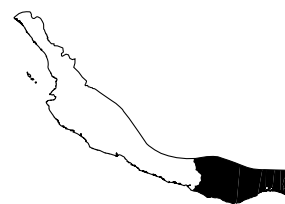


# Oaxaca



The southern state of Oaxaca (wah-*hah*-kah) offers a delightful variety of physical and cultural landscapes. The state capital, Oaxaca city, lies inland at an altitude that gives it a relatively temperate climate. The city boasts marvelous colonial architecture and is the focal point for the region's renowned culinary tradition. Here art and artisanship reach heights seen in few other places in the country. Adding to the city's allure are the nearby ruins of Monte Albán, with their impressive temples and magnificent hilltop vistas.

An immensely scenic bus ride over the mountains connects Oaxaca city with the sultry, sybaritic coast, which has a beach for every budget and a wave for every level of surfing and swimming skill. Long-established beach spots such as Puerto Escondido, Puerto Ángel and Zipolite offer visitors a relaxed beach scene, with plenty of shady hammocks to laze in. For the more actively inclined, opportunities abound for spotting sea turtles, whales, dolphins, crocodiles and scads of bird species.

The eastern third of Oaxaca state is occupied by the hot, low-lying Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Of the areas covered in this chapter, this is where you'll see the greatest numbers of indigenous people (mostly Zapotecs), who make up a large percentage of the state's population. Inhabitants of the isthmus, known as *istmeños*, are fiercely independent (though utterly friendly), and have preserved many of their customs. Visitors to the region can catch glimpses of a Mexico that has all but vanished from many other parts of the country.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Watching the exhilarating spectacle of surfers tackle the Mexican Pipeline's perfect break in mellow **Puerto Escondido** (p244)
- Chilling on the beach at **Mazunte** (p263), between rounds of turtle- and dolphin-spotting
- Feasting your senses on the incomparable artistic and culinary delights of colonial **Oaxaca city** (p224)
- Bird-watching on tropical **Laguna de Manialtepec** (p253)
- Exploring the superb hilltop ruins and tombs of **Monte Albán** (p240), the ancient Zapotec capital
- Discovering the **Parque Nacional Lagunas de Chacahua** (p243), a coast studded with lagoons, pristine beaches and prolific bird and plant life



■ AVERAGE JANUARY DAILY HIGH:  
OAXACA CITY: 25°C | 77°F,  
PUERTO ESCONDIDO: 32°C | 90°F

■ AVERAGE JULY DAILY HIGH:  
OAXACA CITY: 28°C | 82°F,  
PUERTO ESCONDIDO: 35°C | 95°F

### History

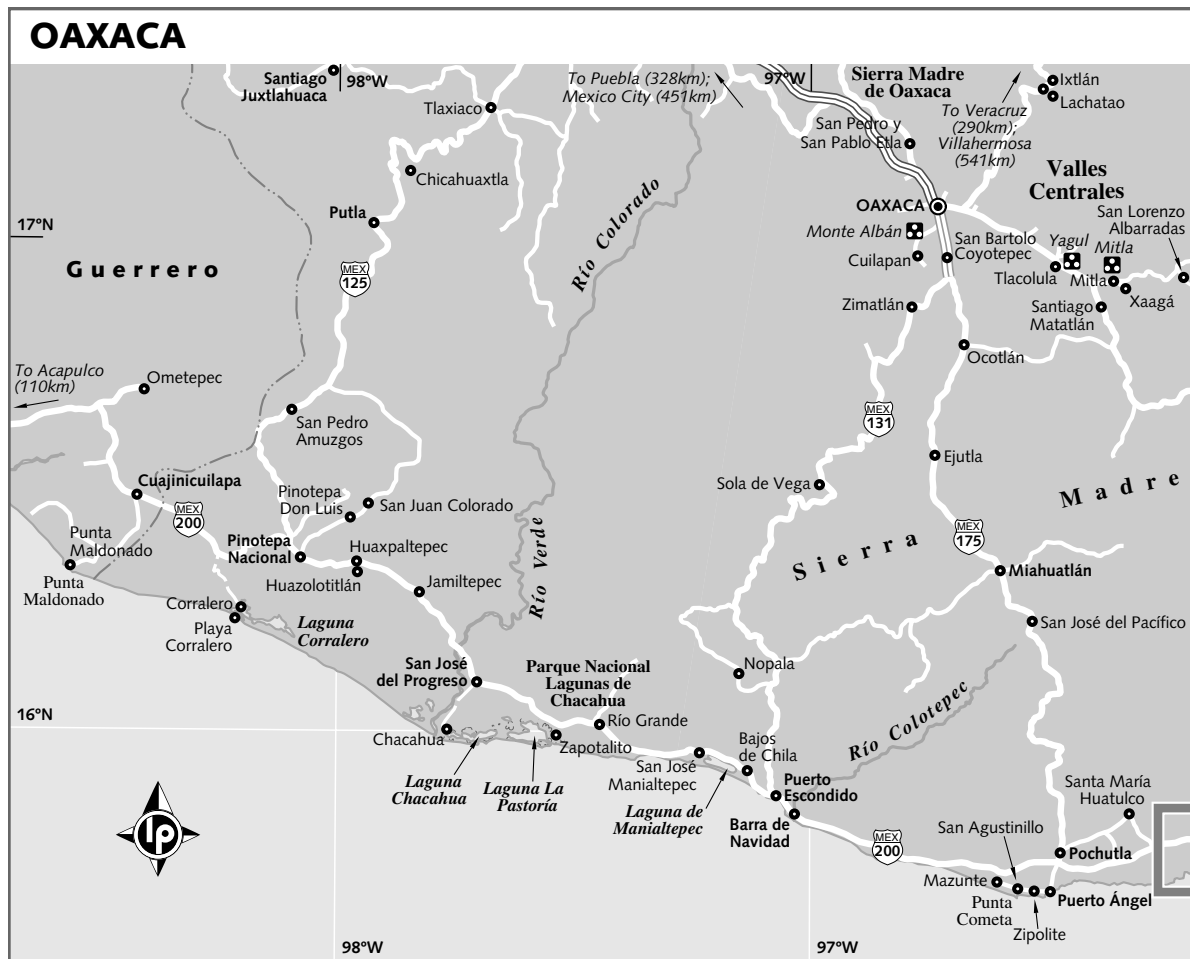
The Valles Centrales (Central Valleys) have always been the hub of Oaxacan life, and the pre-Hispanic cultures reached heights rivaling those of central Mexico. The hilltop city of Monte Albán became the center of the Zapotec culture, which extended its control over much of Oaxaca by conquest, peaking between AD 300 and AD 700. Monte Albán declined suddenly, for reasons still unknown; by about AD 750 it was deserted, as were many other Zapotec sites in the Valles Centrales. From about 1200, the surviving Zapotecs came under the growing power of the Mixtecs, renowned potters and metalsmiths from Oaxaca’s northwest uplands. Mixtec and Zapotec cultures became entangled in the Valles Centrales before the Aztecs conquered them 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. Cortés donated large parts of the Valles Centrales to himself and was officially named Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca. In colonial times,

the indigenous population dropped disastrously as a result of introduced diseases and mistreatment by the Spanish. The population of the Mixteca (the mountainous western region) is thought to have fallen from 700,000 at the time of the Spanish arrival to about 25,000 in 1700. Rebellions continued into the 20th century, but the indigenous peoples rarely formed a serious threat.

Benito Juárez, the great reforming leader of mid-19th-century Mexico, was a Zapotec. He served two terms as Oaxaca state governor before being elected Mexico’s president in 1861.

Through the close of the 19th century, tobacco planters set up virtual slave plantations in northern Oaxaca, and indigenous communal lands were commandeered by foreign and mestizo (of mixed European and American Indian ancestry) coffee planters. After the Mexican Revolution, plantations were dissolved and about 300 *ejidos* (peasant land-holding cooperatives) were set up, effectively returning lands to the people who worked them. However, land ownership remains a source of conflict even today. With little industry,



Oaxaca is one of Mexico's poorest states, and many of its residents leave to work in the cities or the USA. The situation is made worse in some areas, notably the Mixteca, by deforestation and erosion. Tourism is thriving in Oaxaca city and nearby villages and in a few places on the coast, but the backcountry remains largely underdeveloped.

### The Land

The Sierra Madre del Sur (average height 2000m) runs parallel to the Pacific coast. It meets the Sierra Madre de Oaxaca (average height 2500m), which runs down from Mexico's central volcanic belt, roughly in the center of the state. Between them lie the three Valles Centrales, which converge at the city of Oaxaca. In Oaxaca city December and January are the coldest months, with average lows between 8°C and 9°C and highs around 25°C; March through May are the hottest months, with average highs around 30°C. The valleys are warm and dry, with most rain falling between June and September. The coast and low-lying areas are hotter and a bit wetter.

Situated in a region where temperate and tropical climatic zones and several mountain ranges meet, Oaxaca has spectacularly varied landscapes and a biodiversity greater than any other Mexican state. The inland highlands still have cloud forests and big stands of oak and pine, while lower-lying areas and Pacific-facing slopes support deciduous tropical forest.

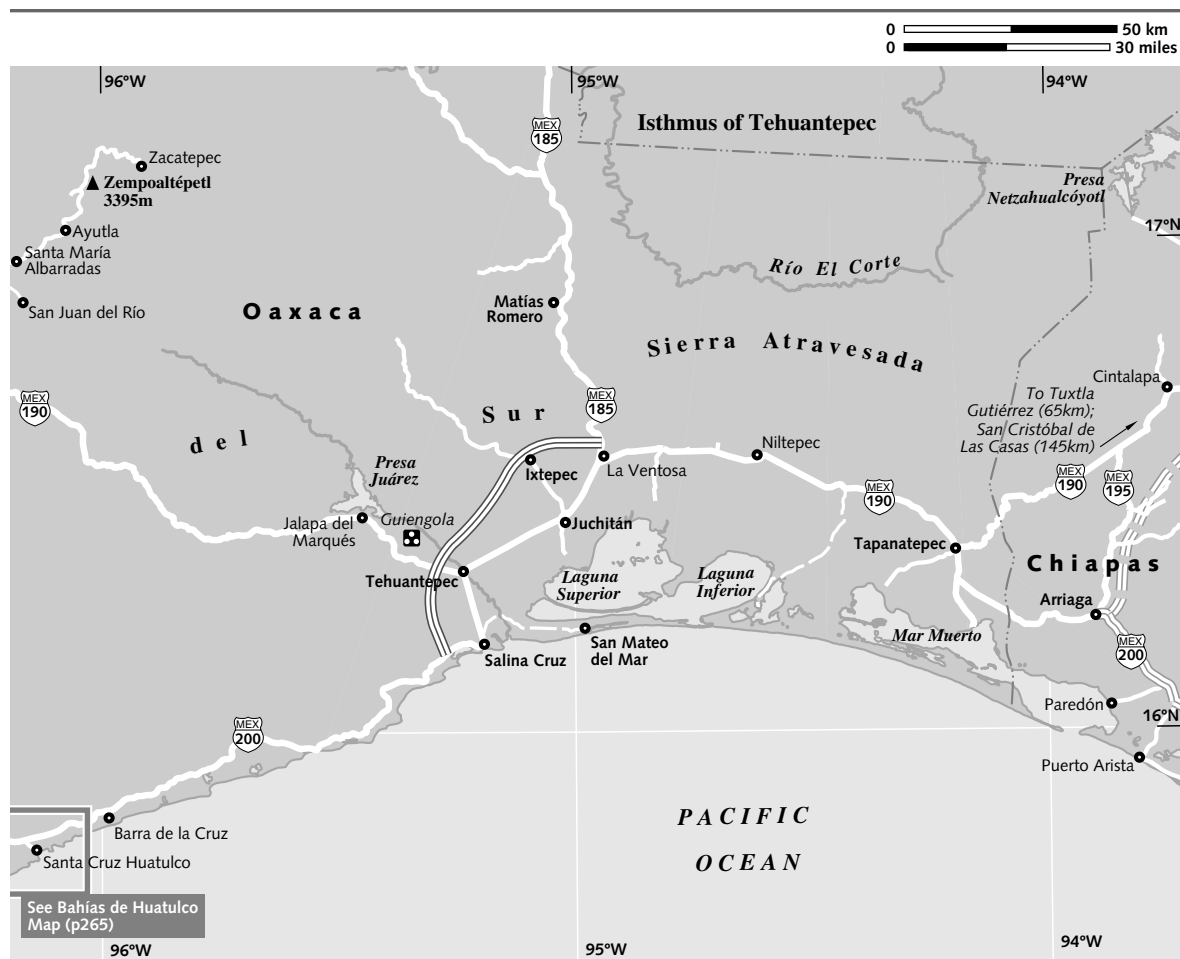
### Internet Resources

**Oaxaca's Tourist Guide** ([oaxaca-travel.com](http://oaxaca-travel.com)) is an excellent photo-filled website with everything from information pertaining to beaches and hotels to regional recipes and biographies of famous Oaxacans. **Oaxaca's Forum** ([bbs.oaxaca.com](http://bbs.oaxaca.com)) is a bulletin board where you can look for rented accommodation or shared transport or ask any old question.

### Dangers & Annoyances

Buses and other vehicles traveling along isolated stretches of highway, including the coastal Hwy 200 and Hwy 175 from Oaxaca city to Pochutla, are occasionally stopped and robbed. Though incidents have decreased in

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recent years, it's still advisable not to travel at night. Robberies aside, this is a good rule of thumb in all of Mexico, particularly on the winding mountain roads connecting the coast to Oaxaca city.

### Getting There & Around

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 and San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Services between the city and the state's main coastal destinations are fairly frequent though mostly 2nd-class. Plenty of buses (again mostly 2nd-class) also travel the length of the Oaxacan coast along Hwy 200 from Acapulco and Chiapas.

Several daily flights link Oaxaca city with Mexico City. Further flights go east to Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Tapachula, Villahermosa and beyond. Small planes hop over the mountains between Oaxaca city and the coastal resorts Puerto Escondido and Bahías de Huatulco, which you can also reach direct from Mexico City.

## OAXACA CITY

📍 951 / pop 263,000 / elevation 1550m

Large numbers of foreigners, particularly Americans, visit the state capital every year. Oaxaca takes them all in its stride, maintaining its cosmopolitan atmosphere with a relaxed grace. Dry mountain heat, the colonial center's manageable scale, lovely architecture (including some phenomenal churches), broad shady plazas and leisurely cafés help slow the pace of life. The arts – including gastronomy – are highly valued here, and supremely talented locals are joined by others attracted from around Mexico and other parts of the world.

The city has some first-class museums and galleries, arguably the best handicrafts shopping in Mexico, and a vivacious cultural, culinary, bar and music scene. It's a popular venue for taking Spanish-language courses, cooking classes or simply hanging out, and an increasing number of US citizens are making a go of retiring here.

Head first for the *zócalo* (main plaza) and taste the atmosphere. Then ramble and see what markets, crafts, galleries, cafés, bars and festivities you run across.

### History

The Aztec settlement here was called Huaxyacac (meaning 'In the Nose of the Squash'), from which '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.

Eighteenth-century Oaxaca grew rich from exports of cochineal, a highly prized red dye made from tiny insects living on the prickly pear cactus in the Mixteca Alta, and from textile weaving. 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 Oaxaca city. It wasn't until decades later, under the presidency of Porfirio Díaz, that Oaxaca began to grow again; in the 1890s its population exceeded 30,000. Then in 1931 another earthquake left 70% of the city uninhabitable.

Oaxaca's major expansion has come in the past 25 years, with tourism, new industries 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

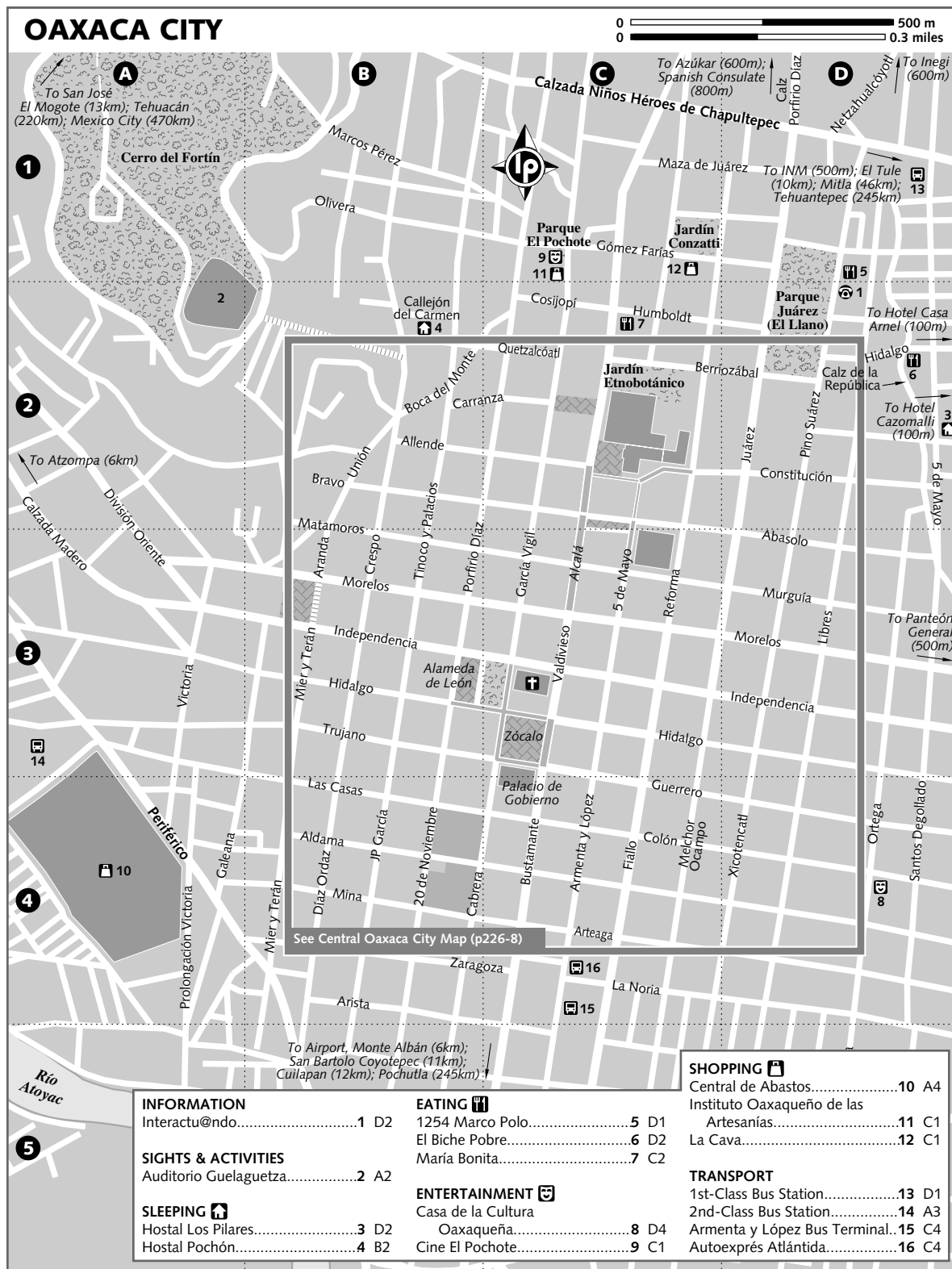
Oaxaca centers on the *zócalo* and the adjoining Alameda de León, a tree-lined promenade in front of the cathedral. Calle Alcalá, running north from the cathedral to the Iglesia de Santo Domingo (a universally known landmark), is pedestrian-only for three blocks.

The road from Mexico City and Puebla traverses the northern part of Oaxaca as Calz Niños Héroes de Chapultepec. The 1st-class bus station is on 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.

The blocks north of the *zócalo* are smarter, cleaner and less traffic-infested than those to the south. The commercial area occupies the blocks southwest of the *zócalo*.

### MAPS

**Inegi** (Map pp226-7; 📞 512-48-00; cnr Zapata & Escuela Naval Militar, Colonia Reforma; 🕒 8:30am-8:30pm Mon-Fri) On a northern extension of Netzahualcóyotl,



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Inegi sells a great range of topographical maps covering Oaxaca; you can also consult maps and census statistics for free.

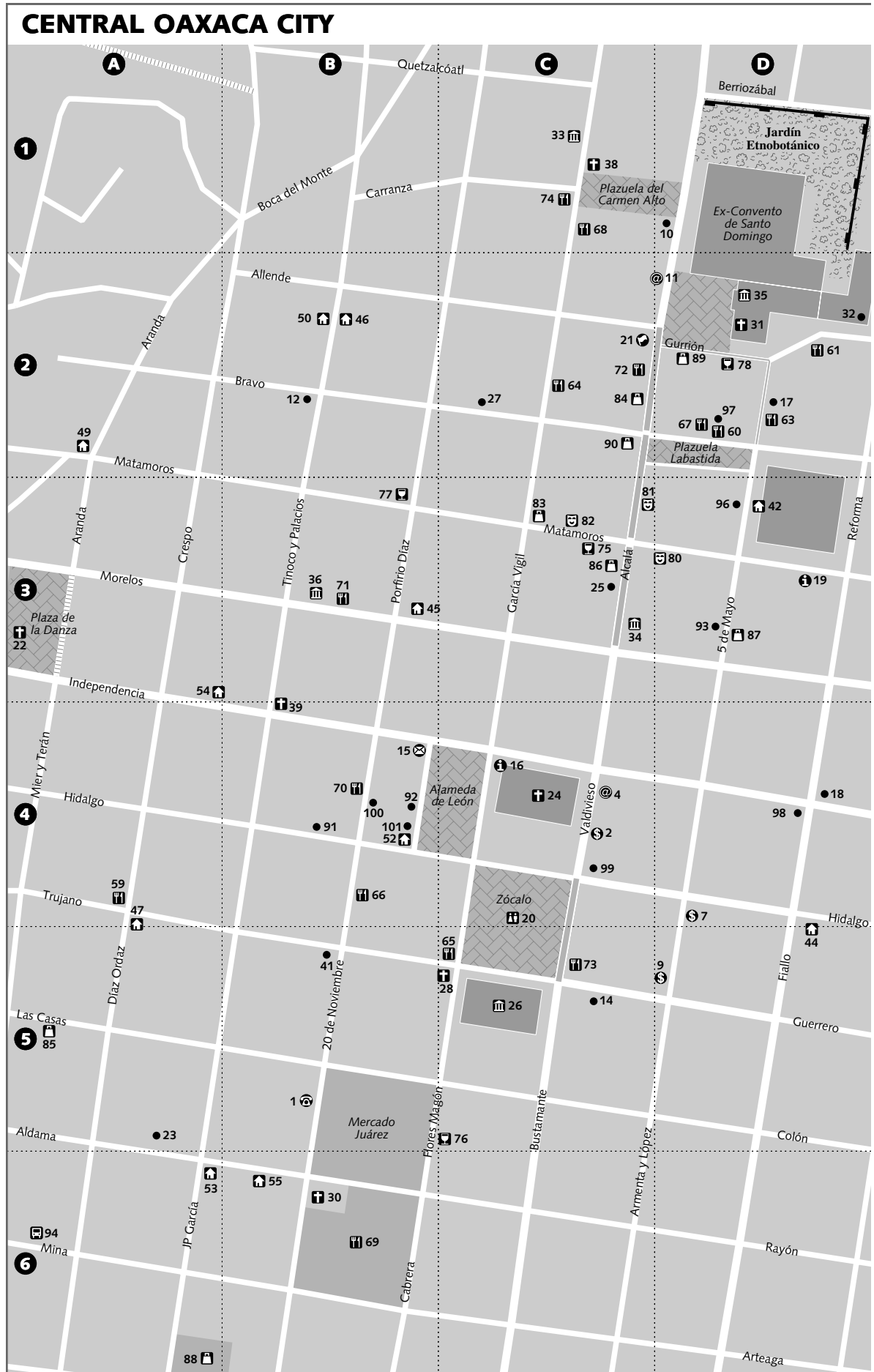
**Information BOOKSTORES**

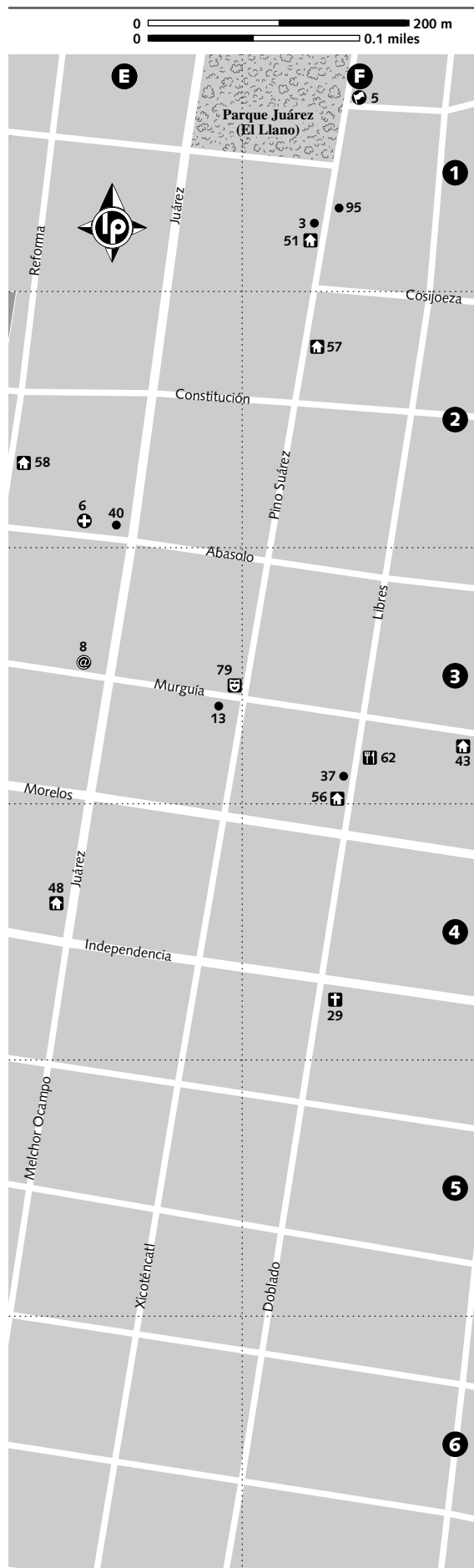
**Amate** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-69-60; www.amatebooks.com; Plaza Alcalá, Alcalá 307-2; 🕒 10:30am-2:30pm &

3:30-7:30pm Mon-Sat) Probably the best English-language bookstore in all Mexico, stocking almost every Mexico-related title (in print) in English.

**Librería Universitaria** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-42-43; Guerrero 108; 🕒 9:30am-2pm & 4:30-8pm Mon-Sat) Located just off the zócalo, long-standing LU sells some English-language books about Oaxaca and Mexico, as well as maps and secondhand paperbacks.

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**Notice boards** (Map pp226-7; Plaza Gonzalo Lucero, Calle 5 de Mayo 412) Check these for ads for rental apartments, classes in everything from Spanish to yoga, and other interesting stuff. You'll also find useful notice boards in the language schools.

**Oaxaca Times** ([www.oaxacatimes.com](http://www.oaxacatimes.com)) Available at various places around town. Similar to Go-Oaxaca but in English only.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Clínica Hospital Carmen** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-26-12; Abasolo 215; 🕒 24hr) One of the town's best private hospitals, with emergency facilities and English-speaking doctors.

### MONEY

There are plenty of banks and ATMs around the center. Banks with reasonable exchange rates include those listed.

**Banamex** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-57-47; Valdivieso 116; 🕒 11am-6pm Mon-Fri)

**HSBC** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-19-67; cnr Armenta y López & Guerrero; 🕒 8am-7pm Mon-Sat)

**Consultoria Internacional** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-91-92; Armenta y López 203C; 🕒 8:30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Changes cash euros, yen, sterling, Canadian dollars and Swiss francs too.

### POST

**Main post office** (Map pp226-7; Alameda de León; 🕒 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

### TELEPHONE & FAX

There are many *casetas telefónicas* (public telephone call stations) scattered about; those on Independencia and Trujano (Map pp226-7) offer fax service too.

**ATSI** (Map pp226-7; Calle 20 de Noviembre 402) Cheaper than pay phones for national long-distance calls and calls to Europe; offers fax service as well.

**dspot** (Map pp226-7; García Vigil 512D; 🕒 9am-10pm) Behind La Biznaga restaurant; offers probably the cheapest foreign calls in town, via the Internet.

**Interactu@ndo** (Map p225; Pino Suárez 804) Calls to the USA are around US\$0.40 per minute, US\$0.80 to the rest of world.

### TOILETS

Clean facilities (Map pp226-7) under the bandstand in the middle of the *zócalo* cost US\$0.20.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Sectur** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 576-48-28; [www.oaxaca.com](http://www.oaxaca.com); Murguía 206; 🕒 8am-8pm) The state tourism department

<b>INFORMATION</b>		Museo Rufino Tamayo.....36 B3	<b>DRINKING ☑</b>
Amate.....(see 90)		Oaxaca International.....37 F3	Bar del Borgo.....75 C3
ATSI.....1 B5		Templo & Ex-Convento del Carmen Alto.....38 C1	La Casa del Mezcal.....76 C5
Banamex.....2 C4		Templo de San Felipe Neri.....39 B4	La Cucaracha.....77 B3
Biblioteca Circulante de Oaxaca.....3 F1		Tierraventura.....40 E2	La Divina.....78 D2
C@fe Internet.....4 C4		Viajes Turísticos Mitla.....41 B5	Tapas y Pisto .....(see 72)
Canadian Consulate.....5 F1		Viajes Turísticos Mitla.....(see 94)	
Ceprotur.....(see 19)			<b>ENTERTAINMENT ☑</b>
Clínica Hospital Carmen.....6 E2		<b>SLEEPING ☑</b>	Candela.....79 E3
Consultoría Internacional.....7 D4		Camino Real Oaxaca.....42 D3	Casa de Cantera.....80 D3
dspot.....(see 68)		Casa de la Tía Tere.....43 F3	Centro Cultural Ricardo Flores Magón.....81 C3
Fray-Net.....8 E3		Casa de Sierra Azul.....44 D5	La Tentación.....82 C3
HSBC.....9 D5		Hostal Casa Antica.....45 B3	
Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca.....10 D1		Hostal Casa del Sótano.....46 B2	<b>SHOPPING ☑</b>
Inter@active Internet.....11 D2		Hostal Paulina.....47 A4	Casa de las Artesanías de Oaxaca.....83 C3
Lava-Max.....12 B2		Hostel Luz de Luna Nuyoo.....48 E4	El Cactus.....84 C2
Lavandería Antequera.....13 E3		Hotel Azucenas.....49 A2	El Rey de los Mezcales.....85 A5
Librería Universitaria.....14 C5		Hotel Las Golondrinas.....50 B2	La Mano Mágica.....86 C3
Main Post Office.....15 B4		Hotel Las Mariposas.....51 F1	MARO.....87 D3
Municipal Tourist Information Kiosk.....16 C4		Hotel Monte Albán.....52 B4	Mercado de Artesanías.....88 A6
Notice Boards.....17 D2		Hotel Posada Catarina.....53 A6	Oro de Monte Albán Workshop.....89 D2
Provedora Escolar.....18 D4		Hotel Posada del Centro.....54 A3	Oro de Monte Albán.....(see 90)
Sectur Tourist Office.....19 D3		Hotel Posada El Chapulín.....55 B6	Plaza Alcalá.....90 C2
Toilets.....20 C4		La Casa de los Sabores.....56 F3	
Turismo Joven.....(see 21)		La Casa de Mis Recuerdos.....57 F2	<b>TRANSPORT</b>
US Consulate.....21 C2		Las Bugambilias.....58 E2	Aeroméxico.....91 B4
			Aerotucán.....(see 25)
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		<b>EATING ☑</b>	Aerovega.....92 B4
Basílica de la Soledad.....22 A3		Café Alex.....59 A4	Alamo.....93 D3
Becari Language School.....(see 27)		Café Los Cuiles.....60 D2	Autobuses Turísticos (to Monte Albán).....94 A6
Bicicletas Pedro Martínez.....23 A5		Casa Oaxaca.....61 D2	Aviacsa.....95 F1
Cathedral.....24 C4		Cenaduría Tlayudas Libres.....62 F3	Budget.....96 D3
Continental-Istmo Tours.....25 C3		Coffee Beans.....63 D2	Hertz.....97 D2
ex-Palacio de Gobierno.....26 C5		Comala.....64 C2	Mexicana.....98 D4
Expediciones Sierra Norte.....27 C2		El Asador Vasco.....65 C5	Ticket Bus.....99 C4
Iglesia de La Compañía.....28 C5		Fidel Pan Integral.....66 B4	Ticket Bus.....100 B4
Iglesia de La Merced.....29 F4		Gaia.....67 D2	Transportes Aeropuerto.....101 B4
Iglesia de San Juan de Dios.....30 B6		La Biznaga.....68 C1	Zona Bici.....(see 64)
Iglesia de Santo Domingo.....31 D2		La Olla.....(see 58)	
Jardín Etnobotánico entrance.....32 D2		Mercado 20 de Noviembre.....69 B6	
Museo Casa de Juárez.....33 C1		Restaurant Colonial.....70 B4	
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca.....34 C3		Restaurant Flor de Loto.....71 B3	
Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca.....35 D2		Restaurante Los Danzantes.....72 C2	
		Terranova Café.....73 C5	
		Zandunga.....74 C1	

usually has someone who can speak English, but workers are often student volunteers with limited knowledge.

**Municipal tourist kiosk** (Map pp226-7; cnr García Vigil & Independencia; ☎ 10am-7pm)

**TRAVEL AGENCIES**

**Turismo Joven** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-22-20; www.turismojoven.com; Alcalá 407, Local 19; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Books tours, issues ISIC cards and sells student air fares and trips to Cuba and elsewhere.

**Dangers & Annoyances**

It's best not to go up on Cerro del Fortín, the hill with the Auditorio Guelaguetza (Guelaguetza auditorium; Map p225), except for special events such as the Guelaguetza (p230). It's a well-known haunt of robbers.

Traffic can be horrendously slow during the morning and evening rush hours; the Periférico (Map p225) near the 2nd-class bus terminal is particularly bad.

Those traveling by bus (especially 2nd-class) between Oaxaca city and coastal destinations should keep a close eye on their personal possessions.

**Sights**

**ZÓCALO, ALAMEDA & AROUND**

Traffic-free, shaded by trees and surrounded by *portales* (arcades) with many cafés and eateries, the *zócalo* (Map pp226-7) is the perfect place to soak up the Oaxaca atmosphere. The adjacent Alameda, also traffic-free but without the cafés, is popular too.



The south side of the *zócalo* is occupied by the former **Palacio de Gobierno** (Map pp226-7), whose stairway mural by Arturo García Bustos depicts famous Oaxacans and Oaxacan history; the building was being converted to a museum at the time of research. The city's **cathedral** (Map pp226-7), begun in 1553 and finished (after several earthquakes) in the 18th century, stands just north of the *zócalo*.

Fine carved facades adorn two nearby colonial churches: **Iglesia de La Compañía** (Map pp226-7), just off the southwest corner of the *zócalo*, and the popular **Iglesia de San Juan de Dios** (Map pp226-7; Aldama at Calle 20 de Noviembre), whose first incarnation was finished in 1526, making it the oldest church site in Oaxaca.

Many colonial-era stone buildings have been cleaned up or restored on **Calle Alcalá** (Map pp226-7); its three pedestrian-only blocks make it a good route north from the *zócalo* to the Iglesia de Santo Domingo.

#### IGLESIA DE SANTO DOMINGO

Four blocks north of the cathedral, **Santo Domingo** (Map pp226-7; cnr Alcalá & Gurrión; ☎ 7am-1pm & 4-8pm) is the most splendid of Oaxaca's churches. It was built mainly between 1570 and 1608 as the city's Dominican monastery. The finest artisans from Puebla and elsewhere helped with its construction. Excluding the transept, nearly every square inch of the church's interior above floor level is decorated in 3-D relief: a base of white stucco bursts into elaborate gilt and colored designs that swirl around a profusion of painted figures. It all takes on a magically warm glow during candlelit evening Masses.

#### MUSEUMS

The excellent **Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-29-91; cnr Alcalá & Gurrión; admission US\$3.75, over 60 & under 13 free; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun) occupies the beautifully restored ex-Convento de Santo Domingo, adjoining the Iglesia de Santo Domingo. These old monastery buildings were used as military barracks for more than 100 years until 1994, when they were handed over to the city of Oaxaca. The comprehensive museum takes you through the history and cultures of Oaxaca state up to the present day. One of its big draws is a priceless treasure trove discovered at Monte Albán in 1932, featuring

beautifully worked silver, precious stones, pearls, crystal goblets, a skull covered in turquoise, and gold. Wrapping around the back of the museum is the **Jardín Etnobotánico** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-79-15; cnr Constitución & Reforma; admission free; tours in English 11am Sat, in Spanish 10am & 5pm Tue-Sat), a fascinating landscaped display of Oaxaca state plants, most of them cacti. Sign up at the entrance in advance (the day before or earlier).

The **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-22-28; Alcalá 202; admission US\$1; ☎ 10:30am-8pm Wed-Mon) occupies a handsome colonial house built around 1700. Its changing exhibits feature recent art from around the world and work by leading modern Oaxacan artists such as Rufino Tamayo, Francisco Toledo, Rodolfo Morales, Rodolfo Nieto and Francisco Gutiérrez.

**Museo Casa de Juárez** (Juárez House Museum; Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-18-60; García Vigil 609; admission US\$2.75; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun), opposite the Templo del Carmen Alto, is where Benito Juárez found work as a boy with a book-binder. The orphaned Zapotec Indian went on to become president of Mexico in 1861. The renovated house shows how the early-19th-century Oaxacan middle class lived.

**Museo Rufino Tamayo** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-47-50; Morelos 503; admission US\$3; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun), an excellent museum of Mexican pre-Hispanic artifacts, was donated to Oaxaca by its most famous artist, the Zapotec Rufino Tamayo (1899-1991).

#### BASÍLICA DE LA SOLEDAD

The image of Oaxaca's patron saint, the Virgen de la Soledad (Virgin of Solitude), resides in this 17th-century church (Map p225), about four blocks west of the Alameda along Independencia. The church, with a rich carved stone baroque facade, stands where the image is said to have miraculously appeared in a donkey pack a few centuries ago. In the mid-1990s, the Virgin's 2kg gold crown was stolen, along with the huge pearl and many of the 600 diamonds with which she was adorned.

#### Courses

Oaxaca is a terrific place to study, and the following schools have received complimentary reviews from some of our readers. The language schools can arrange accommodation.

**LANGUAGE**

**Becari Language School** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-60-76; www.becari.com.mx; Bravo 210; 15/20/30hr per week US\$105/140/210) A medium-sized school with maximum class size of five. Start any Monday morning. There's a US\$70 registration fee.

**Oaxaca International** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-72-24; www.oaxacainternational.com; Libres 207; US\$80/113/175 a week or per hr \$15/20/30) Includes a wide range of workshops with its lessons, from cooking and crafts to dance. Its offerings are tailored to student interest. Special programs for professionals are also offered.

**COOKING**

The following well-received classes are (or can be) held in English, and include market visits to buy ingredients.

**La Casa de los Sabores** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-57-04; www.lasbugambilias.com; Libres 205; 4hr class per person US\$60) Pilar Cabrera, owner of La Olla restaurant, gives classes from 9:30am to 2pm on Wednesday and Friday at her guesthouse (p232) in central Oaxaca. Participants prepare and eat a five-course meal, usually including some vegetarian dishes. The price is reduced if you attend more than one class, or if more than 10 people attend.

**La Casa de Mis Recuerdos** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 515-56-45; www.misrecuerdos.net; Pino Suárez 508; classes from US\$65) Nora Gutiérrez, from a family of celebrated Oaxacan

cooks, conducts classes for groups of up to 10 at her family's charming B&B (p233). You prepare a Oaxacan lunch (planned a couple of days ahead), then sit down to eat it. The price depends on the number of participants and what they want to cook. Vegetarian classes are available.

**Tours**

A variety of tours foster closer contact with Mexican nature or Mexican communities; most reach destinations that few other visitors get to.

**Bicicletas Pedro Martínez** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-59-35; www.bicicletaspedromartinez.com; Aldama 418; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Offers a variety of rides, including four-hour jaunts (US\$43) to the northern fringe of the city and two-day, all-inclusive bike-and-hike trips in outlying areas for US\$188.

**Expediciones Sierra Norte** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-82-71; www.sierranorte.org.mx in Spanish; Bravo 210; ☎ 9am-3pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) This very well-run rural community organization offers walking, mountain biking and accommodations in the beautiful Sierra Norte, northeast of the city.

**Tierraventura** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 501-13-63; www.tierraventura.com; Abasolo 217; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Sat) Run by a multilingual Swiss and German couple who take groups to some fairly remote destinations in Oaxaca state; there's a focus on hiking, nature, crafts, traditional

**GUELAGUETZA GALA**

In its full-scale form, the Guelaguetzta (geh-la-gets-ah) is a brilliant feast of Oaxacan folk dance. It's held from 10am to 1pm on the first two Mondays after July 16, in the open-air Auditorio Guelaguetzta (Map p225) on Cerro del Fortín. Thousands of people flock into Oaxaca for it and associated events, turning the city into a feast of celebration and regional culture (and a rich hunting ground for visiting pickpockets, so stay alert). On the appointed Mondays, known as Los Lunes del Cerro (Mondays on the Hill), 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. The excitement climaxes with the incredibly colorful pineapple dance by women of the Papaloapan region, and the stately Zapotec Danza de las Plumas (Feather Dance), which reenacts, symbolically, the Spanish conquest.

Seats in the amphitheater (which holds perhaps 10,000) are divided into four areas called *palcos*. For *Palcos A* and *B*, the two nearest the stage, tickets (around US\$38) go on sale online about three months beforehand (see [www.aosaxaca.com/guelaguetzta/en.htm](http://www.aosaxaca.com/guelaguetzta/en.htm) for more information). Tickets guarantee a seat, but you should arrive before 8am if you want one of the better ones. The two much 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 for hours, with no shelter, so equip yourself accordingly.

Many other events have grown up around the Guelaguetzta. Highlights include the **Desfile de Delegaciones** (on Saturday afternoons preceding Guelaguetzta Mondays), a parade of the regional delegations through the city center; and the **Bani Stui Gulal** (on Sunday evenings preceding Guelaguetzta Mondays), a vibrant show of music, fireworks and dance telling the history of the Guelaguetzta, in Plaza de la Danza by the Basílica de la Soledad. There are lots of concerts, exhibitions, sports events and a mezcal fair.

medicine and meeting locals, wherever possible working with local community tourism projects.

Several companies offer less adventurous day trips to outlying attractions. A typical three- or four-hour trip to Monte Albán costs around US\$17. There are also agencies with a wide choice of itineraries:

**Continental-Istmo Tours** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-96-25; Alcalá 201)

**Viajes Turísticos Mitla** Hotel Rivera del Ángel (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-61-75; Mina 518); Hostal Santa Rosa (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-78-00; Trujano 201)

## 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 **Guelaguetza** (opposite).

There are many other festivities throughout the year.

**Fiesta de la Virgen del Carmen** (a week or more before July 16) The streets around the Templo del Carmen Alto on García Vigil become a fairground and the nights are lit by processions and fireworks.

**Blessing of Animals** (about 5pm, August 31) Pets are dressed up and taken to the Iglesia de La Merced (Map pp226-7), on Independencia.

**Día de Muertos** (November 2) Day of the Dead is a big happening here, with associated events starting several days in advance. These include music and dance at the main cemetery, the Panteón General (Map p225), on Calz del Panteón about 1.25km east of the *zócalo*.

**Posadas** (December 16-24) Nine night-time neighborhood processions symbolizing Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

**Día de la Virgen de la Soledad** (December 18) Processions and traditional dances, including the Danza de las Plumas, at the Basílica de la Soledad (Map pp226-7).

**Noche de los Rábanos** (Night of the Radishes; December 23) Amazing figures carved from radishes are displayed in the *zócalo* (Map pp226-7). Sounds silly, but it's really neat.

**Calendas** (December 24) These Christmas Eve processions from local churches converge on the *zócalo* (Map pp226-7) about 10pm, bringing music, floats and fireworks.

## Sleeping

Prices given here are for Oaxaca's high seasons, generally mid-December to mid-January, a week each side of Easter and Día de Muertos, and from mid-July to mid-August (dates vary from one establishment to another). Outside of these periods many places drop their prices by between 15% and 30%. Those in the hard-core budget bracket

## AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Camino Real Oaxaca** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 501-61-00, in the US & Canada 800-722-6466; [www.caminoreal.com/oaxaca](http://www.caminoreal.com/oaxaca); Calle 5 de Mayo 300; r US\$328-412; ☎ ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) Built in the 16th century as a convent, the majestic Camino Real served time as a prison, and was converted to a hotel in the 1970s. It has been designated a national treasure by the Mexican government and a historic monument by Unesco. The old chapel is a banquet hall, one of the five lovely courtyards contains an enticing swimming pool, and the bar is lined with books on otherworldly devotion. 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, air-con, safes and good bathrooms.

tend to hold prices steady throughout the year. Street-side rooms everywhere tend to be noisy.

## BUDGET

Oaxaca has more backpacker hostels than any other city in Mexico, and many budget hotels. Hostels in the following listings all have shared bathrooms.

**Hostal Paulina** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-20-05; [www.paulinahostel.com](http://www.paulinahostel.com); Trujano 321; dm US\$12, s/d/tr/q US\$27/29/43/57, all incl breakfast) Impeccably clean and efficiently run, this splendid 92-bed hostel provides bunk dorms for up to 11 people, and rooms with one double bed and a pair of bunks, all with lockers. There's a 4% discount if you have an HI or ISIC card. A neat little interior garden and a roof terrace add to the appeal. They should have free Internet for guests by the time you read this.

**Hostel Luz de Luna Nuyoo** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-95-76; [mayoralj@hotmail.com](mailto:mayoralj@hotmail.com); Juárez 101; dm US\$7, hammock or tent per person US\$5) Readers continue to praise this friendly, medium-sized hostel run by a pair of Oaxacan musician brothers. Separate bunk rooms for women, men and couples (eight beds each) open on to a wide patio; you can hang a hammock or stay in the rooftop cabana. A few self-contained dogs add to the tranquil atmosphere, and there's a good shared kitchen.

**Hostal Pochón** (Map p225; ☎ 516-13-22; [www.hostal-pochon.com](http://www.hostal-pochon.com); Callejón del Carmen 102; dm US\$7, d/tw

US\$16/22; 📺) This hostel gets high marks from guests. It has six four-bed dorms and a couple of private rooms, a full kitchen, good common areas and no curfew, and offers bike rental, luggage storage, cheap phone calls and free Internet access. Beds are comfortable and the common areas brightly painted.

**Hotel Posada El Chapulín** (Map pp226-7; 📞 516-16-46; [hotelchapulin@hotmail.com](mailto:hotelchapulin@hotmail.com); Aldama 317; s/d/tr/q US\$24/27/29/38; 📺) This good, eight-room family-run hotel, perennially full of international backpackers, has a roof terrace, TV and fans in rooms. The owners are opening an overflow facility in nearby Zaachila (Map p225), where they'll take guests by van.

### MIDRANGE

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

**Las Bugambilias** (Map pp226-7; 📞 516-11-65, in the US 321-249-9422; [www.lasbugambilias.com](http://www.lasbugambilias.com); Reforma 402; s US\$70-85, d US\$75-100, all with breakfast; 📺 📺 📺) This delightful B&B has nine rooms decorated with inspired combinations of 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 a high-speed Internet connection, cheap international phone calls and an inviting roof terrace with fantastic views.

**Hostal Casa del Sótano** (Map pp226-7; 📞 516-24-94; [www.hoteldelsotano.net](http://www.hoteldelsotano.net); Tinoco y Palacios 414; r US\$71-92; 📺) This small, modern, quality hotel is very well done up in colonial style. The good-sized rooms are arranged along two elegant patios with fountains, little water gardens and pools, and have solid wooden furnishings, cable TV, phone and fan; some have balconies. The Sótano also has a restaurant and a high terrace with amazing views.

**Hotel Las Golondrinas** (Map pp226-7; 📞 514-32-98; [lasgolon@prodigy.net.mx](mailto:lasgolon@prodigy.net.mx); Tinoco y Palacios 411; s/d/tr US\$39/43/52; 📺 📺) Lovingly tended by friendly owners and staff, this fine small hotel has about 30 rooms that open out onto three beautiful, leafy labyrinthine patios. It's often full, so you should try to book ahead. None of the rooms is huge but all are tastefully decorated and immaculate. Good breakfasts (not included in room rates) are served in one of the patios. A very good value!

**Hotel Posada Catarina** (Map pp226-7; 📞 516-42-70; Aldama 325; s US\$34, d US\$43-58; 📺) Posada Catarina is on a busy street southwest of the *zócalo*, but inside it's spacious and elegant with lush garden patios and a dramatic rooftop terrace. Rooms are clean and comfortable, if poorly ventilated. Readers love it.

**Hotel Las Mariposas** (Map pp226-7; 📞 515-58-54; [www.lasmariposas.com.mx](http://www.lasmariposas.com.mx); Pino Suárez 517; s/d US\$35/40, studio apt s/d US\$40/45, all with breakfast; 📺) Las Mariposas offers six studio apartments (with a small kitchen) and seven rooms. All are large, spotlessly clean and simply but prettily decorated. It's a tranquil, friendly and very secure place. Free wireless Internet access, a library, a kitchen for use by all guests, luggage storage and a good breakfast are among the many extras that make this a great deal.

**Hotel Posada del Centro** (Map pp226-7; 📞 516-18-74; [www.mexonline.com/posada.htm](http://www.mexonline.com/posada.htm); Independencia 403; s/d US\$46/50, with shared bathroom US\$24/29; 📺) Attractive, centrally situated Posada del Centro has two large, verdant patios where breakfast is available. The 22 rooms have fans and pleasing Oaxacan artisanry; there's an ample roof terrace, and the staff are young, bright and helpful.

**Hotel Azucenas** (Map pp226-7; 📞 514-79-18, 800-717-25-40, in US & Canada 800-882-6089; [www.hotelazucenas.com](http://www.hotelazucenas.com); Aranda 203; s/d US\$47/52) This small, welcoming, Canadian-owned hotel is in a beautifully restored colonial house. The 10 cool, white, tile-floored rooms are prettily designed, and a delicious buffet breakfast (US\$3.75) is served on the lovely roof terrace. Street-side rooms may get early-morning noise.

**Hotel Cazomalli** (Map p225; 📞 513-86-05; [www.hotelcazomalli.com](http://www.hotelcazomalli.com); El Salto 104; d/tr/q US\$61/66/80; 📺) The welcoming, family-run Cazomalli, decked with tasteful Oaxacan artwork, is five minutes' walk from the 1st-class bus station, in quiet Colonia Jalatlaco. The 18 rooms all have safe, fan and hair dryer, and the roof terrace has lovely views. Breakfast is available.

**La Casa de los Sabores** (Map pp226-7; 📞 516-57-04; [www.lasbugambilias.com](http://www.lasbugambilias.com); Libres 205; s/d incl breakfast US\$59/72; 📺 📺) Sabores offers five individually decorated, high-ceilinged rooms with ultra-comfortable beds. Four of them are around the quiet patio in which owner Pilar Cabrera gives her twice-weekly cooking classes (see above). The breakfasts are large and gourmet, and the service attentive. A

roof terrace provides a change of scene and the venue for the fifth room.

**Hotel Casa Arnel** (Map p225; ☎ 515-28-56; [www.casaarnel.com.mx](http://www.casaarnel.com.mx); Aldama 404, Colonia Jalatlaco; s/d from US\$40/50, with shared bathroom US\$12.50/25; 🏠) Family-run Casa Arnel is 20 minutes north-east of the city center and five minutes' walk from the 1st-class bus station (head to the right on Calz Niños Héroes de Chapultepec, turn immediately right on Calle 5 de Mayo and watch for the signs). The clean, smallish rooms surround a big, leafy courtyard; many have very nice touches. The common areas – including hammock spots, a sundeck, and many semiprivate spaces – outshine the rooms themselves and have some great views. Arnel offers many travelers' services, including car rental.

**Casa de la Tía Tere** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 501-18-45; [www.mexonline.com/tiatere.htm](http://www.mexonline.com/tiatere.htm); Murguía 612; r incl continental breakfast US\$71-92; 🏠 🏠 🏠) Tere has 12 large, uncluttered rooms with tiled floors, most around a vine-draped patio, some with balconies, all with good showers. There's a small gym, and this is one of few accommodations in central Oaxaca with a swimming pool. Tere also offers a large, clean kitchen and dining room for guests, laundry service and low-cost phone calls, plus free Internet and coffee.

**Hotel Monte Albán** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-27-77; [hotelmontealban@prodigy.net.mx](mailto:hotelmontealban@prodigy.net.mx); Alameda de León 1; s interior/exterior US\$43/52, d US\$52/57) In a grand old high-ceilinged building smack on the Alameda de León, the MA is an atmospheric place all in all, though the fluorescent lighting and somewhat threadbare rooms diminish the romance. The cheaper, interior rooms are no great shakes, but the exterior rooms are large and have balconies or views of the cathedral. The hotel restaurant serves three meals and has nightly Guelaguetza shows.

#### TOP END

Top-end accommodations range from a converted convent to modern resort hotels.

**La Casa de Mis Recuerdos** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 515-56-45; [www.misrecuerdos.net](http://www.misrecuerdos.net); Pino Suárez 508; s incl breakfast US\$53-66, d incl breakfast US\$83-96; 🏠) A marvelous decorative aesthetic prevails throughout this guesthouse. Old-style tiles, mirrors, *milagros* (votives), masks, tinwork and all sorts of other Mexican crafts adorn the walls and halls. The best rooms overlook a fragrant

central garden; two are air-conditioned and two have a shared bathroom. A large breakfast in the beautiful dining room is included in the price. Street-side room windows are double-glazed against noise, but you may still get some. There's a minimum stay of three nights.

**Hostal Los Pilares** (Map p225; ☎ 518-70-00; [www.lospilareshostal.com](http://www.lospilareshostal.com); Curtidurías 721, Colonia Jalatlaco; s/d/tr US\$85/113/131; 🏠 🏠) Opened in mid-2005, Pilares is a very well equipped, faux-colonial hotel. Rooms have plasma TVs (with SKY satellite reception), minibars, nice beds and attractive furniture. The hotel has garden-terrace dining, a bar, pool and Jacuzzi.

**Casa de Sierra Azul** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-84-12; [www.mexonline.com/sierrazul.htm](http://www.mexonline.com/sierrazul.htm); Hidalgo 1002; r US\$117-139) The Sierra Azul is a 200-year-old house converted to a beautiful small hotel, centered on a broad courtyard with a fountain and stone pillars. The 14 good-sized, tasteful rooms have high ceilings, old-fashioned furnishings and good tiled bathrooms.

**Hostal Casa Antica** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 51-26-73; [www.hotelcasantica.com](http://www.hotelcasantica.com); Morelos 601; r US\$97-121; 🏠 🏠 🏠) The remodel and furnishings of this 200-year-old former convent sometimes work and sometimes don't. It's comfortable enough, with lots of exposed stone or brick in rooms, most of which have safes.

#### Eating

The menus at many of Oaxaca's restaurants, especially the higher-end places, have good English descriptions of the dishes.

#### ON & NEAR THE ZÓCALO

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

**Terranova Café** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-05-33; Portal Juárez 116, Bustamente; mains US\$4.50-7.50) Terranova serves good breakfasts until 1pm (with a US\$9 unlimited buffet on Sunday) and a variety of mostly Oaxacan and Mexican standards for lunch and dinner. Children's plates are on offer also.

**El Asador Vasco** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-47-55; Portal de Flores 10A; mains US\$8-15; 🕒 1-11:30pm) Upstairs at the southwest corner of the *zócalo*, the Asador Vasco serves up good Oaxacan, Spanish and international food. It's strong on meat and seafood. For a table overlooking the plaza on a warm evening, book earlier in the day.

**AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Restaurante Los Danzantes** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 501-11-84; Alcalá 403; mains US\$11-15; 🕒 1:30-11:30pm) Innovative Mexican food and a dramatic architect-designed setting make Los Danzantes one of the most exciting places to eat in Oaxaca. A formerly derelict colonial patio now sports high patterned walls of adobe brick, tall wooden columns and cool pools of water in an impeccably contemporary configuration, half open to the sky. Efficient and welcoming young staff serve up a short but first-class selection of food: you might start with a delicious salad or a *sopa de nopales con camarón* (prawn and prickly pear cactus soup) and follow it with pork ribs in plum sauce. Wine selections and desserts are very good, and the restaurant has its own lines of cigars and mezcal.

**Mercado 20 de Noviembre** (Map pp226-7; btwn Calle 20 de Noviembre & Cabrera; mains US\$1.75-3) Cheap *oaxaqueño* meals can be had in this market south of the *zócalo*. Most of the many small *comedores* (inexpensive eateries) here serve up local specialties such as chicken in mole negro (cooked in a dark sauce of chilies, fruits, nuts, spices and chocolate). Pick one that's busy – they're worth the wait. Many *comedores* stay open until early evening, but their food is freshest earlier in the day.

**WEST OF THE ZÓCALO**

**Café Alex** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-07-15; Díaz Ordaz 218; mains US\$3.25-4.50; 🕒 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. Breakfast combinations are only part of the larger menu of traditional Oaxacan dishes.

**Restaurant Colonial** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-5193; Calle 20 de Noviembre 112; lunch US\$3.50; 🕒 8am-5:30pm Mon-Sat) The Colonial's 10 or so tables fill up with locals for the good-value four-course *comida corrida* (set-price lunch menu), which includes soup, rice, a main course such as *pollo a la naranja* (chicken à l'orange), dessert and *aguas frescas* ('fresh waters' – pulped fruits and cornmeal or rice blended with water).

**Fidel Pan Integral** (Map pp226-7; Calle 20 de Noviembre 211; baked goods around US\$0.30 to US\$0.50; 🕒 9am-

9:30pm Mon-Sat) Fidel is a brown-bread-lover's dream, serving whole-wheat cookies, *pan-dulces* (sweet breads) and even croissants.

**NORTH OF THE ZÓCALO**

**Casa Oaxaca** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-88-89; Constitución 104A; mains US\$6-15; 🕒 1-11pm Mon-Sat) This is Oaxacan fusion at its finest. The chef here works magic by combining ingredients and flavors: witness the chayote and banana puree, or the 'cannelloni,' with thinly sliced jicama in place of pasta tube, surrounding a filling of grasshoppers and *huitlacoche* (corn truffle, a fungus that grows on maize). Presentation is outstanding as well, and all is enhanced by the courtyard setting and a good selection of wines. The only negative is that waiters will sometimes do a hard sell on food and wine.

**La Olla** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-66-68; Reforma 402; dishes US\$2.50-9, menú del día US\$7.50; 🕒 8am-10pm Tue-Sat, 9am-10pm Sun; 🍷) This restaurant produces marvelous Oaxacan specialties, good whole-wheat *tortas* (Mexican-style sandwiches made with rolls), juices and salads made with organic lettuce. There are plenty of vegetarian choices, fine breakfasts (US\$2.50 to US\$4.50) and the *menú del día* (aka *menú*; lunch special) is a multicourse gourmet treat.

**La Biznaga** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-80-00; García Vigil 512; mains US\$7-9.50; 🕒 1-10pm Mon-Sat, 2-8pm Sun) La Biznaga's cutting-edge ambience is the work of two brothers from the Distrito Federal (Federal District, which includes half of Mexico City). The courtyard is ringed with slick art, an eclectic music mix plays, and someone will take your order, eventually (for best results, sit close to the full bar). People rave about the *cocina mestiza* (mestizo cuisine) dishes here, including great salads made with organic produce, and fish, fowl and meat cleverly prepared and presented.

**Zandunga** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 044-951-156-27-02; cnr García Vigil & Carranza; mains US\$5.50-6; 🕒 2-11pm Mon-Sat) Give *istmeño* (isthmian) cooking a preview here before you head off to Tehuantepec. The *cochito horneado* (baked pork) goes down easily, as do the *tamales de cambray* (stuffed with beef and chicken and cooked in a banana leaf) and other dishes. The corner location's warm decor includes grade-A artwork on the walls and low light. Service is friendly and low-key.

**Café Los Cuiles** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-82-59; Plaza de las Vírgenes, Plazuela Labastida 115-1; breakfast US\$2.50-3.50, salad, soup & snacks US\$1.50-3; ☎ 8am-10pm) With a handy central location and spacious lounge-gallery feel, Los Cuiles is an excellent spot for breakfast, outstanding organically grown, fair-traded coffee or light eats at any time of day. Sit inside and make use of the wi-fi Internet access, or enjoy the courtyard and its fountain.

**María Bonita** (Map p225; ☎ 516-72-33; cnr Alcalá & Humboldt; breakfast US\$3-5, mains US\$5.50-9; ☎ 8:30am-9pm Tue-Sat, 8:30-5pm Sun) Readers love the economical and tasty variety of traditional Oaxacan food here. Precede your mole (a dish with a chili-based sauce) with one of a good range of appetizers (US\$3 to US\$5.50) and soups, such as the *sopa xóchitl* (squash, squash blossom and sweet corn). The old building is on a noisy traffic corner, but the tasteful art on the walls and relaxed, unhurried service make it all OK.

**Gaia** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-70-79; Plaza de las Vírgenes, Plazuela Labastida 115-3; breakfast US\$3.75-6, panini US\$3.75, salads US\$3; ▼) Behind Café Los Cuiles, and sharing courtyard space with it, Gaia is a mellow café-juice bar serving many vegetarian dishes. Choose from breakfast combinations, panini, omelets, frittatas, excellent organic salads, pastas, and good cold veggie soups with yogurt. Plus a wide range of healthful and delicious juice blends, *licuados* (fruit blended usually with milk, sometimes just with ice) and smoothies (mostly US\$2.75).

**1254 Marco Polo** (Map p225; ☎ 513-43-08; Pino Suárez 806; breakfast US\$2.50-3, mains US\$5-9.50; ☎ 8am-6pm Wed-Mon) Popular Marco Polo has a large garden dining area, attentive waiters and great food. The large breakfasts come with bottomless cups of coffee; from noon until closing, *antojitos* (snacks), seviches and oven-baked seafood are the main draws.

**Coffee Beans** (Map pp226-7; Calle 5 de Mayo 500C; coffee drinks US\$1.25-2; ☎ 8am-midnight) This place roasts and brews some of the best coffee in town; it's strong, tasty and available in several forms, including a good variety of espresso drinks. It also serves an assortment of teas and some good desserts, cookies and the like in a relaxed atmosphere.

**Comala** (Map pp226-7; García Vigil 406; sandwiches US\$3-5; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat) Comala's sandwiches are made with excellent bread (rolls or ciabatta) and contain ingredients like prosciutto, olives and mozzarella. The *hamburguesa de res* (US\$5) is a big, juicy, filling burger, which probably won't leave you with any room for the salads and soups.

**El Biche Pobre** (Map p225; ☎ 513-46-36; cnr Calz de la República & Hidalgo; mains US\$3-6.50; ☎ 8am-9pm Wed-Mon) El Biche Pobre, 1.5km northeast of the *zócalo*, is an informal place serving a range of Oaxacan food at about a dozen tables, some long enough to stage lunch for a whole extended Mexican family. For an introduction to local cuisine, you can't beat the US\$6.50 *botana surtida*, a dozen assorted little items that add up to a tasty meal.

**Restaurant Flor de Loto** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-39-44; Morelos 509; mains US\$3.25-5; ▼) Flor de Loto makes a pretty good stab at pleasing a range of palates from vegan to carnivore. The chicken brochette (US\$4.50) is a large and very tasty choice. Vegetarian options include spinach and soy burgers, and *vegetales al gratin* (vegetables with melted cheese). The US\$4.50 *comida corrida* is quite a meal.

**Cenaduría Tlayudas Libres** (Map pp226-7; Libres 212; servings around US\$3; ☎ 9 or 10pm-4:30am) Drivers double park along the entire block to eat here. Enormous tortillas (*tlayudas*) are folded over frijoles, *quesillo* (Oaxacan goat's cheese) and your choice of salsa, and crisped directly atop hot coals; you can add tough *tasajo* (strips of marinated beef) or spicy *salchicha* (pork

### CHO-CO-LA-TE

Oaxacans love their chocolate. A bowl of the steaming hot liquid, served with porous sweet bread to dunk, is the perfect warmer when winter sets in 1500m above sea level. Hot milk or water is added to a blend of cinnamon, almonds, sugar and, of course, ground cacao 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, hard chocolate for eating, and more. 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.

sausage). It's a filling, tasty meal, but half the fun is taking in the great local, late-night scene as the cooks fan the street-side charcoal grills, raising showers of sparks.

## Drinking

**Tapas y Pisto** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-40-93; Alcalá 403; ☎ 5pm-2am Tue-Sun) Upstairs from Restaurante Los Danzantes and in keeping with its ultrasensual theme, T&P has a black light in the bar, and a rooftop terrace (well removed from the bar) with fabulous views.

**Bar del Borgo** (Map pp226-7; Matamoros 100-B; ☎ 10am-1am) A very small but neatly arranged, semisubterranean space, the Borgo offers some unique street views and a jazzy, arty atmosphere. Check it out!

**La Casa del Mezcal** (Map pp226-7; Flores Magón 209; ☎ 10am-1am) Open since 1935, this is one of Oaxaca's oldest bars, 1½ blocks south of the *zócalo*. It's a cantina, but a safe one. One room has a large stand-up bar and shelves full of mezcal (US\$2 to US\$3 a shot); the other room has tables where *botanas* are served. Most but not all patrons are men.

**La Cucaracha** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 501-16-36; Porfirio Díaz 301A; ☎ 7pm-2am Mon-Sat) A good place to make acquaintance with some classic Mexican beverages, this specialist bar pours 40 varieties of mezcal, including fruit-flavored types and shots from jugs holding scorpions awash in the stuff. A six-flavor sampler runs US\$9.50, while shots are US\$2 and US\$4. Various tequilas are on offer also. Everyone's welcome here, food is available, and on Friday and Saturday a small disco operates in one corner, with live Latin music (*trova*, *rancheras* and *boleros*) in another.

## Entertainment

### Live Music

**Candela** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-20-10; Murguía 413; admission US\$2-3 Tue & Wed, US\$5 Thu-Sat; ☎ 1pm-2am Tue-Sat) Candela's writhing salsa band and beautiful colonial-house setting have kept it at the top of Oaxaca nightlife for over a decade. Arrive fairly early (9:30pm to 10:30pm) to get a good table, and either learn to dance or learn to watch. Candela is a restaurant too, with a good lunchtime *menú* (US\$4). Tuesday and Wednesday are mellow *trova* (folk music) nights, but salsa, merengue and *cumbia* (a style of music and dance that originated in Colombia) take over Thursday through Saturday.

**La Tentación** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-95-21; Matamoros 101; admission US\$4; ☎ 9pm-2am Tue-Sun) This venue can be erratic, but when it gets up a good head of steam, everyone has a great time. This is most likely to happen on Friday and Saturday, when you can move to live salsa, merengue and *cumbia*. The DJ'd weeknights tend to be lame.

Other places with regular live music include **La Cucaracha** (left) and **Azúkar** (Map p225; ☎ 513-11-70; cnr Calz Porfirio Díaz & Escuela Naval Militar; ☎ Thu-Sat), about six blocks north of Calz Niños Héroe de Chapultepec in Colonia Reforma. It alternates between live salsa and other *música tropical* and DJs spinning house, techno and electronica. The *banda* (Mexican big-band music) club next door, La Mata, provides large doses of quintessentially Mexican music.

Free **concerts** in the *zócalo* are given several evenings each week at 7pm, and at 12:30pm on Wednesday and Sunday, by the state marimba (wooden xylophone) ensemble or state band.

### Bars & Clubs

**La Divina** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 582-05-08; Gurrión 104; ☎ 5pm-1am Tue-Sun) Loud, busy La Divina has a disco-esque interior and music from Spanish-language rock and house to English pop. A mixed-nationality crowd generates a warm atmosphere that spills out on to the street if you're lucky. Drinks start at around US\$2.

The bar at **La Biznaga** (p234) is an utterly cool spot for drinks.

### Cinema, Theatre & Dance

**Cine El Pochote** (Map p225; ☎ 514-11-94, 516-69-80; García Vigil 817; admission free, donations accepted; ☎ screenings 6pm & 8pm Tue-Sun) El Pochote shows independent, art-house and classic Mexican and international movies (the latter in their original language with Spanish subtitles). There's usually a different theme each month. To reach it, duck under the old aqueduct into Parque El Pochote.

**Casa de Cantera** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-75-85; Murguía 102; admission US\$14; ☎ 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. Food and drinks are available.

The **Centro Cultural Ricardo Flores Magón** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-62-93; Alcalá 302) and the **Casa de la**



**Cultura Oaxaqueña** (Map p225; ☎ 516-24-83; Ortega 403) both stage musical, dance, theater and art events several evenings and a few mornings a week. These are largely nontouristic events and many of them are free; drop by to see the programs.

## 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 on and near Calle Alcalá, Calle 5 de Mayo and García Vigil, but prices are lower in the markets. Some artisans have grouped together to market their own products directly (see right).

Special crafts to look out for include the distinctive black pottery from San Bartolo Coyotepec; blankets, rugs and tapestries from Teotitlán del Valle; *huipiles* (indigenous women's tunics) and other Oaxacan indigenous clothing; pottery figures from Ocotlán; and stamped and colored Oaxacan tin. Jewelry is also made and sold here, and you'll find pieces using gold, silver or precious stones, but prices are a bit higher than in Mexico City or Taxco. Many shops can mail things home for you.

Just as fascinating as the fancy craft stores is Oaxaca's commercial area, which stretches over several blocks southwest of the *zócalo*. Oaxacans flock here, and to the big Central de Abastos market, for all their everyday needs.

## MARKETS

**Mercado de Artesanías** (Crafts Market; Map pp226-7; cnr JP García & Zaragoza) This sizable indoor crafts market is strong on pottery, rugs and textiles. As you walk through, you're likely to see many of the vendors passing the time

by plying their crafts, such as weaving or embroidering.

**Central de Abastos** (Supplies Center; Map p225; Periférico) The enormous main market, on the western edge of the city center, is a hive of activity every day, though Saturday is 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, *artesanía* (handicrafts) and overwhelming quantities of every sort of produce grown from the coast to the mountaintops.

## CRAFT SHOPS

**MARO** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-06-70; Calle 5 de Mayo 204; ☎ 9am-8pm) This is a sprawling store with a big range of good work (such as woven-to-order rugs) at good prices, all made by the hundreds of members of the MARO women artisans' cooperative around Oaxaca state.

**Instituto Oaxaqueño de las Artesanías** (Map p225; ☎ 514-40-30; www.oaxaca.gob.mx/ioa; García Vigil 809; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Government-run IOA offers a large variety of beautiful craft items, including some gorgeous textiles.

**La Mano Mágica** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-42-75; www.lamanomagica.com; Alcalá 203; ☎ 10:30am-3pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat) They sell some wonderfully original and sophisticated craft products here, including work by master weaver Arnulfo Mendoza.

**Casa de las Artesanías de Oaxaca** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-50-62; Matamoros 105; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) This store sells the work of 80 family workshops and crafts organizations from around Oaxaca state. Its patio is surrounded by several rooms full of varied crafts.

**Oro de Monte Albán** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-45-28; www.orodemontealban.com); Plaza Alcalá (Alcalá 307);

## GOOD TO THE LAST DROP

Central Oaxaca state – especially around Santiago Matatlán and the Albarradas group of villages, south and east of Mitla – produces probably the best mezcal in Mexico (and therefore the world). Just like its cousin tequila, mezcal is made from the maguey plant and is usually better when *reposado* or *añejo* (aged). There are also some delicious *crema* varieties with fruit or other flavors.

Several Oaxaca shops southwest of the *zócalo* specialize in mezcal. Try **El Rey de los Mezcales** (Map pp226-7; Las Casas 509) or look along Aldama, JP García or Trujano. Around US\$11 will buy you a decent bottle but some US\$4 mezcals are also fine. For some export-quality mezcals from Santiago Matatlán (up to US\$55), head to **La Cava** (Map p225; ☎ 515-23-35; Gómez Farías 212B; ☎ 10am-3pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat), north of the center. It has a good selection of wines, too.

Taller (workshop, Gurrion C) This firm's goldsmiths produce high-class jewelry in gold, silver and semiprecious stones, including copies of pre-Hispanic jewelry and pieces inspired by colonial-era designs. It has multiple locations on Calle Alcalá and one at Monte Albán itself. The workshop tour (in Spanish) is very interesting and includes a demonstration of lost-wax casting.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Most international flights to Oaxaca city (airport code OAX) connect through Mexico City. Direct flights to/from Mexico City (one hour) are operated by Mexicana at least four times daily and Aviacsa once, while Azteca flies once a day except Thursday. Continental has daily flights to/from Houston, Texas.

For the spectacular half-hour hop over the Sierra Madre del Sur to Puerto Escondido and Bahías de Huatulco on the Oaxaca coast, Aerotucán (with a 13-seat Cessna) flies daily to/from both destinations, with fares to either around US\$100 one way. Aerovega flies a seven-seater daily to/from Puerto Escondido (US\$90 one-way) and to/from Bahías de Huatulco (US\$100).

### AIRLINE OFFICES

**Aeroméxico** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-10-66; Hidalgo 513; ✉ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5:30pm Sat)

**Aerotucán** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 501-05-30; Alcalá 201, Interior 204)

**Aerovega** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-49-82; aerovega@prodigy.net.mx; Alameda de León 1; ✉ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat)

**Aviacsa** Centro (Map pp226-7; ☎ 513-72-14; Pino Suárez 604); Airport (☎ 511-50-39)

**Azteca** (☎ 01-800-229-83-22)

**Mexicana** Centro (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-73-52; Fiallo 102); Airport (☎ 511-52-29)

### BUS

The **1st-class bus station** (Terminal de Autobuses de Primera Clase or Terminal ADO; Map p225; ☎ 515-12-48; Calz Niños Héroes de Chapultepec 1036) is 2km northeast of the *zócalo*. It's used by, among others, UNO and ADO GL (deluxe lines); the 1st-class lines ADO and Cristóbal Colón (OCC); and 2nd-class Sur buses. The **2nd-class bus station** (Terminal de Autobuses de Segunda Clase; Map p225; Trujano) is 1km west of the *zócalo*; the main companies serving the coast and Isthmus of Tehuantepec from it are **Estrella del Valle/Oaxaca Pacífico** (EV/OP; ☎ 516-54-29); **Fletes y Pasajes** (Fypsa; ☎ 516-22-70); **Estrella Roja** (ER; ☎ 516-06-94) and **Transportes Oaxaca-Istmo** (TOI; ☎ 516-36-64). Some of EV/OP's services stop at the **Armenta y López terminal** (Map p225; ☎ 501-02-88; Armenta y López 721), 500m south of the *zócalo*, after leaving the 2nd-class terminal.

It's advisable to buy your ticket a day or two in advance for some of the less frequent

## THE LONG & WINDING ROAD

Three main paved routes connect Oaxaca city and the Pacific coast:

- **Hwy 175** A spectacular, winding road passing through Miahuatlán to Pochutla (about seven hours by 2nd-class bus, 245km), the jumping-off point for Puerto Ángel, Zipolite and other nearby beaches. Mind your wallet and carry-on luggage, as thieves work this route.
- **Hwy 190** First-class buses use this, the longest, smoothest route. They take about five hours to reach Hwy 200 at the coast near Salina Cruz, then head west to Bahías de Huatulco (eight hours total), Pochutla (nine to 10 hours, 450km) and on to Puerto Escondido (10 to 12 hours).
- **Hwy 131** A few decent 2nd-class buses travel directly to Puerto Escondido (six to eight hours, 250km) via this road, which is scenic but poorly maintained in parts, with many potholes.

The most picturesque route is Hwy 175, climbing high into mountainous pine forests then dropping precipitously to the coast. All in all, it's the happy, quick and affordable medium; however, some bus and van drivers take its many curves nauseatingly fast. Many seasoned travelers tell tales of fear and barfing; others report having no problems. When choosing among the routes, consider your destination, budget, schedule and intestinal fortitude (literally and figuratively). Traveling by day is recommended, for general road safety, sightseeing value, security and to avoid motion sickness. Be aware that Hwys 131 and 175 are particularly susceptible to landslides in periods of heavy rain (most likely from June through October).

services, especially in high season. **Ticket Bus** (Calle 20 de Noviembre Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-66-55; Calle 20 de Noviembre 103D; 🕒 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-9pm Sun; Valdivieso Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-38-20; Valdivieso 2A; 🗺 same), in the city center, sells tickets for many 1st-class lines. See the boxed text on opposite for information on bus routes to the coast.

Other daily bus departures from Oaxaca: **Mexico City** (US\$32-42, 6hr, 47 daily from 1st-class terminal); Fypsa (US\$19, 6hr, 3 daily) Most go to Terminal Oriente (TAPO), and a few to Terminal Sur or Terminal Norte.

**Pochutla** OCC (US\$20, 9-10hr, 5 daily, via Hwys 190 & 200); EV/OP (US\$7.50, 7hr, 10 *ordinarios*; US\$8.50-9, 6hr, 3 *directos* at 9:45am, 2:45pm and 10:30pm, all via Hwy 175)

**Puebla** ADO/ADO GL (US\$25-29, 4½hr, 12 daily from 1st-class terminal)

**Puerto Ángel** EV/OP (US\$7, 7½hr, 1 nightly at 11:15pm)

**Puerto Escondido** OCC (US\$21, 10hr, 5 daily, via Hwys 190 & 200); EV/OP (US\$8.50, 8½hr, 10 *ordinario*; US\$10-10.50, 7½hr, 3 *directo* at 9:45am, 2:45pm, and 10:30pm; all via Hwys 175 & 200); ER (US\$9.50, 6½-7hr, 5 daily, via Hwy 131)

**Santa Cruz Huatulco** OCC/ADO-GL (US\$19/25, 8hr, 6 daily, via Hwys 190 & 200); EV/OP (US\$10.50, 8hr, 1 nightly at 10pm, via Hwys 175 & 200)

**Tehuantepec** (US\$12, 4½hr, 16 1st-class daily from 1st-class terminal; Sur (US\$11, 4½hr, 7 daily); TOI (US\$7.50, 5½hr, 13 daily)

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

See the boxed text on opposite for information on roads to the coast.

Car tolls from Mexico City to Oaxaca on Hwys 150D and 135D total US\$30; the trip takes about six hours. Highway 135D is signed as 131D for some stretches. The main toll-free alternative, via Huajuapán de León on Hwy 190, takes several hours longer.

There are several rental-car agencies in Oaxaca. Prices can start as low as US\$35 a day, including tax and insurance, for an old-style VW Beetle without air-con.

**Alamo** Centro (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-85-34; Calle 5 de Mayo 203); Airport (☎ 511-62-20)

**Budget** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-44-45; Calle 5 de Mayo 315A); Airport (☎ 511-52-52)

**Hertz** Centro (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-24-34; Plaza de las Vírgenes, Plazuela Labastida 115); Airport (☎ 511-54-78)

## VAN

**Autoexpres Atlántida** (Map p225; ☎ 514-70-77; La Noria 101) runs 14-seat, air-conditioned vans nine times daily via Hwy 175 to Pochutla (US\$11.50, 6½ hours); try to reserve a seat up front.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Oaxaca airport is 6km south of the city, 500m off Hwy 175. Transporte Terrestre *combis* (minibuses) from the airport will take you to anywhere in the city center for US\$2.75. Catching a cab outside the terminal should cost between US\$9.50 and US\$11.50, depending on your destination. A ticket taxi desk at the south end of the terminal charges US\$12 if you want to avoid possible hassles.

You can book a *combi* seat from the city to the airport (US\$2.75), a day or more ahead, at **Transportes Aeropuerto** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-43-50; Alameda de León 1G; 🕒 9am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat).

### BICYCLE

Two full-service establishments rent excellent mountain bikes: **Bicicletas Pedro Martínez** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 514-59-35; Aldama 418; per day US\$11.50) and **Zona Bici** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 516-09-53; García Vigil 406; US\$12 per day, per hr US\$2.50). Rentals at both incorporate helmet, lock and tools.

### BUS & TAXI

Most points of importance in the city are within walking distance of each other, but you might want to use city buses (US\$0.30) to/from the bus stations.

From the 1st-class bus station, a west-bound 'Juárez' bus will take you down Juárez and Melchor Ocampo, which are three blocks east of the *zócalo*; a 'Tinoco y Palacios' bus will take you down Tinoco y Palacios, which is two blocks west of the *zócalo*. To return to the bus station, take an 'ADO' bus north up Xicoténcatl (which becomes Pino Suárez), four blocks east of the *zócalo*, or up Díaz Ordaz (which becomes Crespo), three blocks west of the *zócalo*.

Buses between the 2nd-class bus station and the center make their way slowly along congested streets. 'Centro' buses head toward the center along Trujano, then turn north up Díaz Ordaz. Going out to the 2nd-class bus station, 'Central' buses head south on Tinoco y Palacios, then west on Las Casas.

A taxi anywhere within the central area, including the bus and train stations, costs about US\$2.75.

## DETOUR: MONTE ALBÁN

The ancient Zapotec capital of **Monte Albán** (☎ 951-516-12-15; admission US\$3.75; 🕒 8am-6pm) stands on a flattened hilltop 400m above the valley floor, just a few kilometers southwest of Oaxaca. It's one of the most impressive ancient sites to be found in Mexico, and it has the most spectacular 360-degree views. Its name, pronounced 'mohn-teh ahl-bahn,' means White Mountain.

At the site's entrance are a very good museum (with artifacts from the site, including several skulls and a re-created burial; explanations in Spanish only), a café, a bookstore and an Oro de Monte Albán (p237) jewelry store. Official guides offer their services, in Spanish, English, French and Italian, outside the ticket office (about US\$20 for a small group). Parts of the site are wheelchair-accessible. A good scale model of the site, with a handy north point, lies just past the entrance turnstiles.

### HISTORY

Monte Albán was first occupied around 500 BC, probably by Zapotecs. It probably 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 well mean that the elite of Monte Albán were the first to use writing and a written calendar in Mexico. Between 200 BC and about AD 300 (Monte Albán II) the city came to dominate more and more of Oaxaca. Buildings of this period were typically made of huge stone blocks and had steep walls.

The city was at its peak from about AD 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* (a stepped building style with alternating vertical and sloping sections) architecture indicates influence from Teotihuacán. Nearly 170 underground tombs from this period have been found. Skulls with holes drilled, cut or scraped into them have been found in more than 20 burials here – thought to be evidence of medical treatments unique in ancient Mexico.

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

### SIGHTS

#### Gran Plaza

About 300m long and 200m wide, the **Gran Plaza**, was the center of Monte Albán. Its visible structures are mostly from the peak Monte Albán III period. Some were temples, others residential. The following description takes you clockwise around the plaza. Many of the structures in and around the plaza are 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 stands for spectators. The **Pirámide** (Edificio P) was topped by a small pillared temple and was probably an observatory of some sort. At the bottom of its staircase a very low tunnel leads into a tomb. The **Palacio** (Palace) bears atop it 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 corner of its eastern base. **Edificio J**, an arrowhead-shaped building constructed about 100 BC and riddled with tunnels and staircases (unfortunately you can't go inside), stands at an angle of 45° 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 O**, at the front of **Sistema M** (a patio-temple-altar complex from the Monte Albán III phase), was added to an earlier structure in an apparent attempt to conceal the plaza's lack of symmetry. (The rock mounds supporting the Plataforma Sur and Plataforma Norte are not directly opposite each other.)

**Edificio L** 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 100 BC, they generally have open mouths (sometimes downturned in Olmec style) and closed eyes. Some have blood flowing 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, combines typical Monte Albán II construction with overlays from Monte Albán III and IV.

### 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 supported the roof of a hall. Atop the platform is a ceremonial complex built between AD 500 and 800; points of interest here include 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 around AD 800 – four women and a fifth figure represented by a jaguar.

### Tombs

Most of Monte Albán's ancient tombs are usually closed to visitors to help their preservation. But if you're lucky you might be able to peer into one of the following.

Behind Plataforma Norte, **Tumba 104** dates from AD 500 to AD 700. Above the tomb's 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 flayed god and god of spring, Xipe Tótec; on the right wall, wearing a big snake-and-feather headdress, is Pitao Cozobi again.

**Tumba 7**, 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 (p229).

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

### Getting There & Away

**Autobuses Turísticos** (Map pp226-7; ☎ 951-516-53-27) runs buses to the site from Hotel Rivera del Ángel, at Mina 518 in Oaxaca, six blocks (a 10- to 15-minute walk) southwest of the *zócalo*. The buses leave every hour from 8:30am to 3:30pm (details of the schedule change from time to time). The ride up takes 20 minutes. The US\$3 fare includes a return trip at a designated time, giving you about two hours at the site. If you want to stay longer, you must hope for a spare place on a later return bus and pay a further US\$1.50. The last bus back leaves Monte Albán at 6pm.

A taxi from Oaxaca to Monte Albán costs about US\$8, but coming down you may have to pay more. Walking up from the city center takes about 1½ hours.

## OAXACA COAST

The once-remote Oaxaca coast has seen tourism rise as connections with the outside world improve. The fishing villages and former coffee ports of Puerto Escondido and Puerto Ángel have turned into minor resorts, but they remain relatively small and relaxed – Puerto Ángel especially so. Puerto Escondido has famous surf, while Puerto Ángel is at the center of a series of wonderful beaches with plenty of low-cost accommodations. Some of these – including the fabled backpackers' hangout, Zipolite – are gradually turning into resorts of sorts themselves. To the east, a new tourist complex on Bahías de Huatulco is being developed with *some* respect for the area's lovely surroundings. West of Puerto Escondido, nature lovers can visit the lagoons of Manialtepec and Chacahua, which teem with birdlife.

The coast is hotter and much more humid than the highlands. Most of the year's rain falls between June and September, turning everything green. From October the landscape starts to dry out, and by March many of the trees – which are mostly deciduous – are leafless. May is the hottest month.

The coast is described from west to east, except for the towns around Pochutla (including Puerto Ángel, Zipolite and Mazunte), which are described in the order you reach them when coming from that transport hub.

### Internet Resources

**Pacific Coast of Oaxaca** ([www.tomzap.com](http://www.tomzap.com)) This site is a mine of information about the coast.

### Sleeping

The peak tourism seasons on this coast are from mid-December to mid-January, Semana Santa (Holy Week), and the months of July and August. At other times hotel prices may come down anywhere between 10% and 50% from the prices we list.

### Dangers & Annoyances

Though incidents have decreased greatly in recent years, there have been cases of highway robbery along Hwy 200 from Pochutla north to Acapulco, as well as on Hwy 175 between Oaxaca and the coast.

Much of coastal Oaxaca is cattle country, and the numbers of cows (and burros and horses) wandering loose on the highway at all hours give new meaning to the term 'free range.' Both robbery and roadkill occur with greater frequency at night, so try to do your traveling in the daytime.

### Getting There & Away

If you're coming from Guerrero state (Acapulco usually), Pinotepa Nacional will be the first major town you'll pass on Hwy 200. From Oaxaca, you'll either hit Pochutla from Hwy 175, Puerto Escondido from Hwy 131 or Bahías de Huatulco from Hwy 190/200. See p238 for routes from Oaxaca city.

### PINOTEPA NACIONAL

☎ 954 / pop 23,000

Pinotepa is the biggest town between Puerto Escondido (145km) and Acapulco (260km). It's an important market town and urban center for indigenous Mixtecs and Amuzgos who live here and in outlying villages. Though there's little to do *in* Pinotepa, there is lots to do *around* the town, and many of the nearby villages, most of them Mixtec, make good day trips.

Pino's bus terminal is about 2km west of the central plaza. Two banks on the main drag, Bancomer and Bancrecer, change traveler's checks and have ATMs.

The following hotels are friendly and clean and have private bathrooms with hot water.

The semimodern **Hotel Las Gaviotas** (☎ 543-24-02; Carretera a Acapulco s/n; s/d US\$14/17, with air-con US\$19/24; **P** 🚽), about 600m east of the bus station, has decent rooms with good bathrooms and OK beds.

**Hotel Carmona** (☎ 543-23-22; Porfirio Díaz 401; s/d US\$17/24, with air-con US\$25/34; 🚽 📺), on the main road about 500m west of the main plaza, is clean, well run and fairly quiet. Rooms have hot-water bathroom and TV.

All Estrella Blanca buses between Puerto Escondido and Acapulco stop here. It's three hours to Puerto Escondido (1st-class/*ordinario* US\$7.50/6.50), 1½ hours to Cuajinicuilapa (US\$2.75), and five to 6½ hours to Acapulco (1st-class/*ordinario* US\$13/12). First-class OCC buses and 2nd-class Fypsa buses go north on Hwy 125 through the Mixteca, some reaching Oaxaca (US\$20, 10 hours, 1st-class) that way. Estrella Roja has

two buses nightly to Oaxaca via Hwy 131 (US\$14, nine to 10 hours).

## AROUND PINOTEPA NACIONAL

### Playa Corralero

Southwest of Pinotepa, Playa Corralero is a fine beach near the mouth of **Laguna Corralero**. You can stay in *palapas* (thatched-roof shelters) at Corralero village. To get there from Pinotepa by car go about 25km west on Hwy 200, then some 15km southeast. Ten *camionetas* (pickups) run there daily from Pinotepa (US\$1.75, one hour).

### East of Pinotepa Nacional

About 20km (a 20-minute drive) east of Pinotepa, the village of **Huazolotitlán** is famous for its colorful wooden Carnival masks; the village maestro is José Luna López, and anyone can point you to his home. Another long-time carver to ask for is Florencio Gallardo Sánchez. There are many others.

The mainly Mixtec town of **Jamiltepec** (pop 19,000), 30km east of Pinotepa Nacional on Hwy 200, holds a colorful Sunday market below the *plaza central*. Many Mixtec women here wear their colorful *pozahuancos*: horizontally striped, purple wraparound skirts traditionally dyed with *púrpura* (a purple dye made from the shells of sea snails from near Bahías de Huatulco) and cochineal. Mixtec women traditionally wear nothing above the waist, but now often don a small white cloth draped loosely over their shoulders as a nod to the mestizo culture. Mixteca men dress mostly in white.

Buses to both places leave from a small terminal on Pinotepa's main drag just east of the *zócalo*.

## PARQUE NACIONAL LAGUNAS DE CHACAHUA

The area around the coastal lagoons of Chacahua and La Pastoría forms the beautiful Parque Nacional Lagunas de Chacahua. Birds from Alaska and Canada migrate here in winter. Mangrove-fringed islands with stands of mahogany trees harbor cormorants, wood storks, herons, egrets, ibis and roseate spoonbills, as well as crocodiles and turtles. El Corral, a mangrove-lined waterway filled with countless birds, connects the two lagoons. Among the Puerto Escondido agencies offering good day trips is **Hidden**

**Voyages Ecotours** (p253, US\$52 per person, minimum 6; ☒ Thu, Dec-Mar only).

### Zapotalito

About 60km west of Puerto Escondido, a 5km road leads south from Hwy 200 to Zapotalito, a small fishing village with a few simple restaurants on the eastern edge of Laguna La Pastoría. A cooperative here runs three- to four-hour boat tours of the lagoons (US\$75 per boat for up to 10 people). The trips visit islands, channels to the ocean, and the fishing village of Chacahua, at the western end of the park.

You can travel straight to Chacahua village by a *colectivo* (shared) boat and truck combination (see p244).

### Chacahua

Chacahua village straddles the channel that connects the western end of Laguna Chacahua 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 excellent for surfers, including beginners, but there are some strong currents: check with locals on where it's safe to swim. The inland half of the village contains a **crocodile-breeding center** (admission free) with a sorry collection of about 320 creatures kept for protection and reproduction. They range from 15cm to 3.5m in length; Chacahua's wild croc population (not human-eating) has been decimated by hunting.

### SLEEPING & EATING

Several places along the beach at Chacahua village offer basic cabanas. You can sleep in a hammock or camp for free if you eat at a particular establishment. However, this arrangement is not exactly secure, and some readers have complained of theft.

**Restaurante Siete Mares** (mains US\$5.50-7.50) At the west end of the beach, the Siete Mares prepares phenomenal fish and seafood meals. It has some of Chacahua's better cabanas (cabanas d US\$19), 300m away along the beach, with two beds, fans, nets and clean bathrooms. The señora here will lock up your valuables.

**Cabañas Los Almendros** (r or cabanas US\$12-31) The waters of the lagoon lap against this place, just two minutes' walk from the beach. It's run by a friendly young couple, and although

it's not luxury it's fine. There are three cabanas and a couple of other rooms – the upstairs cabana is the pick of the bunch. The shared bathroom is acceptable.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Puerto Escondido, you first have to get to the town of Río Grande, 50km west on Hwy 200. Río Grande-bound minibuses (US\$1.50, one hour) leave 2 Norte just east of the Carretera Costera, in the upper part of Puerto Escondido, about every half hour. All Estrella Blanca buses between Puerto Escondido and Acapulco stop at Río Grande too. From the minibus stop in Río Grande, cross the dirt road and get a *colectivo* taxi (US\$1) to Zapotalito, 14km southwest.

The simplest one-way route from Zapotalito to Chacahua village is by a combination of shared *lancha regular* and *camioneta*, for US\$3. You travel half an hour across the lagoon from Zapotalito to meet with a *camioneta* that will make the half-hour trip along the spit to Chacahua. *Lanchas* leave Zapotalito every two hours from 7:20am to 5:20pm (schedule is subject to change); the last return is at 5pm. Their departure point is 300m further along the main road beyond the tours departure point. This route is adventurous but misses out on the delights of the Lagunas de Chacahua. Shared *directo* boats to Chacahua village (US\$5 per person, 45 minutes, 25km), which take you the full length of the lagoons, also leave from 300m beyond the *lancha* tours departure point. They have no schedule, however, and only leave when US\$50 worth of fares are aboard, so you may have a long wait. You should be able to return to Zapotalito by direct boat, but you need to allow for waiting time. If this fails, take the last afternoon *camioneta/lancha regular* service. Check its departure time before you settle in for the day!

Chacahua village is linked to San José del Progreso, 29km north on Hwy 200, by a sandy track that is impassable in the wet season. A very few *camionetas* travel this route daily (US\$2.75) when possible.

### PUERTO ESCONDIDO

☎ 954 / pop 20,000

Don't be fooled by the few multistory buildings dotting the landscape: Puerto Escondido (Hidden Port) has held on to

its relaxed atmosphere, and boasts a lively travelers' scene. The big draw from day one has been Puerto's astounding waves, which attract an amazing number of tanned, buff and good-looking surfer dudes and dudettes. The rest of the visitors settle for watching the surfers and enjoying any of several beaches, a broad range of accommodations, some excellent restaurants and cafés and a spot of nightlife. When that gets old, several nearby ecotourist destinations provide a change of pace.

### Orientation

The town rises above the small, south-facing Bahía Principal. Highway 200, here called the Carretera Costera, runs across the hill halfway up, dividing the upper town – where buses arrive and most of the locals live and work – from the lower, tourism-dominated part. The heart of the lower town is referred to by all as El Adoquín (*adoquín* is Spanish for paving stone). This is the pedestrianized section (from 5pm until late) of Pérez Gasga. The west end of Pérez Gasga winds up the slope to meet Hwy 200 at an intersection with traffic signals, known as El Crucero.

Bahía Principal curves around at its east end to the long Playa Zicatela, the hub of the surf scene, with loads more places to stay and eat. About 1km west of El Crucero, the area above Playa Carrizalillo has a few places to stay, restaurants and services.

### Information

#### BOOKSTORES

**PJ's Book Bodega** (☎ 044-954-100-36-56; Calle del Morro s/n) A large collection of new and used books in English, Spanish and other languages.

#### EMERGENCY

**Tourist police** (☎ 582-34-39, 24hr; Pérez Gasga s/n) Assistance in English or Spanish.

#### INTERNET ACCESS

**Cofee Net** (Calle del Morro 310; per hr US\$1.50, ☎ 24 hours) In Hotel Surf Olas Altas; free coffee.

**Internet Acuario** (Calle del Morro s/n; per hr US\$1.50) Located in Hotel Acuario building.

**Copacabana** (Pérez Gasga 705; per hr US\$1)

#### LAUNDRY

**Lava-Max** (☎ 540-16-17; Pérez Gasga 405A; ☎ 8am-8pm) Self-service. Wash up to 3.5kg of clothes for US\$1.30



(plus US\$0.70 for detergent, US\$1.25 for dryer); complete wash and dry service costs US\$1.20 per kg.

### MEDIA

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

### MEDICAL SERVICES

In a medical emergency, your best bet is to call the tourist police. The **IMSS clinic** (☎ 582-01-42; Calle 2 Pte s/n) may accept walk-ins.

### MONEY

Many hotels give a fair rate for dollars. The town's *casas de cambio*, named Money Exchange, open longer hours than the banks, and most change US dollar traveler's checks, cash US dollars and euros. A handy **HSBC ATM** (El Adoquín) stands next door to Restaurant Los Crotos. The following banks in the upper part of town all have ATMs and will change US dollar traveler's checks and cash US dollars:

**Bancomer** (cnr 3 Poniente & 2 Norte; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Sat)

**Banorte** (Hidalgo 4; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat)

**HSBC** (1 Norte btwn 2 & 3 Poniente; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat) Changes cash euros.

### POST

**Post office** (cnr Av Oaxaca & 7 Norte; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) A 20- to 30-minute uphill walk (about 2km) from El Adoquín, but you can take a 'Mercado' bus or *colectivo* taxi up Av Oaxaca.

### TELEPHONE

You'll find Telmex card phones and a couple of *casetas telefónicas* on El Adoquín, and more card phones along Calle del Morro on Zicatela and in other parts of town.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Sectur** (☎ 582-01-75; www.aoaxaca.com; cnr Carretera Costera & Juárez; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) This state tourist office (the sign probably still reads Sedetur) is about 2.5km northwest of the center on the road to the airport.

**Tourist information kiosk** (ginainpuerto@yahoo.com; cnr Pérez Gasga & Marina Nacional; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) This very helpful place is 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** (☎ 582-15-51; Pérez Gasga 905B) You can buy air tickets as well as book excursions and rental cars here.

### Dangers & Annoyances

Puerto's safety record is improving, but 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: if you are discovered drinking, peeing or even making out beachside, you could end up paying an on-the-spot fine.

### Sights

#### BAHÍA PRINCIPAL

The main town beach, **Playa Principal**, is long enough to accommodate restaurants at its west end, the local fishing fleet in its center and sun worshipers and young bodyboarders at its eastern end (called Playa Marinero). Occasional flocks of pelicans wing in inches above the waves. Boats bob on the swell, and a few hawkers wander up and down. The smelly water entering the bay at times from the inaptly named Laguna Agua Dulce will put you off dipping away from Playa Marinero.

#### 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' just offshore, 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 PUERTO ANGELITO

The sheltered bay of **Puerto Angelito**, about 1km west of Bahía Principal, has two small beaches separated by a few rocks. Playa Manzanillo, the eastern one, is quieter because vehicles can't reach it. Puerto Angelito is a 20- to 30-minute walk or a US\$2 taxi ride west of El Adoquín.

#### PLAYAS CARRIZALILLO & BACOCHO

Just west of Puerto Angelito, small **Playa Carrizalillo** is in a rockier cove reached by



<b>INFORMATION</b>		Bungalows Zicatela.....19 F4	Restaurant Alicia.....47 B4
Bancomer.....1 C2	Cabañas Edda.....20 F3	Restaurant Bar Los Tíos.....48 F4	Restaurant Flor de María.....(see 27)
Banorte.....2 D2	Cabañas Pepe.....21 A4	Restaurant Junto al Mar.....49 B4	Restaurant Los Croto.....50 B4
Coffee Net.....(see 38)	Casas de Playa Acali.....22 F3	Restaurante El Jardín.....51 F4	Sakura.....52 F4
Copacabana Internet.....3 B4	Hotel Acuario.....23 F4		
HSBC.....4 C2	Hotel Arco Iris.....24 F4	<b>DRINKING ☑</b>	
HSBC ATM.....5 B4	Hotel Buena Vista.....25 F4	Barfly.....53 B4	Casa Babylon.....54 F4
Internet Acuario.....(see 23)	Hotel Casablanca.....26 B3	Los 3 Diablos.....55 B4	Tarros.....56 A4
Lava-Max.....6 A4	Hotel Flor de María.....27 E2	Terraza Bar.....(see 47)	Wipeout Bar.....57 B4
Money Exchange.....7 B3	Hotel Hacienda Revolución.....28 B3		
Money Exchange.....(see 23)	Hotel Loren.....29 A4	<b>ENTERTAINMENT ☑</b>	
PJ's Book Bodega.....(see 58)	Hotel Mayflower.....30 B4	Cinemar.....58 F4	Club Tribal.....59 D3
Post Office.....8 C1	Hotel Nayar.....31 A4	El Son y La Rumba.....60 E3	
Sectur.....9 A1	Hotel Papaya Surf Beach.....32 F4		
Tourist Information Kiosk.....10 A4	Hotel Paraíso Escondido.....33 D2	<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
Tourist Police Office.....11 A4	Hotel Rincón del Pacífico.....34 B4	Aerovega.....61 B4	Budget.....62 A1
Viajes Dimar.....(see 14)	Hotel Rubi.....35 A4	Colectivos to Bajos de Chila.....63 C2	Colectivos to Barra de Navidad.....64 D2
	Hotel San Juan.....36 A4	Minibuses to Río Grande.....(see 63)	OCC (Cristóbal Colón Bus Station).....65 D2
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		Servicio Mixto de Río Grande Buses to Pochutla.....66 A4	
Aventura Submarina.....12 A4	Hotel Santa Fe.....37 F3		
Central Surf.....(see 23)	Hotel Surf Olas Altas.....38 F4		
Cuartel Salvavidas (Lifeguards' Base).....13 F4	Tabachín del Puerto.....39 F3		
Deep Blue Dive School.....(see 17)	Villas Carrizalillo.....40 B3		
Hidden Voyages Ecotours.....14 B3	Zicatela Dorada Resort.....41 F4		
Instituto de Lenguajes.....15 F4	<b>EATING ☑</b>		
Lancha Kiosk.....16 D3	Danny's Terrace.....42 B4		
	El Cafecito.....43 F4		
<b>SLEEPING ☑</b>		El Cafecito (Carrizalillo).....44 B2	
Beach Hotel Inés.....17 F4	La Galera.....(see 24)	La Galería.....45 A4	
Bungalows Puerta del Sol.....18 F4	La Galería.....45 A4	La Hostería.....46 F4	

a stairway of about 170 steps. It's OK for swimming, snorkeling, body-boarding and surfing, and has a bar with a few *palapas*.

**Playa Bacocho** is a long, straight beach on the open ocean west of Carrizalillo; it has a dangerous undertow.

## Activities

More than anything, Puerto is known for surfing. The main break is Zicatela, and it's at its biggest from late April to August. When it's big, it's unforgiving, offering serious punishment to all but the most experienced surfers. If you're a beginner, try **La Punta**, a rolling left point at the far end of Playa Zicatela. When swells are really pumping, Carrizalillo shapes up with some soft lefts and fast rights out over the reef.

You can rent boards for surfing and body-boarding in a few places on Playa Zicatela. One is **Central Surf** (☎ 582-22-85; www.centuralsurfshop.com; Calle del Morro s/n; short board/body-board & fins per hr/day US\$3.75/9.50, long-board per hr/day US\$3.75/14), in the Hotel Acuario building. Central Surf also offers surfing lessons (in English or Spanish) for US\$29 per hour. Other places offering rental and lessons, for about the same prices, include **PJ's Book Bodega** (p244), which also buys and sells boards, and the

**Instituto de Lenguajes** (☎ 582-20-55; www.puerto-school.com; Carretera Costera, Zicatela).

*Lanchas* from the west end of Bahía Principal will take groups of four out for about an hour's **turtle-spotting** for around US\$30, with a dropoff at Puerto Angelito or Playa Carrizalillo afterwards. You can sometimes see other marine life, such as loggerhead turtles, manta rays, dolphins and whales. **Omar's Sportfishing** (☎ 044-954-544-57-90) at Puerto Angelito offers a unique twist to this activity with an underwater microphone that lets you eavesdrop on marine mammals.

Local marlin and sailfish anglers will take two to four people **fishing** with them for three hours for US\$84. Ask at the *lancha* kiosk at the west end of Bahía Principal. The price includes cooking some of the catch for you at one of the town's seafood restaurants.

**Divng** is another possibility. PADI-certified **Aventura Submarina** (☎ 582-23-53; asubmarina@hotmail.com; Pérez Gasga 601A; one-/two-tank dive trips per person US\$38/57, Discover Scuba Diving US\$71, 4-day open-water certification course US\$328) teaches diving courses and leads dive trips for all levels. **Deep Blue Dive School** (☎ 582-07-92; lorenzo2escondido.com; Calle del Morro s/n; 1-/2-tank dive trips per person US\$40/60, minimum two people), in Beach Hotel

Inés (opposite), also offers a variety of trips, as well as PADI courses and certificates.

**Horseback riding** on Playa Zicatela looks fab. Ask the guys on the beach or arrange your rides through Beach Hotel Inés.

## Festivals & Events

**Semana Santa** is a big week for local partying; a local surf carnival is held at this time. At least two international **surf contests** are held on Zicatela each year, usually in August or September, and the **national surfing championships** happen on the last weekend of November.

November is a big month in other ways too: the **Festival Costeña de la Danza** (a fiesta of Oaxaca coastal dance), a sailfishing contest and art exhibitions all take place over the second and/or third weekends of the month. Puerto has begun putting on a February **Carnaval** celebration, but it's still pretty low-key.

## Sleeping

The two main accommodation zones are the central Pérez Gasga area and the surf beach Playa Zicatela. In the peak seasons the most popular places will probably be full, especially on Zicatela. Your best chance of getting into a place you like, if you haven't booked ahead, is to ask early in the day, about 9am or 10am. Many places drop prices drastically in low season from those listed here, and some offer discounts for longer stays.

Several apartments and houses are available for short and long stays. Apartments start at US\$400/US\$800 a month in low/high season; houses overlooking the beach start at around US\$1500. Ask at the tourist information kiosk on Pérez Gasga.

## BUDGET

Playa Zicatela is about the only beach with decent budget accommodations, and the supply is limited.

**Dan & Carmen's** (☎ 582-27-60; [www.casadanycarmen.com](http://www.casadanycarmen.com); Jacaranda 14, Colonia Santa María; cabanas US\$19, r with garden/sea/big sea view US\$26/33/38; (P) 🚽) This excellent place offers 13 self-contained units with fully equipped kitchens and lovely Talavera-tiled bathrooms. Units vary in size from small cabanas for one or two people to larger family rooms for three to four people, with terrace and

views. There's a terrific extra-long lap pool. Reservations are essential, and all the units are available weekly and monthly. It's up the paved road just south of Hotel Papaya Surf, then right across a small bridge.

**Hotel Papaya Surf Beach** (☎ 582-11-68; [www.papayasurf.com](http://www.papayasurf.com); Calle del Morro s/n; d with air-con US\$36, with fan US\$28; 🚽 🚿) Italian-run Papaya has at least 19 rooms with good bathrooms and mosquito screens. Upstairs rooms have shared balconies with hammocks. A restaurant-bar, rooftop *palapa* and pool round out the scene; the combination of beachfront location and facilities make the place a good value.

**Hotel Buena Vista** (☎ 582-14-74; [www.prodigyweb.net.mx/buenavista101](http://www.prodigyweb.net.mx/buenavista101); Calle del Morro s/n; d/tr US\$24/33, with kitchen US\$29/38) Another good value is the well-built Buena Vista, set above Playa Zicatela and reached by a steep flight of steps from Calle del Morro. Its good-sized, spotless rooms all have one double bed and one single, mosquito screens or nets, and a hot-water bathroom. Many have breezy balconies, some with great views.

**Cabañas Edda** (☎ 582-23-22; Carretera Costera; s/d cabanas US\$6/12, with shared bathroom US\$4/8, camping US\$3 per person) Though it's not really 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 facilities. All rooms have screens or nets and ceiling or floor fans; many of the private-bathroom 'cabanas' have tile floors. Some units are rather close to the highway.

There are a number of budget spots in the area around Pérez Gasga.

**Hotel Rubi** (☎ 582-36-84; Pérez Gasga 309; d/tr/q US\$19/27/34; (P) 🚽 🚿) Opened in 2003, the Rubi is one of the only hotels in the budget category offering air-con. All rooms have two double beds and OK bathrooms. None has a sea view, but the small pool and proximity to the bay round it into an attractive package.

**Cabañas Pepe** (☎ 582-20-37; Merklin 101; d US\$18-30) Close to El Crucero, friendly, family-run Pepe's is geared to backpackers and offers 12 simple, well-maintained rooms with two good double beds, fan, nets and hot-water bathroom. Five have superb views and a shared balcony; the others have hammocks slung outside for relaxing in the shade.

**Hotel Mayflower** (☎ 582-03-67; [minnemay7@hotmail.com](mailto:minnemay7@hotmail.com); Andador Libertad s/n; dm US\$7.50, s/d/tr US\$21/26/30) The attractive, popular Mayflower, beside the steps leading down to

El Adoquín from the east end of Merklin, has five fan-cooled dormitories (the largest has seven beds; none have bunkbeds) with more than 40 places in all. Rates include filtered water and the use of a kitchen with fridge and microwave. The 16 pleasing private rooms have fan and bathroom. There are semi-open sitting areas, a billiard table, board games, a safety box and luggage storage facilities. An HI card gets you a 10% discount.

### MIDRANGE

There's plenty of choice near the beaches. Zicatela is sublime but it can get hectic in high seasons. There's also a good range of places around Pérez Gasga.

**Beach Hotel Inés** (☎ 582-07-92; [www.hotelines.com](http://www.hotelines.com); Calle del Morro s/n; r US\$18-75; 📞 📺 📺 📺) German-run Inés has a wide range of bright, cheerful cabanas, rooms, bungalows and suites. All have safes, good mosquito screens and fans; most have wireless Internet access, and some come with kitchens, some with air-con. Tasteful art and *artesanía* abound, and other pluses include a sauna, sundeck and spa, and a relaxed, shaded pool area with a café serving good food. You can arrange horseback riding and scuba here as well.

**Hotel Flor de María** (☎ 582-05-36; [www.mexonline.com/flordemaria.htm](http://www.mexonline.com/flordemaria.htm); 1a Entrada a Playa Marinero; d US\$48-55, extra person US\$10; 📞 📺) A friendly Canadian couple run this good hotel on a lane behind Playa Marinero. The 24 ample rooms are set around a columned patio; all have two double beds; safes; good, large bathrooms; and very well rendered painted murals and door panels. Two rooms have sea views. Extras include a rooftop pool and bar with fabulous views, and a good international restaurant.

**Hotel Arco Iris** (☎ 582-04-32; [www.oaxaca-mio.com/arcoiris.htm](http://www.oaxaca-mio.com/arcoiris.htm); Calle del Morro s/n; d/tr/q from US\$57/61/66; 📞 📺) The attractive, colonial-style Arco Iris has 32 big, clean rooms with balconies or terraces, most looking straight out to the surf, plus a large pool and a good upstairs restaurant-bar open to the breeze. All rooms have two double beds and ceiling fans, and some have a kitchen. You can also park a camper in the sizable grounds.

**Tabachín del Puerto** (☎ 582-11-79; [www.tabachin.com.mx](http://www.tabachin.com.mx); d incl breakfast US\$65-85, extra person US\$15, children under 12 free; 📞 📺) At the end of a

short lane behind Hotel Santa Fe, Tabachín has a gracious and erudite owner and six studio rooms of various sizes (including an enormous one), in varying states of maintenance. All have kitchen, air-con, TV and phone; most have balcony access, some have sea views. The good breakfasts, which include vegetarian choices and organically grown coffee and fruits from the owner's farm in Nopala, draw nonguests as well and are always lively occasions.

**Hotel Acuario** (☎ 582-03-57; fax 582-10-27; Calle del Morro s/n; r US\$70-120; 📞 📺 📺 📺) The 30 or so accommodations here range from cramped rooms and wooden cabanas to spacious upstairs rooms with terrace and beach view. The more substantial bungalows have kitchens and the most appealing interiors. Acuario's complex includes a surf shop, Internet café and an inviting pool area. Prices drop by half out of season.

**Bungalows Zicatela** (☎ 582-07-98; [www.bungalowzicatela.com.mx](http://www.bungalowzicatela.com.mx); Calle del Morro s/n; s/d US\$19/38, bungalow with fan US\$47, with air-con & view US\$66; 📞 📺) The straightforward Zicatela has a sociable pool and restaurant and all its 40-odd accommodations are a good size, solidly built and have mosquito-netted windows. Though squeezed a little tightly together, they have good beds and bathrooms, and most bungalows have kitchens.

**Bungalows Puerta del Sol** (☎ 582-29-22; Calle del Morro s/n; r US\$49; 📞) This place has a small pool, a communal kitchen and 16 spacious, well-constructed rooms with fan, balcony and hammock (and beds of course!).

**Casas de Playa Acali** (☎ 582-07-54; [arnulfodiaz59@hotmail.com](mailto:arnulfodiaz59@hotmail.com); Calle del Morro s/n; cabanas US\$37, bungalows US\$50, r US\$68; 📞 📺) Acali's fenced property holds a fair bit of greenery. The varnished-wood cabanas are fairly rustic but ample, each with one double and one single bed. The bungalows have decent bathrooms, screens and beds (two doubles in each), as well as kitchens. The more expensive rooms climb up the hillside in blocks, and have air-con, large upstairs kitchens and decks for relaxing on.

**Hotel Hacienda Revolución** (☎ 582-18-18; [www.haciendarevolucion.com](http://www.haciendarevolucion.com); Andador Revolución 21; d/tr/q US\$33/38/43, d/tr casita US\$43/47) On a flight of steps leading up from El Adoquín, this Revolution-themed place has 11 attractive and spacious rooms around a garden-courtyard with a beautiful central fountain.

Rooms have colorful paintwork and Talavera-tiled hot-water bathrooms; most have a patio and hammock. Set apart under a shared roof, the casitas are even nicer than the rooms; each has a hammock on the patio. A restaurant in the shady area below opens from December to March.

**Hotel Nayar** (☎ 582-01-13; [www.oaxaca-mio.com/hotelnayar.htm](http://www.oaxaca-mio.com/hotelnayar.htm); Pérez Gasga 407; s/d with air-con US\$41/47; 📞 📺 📺) The Nayar was built in a '60s-modern style that looks much better once you get inside. Its 41 rooms have good beds, OK bathrooms with hot water, and small balconies. Fifteen rooms have sea views, and the view from the terrace is excellent. The pool is in a big garden by the entrance.

**Hotel San Juan** (☎ 582-05-18; [www.hotelsanjuan.cjb.net](http://www.hotelsanjuan.cjb.net); Merklin 503; d from US\$27, r with air-con US\$45; 📞 📺 📺) The friendly San Juan, just below El Crucero, has 31 good, straightforward rooms. All have hot water, mosquito screens, cable TV and a security box; some have terraces and excellent views. The hotel also boasts a pool and a rooftop sitting area.

**Hotel Rincón del Pacífico** (☎ 582-00-56; Pérez Gasga 900; s/d/tr/q US\$30/38/45/54 with fan, with air-con US\$53/66/79/94; 📞) This hotel on El Adoquín has 30 spacious, big-windowed rooms (half with air-con, some with sea views) with good beds and hot-water bathrooms around a palm-filled courtyard. Staff are helpful and the hotel has a beachside café-restaurant.

**Hotel Casablanca** (☎ 582-01-68; [www.ptohcasablanca.com](http://www.ptohcasablanca.com); Pérez Gasga 905; s/d/tr/q US\$33/47/57/66; 📞) The friendly Casablanca is right at the heart of things on the inland side of El Adoquín, and it fills up with guests quickly. It has a small pool and 21 large, clean tile-floored rooms with fan. Some have fridges; the best are street-side with balconies.

**Hotel Loren** (☎ 582-00-57; fax 582-05-91; Pérez Gasga 507; d/tr/q with fan US\$24/33/43, with air-con US\$33/43/52; 📞 📺 📺) A minute uphill from El Adoquín, this friendly, sky-blue-and-lobster-colored hotel has bare, dimly lit but spacious rooms. All have two or three (somewhat springy) double beds, cable TV and balconies; some catch a sea view. It's a good place for the price.

**Zicatela Dorada Resort** (☎ 582-37-27; [www.oaxaca-mio.com/zicateladorada.htm](http://www.oaxaca-mio.com/zicateladorada.htm); Calle del Morro s/n; r US\$55 with fan, with air-con US\$71; 📞 📺 📺) New in 2003, and still being decorated at the time of research, the semi-Mediterranean-style

ZD features 60 rooms with hot water and cable TV set around a courtyard with swimming pool, bar and restaurant. Most have two double beds; the upper ones have small balconies and air-con.

#### TOP END

**Hotel Santa Fe** (☎ 582-01-70, in the US 888-649-6407; [www.hotelsantafe.com.mx](http://www.hotelsantafe.com.mx); cnr Blvd Zicatela & Calle del Morro; r US\$120, bungalow US\$130, junior ste US\$155, master ste US\$260; 📞 📺 📺) The well-landscaped, neocolonial Santa Fe has more than 60 rooms attractively set around small terraces and three pools (a fourth, smaller pool is shared by the master suites). Rooms vary in size and view, but all are well designed and decorated, and have air-con and room safes. Also available are eight appealing bungalows with kitchens, and two impressive master suites furnished with colonial antiques and fabulous modern art. The views are spectacular from the suites and their wraparound terraces.

**Villas Carrizalillo** (☎ 582-17-35; [www.villascarrizalillo.com](http://www.villascarrizalillo.com); Av Carrizalillo 125, Carrizalillo; apt US\$80-125) Sublimely perched on the cliffs above the small Bahía Carrizalillo, Villas Carrizalillo has apartments for two to six people, with fully equipped kitchens and private terraces. Some have stunning sea views. A path goes directly down to Playa Carrizalillo.

**Hotel Surf Olas Altas** (☎ 582-23-15, 582-00-94; [www.surfolasaltas.com.mx](http://www.surfolasaltas.com.mx); Calle del Morro 310; d/tr/q US\$117/131/145; 📞 📺 📺) This modern, three-story 61-room hotel has less character than some of the smaller places, but the rooms are spotless and ample, and set well back from the street. Most have two double beds, room safe, air-con and satellite TV. Some rooms catch a sea view, some look over the pool, some do neither.

**Hotel Paraíso Escondido** (☎ 582-04-44; Unión 10; d US\$99, tr or q US\$141; 📞 📺 📺) The rambling neocolonial Paraíso is decorated with tiles, pottery, stained glass and stone sculpture. Its 20 clean, fair-sized rooms have air-con, good bathrooms, old-fashioned red-tile floors and small terraces. The hotel also has a library and an attractive restaurant, bar and pool area.

#### Eating

Puerto has some excellent eateries, a large proportion of them Italian thanks to the tide of Italian travelers drawn here by the movie

*Puerto Escondido.* Most places are at least partly open-air. You'll eat some of the freshest fish and seafood you've ever had. Tofu products and a mind-boggling range of fruit and vegetable juices and milk and yogurt combos, make this a vegetarian's paradise.

### UPPER TOWN

**Mercado Benito Juárez** (cnr 8 Norte & 3 Poniente; fish/vegetarian dishes US\$4/3) Several clean stalls in the market prepare good fare, and the sights and smells of the produce section make it worth a wander as well, even if you're not hungry.

### PLAYAS ZICATELA & MARINERO

**Sakura** (Calle del Morro s/n; mains US\$3.75-15, sushi per pair US\$2.50-3.75, rolls US\$3.50-5, noodle dishes US\$3.75-7.50) Eating raw fish with your toes in the sand (or on cement, if you prefer), watching the Pipeline's curl – does it get any better than this? The Japanese chefs put out some excellent, tight, super-fresh nigiri, or you can choose from tempura, tofu and teriyaki dishes, curries and spring rolls. Heighten your sense of geocultural displacement by ordering a *michelada* (an iced 'cocktail' made with beer, lime juice, salt and spicy seasoning).

**La Hostería** (☎ 582-00-05; Calle del Morro s/n; mains US\$3-9; ☎ 8am-12:30am; ♿) The Hostería is a labor of love, from its gleaming, super-pro kitchen (with computerized, wood-fired pizza oven) down to the excellent 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 some of the best in town.

**Restaurant Flor de María** (☎ 582-05-36; 1a Entrada a Playa Marinero; mains US\$3.75-11.50, breakfast US\$2.50-3; ♿) In the hotel of the same name, the dinner menu here changes daily depending on what's fresh, and includes fish, grilled meats and Italian dishes. There's always a vegetarian option.

**Restaurante El Jardín** (☎ 582-23-15; Calle del Morro s/n; dishes US\$3.50-7; ☎ 8am-11pm) This *palapa* restaurant in front of the Hotel Surf Olas Altas serves very good vegetarian dishes, including good gado gado, tempeh dishes, hummus, many salad varieties and, of course, tofu offerings. The menu also includes some seafood dishes and an extensive beverage and juice list.

**El Cafecito** (☎ 582-05-16; Calle del Morro s/n; breakfast US\$2.50-3.75, lunch & dinner mains US\$2.75-6.50)

The cinnamon rolls alone are worth a visit, but the Cafecito also serves good breakfasts, whole-wheat *tortas*, espresso drinks and excellent, inexpensive pastries, croissants and cakes. A second El Cafecito at Carrizalillo on Juárez features the same great food and the same sullen service.

**Restaurante Bar Los Tíos** (Calle del Morro s/n; mains US\$3-5.50; ☎ 9am-10pm Wed-Mon) Right on the beach rather than across from it, as most other Zicatela restaurants are, the Uncles serve great *licuados* and several fresh fruit juices to go with their tasty egg dishes, *antojitos*, burgers, salads, and seafood. It's wonderfully relaxed and very popular with locals.

**Hotel Santa Fe** (☎ 582-01-70; cnr Zicatela & Calle del Morro; pasta US\$6.50-9, seafood dishes US\$13-17, vegetarian & vegan dishes US\$5-6.50) The airy and romantically sited restaurant here 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 meals. Seafood choices are average, but service is excellent.

**La Galera** (☎ 582-04-32; Hotel Arco Iris, Calle del Morro s/n; menu del día US\$5.75, mains US\$4-9.50) This restaurant has a good, open-air, upstairs setting and tasty mixed Mexican and international fare. Main dishes focus on fish and meat, but the *menú del día* is usually a three-course (plus drink) vegetarian meal.

Zicatela also has two or three small convenience stores.

### PÉREZ GASGA

**La Galería** (☎ 582-20-39; mains US\$4.50-11.25) At the west end of El Adoquín, La Galería is one of Puerto's more agreeable Italian spots, with art on the walls and good fare on the tables. The pasta dishes and pizza are original and tasty, and the jumbo mixed green salad is a real treat. You can breakfast here, too.

**Restaurant Junto al Mar** (☎ 582-12-72; mains US\$5.75-13) On the bay side of El Adoquín, the JaM has a terrace overlooking the beach. Attentive waitstaff serve up excellent fresh seafood here; the squid dishes and the fish fillet *a la veracruzana* (tomato, onion and pepper sauce) get the thumbs up.

**Restaurant Los Crotos** (☎ 582-00-25; mains US\$6-11.25; ☎ 7am-11pm) With romantic night lighting and an attractive setting almost on the sands of Playa Principal, Los Crotos is a good choice for seafood.

**Danny's Terrace** (☎ 582-02-57; mains US\$6-8.50) Reader-recommended Danny's is beachside at the Rincón del Pacífico Hotel. In addition to the usual seafood, chicken and meat dishes, they serve up...vichyssoise! A decent selection of desserts and wines ties up the package.

**Restaurant Alicia** (dishes US\$3-8.50) Economical little Alicia offers multiple spaghetti variations, seafood cocktails and good fish dishes. Breakfasts and beer are cheap, too – why not try them together?

### Drinking

**Casa Babylon** (Calle del Morro s/n; ☎ 10am-late) This cool little travelers' bar has board games and a big selection of secondhand books to sell or exchange. The owner prides herself on her Cuban and Brazilian specialty drinks: *mojitos* and *caipirinhas*.

**Barfly** (Pérez Gasga) The 2nd-story balcony, music and drink mixes draw a lively crowd most nights.

Rival drinking dens with loud music on El Adoquín include Terraza Bar, Wipeout Bar and Los 3 Diablos. **Tarros** (Marina Nacional), around the corner, is in the same league. Most of these hold two-for-one happy hours from 9pm to 10pm but don't expect much action before 11pm.

A few bars and restaurants overlooking the sea, including Danny's Terrace (above) off the Adoquín and the bar at Hotel Arco Iris (p249) on Zicatela, have happy hours from about 5pm to 7pm to help you enjoy Puerto's spectacular sunsets.

### Entertainment

**El Son y La Rumba** (☎ 582-10-30; Calle del Morro s/n; ☎ 7pm-late Tue-Sun) Tucked against the rocks at the Zicatela end of Playa Marinero, this friendly place usually features the acoustic guitar and vocals of Mayca, who performed the music for the film *Puerto Escondido*. She performs mostly bolero, Mexican *son* and *trova*. Guest artists playing a wide variety of music pass through as well.

**Club Tribal** (Marina Nacional; admission US\$5; ☎ 10pm-4am Fri off-season, Fri & Sat high season) One of a cluster of discos a block or so southwest of El Adoquín.

**La Hostería** (Calle del Morro s/n) La Hostería (p251) shows the 1993 Italian travel-and-crime film *Puerto Escondido* nightly at 6pm. This film (directed by Gabriele Salvatores,

who also did *Mediterraneo*) has attracted thousands of Italians and others to Puerto and is worth seeing, even if it makes the place seem more remote than it really is.

**Cinemar** (Calle del Morro s/n; film showings at 5pm, 7pm & 9pm; admission with popcorn & drink US\$4.25) Air-conditioned Cinemar, sharing the building with PJ's Book Bodega, shows films ranging from classics to latest general releases, in Spanish and English.

### Shopping

The Adoquín is great for a browse – shops and stalls sell fashions from surf designers and from Bali. You'll also find New Age and silver jewelry, souvenirs and classy crafts that are works of art.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

**Aerotucán** (☎ 582-17-25; Puerto Escondido airport) and **Aerovega** (☎ 582-01-51; Pérez Gasga 113) fly to/from Oaxaca. See Getting There & Away (p238) for details. **Click Mexicana** (☎ 01-800-122-54-25) flies nonstop to/from Mexico City twice daily. Continental Express flies from Houston to Bahías de Huatulco (p272) from one to four times a week in winter; from there it's an easy bus ride to Puerto Escondido.

#### BUS

Puerto Escondido's main bus terminal, the Central Turística de Autobuses (generally known as the *central camionera*), is between 3 and 4 Poniente, north of 10 Norte. All long-distance lines use it except **OCC** (Cristóbal Colón; ☎ 582-10-73), which at the time of research was breaking ground on a new facility on the Carretera Costera just west of Av Oaxaca. Bus companies include **Estrella Blanca** (EB; ☎ 582-00-86), Estrella del Valle/Oaxaca Pacífico (EV/OP) and **Estrella Roja** (ER; ☎ 582-38-99). The only true 1st-class bus services are OCC's and a couple of the Estrella Blanca Mexico City runs.

It's advisable to book ahead for all OCC buses and the better services to Oaxaca. Keep a particularly close eye on your belongings when going to/from Acapulco or Oaxaca, and be sure to get a ticket for any bags placed in the baggage hold.

### Oaxaca City

See the boxed text on p238 for an explanation of the three possible routes between



Oaxaca and Puerto Escondido. There are various daily departures from Puerto:

**Via Hwy 131** ER (US\$9.50, 6-8hr, 5 daily)

**Via Hwys 200 & 175** EV/OP (US\$8/8.50-9.50 *ordinario/directo*, 8½/7½hr, 14 daily)

**Via Hwys 200 & 190** OCC (Salina Cruz route; US\$20, 10-11hr, 3 daily)

### Other Destinations

There are also daily departures to other destinations:

**Acapulco** EB (US\$22 *semi-directo*, 8hr, 3 daily; US\$18 *ordinario*, 9½hr, 9 daily)

**Bahías de Huatulco** OCC (US\$6, 2½hr, 11 daily); EB (US\$6.50, 2½hr, 8 daily)

**Juchitán** (US\$15, 6hr, 3 OCC)

**Mexico City** EB (US\$42 12-13hr, 870km, 2 1st-class); OCC (US\$48, 18hr, via Hwys 200 and 190, 1 nightly)

**Pinotepa Nacional** EB (US\$7.50 *semi-directo*, 3hr, 151km, 3 daily; US\$6.50 *ordinario*, 3½hr, 9 daily)

**Pochutla** OCC (US\$3.50, 1½hr, 7 daily); EB (US\$4, 1½hr, 8 daily); Servicio Mixto de Río Grande (US\$2.25, 1½hr, from El Crucero every 20min from 5am-7pm)

**Tehuantepec** OCC (US\$14, 5½hr, 3 daily)

**Zihuatanejo** EB (US\$33, 12 hours, 640km, 1 1st-class at 8pm)

EB 2nd-class *económicos* leave every hour to Acapulco and will drop you anywhere you want to get off along coastal Hwy 200.

### CAR

**Budget** (☎ 582-03-12; Juárez), opposite the tourist office, charges walk-ins US\$90 a day for its cheapest cars, including unlimited kilometers and insurance.

### Getting Around

The **airport** (☎ 582-04-92) is 4km west of the center on the north side of Hwy 200. A taxi costs around US\$3.50, if you can find one (look on the main road outside the airport). Otherwise, *colectivo combis* (US\$4 per person) will drop you anywhere in town. You should have no problem finding a taxi from town to the airport for about US\$3.50. A taxi from the bus station to most parts of town should cost no more than US\$3.

Taxis are the only available transportation between the central Pérez Gasga/Bahía Principal area and the outlying beaches if you don't want to walk. Taxis wait at each end of El Adoquín. The standard fare to Playa Zicatela is US\$2.

## AROUND PUERTO ESCONDIDO

### Laguna de Manialtepec

This lagoon, 6km long, begins about 14km west of Puerto Escondido along Hwy 200. It's home to ibis, roseate spoonbills, parrots and several species of hawks, falcons, ospreys, egrets, herons, kingfishers and iguanas. December to March is the best time to observe birds, and they're most often seen in the early morning. The lagoon is mainly surrounded by mangroves, but tropical flowers and palms accent the oceanside. It makes an excellent day trip from Puerto Escondido.

The best (and practically only) way to see the lagoon is by boat. Several early-morning or sunset tours (from four to five hours, including road time) can be booked from Puerto Escondido. Not all of them include English-speaking guides.

**Hidden Voyages Ecotours** (☎ 954-582-15-51; www.wincom.net/~pelewing; Pérez Gasga 905B, Puerto Escondido; tours for 4-10 people Dec 1-Apr 1 per person US\$37-40) offers highly recommended trips; morning tours are led by a knowledgeable Canadian ornithologist. Hidden Voyages' office is in the Viajes Dimar travel agency.

**Lalo's Ecotours** (☎ 954-588-91-64; www.lalo-ecotours.com, Las Negras Mixtepec; tours per person US\$29) is run by a lagoon local who has worked as a boatman for Hidden Voyages and knows his birds. Tours are year-round. Lalo also rents kayaks, leads nature hikes and offers nighttime visits to the lagoon when it contains phosphorescent plankton, a magnificent occasional occurrence.

A handful of restaurants along the lagoon's north shore (just off Hwy 200) run boat trips.

At the eastern end of lake, **Las Hamacas** (☎ 954-588-85-52; ☎ 9am-8pm; 2½hr trip for up to 5 people US\$56) is a Spanish-Mexican operation renting single- and double-seat kayaks for US\$5 per hour. Boat tours (one to five passengers) start at US\$43. The food's good, too, and you can go water-skiing for US\$56 an hour.

**Restaurant Isla del Gallo** (2hr trip for up to 6 people US\$56), halfway along the lake, offers shaded boat trips, and the boatmen are knowledgeable about birds. Good grilled fish and seafood are available at the restaurant for US\$6 to US\$9.50.

**Restaurán Puesta del Sol** (☎ 954-588-38-67; Km 24; 2½hr trip for up to 5 people US\$47), toward the

west end of the lake, is another recommended embarkation point. One- or two-person kayaks run US\$5 per hour; fish and shrimp dishes cost US\$6 to US\$7.50.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Puerto Escondido, take a Río Grande-bound minibus from 2 Norte just east of the Carretera Costera, in the upper part of town. They leave every half hour from 6am to 7pm (US\$0.90). These and westbound 2nd-class EB buses stop along the lagoon.

### Bajos de Chila

*Pelota mixteca* (a Mixtec ball game), a five-a-side team sport descended from the pre-Hispanic ritual ball game, is played at 3pm every Saturday in the village of Bajos de Chila, 10km west of Puerto Escondido along Hwy 200 (5pm if weather is hot). This is a living relic of Mexico's ancient culture, played for the enjoyment of the participants. The field, called the *patio* or *pasador*, is easy to find in the village.

*Colectivos* leave Puerto Escondido's bus station every 30 minutes, stopping at 2 Norte, just east of the Carretera Costera, on their way to Bajos de Chila (US\$0.50, 15 minutes).

### Lagunas Los Naranjos & Palmazola

These coastal lagoons, near the village of **Barra de Navidad** (6km southeast of Puerto Escondido and just off Hwy 200), offer another chance to get close to the abundant birdlife of the Oaxaca coast – and to the local crocodile population. Villagers have formed a society to protect the lagoons and offer guided visits (US\$15) lasting about 1¼ hours, including a 30-minute boat ride. It's best to go in the early morning or late afternoon. Unaccompanied visits are not permitted.

Barra de Navidad is a short walk south from Hwy 200 on the east side of the Río Colotepec bridge; catch a 'La Barra' *colectivo* from the highway west of El Crucero in Puerto Escondido.

## POCHUTLA

☎ 958 / pop 13,000

This bustling, sweaty market town is the starting point for transportation to the nearby beach spots of Puerto Ángel, Zipolite, San Agustínillo and Mazunte. It also has the nearest banks to those places.

## Orientation

Highway 175 from Oaxaca runs through Pochutla as Cárdenas, the narrow north-south (uphill-downhill) main street, and meets coastal Hwy 200 about 1.5km south of town. Everything described in this section is on Cárdenas, with the approximate midpoint for sites being Hotel Izala. The long-distance bus stations cluster around 300m to 400m downhill from the Izala.

## Information

**HSBC** (Cárdenas 48; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) One block uphill from Hotel Izala. Changes traveler's checks and cash US dollars, and has an ATM. There are several other banks on this street with exchange services and ATMs.

**Post office** (Cárdenas s/n, ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) About 150m downhill from Hotel Izala.

**Telnet** (Cárdenas 94; Internet access per hr US\$1; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat) Opposite the EV/OP bus terminal, has fast Internet connections plus long-distance telephone service.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Costa del Sol** (☎ /fax 584-03-18; Cárdenas 47; 1-bed/tw r US\$20/22 with fan, with air-con US\$24/29; ☎ ☎) Probably Pochutla's best central hotel, 1½ blocks uphill from the Izala, this hotel has a few artistic touches and some greenery. Rooms have good bathrooms, erratic hot water, and cable TV.

**Hotel Izala** (☎ 584-01-15; Cárdenas 59; s/d with fan US\$15/24, with air-con US\$24/33; ☎ ☎) The Izala offers plain, clean rooms, with bathroom and cable TV, on two levels around a leafy courtyard.

**Hotel Santa Cruz** (☎ /fax 584-01-16; Cárdenas s/n; s/d with shared bathroom & fan US\$10/12, with private bathroom US\$12/15, with private bathroom & air-con US\$20/25; ☎ ☎) About 150m north of the main cluster of bus stations, the Santa Cruz has simple, good-sized, adequate rooms. Some private bathrooms lack toilet seats; the air-con is good in those rooms that have it.

**Restaurant y Marisquería Los Ángeles** (Cárdenas s/n; mains US\$4-9; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat) This breezy little upstairs place, downhill from the OCC bus station serves a good octopus cocktail.

## Getting There & Away

The three main bus stations, in north-south order along Cárdenas, are **EV/OP** (☎ 584-01-38), on the left side of the street; **OCC/Sur** (☎ 584-02-74), on the right side; and

### TRANSPORT BETWEEN POCHUTLA & BEACH TOWNS

Transportation services to the nearby coast change frequently. When all is in harmony, frequent *camionetas* and *taxis colectivos* (painted two-tone, either dark-red and white, or cream and blue) run from Pochutla to the coastal towns between 7am and 7pm, usually picking up passengers in Pochutla in front of Mueblería García, a furniture store about five doors uphill from Hotel Santa Cruz, on the same side of Cárdenas.

At the time of writing, plenty of *taxis colectivos* were running to Puerto Ángel (US\$0.70, 20 minutes, 13km), Zipolite (US\$1.50, 30 minutes, 16km), San Agustínillo (US\$2, 40 minutes, 20km) and Mazunte (US\$2, 45 minutes, 21km). *Camioneta* service, though even cheaper (US\$0.50 to Puerto Ángel, US\$0.80 to either Zipolite or Mazunte), was much less frequent.

Be aware that some vehicles reach the coast by heading west on Hwy 200 from Pochutla, stopping first in Mazunte, then San Agustínillo, and so on; this gives quicker service to Mazunte and San Agustínillo, but longer to Zipolite and Puerto Ángel.

Private (*servicio especial*) cabs during the day should cost around US\$6 to Puerto Ángel, US\$9 to Zipolite and US\$11 to San Agustínillo or Mazunte, but you may have to negotiate hard to even get close to these prices; at night they are the only game in town and charge even more.

**EB** (☎ 584-03-80), also on the right side. See the boxed text (p238) for information on routes to Oaxaca city.

There are daily bus departures to various destinations:

**Acapulco** EB (US\$27 *semi-directo*, 8-9hr, 7 daily)

**Bahías de Huatulco** OCC (US\$2.25, 1hr, 8 daily); EB (US\$2.25, 1hr, 5 daily); Sur (US\$1.50, 1hr, every 40min); Transportes Rápidos de Pochutla (US\$1.25, 1hr, every 15min 5:30am-8pm, from terminal just uphill from EV/OP)

**Juchitán** OCC (US\$12, 5hr, 5 daily)

**Mexico City** OCC (US\$50, 15-16hr, 1 daily 7:20pm); EB (US\$45, 14-15hr, 2 daily)

**Oaxaca** OCC (US\$20, 9-10hr, 5 daily, via Hwys 200 & 190); EV/OP (US\$7.50, 7hr, 10 *ordinarios*; US\$8.50-9, 6hr, 3 *directos* at 9:45am, 2:45pm & 10:30pm; all via Hwy 175)

**Pinotepa Nacional** EB (US\$12, 4hr, 7 daily); EB (US\$4 *semi-directo*, 1hr, 7 daily); Sur (US\$2.50, 1½hr, hourly 7:30am-7:30pm)

**Puerto Escondido** OCC (US\$3.75, 1½hr, 5 daily); EB (US\$4 *semi-directo*, 1hr, 7 daily); Sur (US\$2.50, 1½hr, hourly 7:30am-7:30pm)

**Tehuantepec** OCC (US\$11, 4½hr, 5 daily)

**Zihuatanejo** EB (US\$38, 12hr, 7 daily)

**Autoexpres Atlántida** (☎ 584-01-16; Hotel Santa Cruz, Cárdenas s/n) runs nine daily air-conditioned vans, taking up to 14 people, by Hwy 175 (US\$12, 6½ hours) between 4am and 11pm. Two other companies, Eclipse 7 (across the street from Atlántida) and Delfines (just uphill from Atlántida) offer similar service. Drivers will usually stop when you need a bathroom break or want to take photos (or vomit, as not a few people tend to do on this route).

### PUERTO ÁNGEL

☎ 958 / pop 3000

The small fishing town, naval base and travelers' hangout of Puerto Ángel (*pwerr-toh ahn-hel*) straggles around a picturesque bay between two rocky headlands, 13km south of Pochutla. 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 is a good base too. It offers its own little beaches, some good places to stay and eat, and easy transportation to/from 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 and up a hill. It then forks – right to Zipolite and Mazunte, left 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

**Banks** The nearest banks are in Pochutla, but several accommodations and restaurants will change cash or traveler's checks at their own rates.

**Caseta Telefónica Lila** (Blvd Uribe) Has Internet, phone and fax service.

**Farmacia El Ángel** (☎ 584-30-58; Vasconcelos) Dr Constancio Aparicio's practice is here (☎ 9am-2pm & 4pm-8pm Mon-Sat).

**G@l@p@gos** (Blvd Uribe s/n; Internet access per hr US\$1.50) Does phone calls also.



**Gel@net** (Vasconcelos 3; ☎ 9am-10pm) Has telephone, fax and Internet (per hr US\$1.50).

**Post office** (Av Principal; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri) East end of town.

**Municipal tourist office** (Blvd Uribe; ☎ 9am-4pm & 5:30-8pm Mon-Fri) In a palapa-roofed building at the entrance to the pier; useful for transportation details.

**Sights & Activities**

**Snorkeling** and **fishing** are popular around Puerto Ángel, and **diving** is also an option. The drops and canyons out to sea from Puerto Ángel are suitable for very deep dives; a nearby shipwreck, dated 1870, is a popular site.

Some of the café-restaurants on Playa del Panteón rent snorkel gear (US\$2.75/US\$6.75 per hour/day). **Azul Profundo** (☎ 584-31-09; azul\_profundomx@hotmail.com; Playa del Panteón; 4hr snorkeling trips per person US\$9.50; fishing trips per person per hr US\$31), run by friendly Chepe, offers snorkeling, fishing and dives at all levels. Dives run US\$38. Instruction offered includes a five-day SSI certification course for US\$337. Ask at Hotel Cordelia's if you can't find him.

**BEACHES**

On the west side of Bahía de Puerto Ángel, **Playa del Panteón** is shallow and calm, and its waters are cleaner than those near the pier across the bay.

About 500m north along the road to Pochutla, a sign points right along a path to **Playa Estacahuite** 700m away. The three tiny, sandy bays here are all great for snorkeling, but watch out for jellyfish. A couple of shack restaurants serve good, reasonably priced seafood or spaghetti, and may rent snorkel gear.

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 (by boat) from town; it's the site of the Bahía de la Luna bungalows and restaurant (opposite). To get to the beach, take a turnoff 4km out of Puerto Ángel on the road toward Pochutla and then follow the road for 3.5km. A taxi from Puerto Ángel costs around US\$4.50 each way, but it's more fun to go by boat – you can arrange one for a few people from Playa del Panteón or from the pier for around

US\$11 per person, including a return trip at an agreed time.

### Sleeping

Accommodations with an elevated location are more likely to catch any breeze, and mosquito screens are a big plus too. Some places develop a water shortage now and then.

**La Buena Vista** (☎ 584-31-04; [www.labuenavista.com](http://www.labuenavista.com); La Buena Compañía s/n; d US\$35-48; extra person US\$6; 🚿) The 19 big rooms and five excellent mud-brick bungalows on this verdant property are kept scrupulously clean. All have private bathrooms with pretty Talavera tiles, fans, mosquito screens and comfortable beds. Many have breezy balconies with hammocks, and some have excellent views. Wood, stone and brick are cleverly used throughout. There's a good restaurant on an expansive terrace, and a truly lovely pool area.

**Bahía de la Luna** (☎ 589-50-20; [www.bahiadela.luna.com](http://www.bahiadela.luna.com); Playa La Boquilla; s/d/tr from US\$61/72/111; 📍) This tropical hideaway out at gorgeous Playa La Boquilla (opposite) has attractive adobe bungalows set on a tree-filled hillside overlooking the beach. Two two-bedroom bungalows can each hold up to five people, and a house holds up to eight (US\$205 for four, plus US\$11 per extra person). It also has a good beachside restaurant-café with moderate prices, and offers snorkeling gear, sea kayaks and yoga and meditation instruction.

**La Posada Cañón Devata** (☎ 584-31-37; [www.posadapacifico.com](http://www.posadapacifico.com); off Sáenz de Baranda; s/d with fan US\$29/33, bungalows for 2 US\$66, extra adult US\$19; all rates include breakfast; 📅 closed June; 📍) On a woodsy hillside behind Playa del Panteón, the friendly Cañón Devata has a variety of attractive accommodations scattered about its sprawling property. It's run by the artistic and ecologically minded López family, and is a good place for those seeking a quiet retreat. Yoga courses are on offer, and the super-clean kitchen turns out fine food (vegetarian and fish dishes only).

**Hotel Puesta del Sol** (☎ 584-30-96; [www.puertoangel.net](http://www.puertoangel.net); Blvd Uribe s/n; s with shared bathroom US\$11.50, d with shared bathroom US\$15-18, d with private bathroom US\$25-32; 📍) The friendly German/Mexican-owned Puesta del Sol offers sizable, clean rooms with fans and screens. Some sleep up to six people. The more expensive ones have their own terraces and hot-water bath-

room. The sitting room has a small library and satellite TV. Hammocks on a breezy terrace invite relaxation, and breakfast is available.

**Penelope's** (☎ 584-30-73; Cerrada de la Luna s/n; r US\$14-24 with shared bathroom, with private bathroom US\$29, all with continental breakfast) Penelope's, with just four rooms, is set in a quiet, leafy neighborhood high above Playa del Panteón. It's just off the Zipolite road, clearly signposted about 200m beyond the fork to Playa del Panteón. The rooms are clean, with good beds and screens, decent bathrooms and ceiling fans; three are spacious. An attractive terrace restaurant serves economical meals, and hammocks provide lounging opportunities. Ownership was changing at the time of research; the new management may start offering yoga classes.

**Casa de Huéspedes Gundi y Tomás** (☎ 584-30-68; [www.puertoangel-hotel.com](http://www.puertoangel-hotel.com); off Blvd Uribe; r with shared/private bathroom US\$24/29) This tranquil guesthouse 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 US\$6.50 *menú*. The main dining area and one clutch of rooms have outstanding views. Gundi, the friendly German owner, speaks good English and Spanish and provides a safe for valuables, a book exchange, bus and plane tickets and an exchange service for cash or traveler's checks.

**El Almendro** (☎ 584-30-68; [www.puertoangel-hotel.com](http://www.puertoangel-hotel.com); off Blvd Uribe; r US\$29, bungalow US\$57) Set in a shady garden up a little lane, El Almendro has six clean, brightly painted, basic rooms with OK beds and bathrooms, plus a bungalow for up to six people. From November to April, the 6pm to 7pm happy hour is followed by a barbecue dinner of marinated meats or fish, salad from the salad bar and baked potatoes (US\$7).

**Villa Serena Florencia** (☎ 584-30-44; [villa-serena-oax@hotmail.com](mailto:villa-serena-oax@hotmail.com); Blvd Uribe s/n; s/d/tr US\$24/33/38, air-con US\$3 extra; 📍) The well-established Florencia has 13 agreeable, smallish rooms with fans and screens, all set off a couple of walkways. It also offers a shady sitting area and a good Italian restaurant.

**Hotel Soraya** (☎ 584-30-09; Vasconcelos s/n; with fan d US\$29-38, tr US\$33-43, q US\$38-47, with air-con d/tr/q US\$47/52/57; 📍) Overlooking the bay,

the Soraya has 32 clean, tiled-floor rooms with fairly good beds and good bathrooms. All have balconies and some have very good views and a hot-water bathroom.

**Hotel Cordelia's** (☎ 584-31-09; Playa del Panteón; d with/without ocean view US\$33/19, tr US\$38/57; 📄 🚿) Cordelia's is a newer hotel right in the middle of this lovely beach. Run by the same family as the Azul Profundo dive shop, it has at least eight rooms, four of which are spacious with good-sized Talavera-tiled bathrooms, and terraces overlooking the sea. Construction was ongoing at the time of research, and Cordelia was about to install air-con and hot water in all rooms as well as good mosquito screens.

**Casa Arnel** (☎ 584-30-51; [arnelpto.angel@huatulco.net.mx](mailto:arnelpto.angel@huatulco.net.mx); Azueta 666; s/d US\$24/29; 📄) Casa Arnel, up the lane past the market, has five clean, ample tile-floored rooms with fans, and OK beds and bathrooms. *Refrescos* (soft drinks), coffee and tea are available, and there's an upstairs hammock area as well as a small library and a place to wash and dry clothes.

### Eating & Drinking

**La Buena Vista** (☎ /fax 584-31-04; La Buena Compañía s/n; breakfast US\$2.50-4, dinner mains US\$5-8; 🕒 7-11am & 6-10pm, Mon-Sat) Be sure to pre-book dinner out of the high seasons or you may find they're not serving food. On an airy terrace overlooking the bay, La Buena Vista's restaurant offers well-prepared Mexican and Italian fare, from hotcakes to *chiles rellenos* with a *quesillo* filling.

**La Posada Cañón Devata** (☎ 584-31-37; off Sáenz de Barandas; breakfast US\$3-4, dinner US\$15; 🕒 breakfast 8:30am-noon, dinner from 7:30pm) Outsiders are welcome here. A good three-course dinner is served at long tables in a lovely palm-roofed, open-sided dining room. Fare is whole-food vegetarian and fish dishes. Book early in the day.

**Villa Serena Florencia** (☎ 584-30-44; Blvd Uribe s/n; dishes US\$3-7) A reliable standby, this Italian restaurant turns out good pasta dishes, salads, Mexican fare and pizzas, all at very good prices. Breakfasts (served in high season only) are inexpensive.

**Beto's** (Carretera a Zipolite s/n; fish fillets US\$3.75, seviche US\$3, chicken & beef dishes US\$4.25-5; 🕒 4pm-midnight) On the uphill stretch of Blvd Uribe, Beto's is a relaxed, economical, friendly and clean little place with a large terrace.

The restaurants on Playa del Panteón offer fish and seafood for US\$5 to US\$11, plus cheaper fare such as *entomatadas* (a variation on enchiladas, made with corn tortillas, tomato sauce, spices and various fillings, such as chicken or cheese) and eggs. Be careful about the freshness of seafood in the low season. The setting is very pretty after dark. **Restaurante Susy** (☎ 584-30-19) is one of the better beachside establishments.

You'll also find several economical places to eat on the main town beach, though none is very well frequented.

### Getting There & Away

See the boxed text on p255 for details of transportation from Pochutla. An EV/OP bus to Oaxaca (US\$7.50, seven hours) departs at 10pm nightly from near the foot of Vasconcelos. A taxi to/from Zipolite costs US\$0.50 *colectivo*, or US\$3 for the whole cab (US\$5 after dark and even more after 10pm or 11pm). You can find cabs on Blvd Uribe; there's a stand at the foot of Vasconcelos.

A taxi to Bahías de Huatulco airport costs US\$35, to Puerto Escondido airport US\$45.

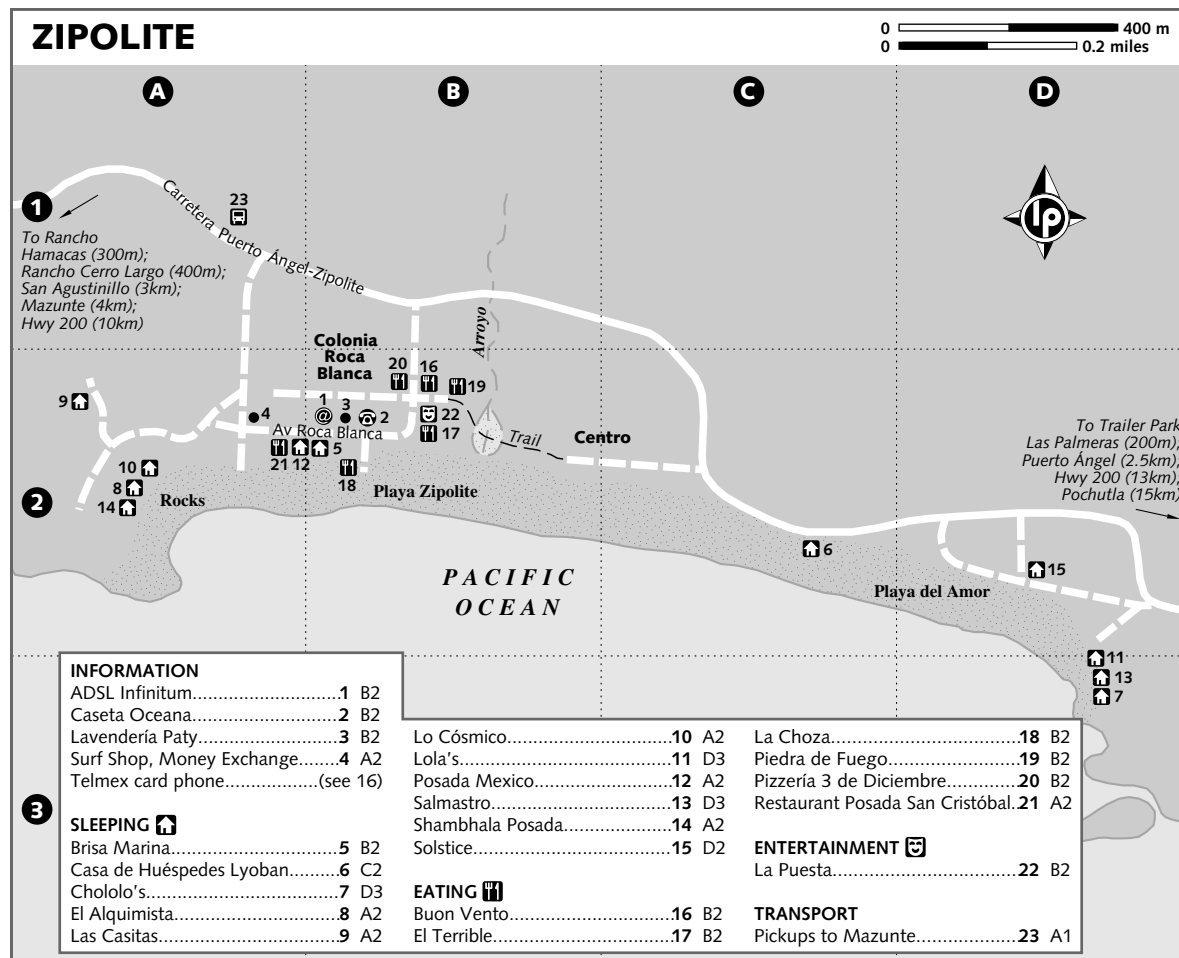
### ZIPOLITE

☎ 958 / pop 1200

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. Inexpensive places to stay and eat line nearly the whole beach, and the combination of pounding sea and sun, open-air sleeping, eating and drinking, unique scenery and a lively travelers' scene make Zipolite a great place to indulge yourself for a few days. Or overindulge, if you follow the lead of some visitors.

### Orientation

The eastern end of Zipolite (nearest Puerto Ángel) is called Colonia Playa del Amor, the middle part is Centro, and the western end (divided from Centro by a narrow creek or lagoon, often called *el arroyo*) is Colonia Roca Blanca. The few streets behind the beach are mostly nameless; Av Roca Blanca, a block back from the beach in Colonia Roca Blanca, is the most prominent and is more commonly known as the Adoquín, for its paving blocks.



OAXACA

**Information**

**Banks** The nearest banks are in Pochutla, but some accommodations may accept US dollars or euros. A combination surf shop and money exchange lies at the west end of the Adoquín.

**Caseta Oceana** (Av Roca Blanca) Has long-distance phone service.

**Lavandería Paty** (Av Roca Blanca; same-day laundry service per kilo US\$1.25; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat)

**ADSL Infitum** (Av Roca Blanca; Internet per hr US\$1.50; ☎ 9am-9pm) Has Internet service and long-distance phone service.

There's a Telmex card phone outside the Buon Vento restaurant.

**Dangers & Annoyances**

By most reports, security in Zipolite has improved, but theft can be a problem, and it's not advisable to walk along the Puerto Ángel-Zipolite road or the beach after dark.

**Sleeping**

Most accommodation is right on the beach, where nearly every business rents small rooms, cabanas or hammocks. Unless

otherwise stated, rooms here have shared bathrooms and beds have mosquito nets. Rates here are for the high season (roughly mid-November to mid-April, as well as August for many places).

**Posada México** (☎ 584-31-94; [www.posadamexico.com](http://www.posadamexico.com); Av Roca Blanca; r US\$15-20) Opened in 2004, the latest arrival on the Zipolite beachfront injects some welcome freshness. All rooms

**DEADLY SURF**

The Zipolite surf is deadly, literally. It's fraught with riptides, changing currents and a strong undertow. Locals don't swim here, and going in deeper than your knees can mean risking your life. Most years several people drown here. Local voluntary *salvavidas* (lifeguards) have rescued many, but they don't maintain a permanent watch. If you do get swept out to sea, swim calmly parallel to the shore to get clear of the current pulling you outward. *Surfistas* take note: the beach break here is one only experienced surfers should attempt.

have safes and good beds, and pleasing Italian-sensibility touches are everywhere, including in the shared bathrooms. The owners continue to improve the place and are adding private bathrooms, though at the time of research only the delightful two-story, two-room cabana at the back of the property had them. By the time you read this, a chef from Italy's Cinqueterre should be serving up meals in the restaurant (which is open December to April only).

**El Alquimista** ([www.el-alquimista.com](http://www.el-alquimista.com); bungalow US\$50) One of Zipolite's most luxurious accommodations, this place has eight fine bungalows on the beach (at the west end of Playa Zipolite), each with homespun textiles, fan, bathroom and hammocked porch. They're often full. The attached restaurant is one of Zipolite's best.

**Las Casitas** (☎ 585-72-63; [www.las-casitas.net](http://www.las-casitas.net); bungalows s US\$17, d US\$24-43, tr US\$29-38) At the west end of Playa Zipolite and set back from the beach on a hill, Las Casitas has seven tasteful, semi-open-air bungalows (six with private bathrooms and kitchens). Most have good views as well, at least in the dry, leafless season, and some have swinging beds. Meals in the beautifully sited restaurant start at US\$20.

**Lo Cósmico** ([www.locosmico.com](http://www.locosmico.com); d cabanas US\$10-25, extra person US\$5, hammocks US\$5) Very relaxed Lo Cósmico has conical-roofed cabanas dotted around a tall rock outcrop at the west end of Playa Zipolite. Each has a double bed, hammock and fan; the cheaper ones are a bit enclosed, while the pricier ones have two stories and views. The hammock area is on a cliff top overlooking the beach, and has lockers; a security box is available to cabana guests. Some private bathrooms are going in to supplement the mediocre common ones, and there's a good on-site restaurant.


**Solstice** ([www.solstice-mexico.com](http://www.solstice-mexico.com); Colonia Playa del Amor; dm US\$11, studio US\$27-32, bungalow US\$39) This excellent, friendly, Dutch-owned retreat, set back from the beach, specializes in yoga courses. Thatched bungalows, studios and dorm accommodations, all fan-cooled, are set around a central space; decor is bright and homey. Bathrooms have a barrel and bucket in lieu of showers. The yoga room is large and inviting, with a full inventory of props. Book ahead, as group retreats fill the place up.

**Casa de Huéspedes Lyoban** (☎ 584-31-77; [www.lyoban.com.mx](http://www.lyoban.com.mx); Colonia Playa del Amor; hammock US\$6,

s/d/tr US\$13/16/21) Relaxed, friendly Lyoban has basic, clean rooms: the beds are comfy, but the walls don't reach the ceiling. Common areas include a sociable bar-restaurant space with board games; ping-pong, foosball and pool tables; a small library; and an upstairs deck for lounging. The hammock price includes a blanket, a sturdy locker and shower usage.

**Shambhala Posada** (Casa Gloria; [www.advantage-mexico.com/shambhala](http://www.advantage-mexico.com/shambhala); hammock US\$4, dm US\$6, s US\$7-8, d US\$8-9, cabanas from US\$25; **P**) This ecologically (if somewhat shambhally) run guesthouse climbs the hill at the west end of Playa Zipolite, and has some great views. Some lodgings have private bathrooms; the shared bathrooms are all right. Shambhala also has a restaurant, a meditation area, and a luggage room to keep your stuff safe.

**Brisa Marina** (☎ 584-31-93; [brisamarinaca@yahoo.com](mailto:brisamarinaca@yahoo.com); Colonia Roca Blanca; r with/without bathroom US\$30/15; **P**) The more expensive rooms at American-owned Brisa occupy a concrete building fronting the beach. They have bathroom, fan and safe; some have views and balconies. There is also a common safe. A rear wooden section has cheaper rooms.

**Lola's** (☎ 584-32-01; s/d US\$15/30; **P** ) Third from the east end of Playa del Amor, Lola's has 25 reasonable rooms on two levels of a brick building. They come with good beds, tiled floors, OK private bathrooms, fans and mosquito screens.

**Chololo's** (☎ 584-31-59; r US\$20, with private bathroom US\$25; **P**) With five simple rooms at the easternmost spot on Playa del Amor, this very friendly place also serves good Mexican and Italian food.

**Salmastro** (☎ 584-31-61; r US\$12-32; **P**) At the east end of Playa del Amor, Salmastro's eight basic rooms (some upstairs, some with sea views) have good beds and thatched roofs.

**Trailer Park Las Palmeras** (Fernando's Camp Ground; Carretera Puerto Ángel-Zipolite; tent space US\$2 plus US\$2 per person; **P**) This small park, beside the road from Puerto Ángel as you enter Zipolite, has a grassy plot edged with trees. Rates include showers and toilets, water for washing and 24-hour caretaking.

## Eating

Eating and drinking in the open air a few steps from the surf is an inimitable Zipolite



experience. Most accommodations have a restaurant of some kind, and some good independent places serve food as well.

**El Alquimista** (mains US\$3.50-9.50; ☎ 3pm-midnight) One of Zipolite's classiest, the Alchemist is delightfully sited in a sandy cove at the west end of Playa Zipolite. Its very wide-ranging fare runs from falafel *tortas* to good meat and chicken dishes, complemented by a full bar and good espresso.

**Buon Vento** (Colonia Roca Blanca; pastas US\$3.50-5; ☎ 6pm-midnight Thu-Tue) On the street between Av Roca Blanca and the main road, this excellent Italian restaurant has good music and subtle vibes. The huge pasta list includes some delicious baked options, and the wine list is decent for Mexico.

**Piedra de Fuego** (Colonia Roca Blanca; mains US\$3.50-5; ☎ 3-11pm) At this superbly simple, relaxed and family-run place, you'll get a generous serving of fish fillet or prawns, accompanied by rice, salad and tortillas. They have four rooms for rent also, smelling pleasantly of wood.

**El Terrible** (Colonia Roca Blanca; pizzas US\$5.50-7.25, crepes US\$2.25-4.75; ☎ 6am-midnight Fri-Wed) The Francophone couple here make a variety of damn good pizzas large enough to feed two moderate people or one gluttonous travel writer. Fresh anchovies, anyone? They do sweet and savory crepes as well.

**Lo Cósmico** (dishes US\$3-5; ☎ 8pm-4am; ♣) Mel-low out on the rocks above the beach, at the west end of Playa Zipolite, at this open-air restaurant with good food from an impeccably clean kitchen. Especially tasty are the crepes (sweet and savory) and salads.

**Pizzería 3 de Diciembre** (Colonia Roca Blanca; prices US\$3.75-6; ☎ 7pm-2am Wed-Sun) The 3 de Diciembre serves not only excellent pizzas but also good pastry pies with fillings such as cauliflower and Parmesan or baked spinach. It's just the place for late-night munchies.

**La Chozza** (☎ 584-31-90; Colonia Roca Blanca; mains US\$5-8) La Chozza's beachside restaurant has a wide-ranging menu including many Mexican favorites, such as *pescado al mojo de ajo* (grilled fish with garlic sauce), most done well, with generous servings.

**Restaurant Posada San Cristóbal** (☎ 584-31-91; Colonia Roca Blanca; mains US\$3.50-11.50) St Chris' wide variety of food runs from several breakfast items to *antojitos*, salads, whole fish, prawns, octopus and chicken.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Zipolite's beachfront restaurant-bars have unbeatable locations for drinks around sunset and after dark. Those toward the west end of the beach are generally the most popular – especially **El Alquimista**, 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 a few. The open-air *discoteca* **La Puesta** (Colonia Roca Blanca; ☎ 9pm-late Tue-Sat) provides slightly more active nightlife than the bars, cranking tunes out through the ether into the wee hours. Nothing much happens before midnight.

## Getting There & Away

See the boxed text on p255 for details on transportation from Pochutla and Puerto Ángel. The *camionetas* between Pochutla and San Agustínillo, via Mazunte, terminate on the main road at the far west end of Zipolite (about 2km from the east end of the beach). *Colectivo* taxis from Puerto Ángel will go to the same spot too, but pass along the length of Av Roca Blanca en route so are a better bet if you're heading for the east end of the beach.

After dark, an *especial* taxi is your only option for getting to Puerto Ángel or San Agustínillo (about US\$5 from 6pm until about 10pm, more after that).

## SAN AGUSTINILLO

☎ 958 / pop 250

Long, straight and nearly empty Playa Aragón stretches west from the headland at the west end of Zipolite to the growing village of San Agustínillo. Footpaths behind Shambhala Posada cross the headland from Zipolite; by the main coast road, it's a 4km drive. Most tourist facilities are right on or just off the main road.

## Sights & Activities

San Agustínillo's small curved bay has waves that are perfect for **boogie-boarding** and often good for **bodysurfing**. The **swimming** is very good as well, but don't get near the rocks. Several relaxed little places to stay and a line of open-air beach *comedores* round out the picture. San Agustínillo has much more of a family atmosphere than its sometimes hedonistic neighbors, Zipolite and Mazunte, and generally higher standards of sanitation.

You can rent surfboards and boogie boards at **México Lindo y qué Rico!** (below) for US\$5 and US\$3 an hour respectively; snorkel gear costs US\$2/US\$4 per hour/day. They will also hook you up with surfing lessons, snorkeling trips, guided hikes, coffee *finca* tours and other activities. **Palapa Olas Altas** (right) offers 1½-hour *lancha* trips at US\$15 per person for turtle-viewing (and occasionally dolphin-viewing). Internet access at **Hotel Malex**, on the east side of town, is US\$1.50 per hour.

The coast between Zipolite and Puerto Escondido is a major sea-turtle nesting ground. Until hunting and 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.

### Sleeping & Eating

As with most places along the coast, un-screened rooms (and sometimes screened rooms) come with mosquito nets over the beds.

**Un Sueño** ([www.unsueno.com](http://www.unsueno.com); d/tr/q US\$55/70/90; **P**) At the east end of Playa San Agustínillo, Sueño boasts four large, freestanding beachfront cabanas. Each has its own terrace with hammock, table and chairs, and artistic touches throughout, especially in the bathrooms. Fans augment the breeze coming through slatted-shutter windows. More cabanas were being built at the time of research.

**México Lindo y qué Rico!** ([fafinyleila@latinmail.com](mailto:fafinyleila@latinmail.com); r US\$30; ☎ closed Oct) Fourth along from the western end of Playa San Agustínillo, México Lindo's seven large rooms feature slat windows, fans and some bright touches such as tiled bathrooms. Especially good are the pair of breezy upstairs rooms under the tall *palapa* roof. The young, friendly owners serve good food (mains cost US\$4 to US\$7), including pizzas cooked in a brick oven.

**Paraíso del Pescador** (☎ in the US & Canada 705-266-7771; [www.paraíso-del-pescador.com](http://www.paraíso-del-pescador.com); d/q US\$35/50; **P** ☎) In the center of town, uphill from the road, Pescador's spacious, modern rooms all have tile floors and good bathrooms, beds, air-con and screens, plus delicious views. The Canadian co-owner does sportfishing trips, and you can get decent coffee in the friendly restaurant.

**Casamar** (☎ 589-24-01; <http://home1.stofanet.dk/casamar>; r US\$35 & US\$45, ste US\$65) Casamar, at the west end of Playa San Agustínillo, has two serviceable downstairs rooms with good hot-water bathrooms and two springy double beds each. The star here is the upstairs suite, with its large salon, ample balcony with shady hammock area, and kitchen (fridge and microwave). Beachside there's a small garden area with soaking pool.

**Palapa Olas Altas** (r with shared/private bathroom US\$15/30; hammock/camping per person US\$4/5) At the west end of Playa San Agustínillo, Olas Altas has 16 palatable fan rooms, one with sea views. The beachside restaurant serves decent food (mains US\$5 to US\$7).

**Palapa de Evelia** (breakfast US\$2.50-3.50, mains US\$6-7.50; ☎ 8am-5pm) Evelia's, third along from the west end of Playa San Agustínillo, does some of the best food on the beach, with straightforward but well-prepared fish and seafood, and great guacamole.

Two places have stunning positions atop the steep slope backing Playa Aragón (between Zipolite and San Agustínillo). Both can be reached by drivable tracks from the road or by paths up from the beach.

**Rancho Cerro Largo** ([ranchocerrolargomx@yahoo.com.mx](mailto:ranchocerrolargomx@yahoo.com.mx); Playa Aragón; s US\$45-75, d US\$45-85, extra person US\$20, all incl breakfast & dinner; **P**) The RCL offers a variety of excellent accommodation in some half-dozen fan-cooled cabanas (both individual and shared, some with private bathrooms and some with tiny fridges). The beds and meals are top-notch, and the views from the shared toilets are superb.

**Rancho Hamacas** (☎ 589-85-48; [hamacasilva@hotmail.com](mailto:hamacasilva@hotmail.com); Playa Aragón; cabanas with/without kitchen US\$25/20; **P**) Further west on the hilltop from Rancho Cerro Largo, Rancho Hamacas has six cabanas with double beds. Half have fridges and gas burners. The owners make beautiful, strong hammocks (around US\$60 to US\$170 depending on size), and serve food at their restaurant from December to March.

### Getting There & Away

See p255 for information about transportation from Pochutla. *Colectivo* taxis to/from Zipolite or Mazunte cost US\$0.50, and *camionetas* between Roca Blanca and Mazunte run US\$0.30.

## MAZUNTE

☎ 958 / pop 450

A kilometer west of San Agustínillo, Mazunte has a fine, curving, sandy beach, an interesting turtle research center and a variety of places to places to stay and eat, many of them inexpensive and right on the sand. It's well known as a travelers' hangout and in recent years has seen an increase in foreign residents, attracted by either the area's beauty or, as one person put it, the 'old-time hippie vibe.' After 1990, when the turtle industry was banned, several attempts at replacing Mazunte's former mainstay were made. Among those that stuck are the research center, a natural cosmetics factory and, obviously, tourism. The waters here are generally safe, though the waves can be quite big.

### Orientation & Information

The paved road running west from Zipolite to Hwy 200 passes through the middle of Mazunte. Three sandy lanes run from the road to the beach (about 500m). The western one is called Camino al Rinconcito, as the west end of the beach is known as El Rinconcito, while the middle one is Camino a la Barrita. The eastern one shall remain nameless. **Mazunet** (Camino al Rinconcito; per hr US\$1.50), near the main road, offers Internet access.

### Sights & Activities

The **Centro Mexicano de la Tortuga** (Mexican Turtle Center; ☎ 584-30-55; admission US\$2.25; ☎ 10am-4:30pm Tue-Sat) is a turtle aquarium and research center with specimens of all seven of Mexico's marine turtle species on view in 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 run every 10 to 15 minutes.

Mazunte's natural cosmetics workshop and store, **Cosméticos Naturales** (☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun), is on the Pacific side of the main road toward the west end of the village. It's a small cooperative making excellent shampoo and cosmetics from natural sources such as maize, coconut, avocado and sesame seeds. They also sell organic coffee, peanut butter and natural mosquito repellents, and rent out clean, affordable rooms that share bathrooms.

Aromatherapy massage is available at **Cabañas Balamjuyuc** ([www.balamjuyuc.com](http://www.balamjuyuc.com); Camino a

Punta Cometa), where a full-body massage costs US\$22 per hour.

### 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 along the coast. You can walk there 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 make the first left.

### PLAYA VENTANILLA

Some 2.5km along the road west from Mazunte, a sign points left to Playa Ventanilla, 1.2km down a dirt track. The settlement here includes a handful of simple homes, a couple of *comedores* and the *palapa* of **Servicios Ecoturísticos La Ventanilla** (☎ 589-92-77; [laven-tanillamx@yahoo.com.mx](mailto:laven-tanillamx@yahoo.com.mx); 1½hr lagoon tours adult/child US\$5/2.50, under 6 free; ☎ 8:30am-5pm). This local cooperative provides interesting 10-passenger canoe trips on a mangrove-fringed lagoon, the Estero de la Ventanilla, 400m along the beach. You'll see river crocodiles (there are about 380 in the lagoon), lots of water birds (most prolific from April to July) and, in an enclosure on an island in the lagoon, a few white-tailed deer. For the best fauna-spotting, make your trip in the early morning. **Servicios Ecoturísticos** also offers three-hour horseback rides (US\$20; by reservation only) to another lagoon further west.

Frequent *camionetas* pass the turnoff, leaving you with the 1.2km walk. A taxi from Mazunte costs upwards of US\$3.

### Sleeping

Most places along Playa Mazunte (including restaurants) have basic rooms or cabañas, hammocks to rent and often tent space. Bathrooms are shared unless otherwise stated. Security can be a problem here.

**Cabañas Ziga** (☎ 583-92-95; d with shared/private bathroom US\$20/38; **P**) **Friendly Ziga**, at the far east end of Playa Mazunte, is near the end of the easternmost access road, on a breezy beachside promontory that gives up some marvelous views after a very short climb. It has a good restaurant, a little flower garden and 17 fan rooms, all with good mosquito nets. The more expensive rooms have tile floors, good bathrooms and beds, as well

as hammocks and terraces. Some of the best views are from the shared-bathroom quarters, which are in a wooden section at the front of the hotel.

**Posada Arigalan** ([www.arigalan.com](http://www.arigalan.com); d US\$50-65, tr US\$65; **P** **ⓧ** **ⓧ**) Up a steep dirt track (above Playa Mazunte) from the main road, between Mazunte and San Agustínillo, Arigalan has commanding views of the Pacific and Punta Cometa, lovely landscaping and nine simply but tastefully furnished air-con rooms with private bathrooms. Its restaurant is open mid-November to mid-January (room rates outside of this time are 30% lower). A trail from the beach provides access as well.

The following two properties are perched next to each other on a hilltop above the west end of the beach, with some superb views. Their entrances are about 400m along a road that leads uphill from Camino al Rinconcito, and they're also reachable by steps up from the beach (it can be a hot climb).

**Alta Mira** (**☎** 584-31-04; [www.labuenavista.com/alta\\_mira](http://www.labuenavista.com/alta_mira); Camino a Punta Cometa; d with private bathroom US\$35-40; **P**) The Alta Mira is run by the people from La Buena Vista at Puerto Ángel (p257), and its 10 electricity-free rooms are among Mazunte's classiest and comfiest, all with beautiful Talavera-tiled bathrooms, mosquito nets and terrace with hammock. They're strung beside steps leading down the hillside, and most catch some breeze and excellent views. The restaurant serves breakfast and dinner, and there's also a safety box.

**Cabañas Balamjuyuc** ([www.balamjuyuc.com](http://www.balamjuyuc.com); Camino a Punta Cometa; s US\$11, d US\$16-40, extra person US\$5; hammock US\$4.50, tent s/d US\$7/11.50; **P**) This quiet, tree-covered property has about seven cabana rooms, some of which are large and airy with good sea views. The shared showers are prettily tiled, and for true budget travelers there's a *palapa* with hammocks and tents (with mattresses). A safety box is available for storing valuables. Breakfast at the restaurant here costs US\$2.50 to US\$3, while mains are US\$2 to US\$7.

**Palapa El Pescador** (camping per person US\$5, r US\$15) This popular restaurant in the middle of Playa Mazunte has a small tent/hammock area on the sand and good, clean upstairs rooms with power.

**Restaurante Tania** (**☎** 583-95-94; d US\$20) Near the end of 2005, Tania completed a few simple rooms on the hill at the western edge

of town about 600m from the beach, above her restaurant. They're solid if not cheerful, with ceiling fans, private bathrooms and a removed sea view.

**La Nueva Luna** (Camino a La Barrita; r US\$7.50 per person) A couple of hundred meters off the beach, the Luna is an exception among low-end Mazunte lodgings in that it has plenty of good (shared) bathrooms, as well as a shared kitchen. The three rooms are adjacent to a bar that was about to open at the time of research; how well the two would coexist was uncertain.

**El Agujón** ([elagujonmazunte@yahoo.com.mx](mailto:elagujonmazunte@yahoo.com.mx); Camino al Rinconcito; s/d cabana US\$6.50/11; **P**) Friendly El Agujón has 10 small, very rustic, clean cabanas on the hillside just above its restaurant.

**Estrella Fugaz** (**☎** 583-92-97; [estrellafugazmazunte@hotmail.com](mailto:estrellafugazmazunte@hotmail.com); Camino al Rinconcito; r per person US\$15-20) The nine rooms here tend toward the gloomy and some are a bit malodorous, but all have fans, mosquito nets, and sleep up to four people. Six have private bathrooms, and the restaurant upstairs has a good selection of Mexican and international dishes (mains US\$3.50 to US\$7), as well as veggie and fruit drinks and coffees.

**Palapa Yuri** (hammock per person US\$5; tr with shared bathroom US\$15, d with private bathroom US\$29) Near the east end of Playa Mazunte, Yuri has adequate rooms that are plain but clean and have fans. Those with shared bathroom have OK views; a thatched roof blocks the view from those with private bathroom. There's a safety deposit box.

**Palapa Omar** (hammock or camping per person US\$2.50, r US\$10 per person) Omar is beside the end of the middle lane (Camino a La Barrita) to Playa Mazunte. The eight rooms in brick buildings have mosquito nets, fans and one or two double beds.

## Eating

Most places to stay are also places to eat, or vice versa.

**Palapa El Pescador** (dishes US\$2.50-7) One of the best and most popular places, El Pescador offers fish, seafood and lighter eats such as quesadillas, tacos, fruit salad, eggs and *tortas*. It's on Playa Mazunte, east of the lagoon.

**El Agujón** (Camino al Rinconcito; dishes US\$2.25-7) Another good restaurant, with a very wide range from large and excellent French-bread *tortas* to crepes, fish and, in the evening, pizzas.

**Restaurante Bar Bella Vista** (fish fillets US\$4.50, spaghetti US\$3.50) With its elevated position at the east end of Playa Mazunte, this restaurant, which belongs to Cabañas Ziga, catches a breeze.

**La Dolce Vita** (mains US\$5-8; ☒ closed October) This Italian restaurant, on the main road (east of Cosméticos Naturales), is well known for its excellent food.

**La Empanada** (sushi US\$3-4, rice dishes US\$1-5; ☒ from 5pm low seasons, 9am-late high seasons) Choose from a Mexican-Asian mix of delectable items including vegetable and fish sushi, all lovingly prepared. You'll find La Empanada on the main road, at the west edge of town.

**Restaurante Tania** (comida corrida US\$3.50, fish fillets US\$4.50-5, vegetarian dishes US\$2-3) At the western edge of town, on the main road, Tania's scores high marks for both its good-value food and hospitality.

### Entertainment

**La Nueva Luna** (Camino a La Barrita; ☒ 6pm-late; closed October) Adjacent to the lodgings of the same name, this bar was nearly ready to open

at the time of research. It has a ping-pong table and a pleasantly shady ambience. The Argentine operator hopes to have live music from December to April, and to serve mixed drinks made with natural fruit juices.

### Getting There & Away

See p255 for information about transportation from Pochutla. *Camionetas* between Mazunte and San Agustín or Zipolite cost US\$0.40.

### BAHÍAS DE HUATULCO

☎ 958 / pop 18,000

Mexico's newest big coastal resort is strung along a series of beautiful sandy bays, the Bahías de Huatulco (wah-tool-koh), 45km east of Pochutla. This stretch of coast had just one small fishing village until the 1980s. The Mexican government has trod 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 supposedly assure that no sewage goes into the sea. (Testing by Mexico's

OAXACA



environmental agency has shown that there is in fact some contamination of the waters.) Lower than expected occupancy rates have slowed development, and for now at least, Huatulco is still a relatively uncrowded resort with a succession of scenic beaches lapped by beautiful water and backed by forest. You can have an active time here – agencies offer all sorts of energetic pursuits from rafting and horseback riding to diving and kayaking. Huatulco is not a place to stay long on a tight budget, however.

The Parque Nacional Huatulco, declared in 1998, protects 119 sq km of land, sea and shoreline west of Santa Cruz Huatulco. 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 there, discharging thousands of passengers for brief visits to the area.

**Orientation**

A divided road leads about 4km down from Hwy 200 to La Crucecita, the service town for the resort. La Crucecita has the bus stations, market, most of the shops and virtually the only cheap accommodations. One kilometer south, on Bahía de Santa Cruz, is Santa Cruz Huatulco (often just called Santa Cruz), with somewhat plush hotels and a harbor. The other main developments so far are at Bahía Chahué, with mainly midrange hotels, 1km east of Santa Cruz; Tangolunda, 4km further east with most of the luxury hotels; and El

**OAXACA**



Faro, near Playa La Entrega, 2.5km south of Santa Cruz.

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

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

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS

The two La Crucecita facilities listed here have swift connections and allow laptops to jack in for the same price as regular browsing (US\$1 per hour).

**El Telefonito** (Map p266; Flamboyán 208; ☎ 24hr)

**Surf Conejo** (Map p266; Guamuchil 208)

### LAUNDRY

**Lavado Express** (Map p266; ☎ 587-27-37; Bugambilia 402, La Crucecita; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Washes and dries 3kg for US\$4.50. Ask for it *sin suavizante* to avoid the perfumey fabric softener.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Dr Andrés González Ayvar** (☎ 587-06-00, 044-958-587-60-65) Provides 24-hour medical assistance.

The big hotels have English-speaking doctors on call.

**Hospital IMSS** (☎ 587-11-84; Blvd Chahué) Halfway between La Crucecita and Bahía Chahué; some doctors speak English.

### MONEY

La Crucecita has several ATMs and banks, including the following:

**Banamex ATM** (Map p266; cnr Carrizal & Guamuchil)

**HSBC** (Map p266; cnr Bugambilia & Sabalí; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Changes cash and traveler's checks, and has two ATMs, with another in Hotel Plaza Conejo.

There are more facilities in Santa Cruz Huatulco and Tangolunda:

**Banamex** (Map p268; Blvd Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz) Changes cash and traveler's checks and has an ATM.

**Bancomer** (Map p268; Blvd Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz)

**HSBC ATM** (Blvd Juárez, Tangolunda) In Hotel Gala.

### POST

**Post office** (Map p266; Blvd Chahué, La Crucecita) About 300m east of Plaza Principal.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Information kiosk** (Map p266; Plaza Principal, La Crucecita; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, closed in off-season)

**Municipal tourist office** (Map p266; ☎ 587-18-71; turismohuatulco@hotmail.com; cnr Bugambilia & Ceiba, La Crucecita; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, closed in off-season) Upstairs in the Casa de la Cultura.

**Parque Nacional Huatulco Office** (Map p268; ☎ 587-08-49; Santa Cruz; ☎ 9am-noon, 2-6pm Mon-Fri) Upstairs in the port.

**State tourist office** (☎ 581-01-77; sedetur@oaxaca.gob.mx; Blvd Juárez s/n; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) In Tangolunda, on the left as you arrive from the west.

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

**Bahías Plus** (Map p266; ☎ 587-02-16; Carrizal 704, upstairs, La Crucecita) Can help with air tickets; also books rafting tours, coffee *finca* visits etc.

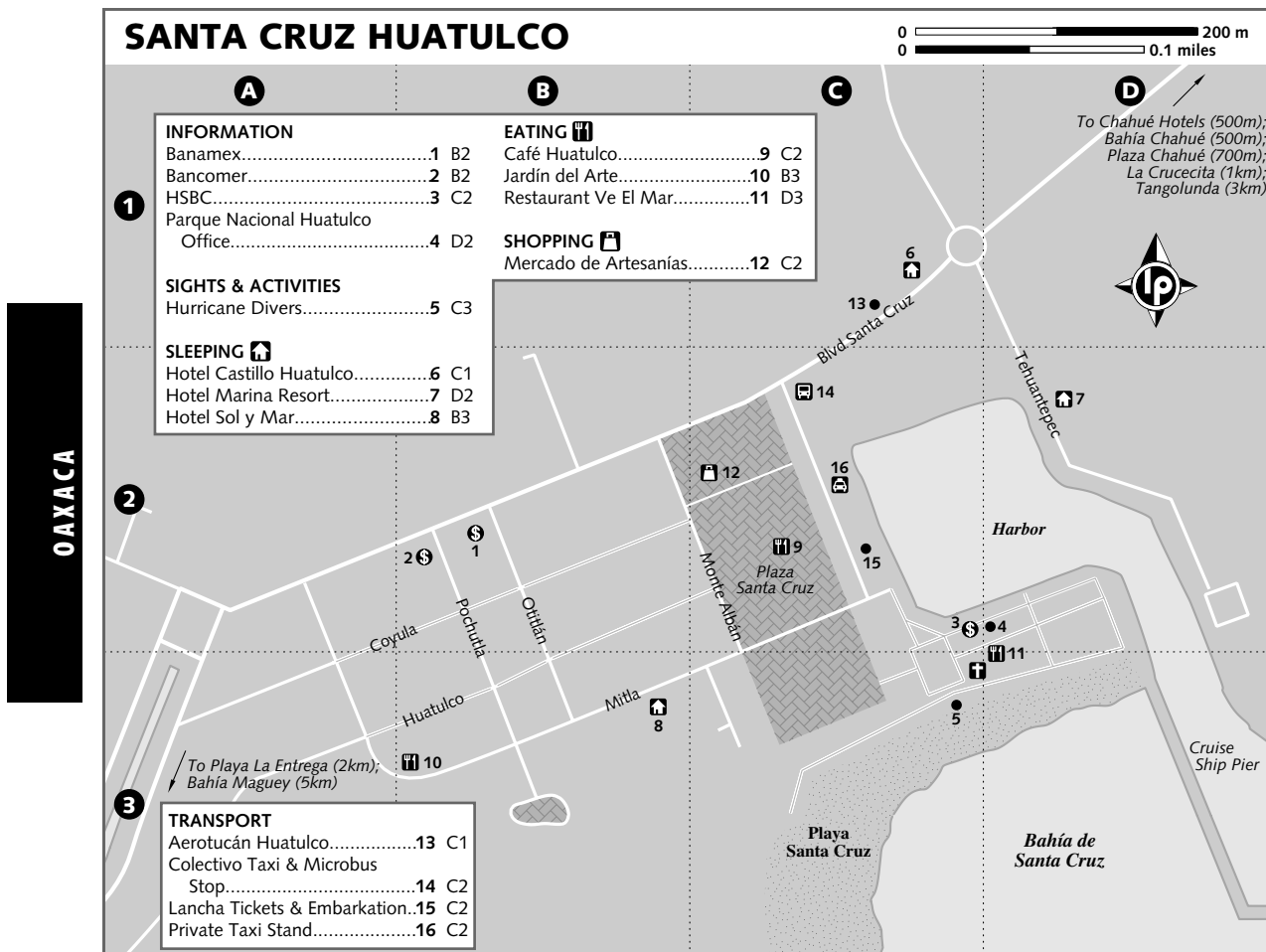
## Sights & Activities

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 sail, snorkel, dive, kayak, surf, fish, raft, canoe, walk in the jungle, watch birds, ride horses, rappel, canyon, cycle, visit a coffee plantation and waterfalls and more. Most outings cost US\$23 to US\$33. **Bahías Plus** travel agency, **Turismo Conejo** (Map p266; ☎ 587-00-09; turismoconejo@hotmail.com; Guamuchil 208, La Crucecita) and several hotels will book many of the activities listed here.

## 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 any time between 8am and 5pm or 6pm, 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. Hire and board the *lanchas* (Map p268) beside the harbor. Round-trip rates for up to 10 people



include Playa La Entrega (US\$18), Bahía Maguey and Bahía El Órgano (US\$46) and La India (US\$73). Another possibility for a fun day is a 6½-hour, **seven-bay boat cruise** (per person US\$20; ☎ 11am-5:30pm) with an open bar. A *lancha* will make the same excursion (less the booze) for US\$120 for up to 10 people.

At Santa Cruz Huatulco, the small, accessible **Playa Santa Cruz** is rather pretty, though its looks are somewhat marred by the cruise-ship pier. **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. The 300m-long beach, backed by a line of seafood *palapas*, can get crowded, but it has calm water and good snorkeling in a large area from which boats are cordoned off. ‘La Entrega’ means ‘the Handover’: it was here in 1831 that Mexican independence hero Vicente Guerrero was betrayed 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 their 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 good for snorkeling, but it lacks *comedores*.

The beach at **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, and there are no services at the beach itself. You probably wouldn’t want to leave a car at pavement’s end, either, as it’s quite isolated.



Cacaluta has a research station for the study of turtles and sea snails.

**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 and one of the area's best places for snorkeling.

Thirteen kilometers down a dirt road from a crossroads on Hwy 200, 1.7km west of the airport, is **Bahía San Agustín**. After 6km the road fords a river. The beach is long and sandy, with a long line of *palapa comedores*, some with hammocks for rent overnight. It's popular with Mexicans on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, but quiet at other times. Usually the waters are calm and the snorkeling is good (some of the *comedores* rent 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 and a new marina at its east end. Further northeast, **Bahía Tangolunda** is the site of the major top-end hotel developments to date. The sea is sometimes rough here, so be wary of currents and be sure to heed the colored-flag safety system. Tangolunda has an 18-hole golf course too. Three kilometers further east is the long sweep of **Playa Punta Arena**, on Bahía Conejos. Around a headland at the east end of Bahía Conejos is the more sheltered **Playa Conejos**, unreachable by road.

#### PARQUE ECOLÓGICO RUFINO TAMAYO

This park (Map p266) on the edge of La Crucecita is composed mainly of natural vegetation, with some paved paths and tile-roofed shelters with benches.

#### SNORKELING & DIVING

You can rent snorkeling gear beside the *lancha* kiosk at Santa Cruz harbor for about US\$5.75 a day. At Playa Maguey you can rent a snorkel, mask and fins for US\$5.50 a day. Tour guides will take you snorkeling for US\$20 to US\$45, or you can arrange a trip with one of the dive outfits listed here.

Huatulco has around 13 dive sites, with a wide variety of fish and corals, as well as dolphins and sea turtles. At least two companies will take you diving and offer instruction from beginner's sessions through to full certification courses.

**Centro de Buceo Sotavento** La Crucecita (Map p266; ☎ 587-21-66; [www.tomzap.com/sotavento.html](http://www.tomzap.com/sotavento.html); Local 18

Interior, Plaza Oaxaca, Flamboyán); Tangolunda (☎ 581-00-51; Plaza Las Conchas, Local 12) This excellent local company offers a range of options from a four-hour introduction (US\$65) to full certification (five days; US\$320) or specialty night dives (US\$65); they also do two-hour fishing trips for one to six people (US\$45 to US\$80, depending on vessel), as well as snorkeling trips for US\$15 per person.

**Hurricane Divers** (Map p268; ☎ 587-11-07; [www.hurricanedivers.com](http://www.hurricanedivers.com); Playa Santa Cruz) The professional international crew here speak English, Spanish, Dutch and German, and offer a variety of courses and dives. One-tank dives are US\$50; PADI programs (with ocean dive) start at US\$95. They do half- and full-day snorkeling trips as well (US\$50/100).

#### RAFTING

The Copalita and Zimatán Rivers near Bahías de Huatulco have waters ranging from class 1 to class 4/5 in rafting terms. They're at their biggest in the rainy season, between July and November. **Turismo Conejo** (p267) books rafting and kayaking trips for US\$61 to US\$66 per person, or contact **Pablo Nárvaez** (☎ 044-958-585-03-03; [pablo\\_rafting@yahoo.com](mailto:pablo_rafting@yahoo.com)).

#### HORSEBACK RIDING

**Rancho Caballo de Mar** (☎ 587-03-66; Playa Punta Arena, Bahía de Conejos; 3½hr rides US\$47) This company runs a beach and forest tour (reservations necessary); the staff speak English and French.

#### Sleeping

All midrange and top-end rooms listed here are air-conditioned. Rates quoted in those categories are for the high seasons (roughly December to April and July to mid-August). Peak periods around Christmas and Easter see considerably higher rates.

#### BUDGET

With the exception of holiday peak periods (when their rates roughly double), these hotels maintain their prices year-round.

**Hotel Jaroje** (Map p266; ☎ 583-48-01; <http://jaroje.tripod.com.mx>; Bugambilia 304, La Crucecita; s/d US\$29/38 with continental breakfast; ☎ ☎) Bright, fresh, three-story Jaroje has good-sized, pleasantly decorated rooms with air-con, cable TV and fine bathrooms. Prices include 15 minutes of email checking.

**Hotel Arrecife** (Map p266; ☎ 587-17-07; hotel arrecife@hotmail.com; Colorín 510, La Crucecita; s with fan US\$26-32, d with fan US\$30-35, with air-con US\$39; 📶 📺 📺 📺) In a quiet, leafy neighborhood, the Arrecife has a small pool and a good little restaurant. Of the 24 rooms, the best are sizable, with two double beds, air-con (some old units) and balcony; others are small and open straight onto the street.

**Hotel Busanvi I** (Map p266; ☎ 587-00-56; Carrizal 601, La Crucecita; s/d with air-con US\$14/28; 📶) The plain, largeish rooms here are a deal. Comfy beds, modern air-con and a small common area are all good, and the showers excellent. Six of the rooms have balconies, and prices stay low year-round.

**Posada Michelle** (Map p266; ☎ 587-05-35; Gardenia 8, La Crucecita; d US\$29, tr or q US\$47; 📶) The Michelle is next to the Estrella Blanca bus station and can be noisy until 9pm. Beds are springy and bathrooms poor, but the dozen or so rooms are brightly decorated and have decent air-con and cable TV. A little sitting area with hammocks adds some appeal as well.

**Hotel Sol y Mar** (Map p268; ☎ 587-16-61; Mitla s/n, Santa Cruz Huatulco; r US\$30) This small hotel, whose good-sized rooms have fans and decent bathrooms, was still coming together at the time of research. Prices may rise as hot water and air-con are installed.

### MIDRANGE

Santa Cruz' and Bahía Chahué's midrange options are generally more luxurious than those in La Crucecita.

**María Mixteca** (Map p266; ☎ 587-23-36; [www.travelbymexico.com/oaxa/mariamixteca](http://www.travelbymexico.com/oaxa/mariamixteca); Guamuchil 204, La Crucecita; s/d/tr US\$50/55/60; 📶 📺) Small and a good value, the MM opened in 2004. It has 14 modern, very well equipped rooms on two upper floors, with super-comfy beds, great bathrooms, and room safes.

**Misión de los Arcos** (Map p266; ☎ 587-01-65; [www.misiondelosarcos.com](http://www.misiondelosarcos.com); Gardenia 902, La Crucecita; r/ste US\$57/61; 📶 📺 📺) This 13-room American-owned hotel is embellished by a touch of interior greenery. It has big, bright comfortable rooms (all decorated in simple white and beige), a gym and a good restaurant.

**Hotel Suites Begonias** (Map p266; ☎ 587-03-90; [getosa@prodigy.net.mx](mailto:getosa@prodigy.net.mx); Bugambilia 503, La Crucecita; d/tr US\$57/66) Most of the lodgings here are comfortable two-room suites with two double beds and attractive bathrooms.

**Hotel Posada Edén Costa** (Map p266; ☎ 587-24-80; [www.edencosta.com](http://www.edencosta.com); Calle Zapoteco s/n, Chahué; r US\$77, ste with salon & kitchen US\$137; 📶 📺 📺) Swiss- and Laotian-owned Eden Costa, a block inland from Blvd Juárez, has quiet rooms with nice touches. Most overlook the small pool. The attached restaurant, L'échalote (p272), is a big bonus.

**Hotel Flamboyant** (Map p266; ☎ 587-01-13; [flamboyhuatulco@prodigy.net.mx](mailto:flamboyhuatulco@prodigy.net.mx); Plaza Principal, La Crucecita; r incl breakfast US\$89; 📶 📺) This pink hotel has a pleasant courtyard, an attractive pool, its own restaurant and 70 rooms. Decor is Oaxacan folksy.

**Hotel Plaza Conejo** (Map p266; ☎ 587-00-09; [turismoconejo@hotmail.com](mailto:turismoconejo@hotmail.com); Guamuchil 208, La Crucecita; s US\$29, d from US\$47; 📶 📺) This friendly hotel has 10 tidy, bright, clean rooms off an interior patio; air-con is good, bathrooms so-so.

### TOP END

Air and lodging packages are your best bet for an affordable holiday in a top-end Huatulco hotel. Another way to save is to look for promotions at hotel websites; you can often find prices well below the rack rates given here.

**Quinta Real** (☎ 581-04-28; [www.quintareal.com](http://www.quintareal.com); Paseo Juárez 2, Tangolunda; ste from US\$346; 📶 📺 📺) The utterly gorgeous Quinta Real has a hilltop position at the west end of Tangolunda. Its 27 suites have Jacuzzi and ocean view; some have fountain-fed private pools that threaten to spill down the hillside to the beach and main swimming pool area.

**Casa del Mar** (☎ 581-02-03; Balcones de Tangolunda 13, Tangolunda; ste from US\$120; 📶 📺 📺) Elegant and sensationably sited Casa del Mar, east of Tangolunda's main hotel cluster, has 25 well-appointed suites with great views, as well as a beautiful pool and restaurant. Reservations recommended.

**Las Brisas** (☎ 583-02-00; [www.brisas.com.mx](http://www.brisas.com.mx); Bahía de Tangolunda Lote 1, Tangolunda; r from US\$188; ste from US\$204; 📶 📺 📺 📺 📺) Sprawling across more than 22 hectares, with its own four beaches, this former Club Med boasts 484 rooms, most with ocean views. It also offers 12 tennis courts; volleyball, squash and basketball courts; a children's club (babysitting available); and a full range of aquatic activities.

**Camino Real Zaashila** (☎ 581-04-60; [www.camino-real.com/zaashila](http://www.camino-real.com/zaashila); Blvd Juárez 5, Tangolunda; r from US\$205

with breakfast; ) Toward the east end of Tangolunda, this tranquil, attractive, Mediterranean-style property has a big pool in lovely gardens. There are 120 rooms; of these, 41 come with their own small pool and, of course, a higher price!

**Hotel Marina Resort** (Map p268; 587-09-63; [www.hotelmariaresort.com](http://www.hotelmariaresort.com); Tehuantepec 112, Santa Cruz; r/ste US\$142/177 with buffet breakfast; ) The 50-room Marina Resort, on the east side of Santa Cruz harbor, has three pools, a nearby *temazcal* (a traditional-style steambath where mud is rubbed on you) and beach club, and lots of pastel green. Rooms have balconies, while suites have kitchenettes and private terraces with marina views.

**Hotel Castillo Huatulco** (Map p268; 587-01-44; [www.boyce.com.mx](http://www.boyce.com.mx); Blvd Santa Cruz 303, Santa Cruz; r US\$153; ) Colonial-style Castillo Huatulco has an attractive pool, a restaurant and 112 good-sized, brightly decorated rooms with safes. Transportation to the Castillo's beach club on Bahía Chahué is free. The hotel also offers packages with the third night for free.

## Eating

### LA CRUCECITA

**Restaurant-Bar Oasis** (Map p266; 587-13-00; Flamboyán 211, Plaza Principal; mains US\$5.50-11.50) The Oasis has good, moderately priced fare, including *tortas*, fish fillets, steaks and Oaxacan specialties, sushi and other Japanese food. It's a popular breakfast spot but the execrable pop music can be hard to take in the morning.

**Tostado's Grill** (Map p266; 587-02-19; Flamboyán 306; mains US\$5.50-12) Much of the menu is Italian food here, but they also serve a mean spinach salad with bacon. It's found in front of Hotel Posada del Parque.

**Don Wilo** (Map p266; 587-06-23; Guanacastle, Plaza Principal; mains US\$5-15; closed Tue) The don's Oaxacan dishes, including tamales and *tlayudas*, are very popular. He also does fish, steaks and pizza.

**Restaurant La Crucecita** (Map p266; 587-09-06; cnr Bugambilia & Chacah; mains US\$5-9; 7am-11pm) This inexpensive spot is a block south of the plaza. Its *sincronizadas a la mexicana* (multiple flour tortillas layered with ham and cheese then lightly fried; US\$4) make a good *antojito*. Tasty *licuados* with yogurt or milk are a specialty (US\$2). Early in the day, watch the chef prepare serious quantities

of *salsa roja* (a red sauce of plum tomatoes, onions, garlic and salt).

**El Patio** (Map p266; 587-02-11; Flamboyán 214; breakfast US\$3.50-5.50, mains US\$5.50-9) An appealing garden patio with tables out back welcomes you here. The breakfasts are good deals; the rest of the day they offer the usual range of fish, seafood, chicken dishes and Oaxacan specialties, as well as a full selection of alcoholic drinks.

**Terra-Cotta** (Map p266; 587-12-28; cnr Gardenia & Priv Tamarindo; breakfast dishes US\$3-4.50, sandwiches US\$6.50; 8am-11:30pm) Soothing air-con and a garden view complement the good food at popular, American-run Terra-Cotta. Egg dishes, waffles, baguettes, fine espresso and ice cream go down easy, as do the several Mexican dishes on the menu.

**Paletería Zamora** (Map p266; cnr Flamboyán & Bugambilia) Don't let the name fool you; in addition to the wide variety of popsicles and ice cream, Zamora blends up a full range of fresh fruit drinks, *licuados* and *aguas frescas* (literally, 'cool waters' – fruit blended with water and sweetener).

**Mercado** (Map p266; cnr Bugambilia & Guanacastle; fish or shrimp platters US\$5.50-6.50) The market's very clean *comedores* serve up good food, including *enfrijoladas* (corn tortillas smothered in beans, with a sprinkling of cheese) or *entomatadas* for US\$3.25 each.

### SANTA CRUZ HUATULCO

**Restaurant Ve El Mar** (Map p268; 587-03-64; Playa Santa Cruz; mains US\$8.50-10; 8am-10pm) Food at the eateries on Playa Santa Cruz is mostly average, but this place at the east end is an exception. The seafood is fine and the margaritas mighty. Try a whole fish, an octopus or shrimp dish or, if you prefer, lobster (US\$24).

**Jardín del Arte** (Map p268; 587-00-55; Hotel Marlin, Mitla 28; mains US\$6-13) This restaurant features international cuisine with a French touch, and homemade bread. You can enjoy crepes, fish dishes, and occasionally *codorniz* (quail), or a sociable breakfast on the terrace.

**Café Huatulco** (Map p268; 587-12-28; Plaza Santa Cruz; breakfast US\$4.50-6, coffee US\$1.50-3.50, cake US\$3; 8am-10:30pm) Mid-plaza near the harbor, Huatulco serves good Pluma coffee in many different ways – the *capuchino paraíso* (cold cappuccino with a dollop of ice cream) is well worth a try.

**BAHÍA CHAHUÉ & TANGOLUNDA**

**L'échalote** (☎ 587-24-80; Calle Zapotecos/s/n, Chahué; mains US\$7.50-14, desserts US\$4-7; 🕒 2-11pm Tue-Sun) This restaurant is attached to the Hotel Posada Edén Costa in Chahué (p270). The Swiss-French chef here prepares French, Thai, Vietnamese, Oaxacan and other dishes. The Thai salad with prawns and bean sprouts is delicious. Quiche lorraine, *nem* (spring rolls) and the chicken-liver salad are also quite good, and the desserts aren't too shabby either.

**Casa del Mar** (☎ 581-02-03; Balcones de Tangolunda 13, Tangolunda; starters US\$4-8, mains US\$7-13.50) A great view and romantic setting make it worth the trouble to get here. Try the *tamal de pescado* (steamed corn dough stuffed with fish). Flambéed bananas to finish? Why not?

Tangolunda's big hotels offer a choice of expensive bars, coffee shops and restaurants.

**BEACHES**

There are decent seafood *palapas* at Playas La Entrega, Maguey, and San Agustín. A whole grilled *huachinango* (red snapper) will cost US\$6 to US\$9.

**Drinking**

**La Crema** (Map p266; ☎ 587-07-02; cnr Flamboyán & Carrizal, La Crucecita; 🕒 7pm-3am) This dark, moody bar has a good music mix and delicious wood-oven pizza.

**Entertainment**

**La Peña** (Map p266; Carrizal s/n, La Crucecita; 🕒 7pm-3am) Head across the street from La Crema for a great Latin party vibe, with good live music, Cuban-style, from Tuesday to Saturday.

**La Papaya** (☎ 583-94-11; Blvd Juárez, Chahué; admission US\$11; 🕒 11pm-5am Thu-Sat) This long-standing disco above Plaza del Mezcal appeals to the 18 to 25 age group.

**Noches Oaxaqueñas** (☎ 581-00-01; Blvd Juárez s/n, Tangolunda; admission US\$10; 🕒 8:30pm Tue, Thu & Sat off-season, daily high season) Catch a Guelagueta regional dance show here, by the Tangolunda traffic circle. Drinks and/or dinner (US\$7 to US\$17) are extra.

La Crucecita's **Cinemas Huatulco** (Map p266; Guamuchil s/n) is in Plaza Madero, a shopping mall at the corner of Guamuchil and Carrizal.

**Shopping**

**Mercado de Artesanías** (Map p268; Plaza Santa Cruz) Santa Cruz' market has a wide range of beach gear and handicrafts, including

some good jewelry and textiles, but with the cruise ships arriving constantly you're not likely to find many bargains.

**Getting There & Away****AIR**

Mexicana and its subsidiary, Click Mexicana, offer three to five flights daily to/from Mexico City. Aerotucán (with a 13-seat Cessna) flies daily to/from Oaxaca, as does Aerovega, with a seven-seater. **Continental Express** (☎ 01-800-900-50-00) flies from Houston from one to four times a week in winter, and cheap charters from Canada, the US and the UK are sometimes available. Airline offices: **Aerotucán Huatulco** Santa Cruz (Map p268; ☎ 587-24-27; Blvd Santa Cruz).

**BUS**

The main bus stations are on Gardenia in La Crucecita. 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. See the boxed text on p238 for information on bus routes to Oaxaca city.

First-class **OCC** (Map p266; ☎ 587-02-61; cnr Gardenia & Ocotillo) is four blocks north of the plaza. Most of its buses are *de paso* (buses that start their journeys elsewhere but stop to drop off and pick up passengers; scheduled times are often very approximate). **Sur** buses pull up here too. **Estrella Blanca** (EB; Map p266; ☎ 587-03-90; cnr Gardenia & Palma Real) has *primera* services that are quick and fairly comfortable, and *ordinario* buses, which are typical *ordinario*. Daily departures include the following:

**Acapulco** EB (US\$28, 10hr, 7 daily)

**Oaxaca** OCC (US\$19, 8hr via Salina Cruz, 3 daily)

**Pochutla** OCC (US\$2.25, 1hr, 6 daily); EB (US\$2.50, 1hr, 7 daily); Transportes Rápidos de Pochutla (US\$1.25, every 15min 6am-8pm) From Blvd Chahué, opposite the north end of Bugambilia in La Crucecita.

**Puerto Escondido** OCC (US\$6, 2½hr, 6 daily); Sur (US\$3, 2½hr, 12 daily); EB (US\$6.50, 2½hr, 7 daily)

**Tehuantepec** OCC (US\$8, 3½hr, 8 daily); Sur (US\$7, 3½hr, 2 daily)

For coastal destinations west of Huatulco, take an Acapulco-bound EB bus; the 2nd-class buses will stop just about anywhere along Hwy 200. OCC also runs a few buses to Juchitán (US\$9, four hours); OCC and

EB go to Mexico City (US\$43 to US\$50, 15 hours); and EB has one daily bus to Zihuatanejo (US\$43, 14 hours).

#### CAR

**Budget** (Map p266; ☎ 587-00-10; cnr Ocotillo & Jazmín, La Crucecita)

**Hertz** (☎ 581-90-92; Airport)

### Getting Around

#### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

**Transportación Terrestre** (☎ 581-90-14) provides *colectivo combis* for US\$8 per person from the airport to La Crucecita, Santa Cruz or Bahía Chahué and for US\$9 to Tangolunda. Get tickets at the company's airport kiosk. For a whole cab at a reasonable price, walk just outside the airport gate, where you can pick one up for about US\$13 to La Crucecita, Santa Cruz or Tangolunda, or US\$14 to Pochutla. Even cheaper, walk 400m down to Hwy 200 and catch a microbus for US\$0.70 to La Crucecita or US\$1.50 to Pochutla. Those buses heading to La Crucecita may be marked 'Santa Cruz' or 'Bahías Huatulco' or something similar.

#### BUS & COLECTIVO

*Colectivo* taxis and a few minibuses provide transportation between La Crucecita, Santa Cruz Huatulco and Tangolunda. In La Crucecita catch them just east of the corner of Guamuchil and Carrizal, one block east of Plaza Principal. In Santa Cruz they stop by the harbor, and in Tangolunda at the traffic circle outside the Hotel Gala. Fares are the same in either type of vehicle: from La Crucecita to Santa Cruz US\$0.30, and to Tangolunda US\$0.50.

#### TAXI

Official taxi rates are posted on the east side of Plaza Principal in La Crucecita, from where you pay around US\$1.50 to Santa Cruz, US\$2.50 to Tangolunda, US\$4.50 to Bahía Maguey and US\$9.50 to the airport. There's a private taxi stand in Santa Cruz Huatulco, on the east side of the main plaza. By the hour, cabs run US\$15.

### BARRA DE LA CRUZ

☎ 958 / pop 700

This tranquil fishing village is reached via a good 1.5km road that heads coastward from Hwy 200 about 20km east of Santa

Cruz. At the mouth of the Río Zimatán, Barra is known for its excellent surfing. At its peak, the right-hand point break gets up to a double overhead. A lack of undertow makes for good swimming as well. Barra's beach has showers and toilets, and a *comedor* offering food, drinks and plenty of hammocks and shade. The municipality charges US\$1 per person to pass along the last stretch of road to the beach, and imposes a 7:30pm curfew; after sunset it's off *la playa*, baby.

You can rent surfboards just outside the toll gate for US\$9.50 per day. Villagers will rent rooms in their houses for around US\$5 a night, but conditions are very rustic. Go more upscale and stay at **Barradise** (☎ 044-958-585-03-03; pablo\_rafting@yahoo.com; r US\$14-19), which consists of two fan-cooled, rooms with private bathrooms above the surf shop. It's run by the very able Pablo Narvaez, who in addition to doing surf guiding can also take you rafting, mountain biking and birding, and has the certificates to prove it.

Taxis from La Crucecita to Barra cost about US\$9.50, or US\$15 all the way to the beach. Eastbound 2nd-class buses will drop you at the turnoff on Hwy 200; the total distance from there to the beach is just under 4km.

From Barra to the east, Hwy 200 provides almost no views of the Pacific until you begin to approach Salina Cruz, and then it's mostly tantalizing glimpses of sea and beaches with enormous dunes piled against rocks, testament to the force of the winds that blow across the isthmus.

## ISTHMUS OF TEHUANTEPEC

Eastern Oaxaca comprises the southern half of the 200km-wide Isthmus of Tehuantepec (teh-wahn-teh-pek), Mexico's narrowest point. Though dramatic mountains are seldom out of view, this is sweaty, flat country. Zapotec culture is strong here, and foreign visitors few. Spend some time and you're bound to encounter some lively, friendly people; you may even get an impromptu tour from schoolkids curious to see a foreign face in their midst.

**DIFFERENT STROKES**

Coming from a matrilineal society, Zapotec Isthmus women are noticeably open and confident and take a leading role in business and government. Many older women still wear embroidered *huipiles* and voluminous printed skirts. For the numerous *velas* (fiestas), Tehuantepec and Juchitán women turn out in velvet or sateen *huipiles*, gold and silver jewelry (a sign of wealth), skirts embroidered with fantastically colorful silk flowers and a variety of headgear. An unusual feature of many *velas* is the *tirada de frutas*, in which women climb onto rooftops and throw fruit at the men below!

**TEHUANTEPEC**

☎ 971 / pop 38,000

Tehuantepec is a friendly town, often with a fiesta going on in one of its barrios.

**Orientation**

The Oaxaca–Tuxtla Gutiérrez highway (190) meets Hwy 185 from Salina Cruz about 1km west of Tehuantepec. The combined highways then skirt the west edge of the town center and turn east to form the northern edge of town. It's here where Tehuantepec's bus stations – collectively known as La Terminal – cluster just south of the highway (1.5km northeast of the town center via the highway, considerably closer in a straight line on foot). To walk to the plaza from La Terminal, follow Av Héroes until it ends at a T-junction, then turn right along Guerrero for four blocks to another T-junction. Then go one block left along Hidalgo – the Palacio Municipal (town hall) stands on the south side of the plaza.

**Information**

**Café Internet La Frontera** (Calle 5 de Mayo; per hr US\$1; ☎ open 9am–9pm), next door to Banorte, is one of several Internet places in town.

**Cruz Roja** (☎ 715-02015) Call in a medical emergency.

**Santander Serfin** (Calle 22 de Mayo; ☎ 9am–4pm Mon–Sat) North side of the plaza; will change traveler's checks and cash US dollars.

Bancomer and Banorte banks, both on Calle 5 de Mayo, are a few steps west of the Palacio Municipal. Both have ATMs; Banorte changes US dollars.

**Sights****EX-CONVENTO REY COSIJOPI**

This former Dominican monastery, north and west of the plaza on a short street off Guerrero, is Tehuantepec's **Casa de la Cultura** (Callejón Rey Cosijopí; admission free; ☎ 9am–2pm & 5–8pm Mon–Fri, 9am–2pm Sat). It bears traces of old religious frescoes and has modest but interesting exhibits of traditional dress, archaeological finds, historical photos and the like. King Cosijopí, the local Zapotec leader at the time, provided the funds for its construction in the 16th century, at the urging of Cortés.

**MARKET**

Tehuantepec's dark, almost medieval indoor **market** (☎ daily) is on the west side of the plaza. It spills out into the surrounding streets, where you can often see flowers for sale.

**Sleeping**

**Hotel Donají** (☎ 715-00-64; [hoteldonaji@hotmail.com](mailto:hoteldonaji@hotmail.com); Juárez 10; s/d/tr/q with fan US\$16/23/31/38, with air-con US\$23/30/40/43; P ☎ ☎) The bright Donají is two blocks south of the east side of the central plaza, and has clean rooms with TV on two upper floors around a shady, colorful patio. Bonuses include a small gym and a small pool.

**Guiexhoba** (☎ 715-17-10; [guiexhoba@prodigy.net.mx](mailto:guiexhoba@prodigy.net.mx); Carretera Panamericana Km 250.5; s/d/tr US\$40/50/60; P ☎ ☎) This motel sits at the junction of Hwys 185 and 190, a kilometer southwest of the center. The rooms are large, as is the covered swimming pool, but rooms on the Hwy 190 side can get quite a bit of traffic noise. Not to worry: some of the air-con units will drown it out entirely. The hotel's restaurant is on the expensive side, but serves enormous salads and good espresso.

**Hotel Oasis** (☎ 715-00-08; Ocampo 8; r with fan US\$15–18, with air-con US\$25; P ☎ ☎) A block south of the plaza, the Oasis has 26 basic rooms, with warm showers.

**Eating**

The **market** has the usual eateries, and at night the entire east sidewalk of the plaza is lined with plastic tables and chairs beside carts serving inexpensive tacos and other delights.

**Bar Restaurante Scarú** (☎ 715-06-46; Callejón Leona Vicario 4; dishes US\$4–11) Two short blocks

east and 50m north of Hotel Donají, the relaxed, friendly Scarú occupies an 18th-century house with a courtyard and colorful modern murals of Tehuantepec life. Sit beneath a fan, quaff a *limonada* or a mixed drink and sample one of the many fish, seafood, meat and chicken dishes on offer. On Saturday and Sunday old-timers plunk out marimba tunes.

### Getting There & Away

At La Terminal, OCC and ADO (1st-class) and Sur and AU (2nd-class) share one building. Some 1st-class buses are *de paso*. Transportes Oaxaca-Istmo (TOI, 2nd-class) is next door, nearer to the highway.

Local buses to Juchitán (US\$1.50, 30 minutes) depart across the street from OCC at least every half hour during daylight hours. Other services:

**Bahías de Huatulco** OCC (US\$8, 3½hr, 3 1st-class); Sur (US\$6.50, 3½hr, 2 2nd-class)

**Mexico City (TAPO)** OCC & ADO (US\$46-54, 11½hr, 6 1st-class & deluxe); AU (US\$41, 13hr, 3 2nd-class)

**Oaxaca** OCC & ADO (US\$12, 4½hr, 15 1st-class); Sur (US\$11, 4½hr, 7 2nd-class); TOI (US\$7.50, 5½hr, 13)

**Pochutla** OCC (US\$10, 4½hr, 3 1st-class)

**Puerto Escondido** OCC (US\$14, 6½ hr, 3 1st-class)

### Getting Around

Taxis between La Terminal and the plaza charge around US\$1.75. A delightful local variation on the common Mexican theme of three-wheeled transportation is the *motocarro*, whose passengers sit – or stand, to better catch the breeze – on a platform behind the driver. The sight of colorfully garbed women riding tall is one that lingers

in memory. Motocarros congregate by the railway track west of the market.

## JUCHITÁN

☎ 971 / pop 68,000

Isthmeño culture is strong in this friendly town, which is visited by few gringos.

### Orientation & Information

Prolongación 16 de Septiembre leads into Juchitán from a busy intersection with traffic signals on Hwy 190, on the north edge of town. The main bus terminal is about 100m toward town from the intersection. The street curves left, then right, then divides into Calle 5 de Septiembre (the right fork) and Av 16 de Septiembre (left). These emerge as opposite sides of the central plaza, Jardín Juárez, after seven blocks. The Palacio Municipal, painted yellow with green and white trim, forms the Jardín's eastern boundary.

At least two banks with ATMs are on the Jardín; at its southwest corner, **Scotiabank** (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) changes traveler's checks and cash US dollars. Internet places abound, particularly on Prolongación 16 de Septiembre. Most charge US\$1 an hour, including **La-Net@.com** (☎ noon-midnight), opposite Hotel Lopez Lena Palace. Try **Hospital Fuentes** (☎ 711-14-41; Efraín R Gómez s/n) in a medical emergency.

### Sights

**Jardín Juárez** is a lively central square. A thriving market on its east side spills into the surrounding streets. Here you can find traditional Isthmus women's costumes, and

#### DETOUR: GUIENGOLA

In 1496 the isthmus Zapotecs successfully defended the hillside fortress of Guiengola from Aztec invaders, and the isthmus never became part of the Aztec empire. The stronghold's ruins lie north of Hwy 190 and are reached via a turnoff just past the Km 240 marker, about 11km out of Tehuantepec (signed 'Ruinas Guiengola'; at the time of research there was a military checkpoint directly at the turnoff). A guide (recommended) may be waiting here or nearer the site. The unpaved 7km stretch of road 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 up the trail gets you to the remains of two pyramids, a ball court, a 64-room complex and a thick defensive wall. You'll also see interesting limestone formations and some fine views over the isthmus.

If you lack a vehicle, catch a bus bound for Jalapa del Marqués from La Terminal. From the turnoff on Hwy 190 it's about a 2½-hour walk. Take plenty of water, and start early (6am or before) to take advantage of the morning cool.

sometimes iguana on the menus of the market *comedores*.

Juchitán's **Lidxi Guendabiaani** (Casa de la Cultura; Belisario Domínguez; admission free; ☎ 10am-3pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat), one block south and one block west of Jardín Juárez, has an interesting archaeological collection and an art collection with works by leading 20th-century Mexican artists, including Rufino Tamayo and the prolific *juchiteco* Francisco Toledo. It's beside the church, and set around a big patio that often buzzes with children.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel López Lena Palace** (☎ 711-13-88; Prolongación 16 de Septiembre 70; s US\$24-31, tw US\$42; 🅓 🅔) Look for the mock Arabic exterior about halfway between the bus station and town center. The Lena has reasonable rooms with comfy beds; the best value are the cheerful but windowless 'minis,' with excellent air-con and showers. The attached **Restaurant El Califa** (mains US\$3-13) prepares some excellent dishes, including fresh salads and stuffed fish, though the breakfasts leave something to be desired.

**Hotel Santo Domingo del Sur** (☎ 711-10-50; hsto@prodigy.net.mx; Carretera Juchitán-Tehuantepec; s/d/tr with air-con US\$36/48/59; 🅓 🅔 🅕) Situated by the Hwy 190 crossroads, the popular Santo Domingo has decent rooms (though some have poor bathrooms for the price), a large swimming pool surrounded by a garden, and a good restaurant (meals US\$3 to US\$14).

**Casagrande Restaurant** (☎ 711-34-60; mains US\$4.50-14) This is the flashiest eatery in town, in a pleasant covered courtyard with ceiling fans and tall plants. All the goodies, from regional dishes and pasta to seafood, get 15%

tax added. It's on the south side of Jardín Juárez; the Casagrande cinema sign makes it easier to find.

**Café Santa Fe** (☎ 711-15-45; Cruce de Carretera Transístmica; dishes US\$4-8; ☎ 24hr) For cool air and good food, try this restaurant, handily wedged between the main bus stations and the highway. It does excellent breakfasts and good espresso, served briskly by white-coated waiters.

### Getting There & Away

OCC and ADO (1st-class) and Sur and AU (2nd-class) use the main bus terminal on Prolongación 16 de Septiembre; they're housed in separate structures. Frequent 2nd-class Istmeño buses to Tehuantepec (US\$1.25, 30 minutes) and Salina Cruz (US\$2, 1 hour) stop at the next corner south on Prolongación 16 de Septiembre during daylight hours. Fletes y Pasajes (Fypsa; 2nd-class) has its own terminal, separated from the main one by a Pemex station and the Café Santa Fe.

Some buses are *de paso* and leave in the middle of the night; many others originate in nearby Salina Cruz and stop at Juchitán not long after.

**Bahías de Huatulco** (US\$9, 4hr, 5 1st-class); Sur (US\$6.50, 3½hr, 2 2nd-class)

**Mexico City (TAPO)** OCC/ADO/UNO (US\$46-67, 10hr, 7 1st-class & deluxe); AU (US\$42, 12hr, 3 2nd-class)

**Oaxaca** OCC & ADO (US\$12.50, 5hr, 20 1st-class & deluxe); Sur & Fypsa (US\$9, 6hr, many 2nd-class)

**Pochutla** (US\$12, 5hr, 5 1st-class)

**Puerto Escondido** (US\$16, 7hr, 5 1st-class)

### Getting Around

'Terminal-Centro' buses run between the bus station and Jardín Juárez. A taxi costs US\$1.50.

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