



nileGUIDE

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



J. Ramos

Oaxaca Guide for pre-Hispanic Ruins Lovers

Oaxaca City, 3 Days

Table of contents:

Guide Description	2
Itinerary Overview	3
Daily Itineraries	5
Oaxaca City Snapshot	11

Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: Oaxaca has so much history. Let's keep in mind the region has been occupied for centuries, and all the civilizations that established here left us something to admire them for.

For this guide I'd recommend to rent a car, specially because on day 1 and 3 you'll be moving around a lot.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Oaxaca City

DAY NOTE: This is the first day of our adventure as pyramids explorers, as pre-Hispanic sculpture searchers, as archaeological explorers. So it's only fair today we visit the two most important Mesoamerican sites in Oaxaca: Monte Alban and Mitla.

They are both magnificent. Monte Alban is, next to Teotihuacan close to Mexico City, Chichen Itza in Yucatan and Palenque in Chiapas, the most important site in Mexico. And as soon as you get there you'll discover why. First of all the view from the ruins is amazing, but is the ruins itself what will take your breath away.

As for Mitla, this is a magical place. Experts haven't been able to agree on why do these buildings have those amazing designs and graphics. They seem to be taken out from the most modern design book, but they were made centuries ago. So what's their secret? What is this religious center hiding? Hope you'll be able to find something none of us have, and when you do, please tell us! But if you don't, that's ok, just enjoy. Submerge your self in these good vibe center.

Hope you enjoy day 1!



Monte Alban

One of the most important and best conserved pre-Hispanic ruins in Mexico.



Mitla

Just 40 minutes from Oaxaca City, these Zapotec ruins are magical and unique.

Day 2 - Oaxaca City

DAY NOTE: So, yesterday we went to Monte Alban and Mitla, and now, for sure, you are even more in love with the Zapotec and the Mixtec civilizations. Today we'll stay in Oaxaca City, but we'll continue admiring these civilizations.

First stop is the Santo Domingo Temple. Ok, this has nothing to do with the pre-Hispanic world, but we can't go to the next stop, being just next to this church, without actually going in. Some people consider Santo Domingo as the most beautiful magnificent and important Colonial church in Mexico. You be the judge, and don't forget to look up as you're entering, a big surprise awaits you.

Now we can continue our archaeological tour. The Centro Cultural Santo Domingo has the treasure found in a tomb in Monte Alban, Surely you heard about it yesterday, and you probably wondered about the many ornaments, jewels and art pieces found in there. So here's your chance to admire them! This Cultural Center has so much more than just the treasure from Monte Alban, so be sure to visit it calmly.

And now, off to the Rufino Tamayo museum. This one you'll love. Rufino Tamayo was one of the most important artists in Modern Mexico, and is still a big influence in the contemporary art. He was a big mesoamerican collector, so before he died, he left all his collection to the people of Oaxaca and founded this museum. I'm sure you'll enjoy it and be left wanting more.



Centro Cultural Santo Domingo

A beautiful and interesting museum in a very important XVI Century building.



Templo de Santo Domingo

One of the most beautiful churches you'll find on all of Mexico. The inside decoration is rich and elaborated.



Rufino Tamayo Museum

This museum houses the large pre-Columbian art collection the famous artista Rufino Tamayo had.

Day 3 - Oaxaca City

DAY NOTE: Today we're going to visit some smaller sites than Monte Alban and Mitla, but still important and special.

Zaachila was the place the Zapotecs moved after abandoning Monte Alban (experts haven't been able to agree on why), and it was the last important city before the dawn of the civilization. Zaachila is famous for its tombs, specially the bats on some of them. You'll what I'm talking about.

After Zaachila we're going to Cuilapan, one of the oldest churches in the State. This XVI convent was never finished, but that doesn't make it less beautiful, in fact, I think is part of its attractive. But if you are still wishing for some more ruins, inquire about the ruins nearby, some almost unexplored Zapotec trace.

And before we head back to Oaxaca City, let's make one last stop at Yagul, the beautiful site with more tombs, designs and buildings. This is the newest mexican addition to the World Heritage List, so it must have something, don't you agree? Also, if you have time and still want to see more, ask about the near by prehistoric caves, also appointed World Heritage Site

I hope you had a great, adventurous and filled of pre-Hispanic history trip. Come back soon!



Zaachila

This was the last standing important city of the Zapotec civilization.



Cuilapan

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

On of the oldest churches in the State, a historic site and a perfect place for the adventurers.



Yagul

A small yet important pre-Hispanic city set around a hill overlooking the mountains of Oaxaca.

Day 1 - Oaxaca City

DAY NOTE: This is the first day of our adventure as pyramids explorers, as pre-Hispanic sculpture searchers, as archaeological explorers. So it's only fair to say we visit the two most important Mesoamerican sites in Oaxaca: Monte Alban and Mitla.

They are both magnificent. Monte Alban is, next to Teotihuacan close to Mexico City, Chichen Itza in Yucatan and Palenque in Chiapas, the most important site in Mexico. And as soon as you get there you'll discover why. First of all the view from the ruins is amazing, but is the ruins itself what will take your breath away.

As for Mitla, this is a magical place. Experts haven't been able to agree on why do these buildings have those amazing designs and graphics. They seem to be taken out from the most modern design book, but they were made centuries ago. So what's their secret? What is this religious center hiding? Hope you'll be able to find something none of us have, and when you do, please tell us! But if you don't, that's ok, just enjoy. Submerge your self in these good vibe center.

Hope you enjoy day 1!

location:

N/A Road to Monte Alban
Oaxaca Oaxaca

Monte Alban

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

The restrooms are next to the museum, and they are the only ones there. The site is large, so if you don't want to walk all the way back to the museum in the middle of your visit, use the restrooms when you enter.

DESCRIPTION: Really close to Oaxaca City is this amazing archaeological site. This was one of the main cities of the pre-Hispanic world and was a very important political center of the Zapoteca civilization. During Monte Alban's Golden Era, the Zapoteca world included what today is the State of Oaxaca, the south part of the State of Puebla and the east part of the State of Guerrero,

Monte Alban is very large complex with many interesting building to visit and a breathtaking view of the mountains. The Juego de Pelota and North Platform are two of the most important buildings on the site and are an excellent example of the Zapotec architecture. At the Danzantes Patio you'll find a set of unique stones with images of people who appear to be dancing (thus the word Danzantes, that means People Who Dances). The Building J is unique in the pre-Hispanic world. Its arrow-like shaped and has a different orientation than the rest of the buildings. Nobody is sure what it was built for, but some believe it was an observatory.

Many tombs have been found inside some of the buildings and next to them. The most marvelous discovery was the Tomb 7 filled with amazing pieces of pottery and jewelry that now can be founded in the Former Convent of Santo Domingo in Oaxaca City.

The site also has a small but informative museum.

It opens every day from 8:00 to 17:00 hrs.

© NileGuide



Fredo in (((Stereo)))

contact:

<http://sic.conaculta.gob.mx/ficha.php>

location:

Carretera Oaxaca - Mitla Km
42
Oaxaca City Oaxaca 70438

Mitla

DESCRIPTION: Mitla was the most important Religious center for the Zapotecs. The city is now a set of ruins, being destroyed by the Spaniards after the Conquest of Mexico. The clergy built the San Pablo church exactly where Mitla's main temple was, but never demolished the rest of the city, so the ruins were preserved without hardly any restoration.

Mitla's famous painted walls and unique entwines and fretworks have influenced Oaxaca's and the rest of Mexico's art. The delicate and complex geometry of the place and the decor are what give Mitla its magical and enchanted feeling. Mitla was recently appointed a World Heritage site by the UNESCO in August 2010.

© NileGuide



Toufic Hanono

Day 2 - Oaxaca City

QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: So, yesterday we went to Monte Alban and Mitla, and now, for sure, you are even more in love with the Zapotec and the Mixtec civilizations. Today we'll stay in Oaxaca City, but we'll continue admiring these civilizations.

First stop is the Santo Domingo Temple. Ok, this has nothing to do with the pre-Hispanic world, but we can't go to the next stop, being just next to this church, without actually going in. Some people consider Santo Domingo as the most beautiful magnificent and important Colonial church in Mexico. You be the judge, and don't forget to look up as you're entering, a big surprise awaits you.

Now we can continue our archaeological tour. The Centro Cultural Santo Domingo has the treasure found in a tomb in Monte Alban, Surely you heard about it yesterday, and you probably wondered about the many ornaments, jewels and art pieces found in there. So here's your chance to admire them! This Cultural Center has so much more than just the treasure from Monte Alban, so be sure to visit it calmly.

And now, off to the Rufino Tamayo museum. This one you'll love. Rufino Tamayo was one of the most important artists in Modern Mexico, and is still a big influence in the contemporary art. He was a big mesoamerican collector, so before he died, he left all his collection to the people of Oaxaca and founded this museum. I'm sure you'll enjoy it and be left wanting more.

location:

Macedonio Alacalá n/n
Oaxaca Oaxaca

Centro Cultural Santo Domingo

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Don't forget to visit the treasure of the Tomb 7 from Monte Alban.

DESCRIPTION: The Former Convent of Santo Domingo, right next to the Temple of Santo Domingo, is an splendid building that currently houses the Museum of the Cultures of Oaxaca, the Botanical Garden of Oaxaca and an ancient Library with more than 23 thousand books.

Because of the Reforma War (1957- 1960) the Dominicans were forced to flee the country and the army used the temple as a stable and the convent as headquarters. Many of the sacred art was lost and the building suffered some alterations. At the end of the XIX century the clergy recovered the temple and in 1994 the reconstruction work for the former convent began. The Centro Cultural (Cultural Center) opened its doors in 1998.

At the Museum of the Cultures of Oaxaca you will find many examples of cultural expressions, history and art of Oaxaca. The treasure of the Tomb 7 of Monte Alban is here. Hundreds of pieces made of gold, pearl, silver, shell, jade, turquoise, coral and many more materials were founded in 1932 in the tomb, and all of them are displayed in here. © NileGuide



rodolfoaraiza.com

contact:
tel: No phone

location:
Macedonio Alacalá n/n
Oaxaca Oaxaca

hours:
Daily 7am-2pm and 4-11pm

1 Templo de Santo Domingo

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Next to the church, the Santo Domingo Former Convent is an important museum of pre-Columbian and Colonial Art.

DESCRIPTION: The Church of Santo Domingo is a baroque building founded by the Dominican Order built over a period of more than 100 years, beginning in 1560. The decoration on the inside is the work of the best artists of that period. The gilded ceiling and walls are covered in plaster statues and flowers. The yellow stained-glass window fills the interior with a golden glow every time the sun shines through it. The under choir is a richly decorated area with an elaborated genealogical tree of the Dominican order, including numerous saints and martyrs. This is the first thing you'll see entering the church, just look up! And don't forget to visit the Centro Cultural Santo Domingo in what used to be the Dominican Convent. Is a beautiful complex with a botanical garden, a library and museum telling the history of Oaxaca.
© NileGuide



scaredy_kat

contact:
tel: 951/516-4750

location:
Av. Morelos 503
Oaxaca Oaxaca

hours:
Mon and Wed-Sat 10am-2pm
and 4-7pm; Sun 10am-3pm

2 Rufino Tamayo Museum

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Guided tours in English are given every Wednesday and Friday at 5:00 pm.

DESCRIPTION: Rufino Tamayo was a abstract and surrealist painter born in Oaxaca. Many people visit the Rufino Tamayo Museum expecting to find paintings by Tamayo. But this building, constructed in 1979 by the renown architects Teodoro Gonzalez de Leon y Abraham Zabludovsky, actually contains the artist's personal collection of pre-Columbian art, gathered over a 20-year period. □
Unlike many others pre-hispanic museums in Mexico, the piece in this one are not displayed chronologically or by civilization. Instead, Tamayo grouped them by themes and designed the displays and each room. □
When the artist died in 1991, he left the museum to his fellow Mexicans. © NileGuide



Ilhuicamina

Day 3 - Oaxaca City

DAY NOTE: Today we're going to visit some smaller sites than Monte Alban and Mitla, but still important and special.

Zaachila was the place the Zapotecs moved after abandoning Monte Alban (experts haven't been able to agree on why), and it was the last important city before the dawn of the civilization. Zaachila is famous for its tombs, specially the bats on some of them. You'll what I'm talking about.

After Zaachila we're going to Cuilapan, one of the oldest churches in the State. This XVI convent was never finished, but that doesn't make it less beautiful, in fact, I think is part of its attractive. But if you are still wishing for some more ruins, inquire about the ruins nearby, some almost unexplored Zapotec trace.

And before we head back to Oaxaca City, let's make one last stop at Yagul, the beautiful site with more tombs, designs and buildings. This is the newest Mexican addition to the World Heritage List, so it must have something, don't you agree? Also, if you have time and still want to see more, ask about the near by prehistoric caves, also appointed World Heritage Site

I hope you had a great, adventurous and filled of pre-Hispanic history trip. Come back soon!

location:

Sierra Madre del Sur, and 7 mi/11.3 km S of Oaxaca Oaxaca Oaxaca

Zaachila

DESCRIPTION: Zaachila was a zapotec king who lived in this city, thus it was named after him.

While Monte Alban was the main city of the Zapotecs during the civilization's golden age, Zaachila was their last important city, before the dawn of the civilization.

Zaachila is currently a small archeological site with some important tombs that can be visited. The union of the site and the church of Zaachila is wonderful example of the contrast of the Zapotec and the Spanish cultures.

© NileGuide



phylevnr

location:

Km10 highway to Zaachila Oaxaca Oaxaca

Cuilapan

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Would you like to witness how an archeological site looks like before being explored and becoming a big touristic point? You've come to the right place.

DESCRIPTION: This XVI Century convent was never finished, still it's a beautiful example of the architecture built as soon as the Spaniards arrived. The open chapel, characteristic of the first years after the Conquest of Mexico, is a fine story-teller of the work the Dominican Order did in the region. Because only the baptized could enter the temple, and there were so many indigenous, this open chapel, used for masses outside the church, is big and well ornamented.

The convent was built in quarry by the indigenous artists of the region. It's an emblematic site in Oaxaca and an important historic site as well. In February 1831, the former president of Mexico, and one of the Independence heroes, Vicente Guerrero, was killed in this town.



Gengiskanhg

Feeling adventurous? If what you like are the Mixtec ruins, don't forget to inquire about the ruins nearby that contain a pyramid and a tomb, probably a Monte Alban influence. © NileGuide

location:

KM 36 Carrtera Federal 190
Oaxaca Oaxaca

Yagul

DESCRIPTION: Yagul was a city associated with the Zapotec civilization, this means that even though they had contact with the Zapotecs, specially Monte Alban, and were influenced by them, they weren't Zapotecs. The word Yagul means old tree in Zapotec and, though nobody knows who named it, it can be easily guessed why, since it's set around a hill. Yagul has been occupied since 500 AD -some of the burials excavated on the site date from that era- but it was during 1250-1521 AD when this site lived its golden era.

In the 1950's - 60's the site was excavated and rescued from destruction. About 30 tombs were discovered some bearing hieroglyphic inscriptions, this made of Yagul one of the most studied sites in Oaxaca.

The site is divided in three principal areas:

- the fortress: situated atop the cliffs, it was the defending point of the city.
- residential area: where one can walk into and across rooms experts believe to be the ruins of some residences.
- ceremonial center: large patios, some of them labyrinths, surrounded by buildings that might have been palaces and temples.

In August 2010 Yagul and the nearby prehistoric caves were appointed a World Heritage Site and added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

There are some one-day tours that take you to Yagul and some close by areas. If you can't find any, you can rent a car, or ask at the information center at the Andador Macedonio Alcala how to get there.

The entrance is 30 pesos, the use of videocameras is 30 pesos and you can hire a guide for 120 pesos.

Open Tue-Sun from 9AM to 5 PM. © NileGuide



maximalideal

Oaxaca City Snapshot

Local Info

During the XV century, before the Spanish Conquest, the Zapotecas and the Mixtecos were the two ruling civilizations in what today is the South of Mexico. When the Spaniards arrived, they were in the middle of a fight with the Mexicas over the control of the commerce with Central America. By the time the Mexica Empire was conquered, Hernan Cortes appointed Pedro de Alvarado the leader in the conquest of the South. Since neither the Zapotecas or the Mixtecos were as advanced as the Mexicas, the conquest was quick.

After that, the Dominican Friars started the evangelization and built many temples. But many indigenous died because of some epidemics, and the area had to be repopulated with African slaves.

In 1858, 37 years after the Independence, Benito Juarez from Guelatao Oaxaca became the first ever full-blooded indigenous President. He governed until his death in 1872.

Oaxaca was highly improved during the Porfiriato, the 35 years Porfirio Diaz held the Presidency. This was the time when the street lighting, the railroad and the telegraph arrived to the city, connecting it with the capital.

In the decade or 1930 the ruins of Monte Alban were discovered and in the decade on 1950 a great deal of infrastructure was developed in the state and in the decade on 1970 the cultural treasure that is Oaxaca was promoted.

© NileGuide

Hotel Insights

Hotels

High season includes Easter, July, August, early November, and most of December. You should have no difficulty finding a room the rest of the time, and promotional rates are usually available. The prices listed include the 18% tax. Most evenings are cool enough that you don't need air-conditioning, but for about 60 days a year, mostly from April to June, it comes in handy, and not every hotel has it.

© 2000-2010 by Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Restaurants Insights

Restaurants

Oaxacan cooking has a great reputation in Mexico. It makes use of more ingredients from the lowlands than central Mexican cooking. It's known for its moles and for a wide variety of chiles, many of which you don't find in other parts of the country. Oaxaca is also known for its mezcal, a distillate of the agave or maguey plant (a different variety than the blue agave, from which tequila is made). This drink has a rougher taste than tequila, and it's commonly drunk with lime and *salsa de gusano* (salt with powdered chile and ground-up maguey worms-- the same that show up in some bottles of mezcal). Any cantina worth its salt will offer *salsa de gusano* to its customers.

Something else bears mentioning. Restaurateurs here seem bent on providing travelers with something more cosmopolitan than the local cuisine. I'm not sure why. A number of fine-dining places are trying hard and, in my opinion, are overrated. **Casa Oaxaca**, the restaurant (Constitución 104; tel. 951/516-8889), gets the best press. If you're tired of moles, then you might want to try this place once; don't go twice. **Los Danzantes** (Macedonio Alcalá 403; tel. 951/501-1184) brings Mexico City chic to Oaxaca. I like what the owners have done with the place, but not with the food. Go for drinks. **La Biznaga** (García Vigil 512; tel. 915/516-1800) usually has the most interesting menu-- try it sometime when you feel completely at leisure, because the service is absurdly slow.

Good coffee and espresso are easier to find these days, but you still have to make a point of seeking it out. **Café Brújula** (tel. 951/526-0056), at 409-D García Vigil, serves excellent coffee and light food to go with it. Another option is **Café Nuevo Mundo** (tel. 951/501-2122), at M. Bravo 206.

Oaxacan Street Food

Unless it's during a festival, don't be surprised to find many restaurants

empty. Oaxaqueños do not frequent restaurants, but do like eating in market and street stalls. They favor foods such as tacos, tamales, *tlayudas* (12-in. tortillas, slightly dried, with a number of toppings), and *empanadas* (in Oaxaca, large tortillas heated on the *comal*-- a flat, earthenware pan-- or among the coals, with several types of fillings). For adventurous diners, here are my picks for enjoying the people's food.

Empanadas are a morning food, and the best place to eat them is in **La Merced** market (on Murguía, about 10 blocks east of Alcalá), where you'll find a number of food stalls. Everyone has a favorite (mine comes with *huitlacoche*); try **La Güerita** or **La Florecita**.

The following places open only at night: A little *taquería* called **Tacos Sierra** (on corner of Morelos and Alcalá) is an Oaxacan institution. They make simple tacos with pork filling and a spicy salsa, but I can never order enough. It closes when the pork runs out, usually by 10pm. Don't expect these tacos to come cheap. Another *taquería* is **El Mesón**, which is across from the northeast corner of the *zócalo* at Hidalgo 805. It serves *tacos de la parrilla* (grill) and *cazuela* (clay pot).

For *tlayudas*, seek out **El Chepil**, a hole-in-the-wall on Constitución around the corner from Calzada de la Revolución. They come with a number of toppings, and with *tasajo* (dried beef) or *cecina* (pork rubbed with red chile) on the side. If you don't like lard, tell them that you want yours *sin asiento*. This is also a good place for getting *tostadas*. For **tamales**, find the woman who sets up her little stand on Avenida Hidalgo and 20 de Noviembre, in front of the pharmacy. She often doesn't get there until 7:30pm, but when she does, she quickly draws a crowd that buys tamales to go. They sell six flavors, and my favorite is always the last one I've eaten. Given that you're in Oaxaca, though, you might want to ask for a tamal made with *mole negro*, *mole amarillo*, or *chepil* (an herb).

© 2000-2010 by Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Oaxaca City Snapshot continued

Nightlife Insights

Nightlife

If you are interested in seeing the region's traditional dances, you can check out the small-scale **Guelaguetza** performed by professional dancers at the Hotel Camino Real on Fridays from 7 to 10pm. The cost(360 pesos) includes a buffet. **La Casa de Cantera**, Ortíz Armengol 104, in Colonia Reforma(just off Calzada Porfirio Díaz;(tel. **951/514-7585**; www.casadecantera.com), offers something similar. The cover charge of 185 pesos is for the show only, which runs every night from 8:30 to 10:15pm. Drinks and supper cost extra. Call for reservations.

Concerts and dance programs take place all year at the **Teatro Macedonio de Alcalá**, Independencia and Armenta y López. Schedules are often posted by the front doors of the theater. In the early evening, thezócalo is a happening place, with all sorts of people out and about. The municipal brass band and marimba players perform free concerts on alternating nights. As the night wears on, you'll usually find some mariachis hanging about.

For salsa, go to **La Candela**, Murguía 413(tel. **951/514-2010**), with live music Thursday through Saturday from 10:30pm to 2am. The cover is usually 50 pesos.
© 2000-2010 by Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Things to Do Insights

Attractions

There is so much sightseeing to do inside and outside Oaxaca that you have to be sure to allow for some idle time in thezócalo. In the traffic-free square, you can relax while getting a feel for the town and Oaxacan society. I recommend going in the late afternoon and taking a seat at the outdoor cafe with the best view of the cathedral. You can get a beer or order a bowl of the traditional drink of Oaxaca: chocolate. The afternoon light filters through the shiny green leaves of the laurel trees, heightening the color of the cathedral's green stone. As dusk comes, a small drill corps enters stage left and performs a flag-lowering ceremony

with much pomp and circumstance. Then the marimba or the municipal band usually strikes up in the central bandstand.

Try to get to the **Casa de Cortés**, which houses the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, and the former convent of **Santa Catalina**, home of the Hotel Camino Real.

Other Things to Do

Cooking Classes-- Susana Trilling(tel. **951/518-7726**; www.seasonsofmyheart.com), author of the cookbook *Seasons of My Heart*, operates a cooking school of the same name just outside Oaxaca. In downtown Oaxaca, Sra. Pilar Cabrera, owner of La Olla restaurant, gives cooking classes at Libres 205. She can be reached at tel. **951/516-5704** or atbugambili2@yahoo.com.mx.

Spanish Classes-- Oaxaca has about a half-dozen language schools. With prior notice, most can arrange home stays with a Mexican family for students looking for total immersion. With little notice, most can arrange a week of classes for visitors to brush up their language skills. The **Instituto Cultural Oaxaca**, Av. Juárez 909(Apdo. Postal 340, 68000 Oaxaca, Oax.; tel. **951/515-3404**; www.instculturaloax.com.mx), has the biggest name and the least flexibility. Besides language skill, classes focus on Oaxaca's history and archaeology. The **Instituto de Comunicación y Cultura**, Alcalá 307-312(68000 Oaxaca, Oax.; tel./fax **951/516-3443**; www.iccoax.com), provides group and private instruction, and uses music, art, and handicrafts to get students into the swing of things. Classes are small. **Becari Language School**, M. Bravo 210(68000 Oaxaca, Oax.; tel. **951/514-6076**; www.becari.com.mx), was founded in 1994, and I've heard good things from students-- lots of flexibility and small classes.

Hiking & Biking-- Northwest of the city of Oaxaca is a mountain range known as the Sierra Norte that is cooler and wetter than the valley. The native communities offer guides and simple lodging for active sorts who are interested in seeing yet another side of Mexico. Several ecotourism outfits work with these communities. For

information, ask at the State Tourism Office(tel./fax **951/516-0123**). **Zona Bici**, García Vigil 406(tel. **951/516-0953**; www.oaxacawebs.org/zonabici), does bike tours on back roads for about 400 pesos for a 4-hour tour.

Shopping

Oaxaca and the surrounding villages are wonderful hunting grounds for handcrafted pottery, woodcarvings, and weavings. The hunt itself may be the best part. Specialties include the shiny **black pottery** for which Oaxaca is famous, **woolen textiles** with the deep reds and purples produced using the natural dyecochineal, and highly imaginative **alebrijes(wood carvings)**.

Shops & Galleries-- Most of the shops, galleries, and boutiques are in the area between **Santo Domingo** and thezócalo, comprising the streets of **Alcalá**, **5 de Mayo**, and **García Vigil** and the **cross-streets**. Customary store hours are from 10am to 2pm and 4 to 7pm Monday through Saturday.

Markets-- There are two market areas: one just south of thezócalo, and the newer Abastos Market, about 10 blocks west. Both areas bustle with people and are surrounded by small shops selling anything from hardware to leather goods to fabrics.

A few shops specialize in chocolate(not for eating, but for making hot chocolate) and mole paste. The neighboring state of Tabasco grows most of the cacao beans used for the chocolate. They are ground with almonds and cinnamon and pressed into bars or tablets. To prepare the drink, you dissolve the chocolate in hot milk or water(the more traditional drink) and beat until frothy. Mole paste, which contains chocolate, is used to make the classic Oaxacan dishes mole negro and mole rojo. A good place to hunt for chocolate and mole paste is along Mina Street, on the south side of the 20 de Noviembre Market. Here you'll find **Chocolate Mayordomo** and **Chocolate La Soledad**. Both offer a variety of preparations to fit American and European tastes, but I like the traditional Mexican best.

Oaxaca City Snapshot continued

Note: Markets are generally open daily from 8am to 5pm.

© 2000-2010 by Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Travel Tips

Planning a Trip

Airline service to Oaxaca has improved in the past few years. The same cannot be said of Chiapas, where the most common port of entry for Palenque as well as the highlands is still the airport at Villahermosa, Tabasco. There are fewer flights into Tuxtla Gutiérrez (near San Cristóbal) and none to San Cristóbal.

Most travelers should choose between visiting Oaxaca or Chiapas and not try to do both in the same trip unless they have a lot of time. Both Oaxaca and Chiapas offer so much to do that each place can easily absorb a week or two. If you decide to do both in the same trip, you're in luck-- there are now direct flights between Oaxaca and Tuxtla Gutiérrez, which is close by San Cristóbal. If choosing Oaxaca, keep in mind

that Oaxaca's coastal resorts-- including Puerto Escondido and Puerto Angel-- are not far away.

© 2000-2010 by Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Fun Facts

1. The word Oaxaca come the Nahuatl and means "at the top of the Huaje(Gourd) tree".
2. There are at least 18 indigenous groups in the state of Oaxaca, and all of them retain their own languages.
3. For a while the city was named by the Spaniards Nueva Antequera (New Antequera), so today its nickname is "La Verde Antequera" (The Green Antequera) due to the green stone used in many structures.
4. Tomb Seven at Monte Albán is the earliest-known necropolis in North America.
5. In December, during the Día de los Rabanos (Day of the Radishes), the Governor is the judge of a contest of nativity scenes carved from radishes.
6. Maria Sabina was a contemporary curandera from Oaxaca famous for the

use of hallucinogenic mushrooms. John Lennon, Mick Jagger, Bob Dylan and many more rock stars visited the shaman during the 1960's.

7. Chapulines, a dish of fried grasshoppers, is a delicacy in Oaxaca.
8. The Mezcal, an alcoholic beverage similar to Tequila, is from Oaxaca. In the 1940s it was discovered that a worm enhances the flavor of the Mezcal, and since then, most bottles include a worm.
9. Oaxaca is often called Land of the Seven Moles since each of the state's 7 regions produces a different variation of the mole sauce.
10. Oaxaca is the main producer of chocolate in Mexico, and there are many different ways to prepare it.
11. During the Conquest, Hernán Cortes declared himself Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca so he could claim province over the state's mineral deposits.
12. Oaxaca's primary industry is tourism.

© NileGuide