolite, San Agustínillo and Mazunte. If you are coming from one of those blissed-out places, welcome back to the real world.

Orientation & Information

Hwy 175 from Oaxaca runs through Pochutla as Av Lázaro Cárdenas, the narrow, traffic-clogged, north-south main street, and meets the coastal Hwy 200 about 1.5km south of town. The bus and van terminals cluster toward the southern, downhill end of Cárdenas. Banks and the better hotels are 300m to 400m north. Street numbers increase as you go downhill.

HSBC (Cárdenas 48; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat)

Changes US-dollar cash and traveler's checks; also has an ATM.

Telnet (Cárdenas 94; internet per hr M\$10; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat) Opposite the Estrella del Valle/Oaxaca Pacifico bus terminal; has long-distance telephone service too.

Sleeping

Hotel Santa Cruz (☎ 584-01-16; Cárdenas 88; s/d with shared bathroom M\$100/120, private bathroom M\$120/150, private bathroom & air-con M\$250/300; 🍷) The Santa Cruz, about 150m north of the main cluster of bus stations, has simple, adequate, assiduously disinfected rooms. Some private bathrooms are dilapidated, but the air-con is good in those rooms that have it.

Hotel Costa del Sol (☎ /fax 584-03-18; Cárdenas 47; s/d with fan M\$200/225, with air-con M\$300/350; 🍷 🍷) The best-value central hotel, with a few artistic touches and some greenery. Rooms have good bathrooms, erratic hot water and cable TV.

Getting There & Away

The **OCC bus station** (☎ 584-02-74; Cárdenas 84) is used by OCC (1st-class) and Sur (2nd-class) services. The other main bus terminals are

2nd-class **Estrella del Valle/Oaxaca Pacifico** (☎ 584-03-49), 50m north of OCC on the opposite (east) side of the street, and **Estrella Blanca** (EB; ☎ 584-03-80), 200m south of OCC. Transportes Rápidos de Pochutla runs small buses to Bahías de Huatulco from a terminal 100m north of Estrella del Valle/Oaxaca Pacifico.

OAXACA

Oaxaca is 245km away by the curvy Hwy 175 – 5½ to six hours in the convenient and fairly comfortable air-conditioned van services (M\$120) offered by several companies including **Autotransportes Atlántida** (☎ 584-01-16; Hotel Santa Cruz, Cárdenas 88) and **Autotransportes Miahuatecos** (☎ 958-1062103; Cárdenas 94). Both these run about every 1½ to two hours from about 4am to 11pm. With Atlántida you can reserve by phone and pay half an hour before departure. Helpfully, drivers will usually agree to stop when you need a bathroom break, or want to take photos (or vomit, as some people tend to do on this route).

Alternative routes to Oaxaca are the 2nd-class buses of Estrella del Valle/Oaxaca Pacifico (M\$75 to M\$90, 16 daily, 6½ to seven hours) and OCC's three daily 1st-class buses (M\$222, 8½ hours). The OCC buses take a much longer, but less winding, route via Salina Cruz.

OTHER DESTINATIONS

Daily bus departures:

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency
Acapulco	M\$280-300	8-9hr	8 from EB terminal
Bahías de Huatulco	M\$18-30	1hr	36 from OCC terminal
	M\$26-30	1hr	9 from EB terminal
	M\$16	1hr	Transportes Rápidos de Pochutla every 15 min, 5:30am-8pm
Mexico City	M\$520	14-15hr	2 from EB terminal (5 & 5:30pm)
	M\$566	15-16hr	2 OCC (4:45 & 7:10pm)
Puerto Escondido	M\$53	1½hr	9 from EB terminal
	M\$25-46	1½hr	35 from OCC terminal
San Cristóbal de las Casas	M\$332	10½-12hr	2 OCC (7:30 & 10:40pm)
Tehuantepec	M\$120	4½hr	4 OCC
Tuxtla Gutiérrez	M\$284	10hr	2 OCC (7:30 & 10:40pm)

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

There are three options for travel between Pochutla and the beach towns and villages to its southwest: *camioneta* (pickup truck – a fun way to travel), *colectivo* (shared) taxi and private taxi.

Camionetas and *colectivo* taxis all start from various Pochutla side streets then travel south down Av Cárdenas picking up passengers as they go. People often wait for them outside Mueblería García, a furniture store about 100m uphill from Hotel Santa Cruz. Fares (*camioneta/colectivo*) are M\$5/10 to Puerto Ángel (20 minutes), M\$10/15 to Zipolite (30 minutes) and M\$8/10 to San Agustínillo (45 minutes) or Mazunte (40 minutes). Vehicles bound for Mazunte do not generally travel through Puerto Ángel but head west along Hwy 200 to San Antonio, then backtrack south-east to Mazunte and continue to San Agustínillo and the west (Roca Blanca) end of Zipolite. Both *camionetas* and *colectivos* run about every half-hour from around 7am to 7pm.

Private cabs from Pochutla during the day should cost around M\$60 to Puerto Ángel and M\$100 to Zipolite, San Agustínillo or Mazunte; at night they charge up to 50% more.

PUERTO ÁNGEL

☎ 958 / pop 2400

Thirteen kilometers south of Pochutla, the small fishing port, naval base and beach town of Puerto Ángel (pwer-toh *ahn-hel*) straggles around a picturesque bay between two rocky headlands. Many travelers prefer to stay out on the beaches a few kilometers west at Zipolite, San Agustínillo or Mazunte, but the marginally more urban Puerto Ángel also offers some good accommodations, along with its own little beaches and activities, and easy transportation to Zipolite.

Orientation

The road from Pochutla emerges at the east end of the small Bahía de Puerto Ángel. The road winds around the back of the bay, over an often-dry *arroyo* (stream) and up a hill. It then forks – right to Zipolite and Mazunte, left down to Playa del Panteón. It's called Blvd Uribe through most of town, though after it crosses the *arroyo* it's also referred to as Carretera a Zipolite.

Information

Banco Azteca (Blvd Uribe; ☎ 9am-9pm) Changes cash US dollars only and may be out of them at weekends; the nearest ATMs are in Pochutla. Several Puerto Ángel accommodations and restaurants will change cash or traveler's checks at their own rates.

Farmacia El Ángel (☎ 584-30-58; Vasconcelos) Dr Constancio Aparicio's practice is here, from 9am to 2pm and 5 to 9pm Monday to Saturday; he also offers 24-hour emergency service.

G@l@p@gos (Blvd Uribe s/n; internet per hr M\$12) You can also make phone calls here.

Gel@net (Vasconcelos 3; internet per hr M\$12; ☎ 9am-10pm) Has telephone, fax and internet services.

Tourist office (Blvd Uribe; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-8pm, days variable) In a *palapa*-roofed building at the entrance to the pier; if open, useful for transportation details.

Beaches

Playa del Panteón, on the west side of the bay, is a small, shallow and calm beach, and its waters are clearer than those near the pier across the bay.

About 500m up the road toward Pochutla, a sign points along a path to **Playa Estacahuite**, 700m away. The three tiny, sandy bays here are good for snorkeling, but watch out for jellyfish. A couple of shack restaurants serve reasonably priced seafood and pasta, and rent snorkels.

The coast northeast of Estacahuite is dotted with more good beaches, none of them very busy. A good one is **Playa La Boquilla**, on a small bay about 5km out, the site of Bahía de la Luna accommodations (p768). You can get here by a 3.5km unpaved road from a turnoff 4km out of Puerto Ángel on the road toward Pochutla (a taxi from Puerto Ángel can cost M\$100 each way), but it's fun to go by boat – ask at Puerto Ángel pier or Playa del Panteón. Boats will take a few people for around M\$100 to M\$150 each, including a return trip at an agreed time.

Activities

Snorkeling and **fishing** are popular, and you can also go **diving**. The drops and canyons out to sea from Puerto Ángel are suitable for very deep dives; there's also a dive to an 1870 shipwreck and lots of fish life.

Several operators on and around Playa del Panteón offer a four-hour, four-beach snorkeling boat trip, including Estacahuite and La Boquilla beaches, with snorkel gear

included for M\$150 per person. En route you should see turtles and, with luck, dolphins and even (from November to May) migrating whales. **Azul Profundo** (☎ 584-34-38; azul_profundomx@hotmail.com) does this trip daily at 9:30am and will pick you up and drop you off at your accommodation in Puerto Ángel or Zipolite; amiable guide Chepe speaks English and German. Other recommended operators (best to make arrangements the day before, and they may require a minimum of four or five people) are **Océanos Tours** (☎ 584-30-83; Restaurant Leyvis y Vicente) and English- and French-speaking **Byron Luna** (☎ 584-31-15), who can be found at his home just behind Playa del Panteón.

The same people will take you sportfishing for marlin, dorado and tuna, for around M\$500 per hour (up to three people).

Azul Profundo also offers diving, with one-/two-tank dives costing M\$500/800 including equipment and a dive guide.

Sleeping

Places with an elevated location are more likely to catch any breeze.

our pick **Hotel Puesta del Sol** (☎ /fax 584-30-96; www.puertoangel.net; Blvd Uribe s/n; s/d with shared bathroom M\$110/150, d with private bathroom M\$250-360; 🏠) Trilingual (English, German, Spanish) Puesta del Sol offers sizable, clean rooms with fans and screens. The more expensive ones have their own terraces and hot-water bathroom, and some sleep up to six. A breezy hammock area invites relaxation, breakfast is available, and the touches of art, useful maps, verdant garden, small library and friendly, informative owners make this an excellent choice.

Casa Arnel (☎ /fax 584-30-51; arnelpto.angel@huatulco.net.mx; Azueta s/n; s/d M\$150/200; 🏠) Up the lane past the market, Arnel has five clean, ample tile-floored rooms with fans, and OK beds and bathrooms. Soft drinks, coffee and tea are available, and there's an upstairs hammock area, a small library and a place to wash and dry clothes.

our pick **Casa de Huéspedes Gundi y Tomás** (☎ 584-30-68; www.puertoangel-hotel.com; s/d with shared bathroom M\$180/250, with private bathroom M\$300/350, room for 6 M\$700) This relaxed guesthouse above Blvd Uribe has a variety of brightly decorated, basic rooms, all with fans, mosquito nets and/



or screens, and some offbeat artistic touches. Good food is available, including homemade bread, mainly vegetarian snacks, fruit drinks and a nightly M\$75 *menú*. The main dining area has outstanding views. Gundi, the friendly German owner, speaks good English and Spanish and provides a safe for valuables, a book exchange, laundry service, bus reservations, and an exchange service for cash or travelers checks. Her sons Fabián and Bastián rent surfboards and offer surf lessons at Zipolite or San Agustínillo.

El Almendro (☎ 584-30-68; www.puertoangel-hotel.com; s/d M\$200/350) In a shady garden up a little lane off Blvd Uribe, El Almendro has five clean, brightly painted, basic rooms with OK beds and bathrooms, plus a bungalow with kitchen for up to six (around M\$1500/5000 per week/month).

Villa Serena Florencia (☎ 584-30-44; villaserenaooax@otmail.com; Blvd Uribe s/n; s/d/tr M\$250/350/400, air-con extra M\$30) Florencia provides 13 pleasant, colorful, smallish rooms with fans, screens and a dash of art and photos. It also offers a shady sitting area and a good Italian–Mexican restaurant.

Hotel Cordelia's (☎ 584-31-09; Playa del Panteón; r M\$350-650; (P)) Right on Playa del Panteón and run by the same family as Azul Profundo dive shop, Cordelia's has 17 mosquito-screened rooms with nice tiled floors, good wood furniture and some attractive *artesanías*. The best are good big rooms with their own terraces overlooking the bay.

La Buena Vista (☎/fax 584-31-04; www.labuenavista.com; La Buena Compañía s/n; d M\$600-700, per additional person M\$70; (R)) The 21 big rooms and six excellent mud-brick bungalows on this verdant property are kept scrupulously clean. Many have breezy balconies with hammocks, some have excellent views, and wood, stone and brick are cleverly used throughout. There's a good restaurant on an expansive terrace and a gorgeous pool area up top. Rates almost halve outside the high seasons of mid-December to early January, Semana Santa and June to August. The only negative is that the staff often seem rather down in the mouth.

Bahía de la Luna (☎ 589-50-20; www.bahiadela luna.com; Playa La Boquilla; s/d/q incl breakfast US\$70/85/140, 6/7-person house from US\$220/245; (P)) This tropical hide-away out at gorgeous Playa La Boquilla (p766) has attractive, bright adobe bungalows with terracotta-tile floors and touches of artisanry, set on a tree-covered hillside overlooking the beach. It also has a good beachside restaurant–

café with moderate prices (dishes M\$30 to M\$65), and offers guests boat trips and free use of snorkeling gear and sea kayaks.

Eating

La Buena Vista (☎ 584-31-04; La Buena Compañía s/n; breakfast M\$2.50-4, dinner mains M\$50-80; ☎ 8-11am & 6-10pm Mon-Sat; (V)) On an airy terrace overlooking the bay, La Buena Vista's restaurant offers well-prepared Mexican and American fare, including meatless choices like vegetarian *tamales* or cheese-filled *chiles rellenos* (stuffed chilies).

Villa Serena Florencia (☎ 584-30-44; Blvd Uribe s/n; dishes M\$30-90) This reliable Italian–Mexican restaurant turns out good pasta, pizzas, salads and Mexican dishes at very good prices. Breakfasts are a good value.

Beto's (Carretera a Zipolite s/n; dishes M\$30-60; ☎ 4pm-midnight) On the uphill stretch of Blvd Uribe, Beto's is a relaxed, economical, friendly and clean little place with a large terrace. Offerings range from fish fillets and ceviches to chicken and beef dishes. Spot it by the string of colored lights leading up the steps.

El Almendro (☎ 584-30-68; off Blvd Uribe; BBQ dinner M\$80) From about mid-December to Easter this accommodation holds a 6 to 7pm happy hour followed by a good-value barbecue dinner of marinated meats or fish, salad from the salad bar and baked potatoes.

The restaurants on Playa del Panteón, **Restaurant Cordelia's** (☎ 584-31-09; Hotel Cordelia's), **Restaurante Susy** (☎ 584-30-19) and **Restaurant Leyvis y Vicente** (☎ 584-30-83), all offer fish and seafood for M\$50 to M\$120, plus cheaper fare such as *entomatadas* (a variation of enchiladas) and eggs. They stay open until 10 or 11pm, and the setting is very pretty after dark. Be careful about the freshness of seafood in the low season.

Getting There & Away

See the boxed text on p766 for details of transportation from Pochutla. An Estrella del Valle/Oaxaca Pacífico bus to Oaxaca (M\$76, seven hours) departs at 10pm nightly from near the foot of Vasconcelos. A taxi to or from Zipolite costs M\$5 *colectivo* (if you can find one), or M\$50 for the whole cab (more after dark).

A taxi to Huatulco airport should cost M\$250; to Puerto Escondido airport M\$350.

ZIPOLITE

☎ 958 / pop 900

The beautiful 1.5km stretch of pale sand called Zipolite, beginning about 2.5km

west of Puerto Ángel, is fabled as southern Mexico's perfect budget chill-out spot. It's a place where you can do as little as you like and enjoy good food and inexpensive accommodation all in wonderfully elemental surroundings of crashing surf, pounding sun, rocky headlands and tree-covered hills. Inexpensive places to stay and eat line the beach, many still reassuringly ramshackle and wooden and with tall thatched roofs that help to create the unique Zipolite landscape. This is one of those magical places where you may find yourself postponing departure more than once.

Zipolite has a certain fame as a nudist beach; in fact total nudity is common only at the western end of the beach and in the small cove called Playa del Amor at the east end.

Orientation

The eastern end of Zipolite (nearest Puerto Ángel) is called Colonia Playa del Amor, the middle part is Centro, and the area toward the western end (divided from Centro by a narrow lagoon and creek) is Colonia Roca Blanca. Av Roca Blanca, a block back from the beach here, is commonly known as El Adoquín, for its paving blocks. The other few streets behind the beach are mostly nameless.

Information

The nearest bank is in Puerto Ángel and the nearest ATM in Pochutla, but some accommodations may exchange or accept payment in US dollars or euros.

Azul Profundo (☎ 584-34-38; Av Roca Blanca; internet per hr M\$15, with own laptop M\$10; ☎ 8am-10pm) You can phone from here too.

Paty.Net (Av Roca Blanca; same-day laundry service per kg M\$14; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Dangers & Annoyances

Beware: the Zipolite surf is deadly. It's fraught with riptides, changing currents and a strong undertow. Locals don't swim here, and going in deeper than your knees can be risking your life. Local voluntary *salvavidas* (lifeguards) have rescued many, but they don't maintain a permanent watch, and people drown here yearly. The shore break is one only experienced surfers should attempt.

Theft can be a problem, so it's good to stay somewhere where you can lock your valuables in a safe. It's not advisable to

walk alone on the beach, or along the Puerto Ángel–Zipolite road, after dark.

Activities

The essence and glory of Zipolite is that organized activity is very minimal. This is a place for hanging out and doing exactly nothing if that's what you feel like.

Azul Profundo (left) will pick you up and drop you off in Zipolite for its snorkeling, diving and fishing trips from Puerto Ángel (p766).

At **Solstice** (☎ 584-32-35; www.solstice-mexico.com; Colonia Playa del Amor) Brigitte Longueville leads 1½-hour hatha yoga classes (US\$7) in a large, inviting upstairs yoga room most days at 9am or 5pm. Five-day retreats and weekend workshops are offered here too. Drop by for a schedule. The meditation hill at Shambhala (p770) is open to all for free.

Piña Palmera (☎ 584-31-47; www.pinapalmera.org; Carretera Zipolite-Mazunte; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Sat), an independently run rehabilitation and social integration center for physically and intellectually disabled people from rural communities, does fantastic work with workshops at its beautiful palm-grove site and on village visits. Over 5000 disabled kids, adults and family members have participated in Piña Palmera programs since 1984. Some toys and crafts made here are sold in a shop on the main road. Piña Palmera can use volunteers who speak '40-50%' Spanish and are ready to work 48 hours a week for at least three months.

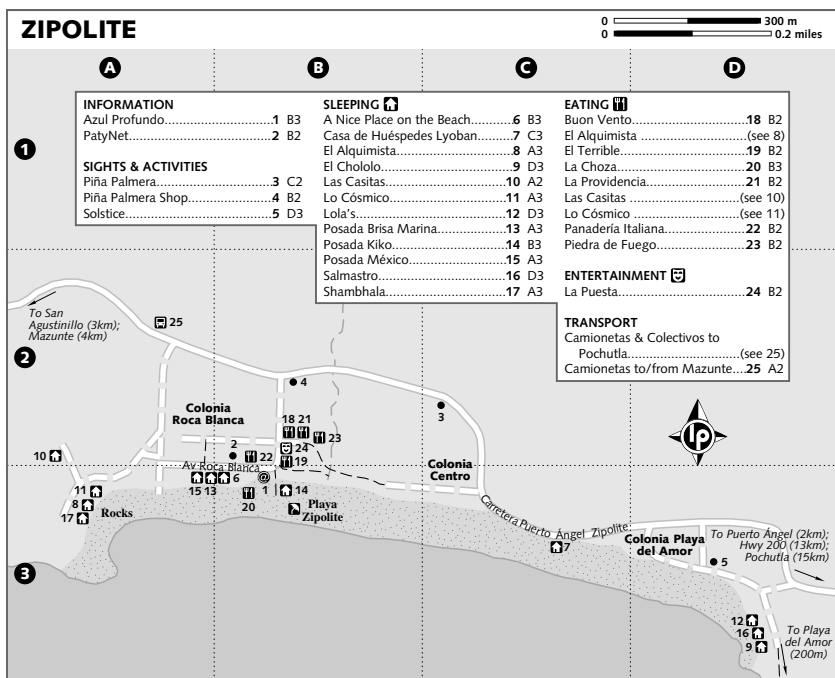
Sleeping

Many accommodations are right on the beach. Unless otherwise stated, rooms here have shared bathrooms.

A Nice Place on the Beach (☎ 584-31-95; Colonia Roca Blanca; r M\$100) A very rustic place right on the beachfront. Rooms have a double bed and mosquito net – no more. Those up the steps and facing the ocean are best, for view and breeze.

Posada Kiko (☎ 584-31-76; Colonia Roca Blanca; d M\$80-150) Basic, friendly and right on the beach, Kiko provides simple *cabañas* with mosquito nets but no fans. The best ones are upstairs and face the ocean.

Posada Brisa Marina (☎ 584-31-93; brisamarinaca@yahoo.com; Colonia Roca Blanca; r with/without bathroom from M\$150/100; ☎) At popular, American-owned Brisa, the rooms with bathroom occupy a



three-story concrete building fronting the beach and have safes. Some of them some have balconies and great views. The cheaper rooms are in a rear wooden section. There's also a common safe.

Shambhala (Casa de Gloria; west end Playa Zipolite; <http://shambhalavision.tripod.com>; hammocks M\$35, dm M\$80-100, r with private bathroom M\$350; **P**) This ecologically run, long-established guesthouse climbs a hill looking right along the beach, with some great views. In part a spiritual retreat, with its own meditation hill and no alcohol or illegal drugs permitted, it's also a good place for anyone looking for a tranquil and economical place to stay. All the varied accommodations are individually and attractively built, and the shared bathrooms are fine. Shambhala has two **restaurants** (☺ 8am-10 or 11pm; **V**). In the upper one no alcohol or red meat are served and offerings include tabouleh salad and homemade yoghurt; the lower one serves chicken, meat, fish, seafood and vegetarian dishes for M\$35 to M\$80, plus alcohol. There's a lockup room for valuables. Shambhala hosts a big spiritual festival, embracing all beliefs, every New Year's Eve.

Lo Cósmico (www.locosmico.com; west end Playa Zipolite; cabañas d/r M\$180/250, q with private bathroom M\$300) Very relaxed Lo Cósmico has conical-roofed *cabañas* dotted around a tall rock outcrop. Each has a hammock and mosquito net; the cheaper ones are a bit enclosed while the pricier ones have two floors and views. A security box is available, and there's a good onsite restaurant (opposite).

Salmastro (☎ 584-31-61; Calle del Amor; hammocks M\$50, d M\$150-220, q M\$350-400; **P**) At the east end of the beach, Salmastro's eight basic rooms (some upstairs, and some with sea views) have good beds, fans and thatched roofs.

Lola's (☎ 584-32-01; Calle del Amor; s/d M\$150/200; **P**) Salmastro's neighbor has rooms with private bath.

our pick Posada México (☎ 584-31-94; www.posadamexico.com; Av Roca Blanca; r with shared/private bathroom M\$150/250) This joint has the most character among the Roca Blanca beachfront places. The wood-and-palm rooms have safes, good beds with mosquito nets, and their own sandy little sitting-out areas with hammocks. It's friendly and personal, and good breakfasts are served at the beachside café.

Casa de Huéspedes Lyoban (☎ 584-31-77; www.lyoban.com.mx; Centro; hammocks M\$70, s/d/tr M\$170/210/260, with private bathroom & fan M\$250/290/360; 🍷) Relaxed, friendly (and gay-friendly) Lyoban has basic, clean rooms with mosquito nets: the beds are comfy, but the walls don't reach the ceiling in the cheaper, upstairs rooms. Common areas include a sociable bar–restaurant space, small swimming pool, tables for ping-pong, foosball and pool, and a breezy upstairs hammock deck. The hammock-sleeping price includes a blanket, a sturdy locker and shower usage. Lyoban has security cameras, too.

El Chololo (☎ 584-31-59; Calle del Amor; r with/without bathroom M\$300/200; 🍷) With five simple rooms at the far eastern end of the beach, this very friendly place also serves good Mexican and Italian food. The rooms with shared bath, upstairs, are breezier.

Las Casitas (☎ 958-5878464; www.las-casitas.net; bungalows d M\$280-500, tr/q M\$350/600) Set back from the west end of Playa Zipolite on a hill, Las Casitas has seven tasteful rooms in semi-open-air, solar-lit *cabañas* of wood, adobe and palm-thatch. Five have private bathrooms and all have kitchen use. Most have good views as well, at least in the dry, leafless season, and some have swinging beds. There's also an excellent restaurant here (right).

El Alquimista (☎ 958-5878961; www.el-alquimista.com; west end Playa Zipolite; bungalows M\$600 or M\$1200; 🍷) Attached to one of Zipolite's best restaurants (right), this place has 14 fine thatched-roofed beach bungalows, each with homespun textiles, one double bed, fan, net, bathroom and hammocked porch. They're often full. There are also three beautiful superior bungalows for two to three people, in a tower just behind, boasting Sky TV, hot water and (in two cases) air-conditioning.

Eating

Eating and drinking in the open air a few steps from the surf is an inimitable Zipolite experience. Apart from the ubiquitous pizzas, most places serve a mix of Mexican and international fare with a maritime slant.

Panadería Italiana (Av Roca Blanca; items M\$15-35; 🕒 11am-2:30pm & 5-8:30pm Mon-Sat) A neat little place to drop into for focaccia and pizza by the slice.

Lo Cómico (West end Playa Zipolite; dishes M\$28-50; 🕒 8am-4pm Tue-Sun; 🍷) Mellow out on the rocks above the beach at this open-air restaurant at the accommodations of the same name.

Cómico provides good food from an impeccably clean kitchen – especially tasty are the crepes (sweet and savory) and salads.

our pick Piedra de Fuego (Colonia Roca Blanca; mains M\$40-60; 🕒 3-11pm) You'll get a generous serving of fish fillet or prawns, accompanied by rice, salad and tortillas at this superbly simple, family-run place. It's an excellent value and highly popular.

Buon Vento (Colonia Roca Blanca; pasta M\$40-65; 🕒 6pm-midnight Thu-Tue) An excellent Italian restaurant with good music, a big video screen and subtle vibes. The huge pasta list includes some delicious baked options, and the wine list is decent for Mexico.

El Terrible (Colonia Roca Blanca; pizzas M\$60-85, crepes M\$25-55; 🕒 6pm-midnight Tue-Sat) The Francophone couple here make a variety of damn good pizzas, large enough to feed two moderately hungry travelers or one very hungry one. Sweet and savory crepes are also served.

La Choza (☎ 584-31-90; Colonia Roca Blanca; mains M\$50-120) La Choza's beachside restaurant provides generous quantities of a wide choice of foods from salads and stuffed avocados to seafood, pasta and whole fish.

Las Casitas (☎ 958-5878464; mains M\$80-90; 🕒 8:30-11:30am & 7:30-10:30pm Thu-Mon) There's great home-made pasta (with fish, seafood or vegetable sauces) as well as meat dishes and home-made baked goods at this Italian-run place back from the west end of the beach. For its specialty *pescado al horno de leña* (fish baked in a wood-fired oven; M\$120), ask a day before.

our pick El Alquimista (☎ 958-5878961; west end Playa Zipolite; mains M\$55-120; 🕒 8pm-midnight) The classy Alchemist is delightfully sited in a sandy cove. Its very wide-ranging fare runs from falafel or hummus starters to good meat and seafood dishes and brick-oven pizzas, complemented by a full bar and good espresso.

La Providencia (☎ 958-1009234; Colonia Roca Blanca; mains M\$80-130; 🕒 7-11pm Wed-Sun) Zipolite's most suave dining option has an open-air lounge area where you can sip a drink while you peruse the menu and place your order. The flavorsome and well-presented food is a *nuevo mexicano* treat, from cold beetroot and ginger soup to chicken breast in a blue cheese and pumpkin flower sauce.

Drinking & Entertainment

Zipolite's beachfront restaurant–bars have unbeatable locations for drinks from sunset onward. Those toward the west end of the

beach are generally the most popular – especially El Alquimista (p771), which plays cool music and serves cocktails as well as the usual beer, *mezcal* and so forth. The swing seats at the bar can get tricky after you've had a few. Holiday periods and full moons see travelers making merry around bonfires on the beach. The open-air *discoteca La Puesta* (☎ 584-31-78; Colonia Roca Blanca; ☒ 9pm-late Tue-Sat) provides slightly more active nightlife, cranking out reggae, funk, techno, hip-hop and Latin tunes into the wee hours, though nothing much happens before midnight.

Getting There & Away

See the boxed text on p766 for details on transportation from Pochutla. The *camionetas* from Pochutla via Mazunte and San Agustínillo terminate at the far west end of Zipolite (about 2km from the east end of the beach). *Colectivo* taxis from Puerto Ángel (M\$5), if you can find one, will go to the same spot too, but pass along the length of Zipolite en route, so they are a better bet if you're heading for the east end of the beach.

After dark, a non-*colectivo* taxi is your only option for getting to Puerto Ángel, San Agustínillo or Mazunte (about M\$50 until about 10pm, more after that).

SAN AGUSTINILLO

☎ 958 / pop 250

The tiny village of San Agustínillo is centered on a small, curved bay, 4km west of Zipolite by road. The waves here are perfect for body-boarding and often good for body-surfing. The swimming is very good as well, but keep away from the rocks. San Agustínillo has generally higher standards of sanitation than its neighbors Zipolite and Mazunte, and its undeniable charms attract an eclectic bunch of fans, including travelers who are seeking a less 'sceney' scene than in the neighboring villages. To walk from Zipolite to San Agustínillo, follow footpaths across the headland behind Shambhala at the west end of Zipolite, then continue along the straight and nearly empty Playa Aragón to San Agustínillo.

Until killing sea turtles was banned in Mexico in 1990, San Agustínillo was the site of a slaughterhouse where some 50,000 turtles were killed per year for their meat and shells. Tourism has grown up since then to provide an altogether different local income source.

Hotel Malex (below) provides internet access for M\$15 per hour from 8:30am to 9pm Monday to Saturday and from 9am to 8pm on Sunday. Un Secreto (opposite) will do your laundry (M\$15 per kg, from 8am to 5pm Monday to Saturday).

Coco Loco Surf Club (www.cocolocosurfclub.com), based at México Lindo (below), rents surfboards for M\$50 per hour or M\$150 to M\$200 per day, and boogie boards or snorkel gear for M\$30 per hour. It also offers surfing classes with qualified French instructor David Chouard (two-hour private class for one/two people M\$350/500; two-hour group class per person M\$200) and three-beach 'discovery trips' combining snorkeling, body boarding and a visit to La Ventanilla (p774) for M\$280 per person (minimum four people).

Local fishermen will take up to three people out **sportfishing** for around M\$400 per hour, or **marine life-spotting** to look for turtles, dolphins, manta rays and (between November and April) whales, for around M\$150 per person (minimum four people) – ask at your accommodation.

Sleeping

Most places are set right on the beach. Rooms have either mosquito-screened windows or mosquito nets.

Palapa Jazmín (☎ 584-32-50; d/q M\$200/400) The Jazmín provides economical lodgings toward the west end of the beach. The five good brick-built rooms have fans and clean bathrooms. The three upstairs have sea views; new units are being added.

ourpick México Lindo y qué Rico! (faustojasso@gmail.com; r with/without sea view M\$350/250; ☒ closed October; Ⓟ) Also near the west end of the beach, México Lindo has friendly, young owners and staff, and its seven large rooms feature slatted windows, fans and some bright touches like tiled bathrooms. Especially good is the breezy upstairs pair of rooms under the tall *palapa* roof. There's excellent food here too (mains M\$55 to M\$90), including pizzas from a wood-fired brick oven.

Hotel Malex (☎ 589-81-95; malex_hotelweb@hotmail.com; r with/without kitchenette M\$350/300, apt M\$800) The Malex, at the east end of San Agustínillo, is unprepossessing from outside, but inside, its three upstairs rooms and one spacious apartment are done in cheerful white and blue, each with good bathrooms and beds, and terraces enjoying close-up sea views.

Hotel Paraíso del Pescador (www.paraíso-del-pescador.com; d/q US\$35/40, with air-con US\$45/50;

(P) **(☺)**) On the inland side of the road in the center of the village, Pescador's six spacious, bright rooms all have tiled floors, good bathrooms and delicious views. The Hungarian-Canadian co-owner specializes in sportfishing trips (four/six hours US\$300/450).

Rancho Cerro Largo (ranchocerrolargomx@yahoo.com; .mx; Playa Aragón; s M\$550-850, d M\$700-950, all incl breakfast & dinner; **(P)**) With a stunning position above Playa Aragón, Cerro Largo offers excellent accommodations in half a dozen mud-and-wattle *cabañas*. All have ocean views, most have private bathrooms and some have a loft enabling them to accommodate four. The beds and mainly vegetarian meals are top-notch (it makes its own bread, yoghurt and granola), and there's also a nice yoga room with daily 1½-hour morning sessions (payment by donation). Get there by a drivable track from the Zipolite-San Agustínillo road.

ourpick Un Sueño (www.unsueno.com; r M\$650, q M\$900; **(P)**) Sueño, at the east end of Playa San Agustínillo, boasts 12 lovely, good-sized rooms, four in freestanding beachfront *cabañas*, the others in four two-story units behind. All are decorated with art and crafts from different places around the world, and have a semi-open-air feel with bamboo-slat windows. Nearly all have their own terraces with hammocks, and there are nice *palapas* for breakfast and hammock-swinging out front.

ourpick Punta Placer (www.puntaplacer.com; r M\$800) A creation of the inventive folk from México Lindo (which is a few doors west along the beach), Punta Placer's rooms have a fresh, open-air feel thanks to their breezy terraces and wood-slat windows. The eight beautiful circular rooms have stylish and natural touches like stone-lined showers, and are set around a garden of native plants and stone paving.

Eating & Drinking

Some of the best eateries are attached to accommodations, but there are others too.

Palapa de Evelia (breakfast M\$25-35, mains M\$70-85; ☺ 8am-5pm) Third along from the west end of Playa San Agustínillo, Evelia serves some of the best food on the beach, with well-prepared fish and seafood, and holy guacamole.

Restaurant Alexana (mains M\$40-90) The friendly restaurant attached to Hotel Paraíso

del Pescador offers goulash as well as good *carnes, mariscos* and *pescados*.

ourpick Un Secreto (mains M\$90-120; ☺ 8am-11pm) Run by Julien from Un Sueño along the street, Secreto serves up *sabores del Pacífico* with a touch of French flair. The short but sweet seafood-based menu runs from a delicious foil-wrapped fish with mint, to vegetable skewers with *alioli*, and lemon pie to round things off. Excellent breakfasts, *licuados*, light lunches and coffee too!

La Casa Mágica (la_casa_magica@yahoo.ca; ☺ 8pm-late Wed-Sun) A favorite with San Ag's amiable little bunch of expats, this welcoming Irish-run bar offers pool, darts, drinks and light food, a couple of hundred meters up the hill opposite Hotel Malex.

Getting There & Away

See the boxed text on p766 for information about transportation from Pochutla. *Colectivo* taxis and *camionetas* for the short trips to or from Zipolite or Mazunte cost M\$4 or M\$5.

MAZUNTE

☎ 958 / pop 700

A kilometer west of San Agustínillo, Mazunte has a fine, curving, sandy beach, an interesting turtle center, and a variety of basic and fancier places to stay and eat. The village is well known as a travelers' hangout and in recent years has seen an increase in foreign residents, attracted either by the area's beauty or, as one put it, the 'old-time hippie vibe.' The economic mainstays here used to be turtle meat and eggs: after the turtle industry was banned in 1990, attempts were made to turn Mazunte into a kind of model ecotouristic village. Some accommodations still maintain an emphasis on sustainability, as do other initiatives launched in the 1990s, such as the natural cosmetics factory and the successful ecotourism scheme at La Ventanilla.

Orientation & Information

The paved road running west from Zipolite to Hwy 200 passes through the middle of Mazunte. Four sandy lanes run about 500m from the road to the beach. The eastern lane, beside the Centro Mexicano de la Tortuga, has no name. The next one, 50m further west, is Calle Principal. Another 200m west is Calle La Barrita, and a further 100m west is the last lane, Camino al Rinconcito, so called because

it runs down to the west end of Mazunte beach, which is known as El Rinconcito.

Go online at **Café Internet Dafne** (cnr main road & Calle La Barrita; internet per hr M\$10; ☎ 9am-10pm).

Sights & Activities

The much-visited **Centro Mexicano de la Tortuga** (Mexican Turtle Center; ☎ 584-33-76; cmt@conanp.gob.mx; admission M\$20; ☎ 10am-4:30pm Wed-Sat, 10am-2:30pm Sun) is a turtle aquarium and research center containing specimens of all seven of Mexico's marine turtle species. They're on view in fairly large tanks – it's enthralling to get a close-up view of these creatures, some of which are BIG! Visits are guided (in Spanish) and start every 10 to 15 minutes, although the management is considering introducing non-guided tours. Remodeling work begun in 2008 may mean that parts of the center are closed for some periods.

Cosméticos Naturales (☎ 587-48-60; cosmenat@hotmail.com; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) is beside the main road toward the west end of the village. A small cooperative making and selling shampoo, cosmetics, mosquito repellents, bath gel and soap from natural sources (like maize, coconut, avocado and sesame seeds), it also sells organic coffee and aromatherapy products.

Local fishermen will take three or more people out for three-hour **boat trips** to snorkel, fish if you like, look for turtles, dolphins and whales and check out some of the beaches along the coast. Departure is usually at 8am and the cost M\$150 per person, including snorkel equipment. Organize this through your accommodation.

PUNTA COMETA

This rocky cape, jutting out from the west end of Mazunte beach, is the southernmost point in the state of Oaxaca and a fabulous place to be at sunset, with great long-distance views in both directions. You can walk here in 30 minutes, over the rocks from the end of Mazunte beach, or start up the path that leads from the beach to Cabañas Balamjuyuc and Alta Mira but take the first left.

LA VENTANILLA

Some 2.5km along the road west from Mazunte a sign points left to Playa Ventanilla, 1.2km down a dirt track. The small settlement here includes a handful of simple homes, a couple of decent *comedores* (dishes M\$25 to

M\$80) and the *palapa* of **Servicios Ecoturísticos La Ventanilla** (www.laventanillamx.com; 1½hr lagoon tours adult/child M\$50/25, under 6yr free; ☎ tours 8:30am-5pm). Servicios Ecoturísticos is Ventanilla's successful conservation and ecotourism cooperative. Most popular are its 10-passenger canoe trips on a mangrove-fringed lagoon where you'll see endangered river crocodiles (there are about 1000 of these in the 230,000-sq-meter local protected area) and lots of water birds (most prolific from April to July). For the best wildlife-spotting, go in the early morning. Servicios Ecoturísticos also offers three-hour horseback rides (M\$250); specialized birding tours (per person per hr M\$50; best at 6am and arranged the day before); and, on certain days, the chance to release turtle hatchlings into the ocean and to join night patrols to see turtles laying and help collect their eggs. There's also accommodation in well-built new *cabañas* with private bathroom (per *cabaña* M\$300) and dorms for up to four (per room M\$200). Servicios Ecoturísticos' conservation work includes a crocodile nursery, mangrove reforestation and turtle protection. It welcomes volunteers (who pay M\$60 per day and are provided with accommodation and kitchen) for work such as reforestation, English-teaching and feeding the deer and young crocs.

Frequent *camionetas* pass the Ventanilla turnoff, leaving you with the 1.2km walk. A taxi from Mazunte should cost M\$30.

Sleeping

Most places along Playa Mazunte (including restaurants) have basic rooms or *cabañas*, hammocks to rent and often tent space. Security can be a problem here. There are also a number of more individual and mostly more expensive accommodations set on hills overlooking the beach.

Palapa Omar (☎ 588-32-45; Calle Principal; hammock site & camping per person M\$25, rented hammock M\$50, s/d M\$70/100) Beside the beach end of Calle Principal, Omar provides 13 bare-bones rooms with fans but no mosquito nets in brick and concrete buildings with shared baths.

El Agujón (el_agujon_mazunte@hotmail.com; Camino al Rinconcito; d with shared/private bathroom M\$150/250; ☎) Friendly El Agujón has 13 small, rustic, clean *cabañas* and rooms on the hillside just above its restaurant (opposite).

our pick **Cabañas Balamjuyuc** (☎ 958-1011808; www.balamjuyuc.com; Camino a Punta Cometa; tents per person

M\$70, cabañas s M\$180, d M\$200-300, tr/q M\$350/400; mains M\$70-100; (P) Partly solar-powered Balamjuyuc is perched on a hill above the west end of the beach, with some superb views. The entrance is about 400m up a road that leads uphill off Camino al Rinconcito, and it's also reachable by steps up from the west end of the beach. Balamjuyuc has six *cabaña* rooms, some of which are large and airy; all have mosquito nets, towels and shared showers. The friendly Argentine owners offer harpoon-fishing classes and therapeutic massages, and have their own temascal. The Mexican-Argentine-vegetarian restaurant serves all meals.

Our pick Posada del Arquitecto (Camino al Rinconcito; hammocks, camping, dm or estrella M\$50, cabañas M\$350-400) Built around the natural features of a small hill at the foot of Camino al Rinconcito, this Italian-owned place provides a variety of airy accommodations on several levels, from hilltop open-air hanging beds with mosquito nets, known as *estrellas*, to a dorm with bunks and lockers and assorted attractive *cabañas* built with mostly natural materials (palm leaves, adobe bricks, bamboo and other woods). There's a morning café and a safe for your valuables.

Posada Ziga (s M\$150-200, d with private bathroom M\$380; (P) Friendly Ziga sits just above the beach at the end of the lane beside the Centro de la Tortuga. It has an economical restaurant open for breakfast and lunch (dishes M\$25 to M\$80), a little flower garden and 17 rooms, all with mosquito nets. The doubles are bigger, with tiled private bathrooms and safes, but the best views are from some of the singles above the restaurant.

Posada Arigalan (www.arigalan.com; Cerrada del Museo de la Tortuga; d M\$350-450; (P) ☎) Up a steep track from the main road just east of the Turtle Center, Arigalan has commanding views of the coast, nice landscaping, and nine tastefully furnished rooms with air-con and terraces. Breakfast is available in high season.

Alta Mira (☎ 585-51-19; www.altamira-hotel.com; Camino a Punta Cometa; r M\$500, bungalows M\$600-650; (P)) Next to Cabañas Balamjuyuc and reached by the same road or steps, Alta Mira has 14 solar- and/or candle-powered rooms and bungalows strung beside steps leading down the hillside. Made with much tile, wood and white paint, they're unpretentiously pleasing and very well kept, with good mosquito nets and terraces with hammocks. The upper ones catch the best views and most breeze. The res-

taurant serves breakfast and dinner Monday to Saturday, with a mainly Mexican menu (main dishes M\$50 to M\$80); and there's a safety deposit box.

Our pick Casa Pan de Miel (☎ 589-58-44; www.casapandemiel.com; Cerrada del Museo de la Tortuga; r M\$1050-1430; (P) ☎ ☎) Neighbor to Posada Arigalan and enjoying similarly wonderful views, this is a place designed for real relaxation. The five bright, elegant, air-conditioned rooms are adorned with varied Mexican art, and all have sea views, Sky TV, kitchenette and terraces with hammocks. There's an inviting large *palapa* area for breakfast (M\$50 to M\$90) with an infinity pool in front of it, and a variety of massages is available. Kids are not accepted here for safety reasons (the cliff-top position).

Eating

La Empanada (sushi M\$30-45, rice dishes & baked potatoes M\$12-60; ☎ from 5pm low season, 9am-late high season) Choose from a Mexican-Asian mix of delectable items including vegetable and fish sushi, all lovingly prepared. La Empanada is on the main road, on the western edge of town.

Estrella Fugaz (Camino al Rinconcito; dishes M\$25-50; ☎ 8am-last customer) This upstairs terrace restaurant, with a beach view through the palm fronds, has a selection of good Mexican and international dishes, as well as vegetable and fruit drinks, breakfasts and coffees.

El Agujón (Camino al Rinconcito; dishes M\$25-70; ☎ 8am-11pm) Just behind the Estrella Fugaz, this is another good spot with a wide range from big French-bread tortas to crepes, fish and, in the evening, pizzas.

Restaurante Tania (☎ 583-90-13; fish & seafood dishes M\$50-100, veg & breakfast dishes M\$25-35; ☎ 9am-11pm; (V)) Tania's scores high for both good-value food and hospitality. It's on the main road, on the west edge of town.

La Dolce Vita (mains M\$60-90; ☎ 4-11pm, closed October) This Italian restaurant, on the main road opposite Camino al Rinconcito, does excellent fish, prawns and spaghetti. For something lighter there are also good salads and crepes.

Entertainment

La Nueva Luna (Calle La Barrita; ☎ 8pm-2am, closed May-Jun, Sep-Oct) Run by indefatigable Carlos from Argentina, this bar is the nightlife and social center of the Mazunte traveler scene. There's live Latin or reggae from around 10pm to

midnight most nights, plus assorted other events such as aerial acrobatics and dance and art classes.

Getting There & Away

See the boxed text on p766 for information about transportation from Pochutla. *Camionetas* run between Mazunte and San Agustín (M\$4, five minutes) or Zipolite (M\$5, 10 minutes).

BAHÍAS DE HUATULCO

☎ 958 / pop 16,000

Mexico's newest planned coastal resort lies along a series of beautiful sandy bays, the Bahías de Huatulco (wah-tool-koh), 50km east of Pochutla. This stretch of coast had just one small fishing village until the 1980s. The Mexican government has trodden more gently here than at other resort projects: pockets of development are separated by tracts of unspoiled shoreline, the maximum building height is six stories, and water-processing plants assure no sewage goes into the sea. Lower than expected occupancy rates have slowed development, and, for now, Huatulco is still a relaxed and relatively uncrowded resort, with a succession of scenic beaches lapped by beautiful water and backed by forest. Balancing this, a cruise-ship pier has gone in at Bahía de Santa Cruz, and between October and May an average of two ships a week dock here. Agencies offer all sorts of active pursuits here, from snorkeling and diving to rafting and horseback riding, but Huatulco is not a place to stay long on a very tight budget.

Orientation

The Huatulco bays are strung along the coast about 10km in each direction from the main harbor at Santa Cruz Huatulco. From west to east, the main ones are San Agustín, Chachacual, Cacaluta, Maguey, El Organo, Santa Cruz, Chahué, Tangolunda and Conejos.

The 'downtown' area is La Crucecita, 1km north of Santa Cruz Huatulco and linked to Hwy 200 by a 5km divided approach road. La Crucecita has nearly all the budget and midrange accommodations and eateries, most shops, the market and the bus stations. Santa Cruz Huatulco has a few plusher hotels as well as the main harbor. The other main developments are

at Bahía Chahué, 1km east of Santa Cruz, with mainly midrange hotels and a marina, and Tangolunda, 4km further east with most of the luxury hotels.

The airport is 400m north of Hwy 200, 12km west of the turnoff to La Crucecita.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

El Telefonito (Map p778; Av Bugambilia 501, La Crucecita; internet per hr M\$10; ☎ 9am-11:30pm) Also offers cheap phone calls to Europe.

Terra-Cotta (Gardenia 902, La Crucecita; internet per hr M\$10; ☎ 10am-9pm) A nice, clean, air-conditioned facility (see p781).

LAUNDRY

Lavandería Diush (Map p778; ☎ 587-27-37; Av Bugambilia 402, La Crucecita; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Washes and dries a minimum 3kg for M\$15 per kg, or M\$20 for four-hour same-morning service.

MONEY

Banco Azteca (Map p778; Guanacastle 309, La Crucecita; ☎ 9am-9pm) Has an ATM and exchanges cash US dollars.

HSBC (Map p779; Harborside, Santa Cruz; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat) Currency exchange and ATM.

TOURIST INFORMATION

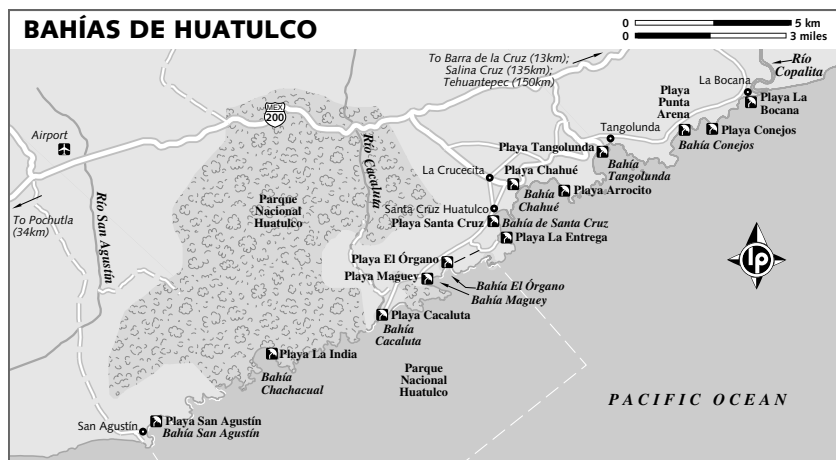
Tourist information kiosk (Map p778; Plaza Principal, La Crucecita; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Has helpful staff.

Tourist office (Map p778; ☎ 587-18-71; turismohuatulco@hotmail.com; cnr Av Bugambilia & Ceiba, La Crucecita; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) A municipal office, upstairs in the Casa de la Cultura; some English spoken.

Sights & Activities

La Crucecita's modern church, the **Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe** (Plaza Principal), has an impressively large image of the Virgin painted on its ceiling. The rest of the area's attractions are on the water, at the beaches or in jungle hinterland. You can snorkel, dive, kayak, surf, fish, raft, canoe, walk in the jungle, watch birds, ride horses, cycle, visit a coffee plantation and waterfalls and more. Most outings cost between M\$250 and M\$400. Hotels, tour kiosks in La Crucecita and travel agencies will book many of these activities.

The **Parque Nacional Huatulco** (Huatulco National Park) protects 119 sq km of land, sea and shoreline west of Santa Cruz Huatulco, including some of Huatulco's most important



coral reefs, which in the past have suffered some damage from fishing and touristic activities. Few visitors enter the national park except on guided or escorted trips, and the paying of the M\$20 fee for entry to the land zone is normally taken care of by your tour operator: otherwise you can pay it from 9am to noon, Monday to Saturday, at the **national park office** (Map p778; ☎ /fax 587-04-46; cnr Blvd Chahué & Guamuchil, La Crucecita). The M\$21 fee for the marine zone is collected at Santa Cruz harbor, along with a M\$5 fee to enter the harbor itself. Use of non-biodegradable suntan lotions or sunscreen is prohibited within the national park.

The **Parque Ecológico Rufino Tamayo** (Map p778) on the edge of La Crucecita is a still rather wild city park, composed mainly of natural vegetation, with some paved paths and tile-roofed shelters with benches.

BEACHES

Huatulco's beaches are sandy with clear waters (though boats and jet skis leave an oily film here and there). Like the rest of Mexico, all beaches are under federal control, and anyone can use them – even when hotels appear to treat them as private property. Some have coral offshore and excellent snorkeling, though visibility can be poor in the rainy season.

Lanchas will whisk you out to most of the beaches from Santa Cruz Huatulco harbor (Map p779) any time between 8am and 5pm, and they'll return to collect you by dusk. Taxis

can get you to most beaches for less money, but a boat ride is more fun. Round-trip *lancha* rates for up to 10 people from Santa Cruz: Playa La Entrega M\$200, Bahía Maguey or Bahía El Órgano M\$500, Playa La India M\$1000, Bahía San Agustín M\$1200.

The small, accessible **Playa Santa Cruz** at Santa Cruz Huatulco is often crowded, and its looks are somewhat marred by the cruise-ship pier. It has several beach restaurants. **Playa La Entrega** lies toward the outer edge of Bahía de Santa Cruz, a five-minute *lancha* trip or 2.5km by paved road from Santa Cruz. This 300m beach, backed by a line of seafood *palapas*, can get crowded, but it has calm water and good snorkeling on a coral plate from which boats are cordoned off – although the coral is in danger of being smothered in silt churned up by the cruise ships entering the bay. 'La Entrega' means 'The Delivery': here in 1831, Mexican independence hero Vicente Guerrero was handed over to his enemies by a Genoese sea captain. Guerrero was taken to Cuilapan near Oaxaca and shot.

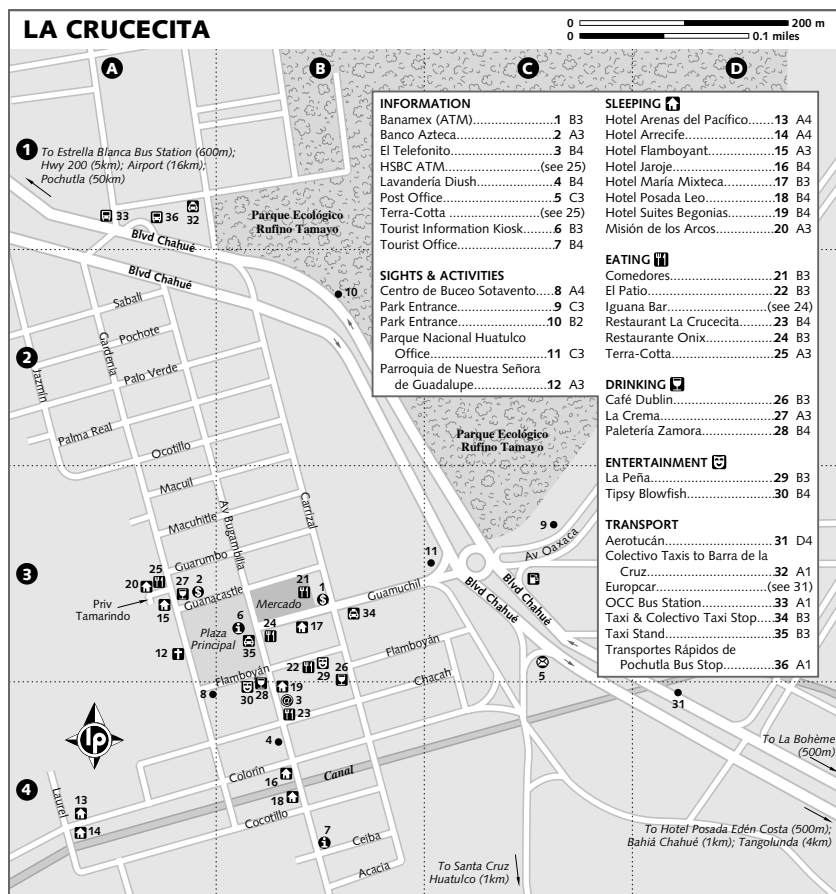
Some of the western bays are accessible by road; at times groups of young men congregate in the bays' parking lots, offering to 'watch your car' and touting for the beach restaurants. A 1.5km paved road diverges to **Bahía Maguey** from the road to La Entrega, about half a kilometer out of Santa Cruz. Maguey's fine 400m beach curves around a calm bay between forested headlands. It has a line of seafood *palapas*. There's good snorkeling around the rocks at the left (east) side

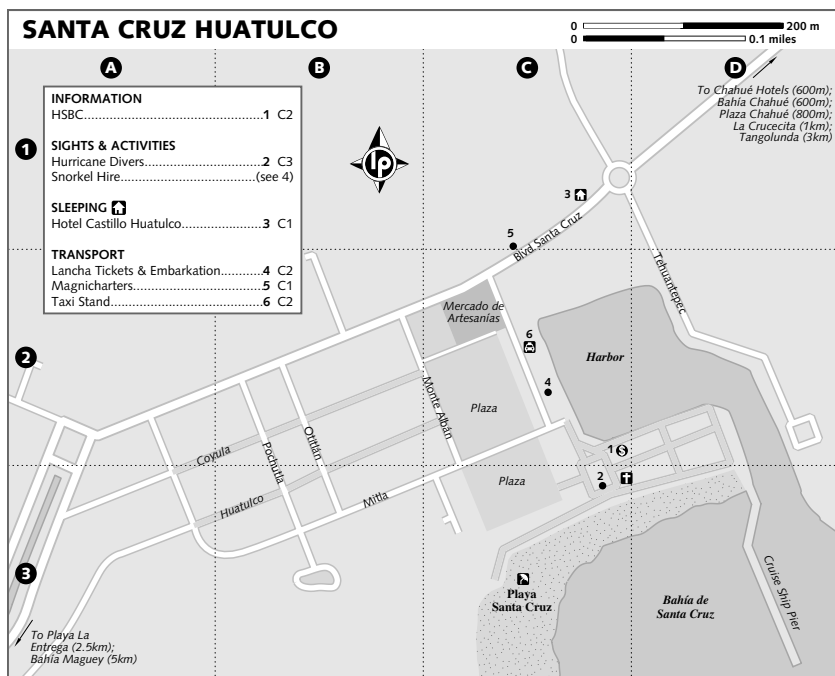
of the bay. **Bahía El Órgano**, just east of Maguey, has a 250m beach. You can reach it by a narrow 10-minute footpath that heads into the trees halfway along the Santa Cruz–Maguey road. El Órgano has calm waters that are good for snorkeling, but it lacks *comedores*.

Bahía Cacaluta is about 1km long and protected by an island, though there can be undertow. Snorkeling is best around the island. Behind the beach is a lagoon with bird life. The road to Cacaluta (which branches off just above the parking lot for Maguey) is paved except for the last 1.5km, but it can be a long, hot walk from the pavement's end, and there are no services at the beach itself. A *lancha* from Santa Cruz Huatulco is a much more pleasant way to get there.

Bahía Chachacual, inaccessible by land, has a headland at each end and two beaches. The easterly **Playa La India** is one of Huatulco's most beautiful beaches and one of the area's best places for snorkeling. No *comedores* here.

If you head 1.7km west of the airport to a crossroads on Hwy 200, then 13km south down a dirt road, fording a river after 9km, you'll reach **Bahía San Agustín**. The beach is long and sandy, with a long line of *palapa comedores*, some with hammocks for rent overnight. It's popular with Mexicans at weekends and holidays, but quiet at other times. Usually the waters are calm, and the snorkeling is particularly good here (some of the *comedores* rent out equipment).





A paved road runs to the eastern bays from La Crucecita and Santa Cruz, continuing eventually to Hwy 200. **Bahía Chahué** has a good beach (though the surf can be surprisingly strong) and a marina at its east end. Further east, **Bahía Tangolunda** is the site of the major top-end hotel developments. The sea is sometimes rough here: heed the colored-flag safety system. Three kilometers further east is the long sweep of **Playa Punta Arena**, on Bahía Conejos, an almost virgin beach with sometimes strong surf. Around a headland at the east end of Bahía Conejos is the more sheltered **Playa Conejos**, whose land access is only by a steep path. Two to 3km further east, the road runs down to the coast again at **La Bocana**, at the mouth of the Río Copalita, where you'll find surfable waves and a couple of seafood *comedores*. Another long beach stretches to the east.

SNORKELING & DIVING

You can rent **snorkeling gear**, including a life jacket, at Santa Cruz harbor for M\$75 a day. The best snorkeling is generally on the coral plates at **Playa La Entrega** and Bahías Cacaluta and San Agustín. You can either hire a *lancha*

to take you to snorkel sites or take a tour with outfits such as those listed below.

The Huatulco bays have 13 main dive areas, with a good variety of fish and corals, as well as dolphins and sea turtles. This is a good place to learn to dive, with warm waters, fascinating marine scenery, no serious currents and calm conditions almost year-round. There's a decompression chamber in the local navy hospital. Two companies will take you diving and offer instruction:

Hurricane Divers (☎ 587-11-07; www.hurricanedivers.com) Santa Cruz (Map p779; Playa Santa Cruz; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sun); Tangolunda (Playa Punta Tangolunda; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Sat) The very professional international crew here speak English, Spanish, Dutch and German, and offer a variety of courses and dives. This is one of Mexico's few PADI Instructor Development Centers. Options include two-tank dives (US\$95), night dives (US\$70) and the Discover Scuba beginners' course (US\$135 for about six hours over two days). But Hurricane's most popular outing is a full-day excursion for US\$120 per person (minimum: two) with snorkeling in at least two bays and a picnic – or US\$155 with up to two dives.

Centro de Buco Sotavento (www.tomzap.com/sotavento.html; scubasota@hotmail.com) La Crucecita

(Map p778; ☎ 587-21-66; Local 18, Plaza Oaxaca Mall, Plaza Principal; 🕒 9am-9pm); Tangolunda (☎ 581-00-51; Local 6, Plaza Las Conchas; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) This friendly local company offers a range of options from a four-hour introduction (M\$750) to full certification (five days; M\$3850) or specialty night dives (M\$750). One-/two-tank dives are M\$550/850. Sotavento also does four-hour snorkeling trips for M\$200 per person (minimum two people).

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The Copalita and Zimatán Rivers near Bahías de Huatulco have waters ranging from Class 1 to Class 5 in rafting terms. They're at their biggest between July and November. The well-established **Rancho Tangolunda** (☎ 587-21-26; www.ranchotangolunda.com; Local 5, Plaza Punta Tangolunda, Blvd Juárez, Tangolunda) not only takes you rafting on the Copalita but also offers river and sea kayaking, horseback riding, climbing, rappelling, a 300m zip-line, walking and bike tours, canyoneering and bird-watching. Most activities cost M\$250 to M\$400 per person, though the more challenging rafting and kayaking options are M\$600 to M\$700. The *rancho* is about 1km inland near the Río Copalita at the east end of Bahías area.

Rancho Caballo de Mar (☎ 587-05-30), based at Playa Punta Arena, takes 3½-hour beach and forest rides for around M\$350 (reservations are advisable; riding experience isn't necessary). English and French are spoken.

Tangolunda has an 18-hole **golf course** (☎ 581-00-37).

Sleeping

You'll find all the budget and most of the midrange options in La Crucecita, with further midrange possibilities in Santa Cruz and Chahué. The top-end resort hotels are at Tangolunda. Midrange and top-end places tend to raise their rates at peak seasons – a couple of weeks around Christmas–New Year and Easter, and often a month or so in summer, typically mid-July to mid-August.

BUDGET

Hotel Posada Leo (Map p778; ☎ 587-26-01; www.posadaleo.com; Av Bugambilia 302, La Crucecita; s/d with fan M\$200/250, air-com M\$250/300; 🕒) A friendly little budget spot, with half a dozen smallish but neat and well kept rooms, all with hot-water bathrooms.

Hotel Jaroje (Map p778; ☎ 587-27-14; www.hotelhuatulco.com.mx; Av Bugambilia 304, La Crucecita; s/d

M\$250/300; 🕒) Bright, centrally located Jaroje has large, white, clean rooms with mosquito screens, air-con, fans, cable TV and fine bathrooms – a very good value.

Hotel Arrecife (Map p778; ☎ 587-17-07, 800-7177771; www.hotelarrecife.com.mx; Colorín 510, La Crucecita; s from M\$200, d with fan/air-con M\$350/400; 🕒) In a quiet, leafy neighborhood, the Arrecife has a nice little pool with a café. Most of the 24 good, clean rooms are sizable, with pleasing decor, white tile floors, balcony, air-con and cable TV; a few at the side lack air-con but are still attractive, with a king-size and a double bed on two levels.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Arenas del Pacífico (Map p778; ☎ 583-49-89, 800-7177771; www.arenasdelpacifico.com.mx; Colorín 507, La Crucecita; r M\$400-450; 🕒) Opposite Hotel Arrecife and under the same ownership, the Arenas del Pacífico has a larger pool area with a couple of kids' slides, and all its rooms are air-con, with balconies, writing desk and pleasing blue-tiled bathrooms.

Misión de los Arcos (Map p778; ☎ 587-01-65; www.misiondelosarcos.com; Gardenia 902, La Crucecita; r M\$450-500; 🕒) This well-run, welcoming, American-owned hotel is embellished by a touch of colonial style and interior greenery. It has big, bright, comfortable, air-conditioned rooms, most with balcony, and walk-through access to Terra-Cotta restaurant, under the same ownership. There's wi-fi throughout.

Hotel Suites Begonias (Map p778; ☎ 587-03-90; www.hotelbegonias.com; Av Bugambilia 503, La Crucecita; r M\$450-500, tr or q M\$500-600; 🕒) The rooms here are bright and attractive with good wooden furniture, not to mention some highly artistic towel-folding. All are air-conditioned and have cable TV and one double or king-size bed.

Hotel María Mixteca (Map p778; ☎ 587-23-36; www.travelbymexico.com/oaxa/mariamixteca; Guamuchil 204, La Crucecita; s/d/tr M\$450/490/530; 🕒) Small and only a few years old, the María Mixteca offers 14 prettily decorated, yellow-and-white rooms on two upper floors, with super-comfy beds, air-conditioning, great bathrooms, cable TV, room safes and wi-fi access.

Hotel Flamboyant (Map p778; ☎ 587-01-13; www.hotelesfarrera.com; Plaza Principal, La Crucecita; r incl breakfast M\$550; 🕒) This yellow downtown hotel has a pleasant courtyard, attractive pool, its own restaurant and 70 good-sized rooms. Decor is Oaxacan folksy. Rates can double, or more, at peak seasons.

Hotel Posada Edén Costa (☎ 587-24-80; www.edencosta.com; Calle Zapoteco s/n, Chahué; r M\$600, ste with salon & kitchen M\$1000; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎) Swiss- and Laotian-owned Edén Costa, a block inland from Bahía Chahué, has quiet and attractive rooms with nice touches including colorful murals. Rooms have two double beds, and most overlook the small central pool. The attached restaurant, L'Échalote (right), is a big bonus.

Hotel Castillo Huatulco (Map p779; ☎ 587-01-44, 800-543-90-40; www.hotelcastillohuatulco.com; Blvd Santa Cruz 303, Santa Cruz; r M\$932, s/d full board M\$1200/1800; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎) Colonial-style Castillo Huatulco has an attractive pool in its central garden, a restaurant and 113 good-sized, brightly decorated rooms with safes. Transportation to the hotel's beach club on Bahía Chahué is free.

TOP END

Air and lodging packages are your best bet for a good-value holiday in a top-end Huatulco hotel. Another way to save is to look for promotions on hotel websites.

Casa del Mar (☎ 581-02-03, 800-9081142; ventas@casadelmaroaxaca.com; Balcones de Tangolunda 13, Tangolunda; ste incl breakfast from M\$1534; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Elegant and sensationally sited Casa del Mar, east of Tangolunda's main hotel cluster, has 22 well-appointed suites with great views, and a beautiful pool and restaurant. It often fills up with Mexican families at holiday times.

our pick Camino Real Zaashila (☎ 583-03-00, 800-9012300; www.caminoreal.com/zaashila; Blvd Juárez 5, Tangolunda; r incl breakfast from M\$2200; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Toward the east end of Tangolunda, this attractively landscaped, modern-hacienda-style property has a fabulously enormous pool in lovely gardens. There are 148 rooms, most with sea view; 41 come with their own small pool.

Quinta Real (☎ 581-04-28, 800-4005000; www.quintareal.com; Blvd Juárez 2, Tangolunda; ste from US\$270; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The utterly gorgeous, Moorish-inspired Quinta Real has a hilltop position at the west end of Tangolunda. Its 28 suites all have Jacuzzis, marble bathrooms and ocean views; some have fountain-fed private pools that seem to spill down the hillside to the beach and main swimming-pool area.

Eating

LA CRUCECITA

Comedores (Map p778; Mercado, cnr Av Bugambilia & Guanacaste; fish or shrimp platters M\$60-80) The very

clean *comedores* in La Crucécita's market serve up good, well-priced food, including egg dishes for M\$30 and *enfrijoladas* (tortillas smothered in beans, with a sprinkling of cheese) for M\$40.

Restaurant La Crucécita (Map p778; ☎ 587-09-06; Av Bugambilia 501; mains M\$40-90; ☎ 7:30am-10pm) This inexpensive open-air spot, a block from the plaza, is dependable for fish, chicken and Oaxacan dishes. There's an economical M\$40 *menú del día*. Early in the day, watch the chef prepare serious quantities of *salsa roja*.

Iguana Bar (Map p778; ☎ 587-00-70; Plaza Principal; mains M\$45-120; ☎ 8am-12:30am) Beneath the classy Restaurante Onix, Iguana is a sound bet for reasonably priced breakfasts and tacos and other Mexican standards.

El Patio (Map p778; ☎ 587-02-11; Flamboyán 214; breakfast M\$30-60, mains M\$50-130) A appealing garden patio with tables out the back welcomes you here. The breakfasts are good deals; the rest of the day you're offered the usual range of seafood, chicken dishes and Oaxacan specialties, as well as a full selection of alcoholic drinks.

our pick Terra-Cotta (Map p778; ☎ 587-12-28; Gardenia 902; breakfasts M\$40-65, mains M\$50-140; ☎ 7:30am-11:30pm) Popular, American-run Terra-Cotta has sidewalk tables as well as a soothing air-con interior. Good service complements the excellent food: breakfasts, shrimp, steaks, *antojitos*, waffles, baguettes and ice cream all go down easy. Breakfast coffee comes with free refills, and there's free wi-fi too.

Restaurante Onix (Map p778; ☎ 587-05-20; Plaza Principal; mains M\$75-215; ☎ 2-11pm) Definitely the finest eating in La Crucécita, this airy upstairs locale overlooking the plaza offers very well prepared Mexican and European dishes. Try the mussels with ham and cheese or the *sopa de tortilla*, followed by steak or tuna *al chipotle* (in a fermented-chili sauce).

CHAHUÉ & TANGOLUNDA

our pick L'Échalote (☎ 587-24-80; www.edencosta.com; Hotel Posada Edén Costa, Calle Zapoteco s/n, Chahué; mains M\$80-150; ☎ 2-11pm Tue-Sun) The Swiss-French chef prepares very tasty French, southeast Asian, Oaxacan and other dishes. The Thai salad with prawns and bean sprouts is delicious. Main dishes range over fish, steaks and the house-specialty fondues, and the desserts aren't too shabby either.

La Bohème (☎ 587-22-50; Paseo Chahué 5, Sector M; mains M\$100-250; ☎ 2-11pm Wed-Mon) La Bohème has some of the highest prices in Huatulco but also some of the best food. The French owner-chef prepares almost exclusively French fare, from snails, mussels or duck foie gras to the rich coq au vin and yummy crepes and profiteroles. Add the elegant setting, friendly welcome and good service, and you'll be glad you found its slightly out-of-the-way location.

Tangolunda's big hotels offer a choice of expensive bars, coffee shops and restaurants. You won't go wrong at the Camino Real Zaashila's **Restaurant Chez-Binni** (☎ 583-03-00; mains M\$100-200; ☎ 6-11pm), which specializes in grills and Oaxacan dishes.

BEACHES

There are decent seafood *palapas* at Playas La Entrega, Maguey, San Agustín and La Bocana. A whole grilled *huachinango* (red snapper) costs M\$60 to M\$100.

Drinking

Paletería Zamora (Map p778; cnr Flamboyán & Av Bugambilia, La Crucecita; drinks M\$10-40; ☎ 9am-11pm) Thirst-zapping Zamora blends up a full range of cooling fresh fruit drinks, *licuados* and *aguas frescas* (fruit blended with water and sweetener).

Café Dublin (Map p778; Carrizal 502, La Crucecita; ☎ 6pm-last customer) This popular little Irish bar proffers darts, sports on TV and lots of drinks including Guinness in cans.

La Crema (Map p778; ☎ 587-07-02; Gardenia 311, La Crucecita; ☎ 7pm-2am) Spacious but dark, this quirky, hippie- and rock-themed den, overlooking the Plaza Principal, has a good music mix, the best cocktail list in town, and delicious wood-oven pizza.

Entertainment

La Peña (Map p778; Flamboyán 210, La Crucecita; ☎ from 8pm Tue-Sat) The live Latin bands at this open-to-the-street spot can whip up a good party vibe; the back room has pool tables for quieter moments.

Tipsy Blowfish (Map p778; ☎ 587-28-44; Flamboyán 304, La Crucecita) There's often decent live rock at this friendly Texan-run bar on the Plaza Principal.

La Papaya (☎ 583-94-11; Blvd Juárez, Chahué; admission M\$110; ☎ 10pm-5am Thu-Sat, daily in high season) Huatulco's hottest disco attracts mostly an

18-to-25 age group. Dancing on the bar, an aquarium with bikini-clad humans and mud-wrestling help warm up the atmosphere.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Mexicana and its subsidiary Click Mexicana offer three flights daily to/from Mexico City. Magnicharters flies most days to/from Mexico City. Aerotucán and Aerovega fly small planes daily to/from Oaxaca, though Aerovega goes only with a minimum of three passengers.

See p734 for more on these flights. **Continental** (☎ 800-900-50-00) flies direct from Houston, Texas, up to five times a week, and cheap charters from Canada, the US and the UK are sometimes available.

Airline offices:

Aerotucán Airport (☎ 587-60-66); La Crucecita (Map p778; ☎ 587-24-27; Plaza Carmelinas, Blvd Chahué; ☎ 8am-2pm & 4:30-8pm Mon-Sat)

Magnicharters (Map p779; ☎ 581-05-12; Blvd Santa Cruz)

Mexicana and **Click Mexicana** Airport (☎ 581-90-07); Chahué (☎ 587-02-23; Plaza Chahué, Blvd Juárez; ☎ 9am-5:45pm Mon-Sat)

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency (daily)
Acapulco	M\$307	10hr	8 from EB terminal
Mexico City (Terminal Sur)	M\$525-730	14hr	3 from EB terminal
Oaxaca (via Salina Cruz)	M\$230-270	7-8½hr	4 from OCC terminal
Pochutla	M\$26-30	1hr	9 from EB terminal
	M\$18-30	1hr	31 from OCC terminal
	M\$16	1hr	Transportes Rápidos de Pochutla every 15 min, 6am-8:30pm
Puerto Escondido	M\$69-82	2½hr	9 from EB terminal
	M\$35-76	2½hr	31 from OCC terminal 8:30pm
San Cristóbal de Las Casas	M\$326	9½-10½hr	OCC, 8:30 & 11:50pm 8:30pm
Tapachula	M\$352	12hr	OCC, 7:50pm
Tehuantepec	M\$76-100	3½hr	10 from OCC terminal
Tuxtla Gutiérrez	M\$276	8-9½hr	OCC, 8:30 & 11:50pm

BUS

Some buses coming to Huatulco are marked 'Santa Cruz Huatulco,' but they still terminate in La Crucecita. Make sure your bus is not headed to Santa María Huatulco, which is a long way inland.

The **OCC bus station** (Map p778; ☎ 587-02-61; Blvd Chahué) is on the north edge of La Crucecita. As well as 1st-class OCC buses, this is the terminal for ADO GL (deluxe) and Sur (2nd class). **Estrella Blanca** (EB; off Map p778; ☎ 587-23-30; Av Carpinteros s/n, Sector V), a further 700m from the center, has further 1st-class and deluxe services. First-class **Turistar** (☎ 587-06-82) also leaves from the EB station.

Transportes Rápidos de Pochutla runs small buses to Pochutla from a stop on Blvd Chahué opposite the north end of Av Bugambilia (Map p778).

CAR

Europcar (www.europcar.com.mx) Airport (☎ 581-90-94; ☎ 11am-5pm); La Crucecita (Map p778; ☎ 583-47-51; Plaza Carmelinas, Blvd Chahué; ☎ 8am-1pm & 4-7pm) Recommended for reasonable rates (from M\$600 per day) and efficient service.

Hertz (www.hertz.com) Airport (☎ 581-90-92; ☎ 24hr); Tangolunda (☎ 581-05-88; Crown Pacific Hotel, Blvd Juárez 8; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-6pm) Also dependable.

Getting Around**TO/FROM THE AIRPORT**

Transportación Terrestre (☎ 581-90-14) provides *colectivo* combis for M\$87 per person from the airport to La Crucecita, Santa Cruz or Bahía Chahué and for M\$102 to Tangolunda. Get tickets at their airport kiosk. You may be able to pick up a whole cab just outside the airport gate for about M\$100 to La Crucecita or Santa Cruz, M\$120 to Tangolunda or M\$150 to Pochutla. An even cheaper option is to walk 400m down to Hwy 200 and catch a bus for M\$7 to La Crucecita or M\$15 to Pochutla. Buses heading to La Crucecita may be marked 'Santa Cruz' or 'Bahías Huatulco' or something similar.

TAXI

Taxis provide the only transportation between La Crucecita, Santa Cruz Huatulco and Tangolunda. Rates are posted at the taxi stand on Plaza Principal in La Crucecita, from where you pay M\$15 to Santa Cruz, M\$25 to Tangolunda and M\$45 to Bahía Maguay. By the hour, cabs cost M\$150.

Taxis operating on a *colectivo* basis wait outside Plaza Madero mall on Guamuchil in La Crucecita, but they're not very frequent. They charge M\$3 per person to Santa Cruz and M\$5 to Tangolunda.

BARRA DE LA CRUZ

☎ 958 / pop 750

This well cared-for Chontal village, about 20km east of Huatulco, is famed for its surf but is also a relaxed and friendly place for anyone to chill out for a day or two. The right-hand point break, off the beach 1.5km from the village, gets up to a double overhead and is long and fast. Good swells for experienced surfers are frequent from March to October and generally at their best in June and July. Barra's surf was unknown to the outside world until the mid-1990s, but the word has been well and truly out since the world's top pro surfers assembled here for the Rip Curl Search event in the 2006 Men's World Tour.

A lack of undertow also makes for good swimming. Barra's beach has showers, toilets and a community-run *comedor* with hammocks and shade. The municipality charges M\$20 per person to pass along the road to the beach and imposes an 8pm curfew. The fee goes to help maintain the road and keep the beach clean. You can rent surfboards at El Chontal restaurant beside the toll gate for M\$100 per day.

Cabañas Pepe (per person M\$80), behind El Chontal, has well-built wood-and-palm-thatch cabins with hammocks out front and shared Western-style toilets and showers. Also good is **Barradise** (pablo_rafting@yahoo.com; per person M\$80), a couple of hundred meters before El Chontal as you come into Barra, which has four fan-cooled rooms with private bathroom. Barradise is ably run by English-speaking Pablo Narváez, who also gives surf classes (around M\$450 for three or four hours) and leads local bird-watching tours. It was Pablo who first brought international surfers to Barra in the 1990s. He sees Barra's surf fame as an opportunity to develop village living standards and social conditions.

El Chontal (mains M\$25-50) serves good Mexican standards and is one of several places to eat.

Getting There & Around

Barra de la Cruz is reached via a 2.5km road that heads coastward from Hwy 200 east of

the Puente Zimatán bridge. *Colectivo* taxis run to Barra (M\$20, 40 minutes) about every half-hour until 7pm from the park just east of the OCC bus station in La Crucecita. A private taxi costs around M\$140. Taxis will run you from Barra village to the beach or the highway turnoff for M\$30 if you don't want to walk.

ISTHMUS OF TEHUANTEPEC

The southern half of the 200km-wide Isthmus of Tehuantepec (teh-wahn-teh-pek), Mexico's narrow waist, forms the eastern end of Oaxaca state. This is hot, flat country and, if you have come down from Oaxaca city, it's a stark reminder that you are well inside the tropics. Indigenous Zapotec culture is strong here, with its own regional twists. In 1496 the isthmus Zapotecs repulsed the Aztecs from the fortress of Guiengola, near Tehuantepec, and the isthmus never became part of the Aztec empire. An independent spirit continues to pervade the region to this day.

If you stay around, you'll encounter a lively, friendly populace, whose open and confident women take leading roles in business and government. Isthmus people let loose their love of music, dancing and partying in numerous annual *velas* (fiestas) lasting several days. If you're here for one of these occasions, you will see women displaying wonderfully worked, highly colorful *huipiles*, gold and silver jewelry, skirts embroidered with fantastic silk flowers, and odd headgear. Many isthmus fiestas feature the *tirada de frutas*, in which women climb on roofs and throw fruit on the men below!

A new toll road, Hwy 185D, bypasses the three main isthmus towns – Salina Cruz, Tehuantepec and Juchitán – and intersects Hwy 190 just west of Tehuantepec. Isthmus culture is stronger in Tehuantepec and Juchitán than in Salina Cruz, which is dominated by its oil refinery. All three towns can be pretty uncomfortable in the heat of the day, but come the evening breezes they take on a more agreeable air. Around La Ventosa, 15km northeast of Juchitán, strong north winds blow, sometimes toppling high vehicles.

TEHUANTEPEC

☎ 971 / pop 37,000

Tehuantepec is a friendly town, 245km from Oaxaca city. June and August are the main months for partying in the fiestas of the 15 *barrios* (neighborhoods), each of which has its own church.

Orientation

Tehuantepec's OCC/ADO bus station, known as La Terminal, is by Hwy 185 on the northern edge of town. To walk to the central plaza from here, head to the left along Av Héroes outside OCC/ADO for 600m until it ends at a T-junction, then turn right along Guerrero. Take the fifth street to the left, Hidalgo, and walk two blocks to the plaza. The Palacio Municipal stands on the south side of the plaza.

Information

Bancomer (☎ 8:30am–4pm Mon–Fri) and **Banorte** (☎ 9am–4pm Mon–Fri), both on Calle 5 de Mayo a few steps west of the Palacio Municipal, have ATMs and change cash US dollars.

Cyberweb Grandalf (Romero 64; internet per hr M\$10; ☎ 8am–10pm Mon–Sat, 9am–9pm Sun) Just past Hotel Oasis.

Tourist Information Office (Hwy 185; ☎ 8am–4pm Mon–Fri, 9am–2pm Sat) Two blocks west from the Palacio Municipal along Calle 5 de Mayo, then 70m south on the highway; they don't see many foreigners here but they are knowledgeable about the area.

Sights

EX-CONVENTO REY COSIJOPI

This former Dominican monastery, north of the plaza on a short street off Guerrero, is Tehuantepec's **Casa de la Cultura** (Callejón Rey Cosijopi; admission free; ☎ 9am–2pm & 5–8pm Mon–Fri, 9am–2pm Sat). It bears traces of old frescos and has modest but interesting exhibits of traditional dress, archaeological finds, historical photos, religious regalia and the like. You may need to ask for some of the rooms to be opened. The last Zapotec king, Cosijopí, provided the funds for its construction in the 16th century, at the urging of Hernán Cortés.

GUIENGOLA

This old hillside **Zapotec stronghold** (admission free; ☎ 8am–5pm), where King Cosijoeza rebuffed the Aztecs in 1496, is north of Hwy 190 from a turnoff 11km out of Tehuantepec. A sign at

Puente Las Tejas bridge, just past the Km 240 marker, points to 'Ruinas Guiengola.' The unpaved 7km road in is passable in dry weather, though the last kilometer or so (heading uphill) requires a high-clearance vehicle. The road ends at a signed trailhead, and about an hour's sweaty walk uphill through tropical woodland gets you to the remains of two pyramids, a ball court, a 64-room complex and a thick defensive wall. Many more unexposed remains lie overgrown by the surrounding forest. You'll also see interesting limestone formations and some fine views over the isthmus.

Victor Velázquez Guzmán (☎ 971-1110768 or contact him through Tehuantepec tourist office) guides small groups to Guiengola from Tehuantepec for M\$600 per group (M\$350 if you have your own vehicle). Victor will speak Spanish, but he has printed explanatory material in English.

MARKET

Tehuantepec's dim, almost medieval, indoor market is open daily on the west side of the plaza. It spills out into the surrounding streets, where flowers are often for sale.

Sleeping

Hotel Oasis (☎ 715-00-08; h.oasis@hotmail.com; Ocampo 8; s/d/tr with fan M\$150/190/270, r with air-con & cable TV M\$400; (P) (♿)) The good-value Oasis is a block south of the plaza, and most of its 28 rooms have been recently renovated in attractive yellows and oranges.

Hotel Calli (☎ 715-00-85; www.hotelcalli.com; Carretera Cristóbal Colón Km 790; r M\$800, ste M\$1300; (P) (♿) (🚿)) Tehuantepec's best lodgings are beside Hwy 185 about 700m toward Juchitán from La Terminal. The Calli's 100 good-size modern rooms, in pleasing blues and yellows, all boast cable TV, wi-fi access, phone, air-con and small balconies. The ample common areas include a restaurant, a good, partly palm-shaded pool and colorful lobby murals.

Eating

Restaurante Bar Scarú (☎ 715-06-46; Callejón Leona Vicario 4; mains M\$50-130; ☎ 8am-10:30pm) Two short blocks east and 30m north of Hotel Donají, friendly Scarú occupies an 18th-century house with a courtyard and colorful modern murals of Tehuantepec life. Sit beneath a fan, quaff a *limonada* and sample one of the many varied dishes on offer. At weekends old-timers plunk out marimba tunes.

At night the entire east side of the plaza is lined with tables and chairs beside carts serving cheap tacos and other delights.

Getting There & Away

OCC and ADO (both 1st class) share La Terminal with ADO GL (deluxe) and Sur and AU (both 2nd class). Daily departures (some are *de paso*) include these:

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency (daily)
Bahías de Huatulco	1st-class M\$100	3½hr	3, 12:10-7:25am
	2nd-class M\$76	3½hr	5
Mexico City	deluxe (TAPO or Terminal Sur)	11hr	3, 6:40-9:30pm
	1st-class M\$578	11½hr	4, 7:45-9:55pm
	2nd-class M\$512	13hr	3, 5:35-9:05pm
Oaxaca	1st-class M\$152	4¼hr	14
Pochutla	1st-class M\$128	4½hr	3, 12:10-7:25am
Puerto Escondido	1st-class M\$170	6hr	3, 12:10-7:25am
	2nd-class M\$132	6½hr	1 (3pm)
	M\$76		
Tapachula	M\$250	9hr	1st-class, 11:50pm
Tuxtla Gutiérrez	1st-class M\$180	4½-5½hr	4
Villahermosa	1st-class M\$286	7½hr	4

Buses to Juchitán (M\$15, 30 minutes) depart across the street from OCC at least every half-hour during daylight.

Getting Around

Taxis between La Terminal and the plaza cost M\$15. A unique local transportation option is the *motocarro*, where passengers sit (or stand, to better catch the breeze) on a platform behind the driver. The sight of colorfully garbed women riding tall will linger in your memory.

JUCHITÁN

☎ 971 / pop 69,000

Istmeño culture is strong in this friendly town, which is visited by few gringos. About 30 different neighborhood festivals (*velas*) almost fill the calendar with music, dancing, drinking, eating

and fun from mid-April to early September, above all in May. Juchitán is also famed for its *muxes* – the town's openly gay, frequently cross-dressing, men, who are fully accepted in local society and hold their own *vela* in November.

Orientation

Prolongación 16 de Septiembre heads toward the town center from a busy intersection with traffic signals on the north edge of town. The main bus terminal is 100m toward town from this intersection. Past the bus station the street curves left, then right, then divides into 5 de Septiembre (right fork, for southbound traffic) and 16 de Septiembre (left fork, northbound). These two emerge as opposite sides of the central plaza, Jardín Juárez, after seven blocks.

Sights

Jardín Juárez is a lively central square. In the busy two-story market on its east side you'll find locally made hammocks, Isthmus women's costumes, and maybe iguana on the menus of the *comedores*.

Juchitán's **Lidxi Guendabiaani** (Casa de la Cultura; ☎ 711-32-08; Belisario Domínguez; admission free; 🕒 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) is by the San Vicente Ferrer church a block south and west of Jardín Juárez, set around a big patio that buzzes with children. It has a gallery, where there is usually interesting exhibition on, and a small archaeological museum.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Don Alex (☎ /fax 711-10-64; 16 de Septiembre No 48; r M\$350-400; 🕒 🍷) Just 1½ blocks north of Jardín Juárez, the Don Alex has medium-sized rooms, with small touches of art, but they can be a bit airless. All are air-conditioned but only the M\$400 ones have hot water or a phone.

Hotel López Lena Palace (☎ 711-13-88; hotellopez lena@hotmail.com; 16 de Septiembre 70; s M\$290-384, d/tr/q M\$480/600/680; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Look for the mock Arabic exterior about halfway between the town center and bus station. The Lena's rooms are cheerful with good air-con and cable TV; the best value are the windowless but homey 'minis,' with excellent showers.

Café Jamaica (☎ 712-18-36; 16 de Septiembre s/n; items M\$12-40; 🕒 8am-10pm) A bright, clean place for drinks and light meals, from enchiladas to tortas and burgers, with an under-30s vibe and decor dedicated to Bob Marley, the US and the Yucatán Peninsula. It's just a couple of doors off Jardín Juárez.

Casagrande Restaurant (☎ 711-34-60; Jardín Juárez; mains M\$65-150; 🕒 8am-10pm) The flashiest eatery in town, serving a mix of Oaxacan and international dishes in a pleasant covered courtyard, with ceiling fans and hanging plants. It's on the south side of the plaza; the Casagrande cinema sign makes it easier to find.

Getting There & Away

UNO and ADO GL (deluxe), OCC and ADO (1st class) and Sur, AU and Ecobús (2nd-class) all use the main bus terminal on Prolongación 16 de Septiembre. Some buses here are *de paso*, and many depart between 11pm and 7am.

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency (daily)
Bahías de Huatulco	M\$91-144	4hr	14
Mexico City (TAPO or Terminal Sur)	M\$494-980	10½-12hr	15
Oaxaca	M\$100-194	4½-6hr	24
Pochutla	M\$122-149	5hr	10
San Cristóbal de Las Casas	M\$216	5½-6¾hr	3, 12:15-3:55am
Tapachula	M\$252-294	6-8½hr	3
Tehuantepec	M\$15-24	30min	56
Tonalá	M\$102-126	3-5hr	6
Tuxtla Gutiérrez	M\$162-164	4-5½hr	6

Frequent 2nd-class Istmeños buses to Tehuantepec (M\$15, 30 minutes) and Salina Cruz (M\$25, one hour) stop at the next corner south from the main terminal on Prolongación 16 de Septiembre during daylight.

Getting Around

'Terminal-Centro' buses run between the bus station and Jardín Juárez. A taxi costs about M\$15.

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