

THE ARTS

top picks

- Ballet Folclórico de México (p180)
- Sala Carlos Chávez (p179)
- Foro Shakespeare (p182)
- Sala Nezahualcóyotl (p179)
- Palacio de Bellas Artes (p179)

What's your recommendation? www.lonelyplanet.com/mexico-city

THE ARTS

One Sunday morning in May 2007 approximately 18,000 people stripped down for US photographer Spencer Tunick in the *Zócalo*, setting a new record for his famed mass nude photo shoots. Tunick told the local press that attention had turned to Mexico City to appreciate how a country can be free and treat the naked body as art.

Take this wonderful sense of inhibition, combine it with the exuberance and inherent creativity of the people, and it is no wonder that Mexico City has one of the most flourishing contemporary art scenes in Latin America – as witnessed by the sheer number of galleries opening up all the time, particularly in the boho-chic area of Roma.

The city also prides itself on its music, and well it might: its palatial Palacio de Bellas Artes is one of the most important concert halls in this part of the world and emotional and highly theatrical opera has always been close to the Mexican heart. The Palacio is also the official home of the Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra, which occupies a very important place in Mexico's rich musical life. The orchestra has made more than 50 recordings, as well as playing with such legendary soloists and conductors as Plácido Domingo and Leonard Bernstein.

Theater too is increasingly seeking to forge its own voice, with the trend in new writing moving toward the more idiomatic and away from the influence of European and US theatrical models. And, if you are a movie buff, then the sheer number of cinemas here will guarantee that you don't have to suffer one night's deprivation of popcorn-fueled big-screen entertainment.

Information

One of the best sources of 'what's on' information is the Spanish language *Tiempo Libre*, which is published weekly on Thursday and includes events and gallery listings for the week ahead, plus concerts, film and theater events. Other useful guides include the comprehensive monthlies *Donde Ir* and *Chilango*, the latter with a *Time Out*-style supplement. *Primera Fila*, a Friday section of the *Reforma* newspaper, also includes entertainment listings. The Palacio del Bellas Artes publishes *Agenda Arte*, a small comprehensive monthly guide to concerts, theater and dance productions, which you can pick up free at tourist kiosks and performing arts venues.

Tickets & Reservations

TICKETMASTER

☎ 5325-9000; www.ticketmaster.com.mx

Tickets for major venues are available via internet, phone or at any of these outlets.

Auditorio Nacional (Map p78; Paseo de la Reforma 50, Bosque de Chapultepec; ☎ 11am-6pm; 📺 Auditorio)

Liverpool Centro (Map pp48-9; Venustiano Carranza 92, Centro; ☎ 11am-7pm; 📺 Zócalo); Polanco (Map p84; Mariano Escobedo 425, Polanco; ☎ 11am-8pm; 📺 Polanco)

Mixup Centro Histórico (Map pp48-9; Madero 51, Centro; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-8pm Sun; 📺 Zócalo); Calle

16 de Septiembre (Map pp48-9; Calle 16 de Septiembre 14, Centro; 📺 San Juan de Letrán); Zona Rosa (Map pp74-5; Génova 76, Zona Rosa; ☎ 9am-9pm; 📺 Insurgentes)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Mexico City is arguably the best place to enjoy classical music in Mexico, for both the high caliber of the musicians and also the exceptional acoustics and theater spaces of the top venues. Together with the philharmonic and symphony orchestras, there are several smaller ensembles, including the Carlos Chávez Youth Symphony, the New World Orchestra (Orquesta del Nuevo Mundo), the National Polytechnical Symphony and the Bellas Artes Chamber Orchestra (Orquesta de Camara de Bellas Artes). In addition to the following listings, several museums also hold occasional classical concerts, and some of the swankier five-star hotels have a string quartet to accompany cocktail hour.

AUDITORIO BLAS GALINDO Map p95

☎ 1253-9400, ext 1607; Centro Nacional de las Artes, cnr Río Churubusco & Thalpan; tickets M\$40-100; www.ticketmaster.com.mx; 📺 General Anaya This good-size auditorium in the south of the city has a regular program of classical music concerts performed by the Carlos Chávez Symphony Orchestra, and visiting international youth orchestras; check

listings in the local press. The auditorium is also one of the main venues for performances by musicians participating in the *Foro Internacional de Musica Nueva* (International Competition for New Music), an annual event since 1977.

CENTRO CULTURAL OLLIN YOLIZTLI

Map p105

☎ 5606-6089; Periférico Sur 5141, Ciudad Universitaria

Regular year-round free concerts of chamber ensembles and string recitals are held at this Cultural Center's Sala Herminio Novelo, with music students and professionals consistently delivering polished performances. Admission is free and, at the time of writing, the concerts took place weekly at 8pm on Thursday (although confirm, if possible, before setting out). This Cultural Center is one of the most active on the classical music scene, however several other similar centers, as well as museums, in the city present occasional classical music performances; check *Tiempo Libre* or Friday's *La Jornada* for listings. For transport information, see p106.

NATIONAL MUSIC CONSERVATORY

Map p84

☎ 5280-6347; Auditorio Silvestre Revueltas, Av Presidente Masaryk 52, Polanco; 📺 Polanco

The country's most important music conservatory was founded at the beginning of the 20th century and still produces some of the country's top classical musicians, like current golden boy José Antonio Espinal, recognized as one of the most talented young conductors, pianists and musicians in Mexico today. The Conservatory holds regular free concerts, but is not famed for its publicity or advance notice. Keep a close eye on the local press, stop by or telephone the information office.

PALACIO DE BELLAS ARTES

Map p64
☎ 5512-2593; www.bellasartes.gob.mx; Av Hidalgo 1, Centro; tickets M\$100-300; box office ☎ 11am-7pm; 📺 Bellas Artes

The fabulous Art Nouveau extravaganza which is the Palacio de Bellas Artes creates a glittering showcase for classical music concerts. And, encouragingly, if you are a classical music buff, you are not alone; according to Palacio program manager, Claudia González Romero, although clas-

sical music has taken an overall dip in the global hit parade, there is still an enthusiastic audience for the big orchestras here.

The resident orchestra, since 1975, is the Orquesta Filarmónica de la Ciudad de México (Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra) under the artistic direction of Jorge Mester (described by the *Los Angeles Times*' art critic as 'a master ... who finds the depth, complexity and power in the music'). Leading international musicians and conductors also make frequent guest appearances, while chamber groups appear at the Palacio's recital halls. Tickets are usually available on the previous or actual day of the concert at the ticket windows in the lobby, open 11am to 7pm Monday to Saturday, 9am to 7pm Sunday. You can also get them from Ticketmaster.

SALA CARLOS CHÁVEZ

Map p105

☎ 5622-6958; www.musicaunam.net in Spanish; Centro Cultural Universitario, Av Insurgentes Sur 3000, Ciudad Universitaria; tickets M\$50-75; box office ☎ 10am-2pm Tue, to 2pm & 4:30-8:30pm Wed-Sat, to 1:30pm Sun, concert days 4:30-7.45pm Sat, to 6.45pm Sun

Named after the famous 20th-century Mexican composer, this small *sala* with seating for just 165 (and designed so no big hairdos can obstruct the view of the stage), is the ideal intimate space for enjoying chamber music (for which Chávez was particularly famed) and soloists (including classical guitarists). For transport information, see p106.

SALA NEZAHUALCÓYOTL

Map p105

☎ 5622-7125; www.musicaunam.net, in Spanish; Centro Cultural Universitario, Av Insurgentes Sur 3000, Ciudad Universitaria; tickets M\$50-100; box office ☎ 10am-2pm Tue, to 2pm & 4:30-8:30pm Wed-Sat, to 1:30pm Sun

This impressive concert hall with the impossible-to-pronounce name is located at the heart of the University's Cultural Center. The design emulates Amsterdam's late-19th-century Concertgebouw theater, with the seats extending to the sides and rear of the orchestra platform, creating the ultimate surround-sound experience. This is further accentuated by the 'canopy' over the stage. The university has its own UNAM Philharmonic Orchestra, which regularly stages concerts here. The Nezahualcōyotl is also a respected venue for world-renowned

musicians, along with the Palacio. The concert season runs from September to June. For transport information, see p106.

TEATRO DE LA CIUDAD Map pp48–9

☎ 5510-2942; Donceles 36, Centro; tickets M\$50-100; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun; 🚗 Allende
Dating back to 1918, this was the first theater to be built in Mexico City and, after being closed for several years, has been exquisitely restored to its former glory. The elaborate neoclassical facade is a suitable taster of what's to come: a sumptuous Art Nouveau interior reflecting the belle époque style of the period. The 1300-seat theater is the venue for a healthy selection of musical genres, including classical orchestras, recitals and blues (John Lee Hooker Jnr was a recent sold-out star).

DANCE

Mexico City is home to one of the oldest dance companies in the country. Founded in 1952 by Amalia Hernández, now managed by her daughter, the *Ballet Folclórico de México* has developed the choreography for 40 so-called 'ballets' that are based on folk dances from all over the country. Other companies of a similarly high caliber to look out for are the *Compañía Nacional de Danza Folclórica* (formed in 1984 under the direction of Nieves Panigua) and the *Ballet Folklórico Mexicano Fuego* (established in 2005 with members from the former *Ballet Nacional de Aztlan*).

A free and always entertaining spectacle is provided by the Conchero dancers who gather informally every day in the Zócalo to carry out sweaty pre-Hispanic dances – or their interpretation; no one can really verify the authenticity. They are very photogenic though, in their feathered headdresses and *concha* (shell) anklets and bracelets, dancing to the rhythm of big booming drums. The classical flipside has to be the national dance company's performance of Swan Lake, generally performed on islands in the Lago Chapultepec, at 8pm Wednesday to Sunday from late February to early April.

Although contemporary dance and ballet both have sizable followings here, one of the longest established ballet companies, the Ballet Teatro del Espacio, was forced to close in 2007 for lack of funding – for which they vociferously blamed the government in the local press.

As well as the following venues, several of the theaters listed under Classical Music also stage occasional dance productions.

PALACIO DE BELLAS ARTES Map pp48–9

☎ 5512-2593; www.bellasartes.gob.mx; Av Hidalgo 1, Centro; tickets M\$360-600; box office ☎ 11am-7pm; 🚗 Bellas Artes
Performances of the dramatic *Ballet Folklórico de México* are normally at 8:30pm Wednesday and 9:30am and 8:30pm Sunday. Despite the show's popularity, tickets are usually still available on the day at the ticket windows in the lobby, open 11am to 7pm Monday to Saturday, 9am to 7pm Sunday. You can also get them from Ticketmaster (see p178) or in advance from the theater.

SALA MIGUEL COVARRUBIAS Map p105

☎ 5622-6958; www.musicaunam.net, in Spanish; Centro Cultural Universitario, Av Insurgentes Sur 3000, Ciudad Universitaria; tickets M\$50-75; box office ☎ 10am-2pm Tue, to 2pm & 4:30-8:30pm Wed-Sat, to 1:30pm Sun, concert days 4:30-7.45pm Sat, to 6.45pm Sun
This contemporary dance venue programs exceptional and diverse performances. Recent shows include performances by La Rossignol, an Italian company that

top picks
FESTIVALS & FAIRS

- **Festival de Cine Franco-Mexicano** (French-Mexican Film Festival); ☎ Nov; see p183)
- **Festival Cinematográfico de Verano** (Summer Film Festival; www.unam.mx, in Spanish; ☎ Jun-Aug; see p184)
- **Feria de México Arte Contemporáneo** (Contemporary Mexican Art Fair; www.macomexico.com; ☎ Apr; see p185)
- **Festival Internacional de Música y Escena** (International Festival of Music & Scenery; www.musicaunam.net, in Spanish; ☎ Aug; see above)
- **Foro Internacional de Música Nueva** (International Competition for New Music; www.cnca.gob.mx; ☎ May; see p178)
- **Muestra Internacional de Cine** (International Film Festival; www.mexicofilmfestival.com; ☎ Jun; see p183)

delivers an evocative show of Renaissance music and dance. The auditorium also serves as the venue for the *Festival Internacional de Música y Escena* (International Festival of Music and Scenery), an annual event since 1998. For transport information, see p106.

TEATRO DE LA DANZA Map p78

☎ 5280-6228; Centro Cultural del Bosque cnr Paseo de la Reforma & Campo Marte, Bosque de Chapultepec; box office ☎ noon-3pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri & prior to events; 🚗 Auditorio
The Centro Cultural del Bosque complex behind the Auditorio Nacional features six theaters, including the Teatro de la Danza, established in 1969 and dedicated to modern dance. There are just 340 seats in this elegant auditorium, so advance reservations are recommended for the higher-profile performances. As with classical music, Mexico City's cultural centers frequently stage classical and contemporary dance performances. Watch out for announcements in *Tiempo Libre* and Friday's *La Jornada*.

OPERA

The Palacio de Bellas Artes, home of the esteemed Opera Nacional de México is the place to see opera in the city. Maria Callas famously sang in several productions at the Palacio early in her career, and recordings exist of several of her performances here. Plácido Domingo, who lived in Mexico City for much of his early life and apparently considers himself equally Mexican and Spanish, also launched his career here at the premiere of *My Fair Lady* (1961), as well as a subsequent production of *The Merry Widow*, singing either the role of Camille or Danilo. Unfortunately for opera fans, his commitment to the city seems to be more culinary than operatic of late (see p146). Other venues that stage opera include the Teatro de la Ciudad and the Auditorio Blas Galinda (see p178).

THEATER

Although there's no distinct West End-style theater district here, the world of theater is alive and well, with plenty of stages located around the city. The more contemporary avant-garde productions often take place in cultural centers, or on a makeshift stage in a Condesa café (or similar), while the larger

top picks
FOR KIDS

- **Teatro de la Danza** (left) On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, children's plays and puppet shows are staged at the Centro Cultural del Bosque.
- **Cineteca Nacional** (p183) Cartoons are a staple at cinemas around town, including weekend matinees here.
- **Ballet Folclórico de México** (opposite) The costumes, color and spirited music and dance can't fail to delight the kiddies.
- **Teatro Polyforum Siqueiros** (p183) Has a regular program of musicals and shows specifically geared for children.

theaters will pull in the crowds with the more commercial productions and musicals.

Although the theater scene here can be vastly entertaining, a command of Spanish is essential for the more contemporary productions, which often play on subtle nuances relating to the current political and socio-economic climate.

The websites www.mejorteatro.com.mx, www.cenart.gob.mx and www.conaculta.gob.mx (all in Spanish) cover the major theaters. Performances are generally Thursday to Sunday evenings, with weekend matinees.

CASA DE CULTURA JESÚS REYES HEROLES Map p95

☎ 5659-3937; Francisco Sosa 202, Coyoacán; 🚗 Miguel Ángel de Quevedo
This cultural center is set in a gorgeous colonial-style building, with arches, patios and bubbling fountains. The modest theater stages plays (free), as well as small concerts featuring local musicians. There's also an exhibition space; pick up a copy of the monthly *Cartelera Cultural Coyoacanense*, which includes a theater program. The center is located in Santa Catarina's pretty main square, also home to the larger **Teatro Santa Catarina** (☎ 5658-0560; www.teatrounam.mx), a UNAM theater which primarily stages serious drama productions (in Spanish).

CAFÉ 22 Map p88

☎ 5212-1533; Montes de Oca 22, Condesa; tickets M\$100-180; performances ☎ 9pm Mon-Sat; 🚗 Chapultepec

STARS IN YOUR EYES

'The Mexican audience is becoming increasingly sophisticated,' comments Orly Beigel, founder of Orly Beigel Productions, a leading Mexico City music promotion company, which she founded in 1980. 'As well as huge names like Academy Award-winning composer Philip Glass, we have also had seats sell out with famous, but more experimental performance artists, like Laurie Anderson.'

'However, in a city of some 24 million, it's hardly surprising that there is a public for everything. I think one reason for our success is that we carefully target our publicity.'

Other big names in the classical music world who Orly exclusively represents in Mexico include American opera singer Jessye Norman, 'who has a majestic stage presence', Portuguese *fado* and folk group Madredeus, the classical Kronos String Quartet, Israeli clarinetist Giora Feidman and Zubin Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

In January 2006 several of these musicians, plus others of similar international renown, took part in one of the most poignant concerts ever to take place at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. Titled *Never Again, A Concert to Life*, musicians paid tribute to the six million people murdered by the Nazis. As Orly explains: 'My mother was a Holocaust survivor, the purpose of this concert was to raise awareness of violence and intolerance via this thought-provoking and poignant concert.'

Unsurprisingly, the audience's standing ovation was one of the longest and most emotional ever to be witnessed at the Palacio de Bellas Artes.

This chilled-out theater-club in the informal environment of a café stages experimental contemporary productions like *Ni Princesas Ni Eslavas* with a three-woman cast, described as being more daring than *Desperate Housewives*, and more revealing than *Sex & the City*. The cover price includes a beer, or similar.

CENTRO CULTURAL HELÉNICO Map p101

☎ 3640-3139; www.helenico.gob.mx, in Spanish; Av Revolución 1500, Guadalupe Inn; tickets M\$250; box office ☎ noon-2pm & 4-8:30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 4-8:30pm Sat & Sun; 🚏 Metrobus Altavista One of the city's most prominent of the larger theaters, established in the late '80s, with a vigorous program, including the occasional English-language production. The comfortable Helénico performs everything from comic farce to monologues and drama. Productions take place from Fridays to Sundays and tickets can be purchased at the box office, by phone, Internet or Ticketmaster.

FORO SHAKESPEARE Map p78

☎ 5553-4642; www.foroshakespeare.com; Zamora 7, Roma; tickets M\$120-250; box office ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri; 🚏 Chapultepec Originally a bookshop specializing in theatrical tomes, the Foro opened in 1982 as one of the first venues to stage alternative theater productions. Located in the cosmopolitan surroundings of Condesa, this barrio theater continues to produce an eclectic, often edgy, program, including ex-

perimental theater and stand-up comedian shows. The venue includes an exhibition space for local artists and photographers.

TEATRO BLANQUITA Map pp48-9

☎ 5512-8264; Eje Central Lázaro Cardenas, Centro; tickets M\$100-175; 🚏 Chapultepec There is something very traditional about this theater, located a sombrero-spin from the mariachi musicians in Plaza Garibaldi. One of the city's older theaters, it has long been regarded as the best place in town to enjoy musicals and comedy, as well as popular plays, generally geared toward a family night out. The seats are comfortably cushioned and priced.

TEATRO EL GALEÓN Map p78

☎ 5280-6228; Centro Cultural del Bosque, cnr Paseo de la Reforma & Campo Marte, Bosque de Chapultepec; box office ☎ noon-3pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri & prior to performance; 🚏 Auditorio One of several theaters within this vibrant cultural center, the Galeón stages evocative thought-provoking plays by primarily Mexican writers. Most recently, these have included the acclaimed *Rashid 9/11*, written by Jaime Magnus, which obtained first prize in the *Premio Nacional de Dramaturgia Victor Hugo* (a national playwrights' competition) in 2006.

TEATRO JUAN RUIZ ALARCÓN Map p105

☎ 5665-0709; www.teatronamx.com, in Spanish; Centro Cultural Universitario, Av Insurgentes Sur

3000, Ciudad Universitaria; tickets M\$50-100; box office ☎ 10am-2pm Tue, to 2pm & 5-8pm Wed-Fri, to 1:30pm & 4:30-7:45pm Sat, 10:30am-1:30pm & 4:30-6:30pm Sun

This plush 466-seat theater, within the university's Cultural Centre, has a large stage and excellent lighting and acoustics, so is the frequent venue for large-cast musicals and similar, as well as Shakespearean and other classic drama. For transport information, see p106.

TEATRO POLYFORUM SIQUEIROS

Map pp42-3

☎ 5606-8028; www.marioivanmartinez.com, in Spanish; Insurgentes y Filadelfia, Del Valle; tickets M\$250-300; box office ☎ noon-2pm & 4-7:30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm & 4-8:30pm Sat & Sun; 🚏 Metrobus Poliform

A friendly small theater auditorium with wrap-around seats surrounding a central stage. The productions regularly include programs designed for children which, even if Spanish does not trip easily off your tiny tot's tongue, can be colorful and entertaining. Classic comedies are also regularly staged.

FILM

Mexicans love going to the cinema and the city is a world-class banquet for filmgoers. Almost everything is screened here, from corny American blockbusters to obscure foreign-language films. Admission prices are around M\$40, with many places offering discounts on Wednesday and showings before 6pm. Except for children's fare, movies are in original languages with Spanish subtitles. *Reforma* and *La Jornada* have daily listings.

The following multiplexes have mostly Hollywood mainstream films, with the odd Mexican hit.

CINEMARK Map pp74-5

☎ 5432-6789; www.cinemark.com.mx; Paseo de la Reforma 222, Zona Rosa; adult/child M\$33/28; ☎ 12:30am-10:30pm; 🚏 Insurgentes

This Cinemark complex opened in November 2007, as part of the spanning new Plaza Reforma Mall (see p124); the company is massive throughout Mexico with a total of 29 complexes (nine in the city). This one has 11 modern auditoriums, equipped with Dolby sound and THX, comfortable seats and digital image. There is a car park and a kick-back lounge-cafeteria.

CINEMEX PALACIO Map p64

☎ 5512-0348; www.cinemex.com; Iturbide 25, Centro; adult/child M\$44/36; ☎ 11am-11.05pm; 🚏 Juárez

One of over 30 multiplexes in the capital, Cinemex is the largest chain of movie theaters in Mexico City. It was founded back in 1993 by three astute Harvard college students (majoring, naturally, in Business Studies) after regulations were lifted with the new Cinematography Law. Known for their bigger screens, plush carpeting, well-lit interiors and US-style food and drink vendors, back in the mid-'90s this was also the only chain in the world with 100% digital sound. Cinemex is well-represented throughout all districts. To find the most convenient location, check the easy-to-navigate website (in Spanish), scrolling down on the *complejos* (venues) box.

CINÉPOLIS DIANA Map pp74-5

☎ 5511-3236; Paseo de la Reforma 423, Zona Rosa; adult/child M\$38/28; ☎ 11:30am-11.15pm; 🚏 Sevilla

Yet another cinema chain, although Cinépolis has a modest half-dozen complexes. This one has a manageable, six-screen choice with air con, comfortable reclining seats, Dolby sound and a cafeteria. Matinees are shown at weekends. This cinema is also the venue of the *Festival de Cine Franco-Mexicano* held annually during the second week in November.

CINEMEX CASA DE ARTE Map p84

☎ 5280-9156; www.cinemex.com in Spanish; France 120, Polanco; admission M\$40; ☎ 11:30-10:30pm; 🚏 Polanco

This Cinemex Casa de Arte (*House of Art*) screens independent first-run and foreign films in its four-screen complex, which also thoughtfully caters to the hearing-impaired. The venue is also the annual host to the *Muestra Internacional de Cine* (International Film Festival), when a selection of some of the most exceptional foreign films is screened.

CINETECA NACIONAL Map p95

☎ 1253-9390; www.cinetecanacional.net, in Spanish; Av México-Coyoacán 389, Coyoacán; admission M\$35; ☎ 4:30-10pm; 🚏 Coyoacán

Thematically-focused film series are shown on six screens here, with at least one regularly devoted to Mexican cinema. You can

eat, drink and read here as well, as the complex includes cafés and bookstores. Located 700m east of metro Coyoacán, *Tiempo Libre* devotes two weekly pages to the Cineteca's city-wide programs.

FILMOTECA Map p105

☎ 5665-0709; Centro Cultural Universitario, Insurgentes Sur 3000, Ciudad Universitaria; admission M\$25; 🕒 6:30-11:30pm
UNAM's two cinemas screen films from its collection of over 35,000 titles, selected from an archive (founded in 1960) that has played a pivotal role, not only in Mexican but in international film culture. Among its activities, the FilMOTECA actively seeks long-lost films for preservation. It has also played a vanguard role in international film culture, organizing the first Mexican film festival in Paris back in 1963. You can catch the *Festival Cinematográfico de Verano* (Summer Film Festival) between June and August. For transport information, see p106.

LUMIERE REFORMA Map pp74-5

☎ 5514-0000; Río Guadalquivir 104, Zona Rosa; admission M\$45; 🕒 11:30am-12.50pm; 🚶 Sevilla
This theater has four screening rooms with just 50 seats apiece, as well as the technology to show the same film simultaneously in more than one *sala*. Screens quality art-house and foreign releases with a liberal dose of the quirky and unconventional.

EL LUNARIO Map p78

☎ 5280-9250; www.lunario.com.mx; Costado Poniente, Bosque de Chapultepec; admission M\$50; 🕒 6:30-11pm; 🚶 Auditorio
Regular weekly cinema screenings take place every Thursday at this see-and-be-seen fashionable theater, film-house, cabaret and good-time bar (see also p174).

VISUAL ARTS

Contemporary and controversial Turner Prize (UK) winner, Damien Hirst, is just one of many leading international artists who has been enthralled and influenced by the Mexican culture. His US\$100 million diamond-encrusted skull, unveiled in June 2007, was the result of time spent here, and the influence of the elaborately decorated skulls of the extraordinary annual celebration: Día de Muertos.

Mexicans are also justifiably proud of their artistic heritage, as witnessed when you visit

any local gallery or museum and do a nationality head count. The virtual cult status of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera throughout the world has also obviously played its part in raising national awareness of today's Mexican art world.

Roma is gradually evolving as the hip new place for contemporary art galleries in DF, while adjacent Condesa also has a few good galleries. Polanco is predictably more upmarket and conservative, but it has some great exhibition spaces. Be prepared that many galleries have gone the unfriendly, locked-door route and don't even have window displays, which is mildly disquieting if you are a casual art appreciator and would rather look around relatively incognito. But persevere, doors will be opened and gallery owners are generally friendly and informative.

Likewise, art aficionados (especially hungry ones) should keep an eye on the local press for art openings. Members of the public are almost always welcome and, as well as enjoying the occasion, the company and the art, you will in all likelihood be offered some hearty snacks and drinks as well. Pick up the freebie monthly art map and guide (www.arte-mexico.com), available at galleries and museums, with its comprehensive list of exhibition inaugurations.

ART GALLERIES

ARRÓNIZ Map pp74-5

☎ 5311-7965; www.aroniz-arte.com; Plaza Río de Janeiro 53, Roma; 🚶 Insurgentes
Despite its location on an elegant leafy square, this gallery has a raw urban energy, with its Soho-style space and basic concrete floors. This is the only gallery in the country specializing in limited-edition engravings and prints. Artists include the new and the emerging as well as the established. A modest number of paintings and photography is generally on show here, too. Exhibitions change every three months.

CENTRO CULTURA DE CASA LAMM

Map pp74-5

☎ 5525-1322; www.galeriacasalamm.com.mx; Álvaro Obregón 99, Roma; 🚶 Insurgentes
The beautiful art deco building creates a perfect ambience for this private art college, which offers lectures and courses, as well as a video club, café, bookshop, library

and excellent art gallery exhibiting the work of talented contemporary artists such as Cuban Eduardo Roca Salazar (Choco).

CINCO CLÁSICOS Map pp74-5

☎ 5525-4079; Estocolmo 26, Zona Rosa; 🚶 Insurgentes

This small gallery in an exquisitely restored 1930s dollhouse of a building deals with mainly contemporary Latin American and Mexican art. The painters include Francisco Toledo, Sergio Hernandez and Rafael Coronel. The congenial owner, Simón Alkón, speaks excellent English.

CÍRCULO AZUL Map p95

☎ 5659-1881; Fransisco Sosa 363, Coyoacán; 🚶 Viveros

The picturesque courtyard, with its tiles and 16th-century fountain, is a fitting introduction to this fine gallery, with its classic and contemporary artwork and sculpture. There's an original painting signed by Diego Rivera, plus some stunning charcoal and ink drawings by contemporary Mexican artist, Raquel Chávez Lanz.

GALERÍA DE ARTE MEXICANO Map p78

☎ 5272-5529; www.artegam.com; Rebollar 43, Bosque de Chapultepec; 🚶 Constituyentes
The first contemporary art gallery to open in Mexico City (way back in 1935). Since this time, the gallery has held close to 1000 shows, with exhibitions of smock-and-beret masters like Diego Rivera, Miguel Covarrubias, Rufino Tamayo and Frida Kahlo. The gallery continues to promote established and emerging Mexican artists and remains one of the most exciting and extensive in the city.

GALERÍA JUAN MARTÍN Map p84

☎ 5280-0277; Dickens 33, Polanco; 🚶 Polanco
A welcoming two-story gallery with a light, airy feel and an exciting permanent collection of paintings, pottery and photography by Mexican and international artists, as well as regular temporary exhibitions. The variety and combination of styles and themes contributes towards the appeal of the place.

GALLERY 13 Map pp92-3

☎ 5525-6077; Orizaba 92, Roma; 🚶 Insurgentes
This is a young dynamic gallery that typically displays up-and-coming artists and

photographers under the age of 30. The exhibition spaces are spread over two floors with five well-lit galleries. Definitely one to watch.

GARASH Map pp92-3

☎ 5207-9858; Alvaro Obregón 49, Roma; 🚶 Insurgentes

A gregarious toddler on the contemporary art scene, Garash was established in 2003 in this classic early 20th-century building, complete with original columns. Exhibitors are mainly Mexican and Japanese and tend to be in the innovative genre of Hisae Ikenaga, the Madrid-based sculptor famed for transforming mass produced modular furniture into startlingly contemporary sculpted forms (which is what many of us end up doing naturally when trying to assemble an Ikea flat pack!) and who has had a successful solo exhibition here. This is one of the galleries to participate in the annual MACO art fair, established in 2004 and held during the last week of April. This is considered the most important event of its kind in the Latin American contemporary art world. Check the website (www.macomexico.com, in Spanish) for a list of participating galleries in the city.

JARDÍN DEL ARTE Map pp74-5

Juaréz; 🕒 Sun; 🚶 Metrobus Reforma
A small art market, between Sullivan and Villalongín, and also known as the Sullivan Market, has a large selection of paintings and art supplies, plus some food.

LOURDES SOSA Map p84

☎ 5280-6857; www.lourdesosagalera.com; Ibsen 32, Polanco; 🚶 Polanco
A small one-room gallery with regular exhibitions of paintings, sculptures and graphic art by renowned national artists such as Manuel Felguérez, whose massive *Puerta 1808* sculpture (Map p64) graces the intersection between Paseo de la Reforma and Juaréz near the city center.

MUCA Map pp92-3

☎ 5511-0925; Tonalá 51, Roma; 🚶 Insurgentes
This gallery is a branch of the national university's Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Artes (p104). The range of exhibits is impressive, covering both traditional and cutting-edge contemporary Mexican art, like the pop art style installations of Manolo Arriola

for which he projects images on to the wall via a dazzle of neon lights.

GALERÍA NINA MENCAL *Map pp74–5*

☎ 5564-7209; www.ninamenocal.com; Zacatecas 93, Roma; **M** Insurgentes

Established in 1990, this sophisticated Cuban-owned gallery became initially famous for representing legendary Cuban artists like Félix González and still represents several Cuban artists, as well as Mexican and European contemporary artists and sculptors. The gallery's setting is a classic colonial-style '40s building with galleries situated around a central ivy-flanked courtyard.

OMR *Map pp92–3*

☎ 5207-1080; www.galeriaomr.com; Plaza Río de Janeiro 54, Roma; **M** Insurgentes

Housed in a grand Art Nouveau gem of a building with soaring ceilings, OMR adds its own slant to contemporary with a floor

that tilts to one side, the result of settling soil (Roma is built on a dry lake bed). The gallery holds six to eight exhibitions per year and represents a broad spectrum of the most prominent painters, sculptors and photographers on both the Mexican and international art scene, like Mauricio Alejo, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, José Leon Cerrillo and Spanish artist Félix Curto.

PROBERT *Map p101*

☎ 5616-4675; San Jacinto 20, San Angel; **M** Miguel Angel de Quevedo

A quality gallery specializing in contemporary works by Mexican and Latin American artists, plus paintings by several European and American artists now resident in Mexico. The latter include respected Dublin-born artist Phil Kelly, who has lived here since 1989 and paints evocative landscapes. Also here to tempt you is a selection of exquisite and unusual glass and ceramic beaded jewelry.

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

top picks

- Lucha Libre (p192)
- Cycling on Paseo de la Reforma (p188)
- Jogging in Xochimilco (p188)
- Temascal (p189)
- Soccer (p190)
- Charreadas (p193)

The exuberance that Mexicans have for life reaches crescendo pitch when it comes to certain sports. It's no surprise that the so-called Mexican wave originated here; this loony arm-waving custom dates back to the 1986 World Cup finals held in Mexico City. Although originally intended to distract competitors, the wave's ripple effect and the good cheer and congeniality it suggests is the exact opposite to the football thuggery so typical of football matches in northern Europe.

Overall, spectator sports are the big noise here, Mexicans are not as keen on donning the Lycra and sweating their way through a body-pump class as in, say, the US. That said, although crowded central Mexico City is not overly endowed with sports halls, if you feel like working off all those refried beans and tortillas, you don't have to go far to find somewhere to work on your muscle tone.

No sport ignites Mexicans' passions as much as *fútbol*, while rodeos and bullfighting share a vigorous fan base. And, approached with an open mind and a sense of humor, watching a flamboyant and quirky *lucha libre* match could well be the highlight of your trip.

ACTIVITIES

If you are peso poor, but want to exercise those new Nikes, there are several leafy parks with jogging pathways which provide a great escape from the traffic fumes. Use your common sense and only jog during daylight hours. Other available sports include tennis and ice-skating, and adventure sports are on the increase. If you want to fire up your adrenalin on all cylinders, *Tiempo Libre* has a sports page with listings that generally include canoeing, mountain climbing and rafting organizations.

CYCLING

On Sunday mornings Paseo de la Reforma is closed to traffic from Bosque de Chapultepec down to the Alameda Central, and you can join the legions of Chilangos who happily skate or cycle down the avenue each week.

For a more ambitious trek, the urban cycling group *Bicitekas* (Map p88; www.bicitekas.org, in Spanish) organizes rides starting from the Monumento a la Independencia at 9pm every Wednesday. Groups of up to 100 cyclists ride to destinations like Coyoacán and Ciudad Satélite. Participants must be sufficiently robust to handle treks of up to 40km. Helmets and rear lights are required.

For information on renting bicycles and around-town routes, see p246.

ICE SKATING

As part of Mayor Marcelo Ebrard's campaign to bring fun recreational activities to the city's

poorer inhabitants, a huge ice skating rink (reportedly the world's largest) is installed in the Zócalo during the Christmas holiday season, from early December through January. Loans of ice skates are provided free of charge – if you don't mind waiting as much as two hours to get them.

PISTA DE HIELO SAN JERÓNIMO

Map pp42–3

☎ 5683-1929; Av Contreras 300, Colonia San Jerónimo Lídice; admission per hr/day M\$34/48; ☎ 11am–8pm Tue–Sun

Located 2.5km west of the Ciudad Universitaria. To get here hop on a 'Contreras' pesero from Copilco metro station; get off at the Glorieta San Jerónimo intersection on the Periférico ring road. admission includes skate hire

JOGGING

BOSQUE DE TLALPAN

Map p109
Camino a Santa Teresa, Tlalpan; (M) Tasqueña
This beautiful forest contains several jogging and hiking trails, as well as numerous picnic areas where you can kick back with your water bottle and muesli bar. Springtime is stunning with a dazzle of wildflowers. From metro Tasqueña, take the Tren Ligero to the Estadio Azteca station, then catch a Tlalpan pesero, which will drop you at the park.

PISTA DE CUEMANCO

Map pp112–13
Esquina de Periférico Sur y Canal Nacional, Xochimilco; (M) Tasqueña

Following the trail around the Canal Nacional, one of the web of waterways in Xochimilco and a wonderful setting for jogging. From the metro continue on the Tren Ligero to the last stop, from where bicycle taxis will shuttle you to the canals.

VIVEROS DE COYOACÁN

MAP p95
Av Universidad 2100, Coyoacán; (M) Coyoacán
This pretty wooded park has a 2.1km winding *circuito atlético* which is marked every 100m, so you can keep pace with your progress. For strollers, the *sendero didáctico* (educational trail) has Spanish-language signs identifying the surrounding trees.

TENNIS

SHERATON MARÍA ISABEL HOTEL

Map pp74–5

☎ 5242-5555, ext 3934; Paseo de la Reforma 325, Zona Rosa; per person per hr M\$200; ☎ 10am–5pm; (M) Insurgentes

One of the most central venues for tennis enthusiasts. With only two courts available, though, be sure to reserve in advance, via phone or in person, before you swagger on court accompanied by your killer serve.

HEALTH & FITNESS

If you are staying in one of the city's top-end hotels, you will probably have a gym available to indulge in a little weight-training before your double helping of *huevos rancheros*. Some

hotels, especially those with spas, also have day rates available for nonguests. Otherwise there are several city gyms where you can use the equipment and take classes inexpensively.

GYMS

EQUILIBRIUM

Map pp74–5
☎ 5207-5045; Río Papaloapan 3, Juaréz; classes M\$45; ☎ 7am–10pm; (M) Insurgentes

A modest gym with friendly staff and a small weight room with good equipment, this place offer lots of regular classes, including spinning, Pilates, yoga and Latin rhythm. It lacks a website so you will have to make a trip here to find out the current schedule.

CENTRO CABA

Map pp92–3
☎ 5574-1976; Álvaro Obregón 160, Roma; per day M\$45; ☎ 7am–10pm Mon–Fri, 8am–10pm Sat, 9am–4pm Sun; (M) Insurgentes

This sweaty gym has been a hit with pumping bodies for a decade. Classes, including Pilates, rumba Cubana and kickboxing, are (amazingly) included in the day-pass price, as are use of the small (but efficient) weight room and sauna.

CENTRO QI

Map p88
☎ 5584-4880; www.qi.com.mx, in Spanish; Amsterdam 317, Roma; per day M\$185; ☎ 6am–11pm Mon–Thu, 8am–6pm Sat, 9am–4pm Sun; (M) Insurgentes

Centro QI is an exclusive gym and spa located in Roma. It is considered one of

SPA TIME OUT

The antithesis of the chaos and noise of Mexico City street life, there are several spas here where you can luxuriate in self-pampering bliss.

- **aWay Mexico City** (Map p84; ☎ 5255-9138; www.whotels.com; W Mexico City Hotel, Campos Eliseos 252, Polanco; per day M\$500; ☎ 6:30am–10:30pm; (M) Auditorium) The only place in town where you can enjoy a renewing session in a *temascal* (traditional adobe sweat lodge). This classy marbled space includes a gym, jet pools, steam rooms, and sun beds on the rooftop terrace from where you can enjoy sweeping city views. There's also a small bar for invigorating fruit juices and Vogue magazine for inspiration.
- **Spa Gran Meliá** (Map p64; ☎ 5128-1212; www.solmelia.com; Hotel Gran Meliá Mexico Reforma, Paseo de la Reforma 1, Juaréz; per day M\$250; ☎ 6am–8pm; (M) Hidalgo) Well-priced for the facilities which include a superb gym with round-the-clock trainer, three Jacuzzi spas with skylights, a small indoor pool, a sauna and a steam room. Therapies and treatments on offer include shiatsu, volcanic mud, lip wrap, body scrub and the enticing-sounding body wine massage (Chardonnay apparently, such a waste...).
- **Spa Marquis** (Map pp74–5; ☎ 5229-1200; www.marquisreforma.com; Hotel Marquis Reforma, Paseo de la Reforma 465, Zona Rosa; per day M\$310; ☎ 7am–9pm; (M) Chapultepec) The day fee covers use of the separate-sex Jacuzzi, sauna and steam room and mixed gym and pool. There are sitting areas with magazines, complimentary juices and coffee and domed skylights. Massages cost an average of M\$90 for 50 minutes and additional treatments, including mud therapy and various facials, are available.

BUILDING SANDCASTLES IN THE CITY

The city's mayor, Marcelo Ebrard, apparently inspired by the artificial beaches in European capitals like Paris and Budapest, has created four urban beaches in the city, using 130 tons of sand brought from Boca del Río in Veracruz. To add to the holiday-by-the-sea feel, each beach has ice-cream vendors and live music at weekends.

There has been predictable controversy surrounding the urban beaches with the criticism almost exclusively coming from wealthier locals, who typically trip off to Acapulco for their hols and see the sand-in-the-city idea as an unnecessary waste of public funds and a bit of an eyesore.

Not so all the thousands too poor to vacation anywhere, many of whom have never seen a beach. Now they can have a quasi-family holiday every weekend: build sandcastles, play volleyball and enjoy a picnic with sand in between their tacos and toes.

The beaches are located in far-flung parts of the city: the park built for the 1968 Summer Olympics, the northeastern Gustavo A Madero district, the eastern district of Iztacalco and Azcapotzalco, in the far north.

'I don't know why this is annoying people so much,' Ebrard told the local press. 'It doesn't cost the government much work to adapt spaces so people can have a good time with their families. To those who don't want to use the beaches, it seems a bad idea. But to most people, it's great...'

the best health clubs in the city for both its stylish design and the diversity of its services. Facilities include a climbing wall, massage rooms, tanning beds and every class you could possibly think of like Pilates, spinning, body combat, body pump, belly dancing, yoga, chi kung and (if it all sounds too much) meditation.

SPECTATOR SPORTS

Events such as soccer games, bullfights and wrestling can be fascinating: even if the action doesn't especially interest you, the crowd probably will. Most of the daily newspapers will have a generous sports section, where you can find out who is kicking which ball where (and similar). True enthusiasts should look for *La Afición* (www.laaficion.com), a Spanish-language daily devoted to sports.

SOCCER (FOOTBALL)

Soccer (or *fútbol* as it is known here) is the national sport, followed fanatically by millions of Mexicans. Even if you are only mildly interested in the game, attending a *partido* can be very entertaining. In general, games are an appealingly relaxed affair, with rival fans sitting close to each other exchanging good-hearted competitive banter that rarely resorts to violence – aside from the occasional good-humored soft whack in the face by a toilet roll (or similar) on its missile route to the pitch. Face painting contributes to the good time atmosphere, together with the steady supply of drinks and food that are sold directly to spectators at their seats.

The capital stages two or three soccer matches almost every weekend in the national Primera División. Mexico City's four teams are: América nicknamed Las Águilas (the Eagles), and the most popular in the country; Las Pumas, of UNAM, which come second in popularity; followed by Cruz Azul (known as Los Cementeros); and lastly, Atlante (Los Potros).

The soccer calendar is divided into a *torneo de invierno* (winter season, August to December) and a *torneo de verano* (summer season, January to May), each ending in eight-team playoffs (*liguillas*) and eventually a two-leg final to decide the champion. Games follow a baffling system which involves a certain amount of unpredictability. For example, it is feasible that a team can come top in the league and be subsequently relegated to a lower position as the latter placement is decided by the overall previous season's results.

The biggest match of all is El Clásico, between América and Guadalajara, which typically fills the Estadio Azteca with 100,000 flag-waving fans. This is about the only game of the year when you should get tickets in advance. Crowds at other games range from a few thousand to around 70,000.

Tickets (M\$80 to M\$450 for regular season games) are usually available at the gate right up to game time, or can be purchased from Ticketmaster (see p178). There are several stadiums that host games. The newspapers *La Afición* and *Esto* have the best soccer coverage and there are plenty of websites related to Mexican soccer, including the comprehensive www.futmex.com and www.femexfut.org.mx.

ESTADIO AZTECA Map pp42–3

☎ 5617-8080; www.esmas.com/estadioazteca, in Spanish; Calz de Tlalpan 3665, Tlalpan
The country's largest stadium (capacity 114,000) is home to both the América and Atlante clubs. Presided over by an enormous sculpture by the late American artist, Alexander Calder, games are played on weekend afternoons; check the website for kickoff times. Take the Tren Ligerero from metro Tasqueña to Estadio Azteca station.

ESTADIO AZUL Map pp42–3

☎ 5563-9040; www.cruz-azul.com.mx, in Spanish; Indiana 260, Colonia Nápoles; 🚏 Metrobus Ciudad de los Deportes
The stadium is next door to the Plaza México bullring. Cruz Azul home games kick off at 5pm on Saturday.

ESTADIO OLÍMPICO Map pp42–3

☎ 5522-0491; www.pumasunam.com.mx, in Spanish; Insurgentes Sur 3000, Ciudad Universitaria
This is the home of the UNAM Pumas. Games start at noon on Sunday and are always well attended and entertaining; the exuberant university fan clubs are well known for their raucous chants. See p106 for directions.

LA CORRIDA

This most machismo of spectator sports is one of the world's most controversial: to *aficionados* the pitting of man against bull is nothing less than an art form, while critics see it more as a one-sided ghoulish exhibition of torture and slaughter.

Although Spain is its true home, *la corrida de toros* is also quintessentially Mexican – it's said that this is the only event locals ever arrive on time for (aside from weddings and funerals).

The *corrida* starts promptly generally in the afternoon on a Sunday. To the sound of, typically, a Spanish *paso doble*, the matador, in his twinkling *traje de luces* (suit of lights), and his *toreros* (assistants) give the traditional *paseillo* (salute) to the fight authorities and the crowd. Then the first of the day's six bulls is released from its pen for the first of the three *suertes* (acts).

The cape-waving *toreros* first attempt to lure out the bull by luring him around the ring. Next, two *picadores*, on heavily padded horses, enter and jab long lances into the bull's shoulders to weaken him. This is a time you may want to look away, as it can be pretty gruesome.

Next, the band pipes up again, the *picadores* leave the ring, and the *suerte de banderillas* begins, as the *toreros* attempt to stab three pairs of elongated darts into the bull's shoulders without getting impaled on his horns. After the band signals the end of this second *suerte*, the final *suerte de muleta* is the climax in which the matador has exactly 16 minutes to kill the bull. Starting with fancy cape work to tire the animal, the matador then exchanges his large cape for the smaller *muleta* and takes sword in hand, baiting the bull to charge before delivering the fatal lunge with his sword. If the matador succeeds, and he usually does – if not always on the first attempt – the bull collapses and an assistant dashes into the ring to sever its jugular. If the applause from the crowd warrants, he will also cut off an ear or two and sometimes the tail for the matador. The dead bull is dragged from the ring to be butchered for sale.

A 'good' bullfight depends not only on the skill and courage of the matador but also the spirit of the bulls. Animals lacking heart for the fight bring shame on the ranch that bred them. Very occasionally, a bull that has fought outstandingly is spared – an occasion for great celebration – and allowed to return to its stud farm to live out its life in peace.

BULLFIGHTING

The most important bullring in the city is the aptly named Monumental Plaza, one of the world's largest bullrings, where the main season runs from October or November to March.

If you're not put off by its very concept, a *corrida de toros* (bullfight) is quite a spectacle, from the milling throngs and hawkers outside the arena to the pageantry and drama in the ring itself and the crowd response it provokes. Six bulls are usually fought in an afternoon, two each by three matadors.

From October or November to March or April, professional fights are held at the Monumental most Sundays, starting at 4pm. There are sometimes extra *corridas* – often with star Mexican and visiting Spanish matadors. The veteran Eloy Cavasos, from Monterrey, is often acclaimed as Mexico's best matador. Ignacio Garibay, José Luis Angelino and José María Luevano are younger stars. From June to October, junior matadors fight young bulls. Some are as young as 10 (the age minimum in Spain is 16). The youngest matador on record is Rafita Mirabal who, in 2005, at only eight years old was facing lethal young bulls in the ring. This fad for child *toreros* continues to be attacked by child protection groups, antibullfighting organizations and doctors. However

the temptation is there, especially for poorer families seduced by the idea of obtaining fame and wealth, with little apparent thought of the inherent danger involved.

MONUMENTAL PLAZA MÉXICO

Map pp42–3

☎ 5563-3961; Rodin 241, Colonia Nápoles; 📍 Ciudad de los Deportes

This deep concrete bowl can hold 48,000 spectators. The *taquillas* (ticket windows) by the bullring's main entrance have printed lists of ticket prices. As a rule, the more expensive seats are in the *sombra* (shade), the cheaper are in the *sol* (sun). The cheapest seats of all are in the Sol General section – the top tiers of seating on the sunny side of the arena. Seats in the Sombra General – the top tiers on the shady side – cost slightly more. The best seats are in the Barreras, the seven rows nearest the arena which normally cost around M\$175 to M\$300.

Except for the biggest *corridos*, tickets are available right up to the time the third bull is killed, though the best seats may sell out

early. You can buy advance tickets Thursday to Saturday from 9:30am to 1pm and 3:30pm to 7pm, and Sunday from 9:30am onward. Most major hotels and many travel agencies sell tickets at a markup.

BASEBALL

Mexico City has one team in the Liga Mexicana de Béisbol, the Diablos Rojos (www.diablos.com.mx), since their former second team, the Tigres, moved to nearby Puebla due to poor attendance. During the regular season (March to July), the Diablos play every other week with Sunday games played at noon. The playoffs take place in August. The league's website is www.lmb.com.mx.

FORO SOL Map pp42–3

☎ 5639-8722; cnr Av Río Churubusco & Viaducto Río de la Piedad; tickets M\$25-90

This stadium seats 26,000 spectators and is located to the east of the city. Games usually start at 6:30pm. Ticketmaster sells tickets and the Afición sports paper details

© Lonely Planet Publications

upcoming games. From the Ciudad Deportiva station, on metro Línea 9, it's a five-minute walk to the ballpark.

CHARREADAS

Much like their American counterpart *charreadas* (rodeos) are thrilling to watch and demonstrate superb ranching and equestrian skills. Check the website of the Asociación Nacional de la Charrería (www.nacionaldecharros.com in Spanish) for an up-to-date schedule. The main difference between a *charreada* and a US rodeo is that the Mexican riders compete in teams of up to eight people who ride in unison, as well as separately. Live mariachi music adds to the good-time atmosphere.

RANCHO DEL CHARRO Map pp42–3

☎ 5277-8706; Av Constituyentes 500, Bosque de Chapultepec; tickets M\$25-90; 📍 Constituyentes This permanent covered arena is located between the Panteón Civil de Dolores and the 3ª Sección of the Bosque de Chapultepec. The main charreada season is from mid-May to early June.

BOXING

Mexico has produced many world boxing champs and a big fight here is a major event, widely televised. The venues are the same as those used for *lucha Libre* (see [opposite](#)). For a schedule of matches, check the *La Afición* daily sports' newspaper.

LUCHA LIBRE

Violence, torture and extreme cruelty are on display in Mexico's capital three nights a week. *Lucha libre*, the Mexican version of pro wrestling, serves up this antisocial behavior as popular entertainment. Laden with myth, charged with aggression and chock-full of hilarious theatrics, it can be an amusing spectacle.

Mexico City's two wrestling venues, the 17,000-seat **Arena de México** (Map p64; ☎ 5588-0266; www.arenamexico.com.mx, in Spanish; Dr Lavista 197, Colonia Doctores; 🕒 8:30pm Fri; tickets M\$45-200; 📍 Balderas or Cuauhtémoc) and the smaller **Arena Coliseo** (Map pp48–9; República de Perú 77; 🕒 7:30pm Tue, 5pm Sun; 📍 Allende) are taken over by a circus atmosphere each week, with roving vendors selling beer, sandwiches and wrestlers' masks. There are three or four bouts, building up to the most formidable match-ups. Sporting day-glo tights, flaming masks and rippling biceps and taking names like Tarzan Boy, Violencia, Virus, Satánico and Super Crazy, the flamboyant *luchadores* play up their superhero and super villain personae. After being ushered in by bikini-clad babes, the stars go at each other in teams or one-on-one. Though more a display of acrobatics and theatrical histrionics than an actual competition, their antics can be pretty impressive and not without bodily risk. Wrestlers catapult off the rope and launch into somersaults en route to pouncing their opponent, and it's not unusual to see a pair of combatants, locked in mortal embrace, go hurtling into the crowd. The predominantly working-class fans are happy to suspend their disbelief and enter the fray, with grandma shaking her fist and shouting, 'Kill him!'

Perhaps the sense of catharsis comes from witnessing an acting out of the unresolved struggle Mexicans observe on a daily basis in the political and social arenas – with the good guys winning for a change. *Lucha libre* (literally, 'free fight') means anything goes, and referees seem more like props than arbiters. The scenario invariably pits *técnicos* ('craftsmen') against *rudos* ('rulebreakers') in a mythic face-off between good and evil. The *rudos* usually wear black and engage in dirty tactics, not hesitating to grab a nearby piece of furniture to pummel an opponent. They usually get the upper hand early on, only to be pounded mercilessly by the *técnicos* in a stunning reversal toward the end of the match.

For seven decades, the Consejo Mundial de Lucha Libre has provided a forum for *lucha libre*'s popular heroes, who generally come from the city's rougher barrios. As with any sport, certain figures have loomed large. Undoubtedly the most charismatic figure was Santo, who hid his real identity behind a silver mask until his death in 1984. Santo consolidated his presence in popular culture by crossing over into cinema during Mexico's golden age of B movies, battling zombies and martians on the screen. Another *lucha libre* star, Super Barrio, went into politics, becoming a standard bearer for the leftist PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution).

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'