

## DAY TRIPS & EXCURSIONS

What's your recommendation? [www.lonelyplanet.com/mexico-city](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/mexico-city)

# DAY TRIPS & EXCURSIONS

Vast as Mexico City may appear, getting beyond the sprawl is not as daunting a prospect as you might expect. Indeed, hordes of Chilangos escape the smog every weekend for such nearby destinations as Cuernavaca, Tlaxcala and Malinalco. The capital is linked to the 'interior' (as urban-centric inhabitants refer to any part of Mexico outside the DF) by a network of high-speed toll roads, and frequent bus connections make the whole region easily accessible.

The capital's environs offer much to explore. Almost every visitor makes it out to the awesome pyramids of Teotihuacán but many other nearby places offer copious rewards often overlooked by travelers eager to get to the coast. Venturing outside the capital gives you the chance to get into a Mexico far removed from the DF's asphalt ambience. So-called '*pueblos mágicos*' like Puebla and

Taxco boast plenty of colonial splendor, with well-preserved historic centers and a wealth of sacred art, not to mention unique culinary traditions. Pyramids and other majestic remnants of pre-Conquest civilizations dot the region, while indigenous traditions live on in festivals and rituals. And if it's wilderness that pulls you, other-worldly landscapes await around and upon the peaks of nearby mountain ranges. Often overrun with refugees from the capital on weekends, most of these places go practically unvisited Monday to Friday.

While day trips are feasible to such nearby destinations as Teotihuacán and Tepotzotlán, those going farther afield to, say, Taxco or Puebla, should consider staying at least one night to get a real feel for those towns. There are plenty of accommodations and outside of special occasions there's rarely a need to book ahead.

## DETOUR: SIERRA DE AJUSCO

The highest point in Mexico City, the extinct Volcán Ajusco (3937m), is part of the Sierra de Ajusco-Chichinautzin, a volcanic range that traverses the city's southern edge. The volcano stands southwest of the capital within the 9.2 sq km Parque Nacional Cumbres de Ajusco, a theoretically protected zone that contains most of the Federal District's forests. Glorious views of the Valle de México and further east to the peaks of Popo and Iztac are glimpsed from its piney slopes. White-tailed deer, gray fox and the endemic *teporingo* rabbit roam the premises.

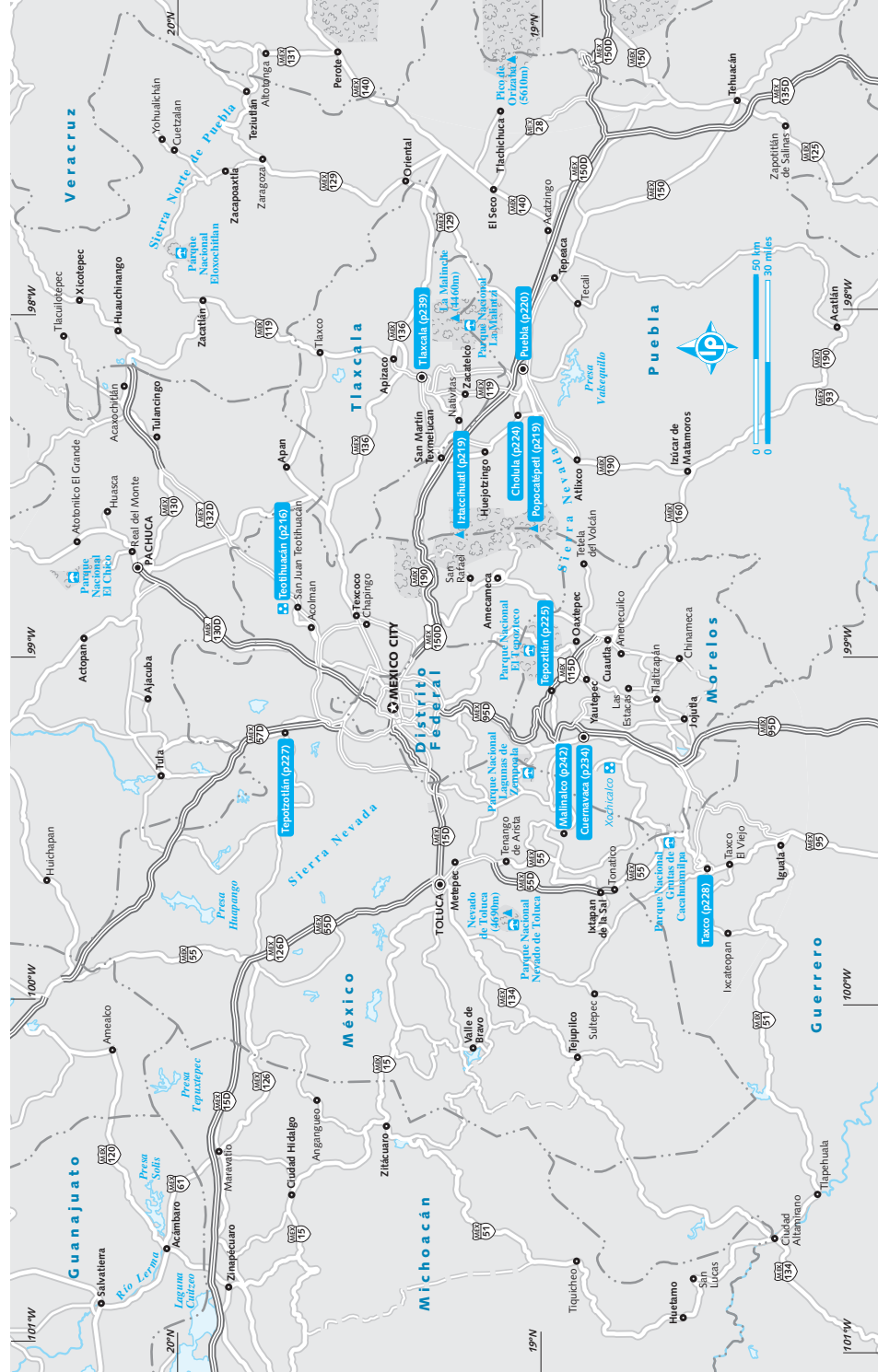
A fine access to the mountain is the **Parque Ejidal San Nicolás Totolapan** (☎ 5644-1280; Km 11.5 Carretera Picacho Ajusco; admission on foot/with bike; M\$10/20 ☞ 8am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 7am-5pm Sat & Sun), a forested area of 23 sq km between altitudes of 2700m and 3740m. Crisscrossed by more than 50km of trails carpeted with pine needles, the park is popular with local mountain-bikers and hikers. The *ejidatarios* (communal landowners) set up the *parque ejidal* in the late 1990s chiefly to derive some benefit from their land's popularity. Though not an untouched wilderness, it is well-maintained and staff point out that it's safe, meaning that guards keep an eye on activities within. Outside the park's boundaries, they warn, it is not uncommon for hikers to be attacked by bandits.

Mountain bikes are rented by the entrance (M\$50 per hour). Around 200m inside, there's a kitchen shack preparing excellent wild mushroom soup, quesadillas and café de olla. At the *granja de truchas* (trout hatchery), you can rent a fishing pole (M\$20), and they'll prepare your catch to eat at a terrace by a mountain stream.

The trails are not clearly signed, but with the aid of the rough map provided by the ticket office, you should be able to keep your bearings. If you head southwest and generally upward for 4km, you should come out at a line of *comedores* on the Circuito de Ajusco road, to the south of which rises the volcano.

The park rents four 'chalets' of varying size (M\$120 per person), 600m uphill from the entrance, with bunks and mattresses (bring your own sleeping bag), kitchen with hot water and a fireplace. There's also a camping area with tents for rent (M\$150 for four persons).

To reach the *parque ejidal*, take metro Línea 2 to its southern terminal at Tasqueña, then continue south on the Tren Ligero to the Estadio Azteca station. Leave the station via the 'Paradero Autobus' exit. Look for a Ruta 39 bus marked 'Six Flags-Santo Tomás-Ajusco', at the fourth platform. The bus arrives at the park in a little under an hour (M\$4). The driver may not know it by name; ask for Las Llantas ('lahs yahn-tahs,' the Tires), a name that refers to lines of tires set in the ground at the *parque ejidal*'s entrance to mark out a biking or riding track. The entrance is also marked by a parking lot and a 'Bienvenido! Parque Ejidal San Nicolás Totolapan' sign.



## PRE-HISPANIC LEGACY

A cultural and economic crossroads long before the Spanish arrived, the region around present-day Mexico City played host to a succession of important indigenous civilizations. By the late 15th century, the Aztecs had managed to dominate all but one of central Mexico's states.

Many archaeological sites and museums preserve remnants of pre-Hispanic history. Most amazing of all are the Pyramids of the Sun and Moon at Teotihuacán, a major city that flourished northeast of the Valle de México 20 centuries ago. Murals and stone carvings at the site's various palaces and temples attest to the civilization's stunning artistic legacy. An equally formidable though largely unrecovered pyramid stands at Cholula, a lively university town near Puebla. Smaller temples of Aztec origin hold lofty perches above the mystically charged villages of Tepoztlán and Malinalco, south and southwest of Mexico City. The latter features an excellent archaeology museum. Another major collection of indigenous art held by Puebla's Museo Amparo (p220) covers the entire mesoamerican panorama prior to the Spanish conquest.

## COLONIAL ART & ARCHITECTURE

Post-conquest, the Spanish transformed central Mexico, establishing ceramic industries at Puebla, mines at Taxco, and wheat, sugar, *pulque* and cattle-producing haciendas. The Catholic church used the region as a base for its missionary activities, leaving a series of imposing churches and fortified monasteries. Today, most towns retain a central plaza surrounded by colonial buildings.

The entire central region is dotted with superb leftovers from the colonial period. Perhaps the most impressive showpiece is the colonial center of Puebla, southeast of Mexico City, where the facades of palaces and churches display the region's trademark tilework. Similarly tiled church domes spring up like painted mushrooms between the buildings of nearby Cholula and Tlaxcala. The legacy of successive silver rushes, the town of Taxco presents an amazing agglomeration of scrupulously preserved colonial structures that seem to spill down a steep hillside. Located three hours south of the capital, it remains a major tourist destination, both for its impressive setting and contemporary silverwork. Fortress-like former

monasteries at Tepoztlán and Malinalco retain harmonic cloisters with fantastically painted designs on their walls and ceilings. Outstanding museums in Puebla and Tepoztlán, the latter just north of Mexico City, house treasure troves of religious painting and polychrome statuary from the Spanish viceroyalty.

## HIKING

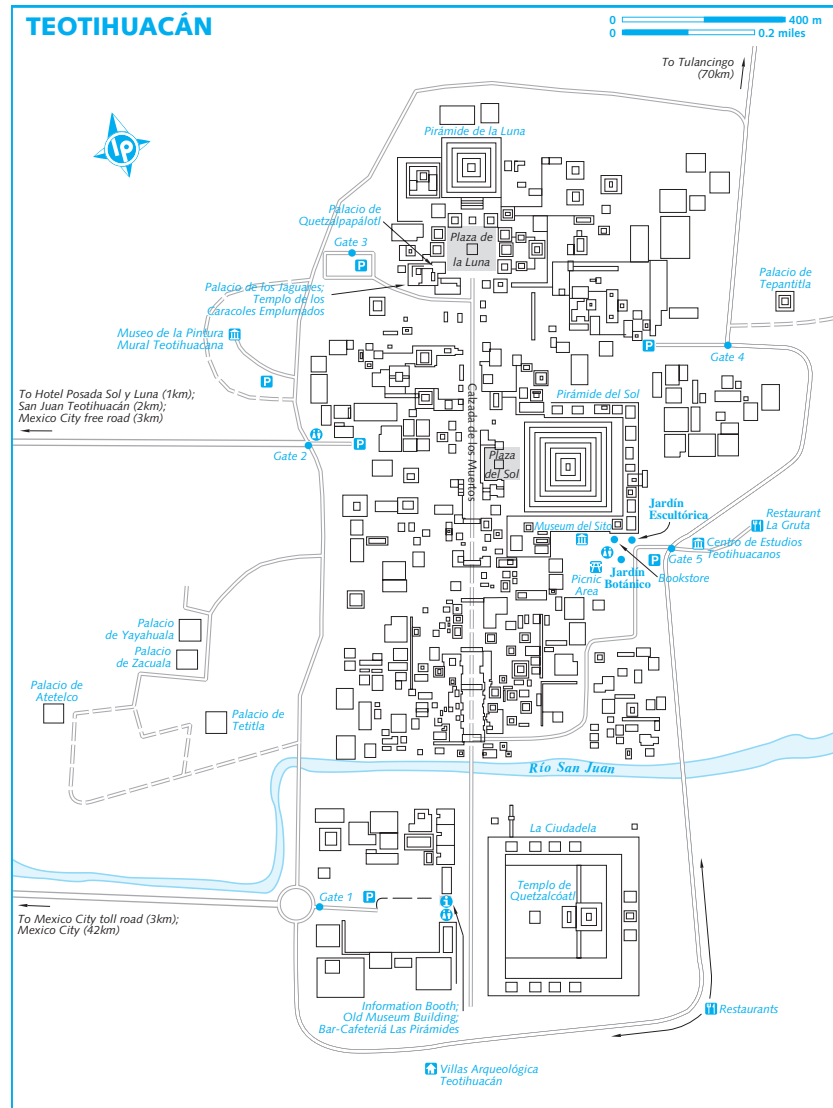
The mountainous terrain that rings the capital makes for some splendid hiking and climbing opportunities. Whether looking to scale some jagged peaks or just walk in the woods, fresh-air fiends won't have to venture far to reach some pristine settings. The area around and between Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl, the prominent volcano pair rising east of the metropolis, is a favored destination for outdoors enthusiasts. Popo's intermittent activity limits exploration to the lower slopes, but skilled mountaineers can take a stab at Izta's summit. Near the Volcán de Ajusco, southwest of town, is an eco-reserve with miles of trails threading through that extinct volcano's piney slopes. Malinalco and Tepoztlán, atmospheric villages set amidst the spire-like hills south of the city, offer less demanding but serene nature walks to hilltop Aztec temples.

## TEOTIHUACÁN

Set in a mountain-ringed offshoot of the Valle de México, Teotihuacán is justly known for its two awesome pyramids, Pirámide del Sol and Pirámide de la Luna, which dominate the remains of the ancient metropolis. Teotihuacán (teh-oh-tee-wah-kahn) was the capital of what was probably Mexico's largest pre-Hispanic empire, and compares in significance to the Maya cities of Yucatán and Chiapas.

The city's grid plan was platted in the early part of the 1st century AD, and the Pirámide del Sol was completed – over an earlier cave shrine – by AD 150. The rest of the city was developed between about AD 250 and 600. Social, environmental and economic factors hastened its decline and eventual collapse in the 8th century AD.

The major structures are typified by a *talud-tablero* style, in which the rising portions of stepped, pyramid-like buildings consist of both sloping (*talud*) and upright (*tablero*) sections. They were often covered in lime and colorfully painted. Most of the city was made up of residential compounds, some of which contained elegant frescoes.



Much of what there is to see lies along the Calzada de los Muertos. Buses arrive at a traffic circle by the southwest entrance (Gate 1), which puts you at the bottom of the Calzada de los Muertos (Avenue of the Dead) by La Ciudadela, a square complex believed to have been the residence of the city's supreme ruler. Within its four wide walls is a pyramid called the Templo de Quetzalcóatl, with striking carvings of the sharp-fanged feathered serpent deity.

Continuing north along Calzada de los Muertos across the river toward the pyramids, a path to the right leads to the **site museum** (☎ 958-20-81; admission free with site ticket; ⏰ 7am-6pm), with excellent displays of artifacts, fresco panels, and an impressive large-scale model of the city set under a transparent walkway.

The world's third-largest pyramid, the **Pirámide del Sol** overshadows the east side of Calzada de los Muertos. The base is 222m long

on each side, and it's now just over 70m high. The pyramid was cobbled together around AD 100, from three million tons of stone, without the use of metal tools, pack animals or the wheel.

The Aztec belief that the structure was dedicated to the sun god was validated in 1971, when archaeologists uncovered a 100m-long underground tunnel leading from the pyramid's west flank to a cave directly beneath its center, where they found religious artifacts. It's thought that the sun was worshiped here before the pyramid was built and that the city's ancient inhabitants traced the very origins of life to this grotto. Centuries after its fall, Teotihuacán remains an important pilgrimage site: thousands of New Age devotees flock here each year to celebrate the vernal equinox (March 21) and soak up the mystical energies believed to converge here.

Teotihuacán's most famous fresco, the worn *Paradise of Tláloc*, is in the **Palacio de Tepantitla**, a priest's residence 500m northeast of Pirámide del Sol.

The **Pirámide de la Luna**, at the north end of Calzada de los Muertos, is smaller than the Pirámide del Sol but more gracefully proportioned. Completed around AD 300, it's summit is nearly the same height because it's built on higher ground. The Plaza de la Luna, located just in front of the pyramid, is a handsome arrangement of 12 temple platforms. The altar in the plaza's center is thought to have played host to religious dancing.

Off the Plaza de la Luna's southwest corner is the **Palacio de Quetzalpapálotl** (Palace of the Quetzal Butterfly), reckoned to be the home of a high priest. A flight of steps leads up to a roofed portico with an abstract mural, and nearby a well-restored patio has columns carved with images of the quetzal bird or a hybrid quetzal butterfly.

## TRANSPORTATION: TEOTIHUACÁN

- Distance from Mexico City – 50km
- Travel time – one hour
- Direction – northeast
- Bus – Autobuses México-San Juan Teotihuacán runs buses from Mexico City's Terminal Norte to the ruins every 15 minutes from 7am to 6pm. (Make sure your bus is headed for 'Los Pirámides,' not the nearby town of San Juan Teotihuacán.) Buses arrive and depart from near Gate 1, by the southwest entrance to the site.

The **Palacio de los Jaguares** (Jaguar Palace) and **Templo de los Caracoles Emplumados** (Temple of the Plumed Conch Shells) are behind and below the Palacio de Quetzalpapálotl. On the lower walls of several of the chambers off the patio of the Jaguar Palace, are parts of murals showing the jaguar god in feathered headdresses, blowing conch shells and apparently praying to the rain god Tláloc.

Another group of palaces lies west of the site's main area, several hundred meters northwest of Gate 1. Many of the murals, discovered in the 1940s, are well-preserved or restored, and perfectly intelligible. Inside the sprawling **Palacio de Tetitla**, no fewer than 120 walls are graced by murals, with Tláloc, jaguars, serpents and eagles among the easiest figures to make out. Some 400m west is the **Palacio de Atetelco**, whose vivid jaguar or coyote murals – a mixture of originals and restorations – are in the Patio Blanco (White Patio) in the northwest corner.

## Information

There's an **information booth** (☎ 594-956-02-76; ☎ 9am-4pm) near the southwest entrance (Gate 1). Free site tours by authorized guides (in Spanish only) may be available here if a sizeable group forms.

Crowds at the **ruins** (admission M\$45; ☎ 7am-6pm) are thickest from 10am to 2pm, and it is busiest on Sunday and holidays. Due to the heat and altitude, it's best to take it easy while exploring the expansive ruins. Bring a hat and water – most visitors walk several kilometers, and the midday sun can be intense. Afternoon rain showers are common from June to September.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Posada Sol y Luna** (☎ 594-956-23-68/71; www.posadasolyluna.com, in Spanish; Cantú 13, San Juan Teotihuacán; r/ste from M\$330/450; Ⓟ) This well-run place has 16 fine (if unexciting and rather sterile) rooms, all with TV and ensuite bathroom. Junior suites have rather ancient Jazzz in them – not worth paying extra for unless you have rheumatism. It's at the east end of town, en route to the pyramids and this is also a good place to get breakfast (from M\$60) for guests and nonguests alike.

**Villas Arqueológica Teotihuacán** (☎ 55-5836-9020; www.teotihuacaninfo.com; M\$875/1000 Sun-Thu/Fri & Sat; Ⓟ) By far the best option in the area is this Club Med-run complex just outside the site grounds. While it's not cheap, the place has plenty of charm and the rooms

## TRANSPORTATION: POPOCATÉPETL & IZTACCÍHUATL

- Distance from Mexico City to Amecameca – 72km
- Travel – 1½ hours
- Direction – southeast
- Bus – from Mexico City's Terminal de Autobuses de Pasajeros de Oriente (TAPO), Volcanes and Sur run 2nd-class buses to/from Amecameca (M\$28, every 15 minutes). Colectivos (minibuses that pick up and drop off passengers along a predetermined route) departing from Amecameca's plaza for Paso de Cortés cost M\$35. From the national park office, taxis will take groups to La Joya (40 minutes) for a negotiable M\$250 to M\$350.

are all cozy, clean and well furnished. Amenities include a heated outdoor pool, a lit tennis court, a playground, a billiards table, nice gardens and a refined French-Mexican bar-restaurant. A couple of one-bedroom suites have in-room whirlpools.

**Restaurant La Gruta** (☎ 594-956-01-04/27; mains M\$200; ☎ 11am-6pm) This deeply odd restaurant has quite the strangest setting of any in Mexico – a vast, subterranean, dank cave just 75m from gate 5 (don't be put off by the sign on the path that says it's 500m away – it's a misprint). It's aimed squarely at tourist parties and, while the food is very good, it's pricey too – and served in a subterranean, dank cave. On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, there's live music and folkloric ballet (cover M\$30). As you'd expect all major credit cards are accepted.

## POPOCATÉPETL & IZTACCÍHUATL

Mexico's second- and third-highest peaks – **Popocatepetl** (po-po-ka-teh-pet-l; Náhuatl for 'Smoking Mountain'; 5452m) and **Iztaccíhuatl** (iss-ta-see-wat-l; 5220m) – form the eastern rim of the Valle de México. While the craterless 'Izta' is dormant, 'Popo' is wide awake. Between 1994 and 2001, the volcano's major bursts of activity triggered evacuations of 16 villages and warnings to the 30 million people who live within striking distance of its volatile crater.

Izta's highest peak is **El Pecho** (5286m). All routes to it require a night on the mountain, and there's a shelter hut that can be used during an ascent between the staging point at La Joya and Las Rodillas. On average, it takes at least five hours to reach the hut from La Joya,

another six hours from the hut to El Pecho, and six hours back to the base.

Near Paso de Cortés, in the saddle approximately halfway between Popo and Izta, there are plenty of lower-altitude trails through pine forests and grassy meadows, some offering breathtaking glimpses of nearby peaks. Trails begin at the La Joya parking lot, 2km beyond the Altzomoni Lodge (see p220).

## Information

All visitors must pay the M\$10 per day park entrance fee in advance at the national park office in Amecameca, or on Sunday at Paso de Cortés.

Before ascending Izta, all climbers should contact the **Parque Nacional Iztaccíhuatl-Popocatepetl** (☎ /fax 597-978-38-29/30; http://iztapopo.conanp.gob.mx; Plaza de la Constitución 9B; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat), in the nearby village of Amecameca, the usual starting point. To arrange permission, call the office or submit a form that's available online. You'll need the permit to pass the military checkpoint near Paso de Cortés. Alternatively, you can depart from the village of San Rafael, 8km north of Amecameca, a longer and more rigorous climb.

Iztaccíhuatl should *only* be attempted by experienced climbers. Because of hidden crevices on the ice-covered upper slopes, a guide is advisable. Mexico City-based **Mario Andrade** (☎ 55-1038-4008, 55-1826-2146; mountainup@hotmail.com), an authorized, English-speaking guide, has led many Izta ascents. His Izta fee is M\$3800 for one person, less per person for groups. The cost includes roundtrip transportation from Mexico City, lodging, mountain meals and rope usage.

It can be windy and well below freezing any time of year on Izta's upper slopes, and it's nearly always below freezing near the summit at night. Ice and snow are fixtures here; the average snow line is 4200m. The ideal months for ascents are November to February, when there is hard snowpack for crampons. The rainy season (April to October) brings with it the threat of whiteouts, thunderstorms and avalanches.

## Sleeping

The sleepy town of **Amecameca**, 60km east of Mexico City by road, is the key staging point for an Izta climb. With volcanoes and 16th-century churches as a backdrop, it makes an appealing destination in itself. Most climbers

## TRANSPORTATION: PUEBLA

- Distance from Mexico City – 125km
- Travel time – two hours
- Direction – southeast
- Bus – most buses to and from Puebla use Mexico City's TAPO, with additional half-hourly services to Terminal Norte. The deluxe ADO GL (☎ 800-702-80-00; www.ado.com.mx) runs buses every 40 minutes (M\$104); **Estrella Roja** (ER; ☎ 800-712-22-84; www.estrellaroja.com.mx) runs 1st-class buses every 20 minutes (M\$104). Puebla's **Central de Autobuses de Puebla** (CAPU; ☎ 222-249-72-11; Blvd Norte 4222) is 4km north of the zócalo and 1.5km off the autopista. Tickets for most routes can also be purchased downtown via **Ticketbus** (☎ 222-232-19-52; www.ticketbus.com.mx; Av Palafox y Mendoza 604; ☎ 9:30am-5pm) inside the Multipack office.

sack out at the unassuming **Hotel San Carlos** (☎ 597-978-07-46; Plaza de la Constitución 10; r M\$100), facing the plaza's southwest corner, where the rooms are clean and spartan, but comfortable, and cost M\$5 more with TV.

Basic shelter is available at the **Altzomoni Lodge** (beds per person M\$25), by a microwave station roughly halfway between Paso de Cortés and La Joya. Request the keys at Paso de Cortés before hiking up, and bring bedding, warm clothes and drinking water.

## PUEBLA

A bastion of conservatism, Catholicism and tradition, Puebla can sometimes feel as if the colonial era in Mexico never quite ended. For the most part this is a positive thing, giving Puebla its fantastic colonial centre, a stunning cathedral and a wealth of beautiful churches, although it also contributes to the (quite unfair) Mexican stereotype of the criollo (people born of Spanish parents in Nueva España) *poblanos* being snobbish and aloof.

The city itself is well worth a visit, with 70 churches in the historic center alone, more than a thousand colonial buildings adorned with the *azulejos* (painted ceramic tiles) for which the city is justly famous, and a long culinary history that can be explored in any restaurant or street food stall.

For a city of its size, Puebla is far more relaxed and less gridlocked than you might expect. Its charming architecture and well-preserved colonial imprint in no way make the city feel like a museum piece, and part of its attraction is that it's so clearly a thriving city, yet it still takes great pride in its past.

Founded by Spanish settlers in 1531 as Ciudad de los Ángeles, the city grew into an important Catholic center. Fine pottery had long been crafted from the local clay, and after the colonists introduced new materials

and techniques, Puebla pottery evolved as both an art and an industry. By the late 18th century, the city emerged an important glass and textile producer.

Puebla's superbly impressive **cathedral** (nr Avs 3 Ote & 16 de Septiembre; ☎ 10.30-12.30pm, 4-6pm Mon-Sat), whose image appears on Mexico's 500-peso bill, occupies the entire block south of the *zócalo*. It blends early baroque and severe Herrerresque-renaissance styles. Construction began in 1550 but most of it took place under Bishop Juan de Palafox in the 1640s. At 69m the towers are Mexico's highest. Inside, the dazzling interior, the frescoes and elaborately decorated side chapels are all awesome and most have bilingual signs explaining their history and significance.

Puebla's central **zócalo**, which was being renovated at the time of writing, was originally a marketplace where bullfights, theater and hangings transpired, before it assumed its current arboretum-like appearance in 1854. The surrounding arcades date from the 16th century. The plaza fills with an entertaining mix of clowns, balloon hawkers and ambulatory snack vendors on Sunday evenings. If you're in town on Thursday around 6pm, don't miss the patriotic changing of the flag ceremony, animated by the city's marching band.

By far Puebla's best sight, the superb private **Museo Amparo** (☎ 222-229-38-50; www.museoamparo.com; Calle 2 Sur 708; adult/student M\$35/25, camera/video fee M\$50, free Mon; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon), housed in two 16th- and 17th-century colonial buildings, is a must-see. The first has eight rooms loaded with pre-Hispanic artifacts, which are well displayed, with explanatory information sheets (in English and Spanish) of their production techniques, regional and historical context, and anthropological significance.

Inaugurated in 1999, the **Museo Poblano de Arte Virreinal** (☎ 222-246-58-58; Calle 4 Nte 203; admission adult/student M\$15/10, free Tue; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is



housed in the 16th-century Hospital de San Pedro. One gallery displays temporary exhibits on the art of the viceregal period (16th to 19th centuries); another has temporary exhibits of contemporary Mexican art; and the last houses a fascinating permanent exhibit on the hospital's history, including a fine model of the building. The excellent library and bookstore have many art and architecture books in English.

The **Museo Casa del Alfeñique** (☎ 222-32-42-96; Av 4 Ote 416; admission adult/student M\$15/10, free Tue; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is an outstanding example of the over-the-top 18th-century decorative style, *alfeñique*, characterized by elaborate stucco ornamentation and named after a candy made from sugar and egg whites.

## Information

**Cyberbyte** (Calle 2 Sur 505B) Internet access and cheap international VoIP phone calls.

**Money** ATMs are plentiful throughout the city. Banks on the *zócalo* and Av Reforma have exchange and travelers check facilities.

**Municipal Tourist Office** (☎ 222-404-50-08/47; www.puebla.gob.mx, in Spanish; Portal Hidalgo 14; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, to 3pm Sun) English- and French-speaking office.

**State Tourist Office** (Sector; ☎ 222-246-20-44; Av 5 Ote 3; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) Faces the cathedral yard. English-speaking staff.

## Sleeping

**Hostal Santo Domingo** (☎ 222-232-16-71, hostalstodomingo@yahoo.com.mx; Av 4 Pte 312; dm M\$100, s/d/t/q M\$250/290/350/445; 📍 📺 📶) This is Puebla's only real hostel, offering clean and safe mixed-sex dorms as well as a large range of private rooms. Those at the front of the building enjoy balconies and lots of daylight, while all have high-ceilings. Noise from both the bar downstairs and the street can be a problem, but this is definitely a great place to meet other travelers and have fun. There's web access for M\$8 per hour in the courtyard.

**Hotel Provincia Express** (☎ 222-46-35-57; Av Reforma 141; s/d M\$260/350; 📍 📺 📶) Tile fetishists on a budget, look no further! This wonderful place has one of the most stunning traditional interiors in Puebla, and all at knock-down prices. Refitted in 2007, the rooms themselves are simple but modern and spotlessly clean, while the corridors and facade are just wonderful.

**Hotel Royalty** (☎ 222-242-02-02, 800-638-99-99; www.hotelr.com; Portal Hidalgo 8; s/d/t M\$465/566/645, ste

M\$670-840; 📍 📺) On the *zócalo*'s north side, with an entrance off the arcade, the 45-room Royalty is a friendly, well-kept colonial-style place. The price hike here is for the superb location. Rooms are nothing special: although they're generally spotlessly clean and comfortable enough, they have the familiar natural daylight problems that haunt the city. The junior suites with cathedral views merit the extra pesos. Downstairs, the sidewalk restaurant-café is perfect for people watching.

**Hotel Puebla Plaza** (☎ 222-246-31-75, 800-926-2703; www.hotelpueblaplaza.com.mx, in Spanish; Av 5 Poniente 111; s/d M\$382/499; 📍 📺) This charming place enjoys a great location and has very comfortable rooms and good service. As with many colonial-style hotels though, the rooms at the back are incredibly depressing with little or no natural light, and it's worth paying extra for rooms on the street with little balconies. All rooms have TV, phone, private bathroom and free wi-fi.

**our pick Hotel Colonial** (☎ 222-246-46-12, 800-013-00-00; www.colonial.com.mx; Calle 4 Sur 105; s/d/tr/q M\$590/690/790/890; 📍) This utter charmer is hard not to love, even though its size and good value has made it a magnet for tour groups. Once part of a 17th-century Jesuit monastery and existing as a hotel in various forms since the mid-19th century, the place oozes heritage from its many gorgeously furnished rooms (half of the 67 rooms have retained colonial décor and half are modern). There's a good restaurant, lobby wi-fi and a fantastic gilt-clad elevator complete with liveried porters. Noise from live music and the street can be a problem, but otherwise this is an excellent choice with an unbeatable vibe and location. Book ahead.

**Casa de la Palma** (☎ 222-246-14-37; www.casadelapalmapuebla.com; Av 3 Oriente 217; r/ste from M\$825/1062; 📍 📺) This sumptuous conversion of a colonial town house into a boutique hotel is a winner. If you want to pretend you're a 19th-century *poblano* aristocrat, look no further than the Porfiriana suite, which is stunning for its sheer size and over-the-top rococo flourishes. Opening in 2007, it was still in its early days when we visited. Small qualms such as patchy wi-fi coverage and lack of breakfast options will no doubt soon be resolved.

**Mesón Sacristía de Capuchinas** (☎ 222-32-80-88, 800-712-40-28, in US ☎ 800-728-9098; www.mesones-sacristia.com; Av 9 Oriente 16; r incl full breakfast M\$1600; 📍 📺) This wonderful boutique-antique hotel has just six beautifully presented rooms all featuring luxurious four-poster beds and various carefully selected *objets d'art* scattered around. The romantic El Santuario Restaurant is open on guests' request and crafts inspired contemporary takes on traditional Mexican cuisine. Breakfast in bed is simply divine. Perfect for romance, this is one of Puebla's very best options.

## PUEBLA'S UNFORGETTABLE SEASONAL TREATS

Puebla is rightly famous for its gastronomy (and most famously of course, *mole poblano*, the classic spicy sauce you must seek out at a top restaurant while you're in the city to really have experienced Puebla). However, the city also has a range of unusual delicacies not likely to make it to your local Mexican restaurant any time soon. These are all seasonal, but any serious foodie should be brave and try whatever's cooking!

- **Escamoles** (March-June) Ant larvae, a delicacy that looks like rice, usually sautéed in butter. Delicious!
- **Gusanos de maguey** (April-May) Worms that inhabit maguey agave plants, fried in a drunken chili-and-pulque sauce.
- **Huitlacoche** (June-October) Also spelt *cuitlacoche* (kweet-lah-koh-chay). Corn mushrooms are an inky black fungus delicacy with an enchanting, earthy flavor.
- **Chiles en nogada** (July-September) Large green chilies stuffed with dried fruit and meat, covered with a creamy walnut sauce and sprinkled with red pomegranate seeds.
- **Chapulines** (October-November) Grasshoppers purged of digestive matter, then dried, smoked or fried in lime and chili powder.

## Eating & Drinking

Puebla's culinary heritage, of which *poblanos* are rightly proud, can be explored in a range of eateries throughout the city, from humble street food stalls to elegant colonial-style restaurants.

**Tacos Tony** (☎ 222-240-94-31; Av 3 Pte 149; tacos M\$10-20) Follow your nose – or ring for delivery – for a *torta* or *pan árabe* taco (made with pita bread instead of tortillas), stuffed with seasoned pork sliced from a trio of enormous grilling cones.

**La Poblana** (☎ 222-246-09-93; Av 7 Ote 17; mains M\$15-30; 🕒 10am-6pm) Around the corner from the Museo Amparo, this small, friendly place whips up (and delivers) a dozen styles of authentic Puebla *cemitas* (a type of sandwich with meat and cheese).

**La Zanahoria** (☎ 222-232-48-13; Av 5 Ote 206; mains M\$20-40, set meals M\$49; 📍 📺) This entirely meat-free godsend for vegetarians is a great place for lunch, moments from the *zócalo* and the Museo Amparo. The restaurant is split into two – the express service area (including a juice bar and a health food shop) in the front and the more relaxed service of the spacious interior courtyard, where everything from veggie *hamburguesas* to *nopales rellenos* (stuffed cactus paddles) are served up.

**Fonda de Santa Clara** (☎ 222-46-19-19; www.fondade-santaclara.com; Av 3 Pte 920; mains M\$75-130) This classic *poblano* restaurant founded in the 1960s by Alicia Torres de Araujo specializes in local seasonal specialties of the region – from maguey worms to grasshoppers. If however, you're not of the bug-eating persuasion, there's plenty of more standard *comida poblana* on offer, including enchiladas and chicken *mole*. This main branch, in a well-restored colonial mansion, is very festive since it attracts locals celebrating special occasions. It also has a gift shop full of Talavera items and typical sweets. There is also a second smaller branch (☎ 242-26-59, Av 3 Pte 307).

**Restaurant Sacristía** (☎ 222-42-45-13; Calle 6 Sur 304; mains M\$85-110; 🕒 8am-11:30pm Mon-Sat, 8am-6pm Sun) This award-winning restaurant, in the delightful colonial patio of the Mesón Sacristía de la Compañía, is an elegant place for a meal of authentic *mole* and creative twists on rich *poblano* cuisine, or a cocktail or coffee and dessert in the intimate Confesionario bar. Live piano and violin soloists lend a romantic ambience most nights from around 9pm. If you like what you taste, inquire about their small-group cooking classes.

## Shopping

Several shops along Av 18 Pte, west of the Ex-Convento de Santa Mónica, sell colorful, hand-painted ceramics, known as Talavera. Designs reveal Asian, Spanish-Arabic and Mexican indigenous influences. Bigger pieces are expensive, delicate and difficult to transport. Smaller tiles fetch up to M\$50, quality plates upwards of M\$100. The finest Puebla pottery of all is the white ceramic dishware called *majolica*.

A wonderful array of quirky antique shops dominates **Callejón de los Sapos**, around the corner of Av 5 Ote and Calle 6 Sur. Most shops open from 10am to 7pm. On Sunday the Plazuela de los Sapos is the site of a lively outdoor antiques market. It's great for browsing, with a wonderful variety of old books, furniture and bric-a-brac.

Few of Puebla's Talavera shops make pottery on site anymore, but **Talavera Uriarte** (☎ 222-232-15-98; Av 4 Pte 911; www.uriartetlalavera.com.mx; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10:30am-5:30pm Sat, 11:30am-4:30pm Sun) still does, and it has a factory and showroom. Factory tours (M\$60) are offered Monday to Friday until 1pm in English and French, and later in Spanish as groups arrive.

Browse local Talavera, onyx and trees of life at **El Parián crafts market**, between Calles 6 and 8 Nte and Avs 2 and 4 Ote). Some of the work is shoddy, but there is also some quality handiwork and prices are reasonable.

## CHOLULA

Almost a suburb of Puebla these days, but far different in history and feel, the town of Cholula is home to the widest pyramid ever built, the Pirámide Tepanapa. Despite this great claim to fame, it's a surprisingly ignored place, largely because unlike its contemporaries Teotihuacán or Tula, the pyramid has been so neglected over the centuries as to be virtually unrecognizable as a manmade structure. Indeed, the pyramid was so overgrown even when the Spanish arrived that they built a church on the top, not realizing that their 'hill' was actually a native religious site – something that would no doubt have horrified them.

The **Zona Arqueológica** (☎ 222-235-94-24, 235-97-20; admission M\$37, Spanish/English guide M\$90/120; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) comprises the excavated areas around the pyramid and the tunnels underneath. You enter via the tunnel on the north side, which takes you on a spooky route through the centre of the pyramid. Several pyramids were built on top of each other during various reconstructions and so over 8km of tunnels have been dug beneath the pyramid by archaeologists to penetrate each stage. From the access tunnel, a few hundred meters long, you can see earlier layers of the building. You don't need a guide to follow the tunnel through to the structures on the pyramid's south and west sides, but since nothing is labeled, they can be helpful in pointing out and explaining various features.

The Pirámide Tepanapa is topped by the brightly decorated **Santuario de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios**. It's a classic symbol of conquest, but possibly an inadvertent one, as the church may have been built before the Spanish realized the mound contained a pagan temple. You can climb to the church for free via a path starting near the northwest corner of the pyramid.

A small **museum** (Calz San Andrés; admission free with site ticket), across the road from the ticket office and down some steps, provides the best introduction to the site – a cutaway model of the pyramid mound shows the various superimposed structures.

The **Ex-Convento de San Gabriel** (also known as Plaza de la Concordia) faces the east side

of Cholula's huge **zócalo**. It includes a tiny but interesting **Franciscan library** and three fine churches, all of which will appeal to travelers interested in antique books, and early religious and Franciscan history. On the left, as you face the ex-convent, is the Arabic-style **Capilla Real**, which has 49 domes and dates from 1540. In the middle is the 19th-century **Capilla de la Tercera Orden**, and on the right is the **Templo de San Gabriel**, founded in 1530 on the site of a pyramid.

The excellent **Museo de la Ciudad de Cholula** (☎ 222-261-90-53; cnr 5 de Mayo & 4 Poniente; adult/child M\$20/10; ☎ 9am-3pm Thu-Tue) is housed in a fantastically restored colonial building on the **zócalo**. The small but strong collection includes ceramics and jewelry from the Pirámide Tepanapa as well as later colonial paintings and sculptures. Most interestingly you can watch museum employees painstakingly restore smashed ceramics and repairing jewelry through a glass wall.

Aside from the pyramid and churches, Cholula boasts a buzzing nightlife thanks to the presence of the Universidad de las Américas, plus plenty of good eating and accommodation options centered on the huge **zócalo**. Nearby, the charming villages of Acatepec and Tonantzintla have splendid churches not to be missed by lovers of colonial architecture.

## Information

**Banks** Facing **zócalo's** south side; they change cash and have ATMs.

**Gioconda Internet** (5 de Mayo; per hr M\$15) On west side of **zócalo**.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 222-261-23-93; cnr Calles 12 Ote & Av 4 Nte; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat & Sun)

## Sleeping

**Hotel Reforma** (☎ 222-247-01-49; Calle 4 Sur 101; s/d M\$180/200; (P)) If the crumbling exterior doesn't put you off, the interior fares much better – a charming pink

### TRANSPORTATION: CHOLULA

- Distance from Mexico City – 115km
- Travel time – two hours
- Direction – southeast
- Bus – Estrella Roja runs hourly buses between Mexico City's TAPO and Puebla that stop in Cholula (M\$61) on Calle 12 Pte. There are also hourly buses from here to Mexico City's Benito Juárez airport (M\$155).

and white painted courtyard divided up into 11 simple but clean rooms, all with their own bathrooms and plenty of character. Overnight parking costs M\$20.

**Casa Calli** (☎ 222-261-5607; www.hotelcasacalli.com, in Spanish; Portal Guerrero 11; s/d M\$450/500; (P) (A) (B)) If you fancy a boutique feel on a budget, this excellent hotel is a great option. Right on the **zócalo**, the hotel contains 40 stripped down, stylishly minimalist rooms, a good pool, free wi-fi, friendly staff and an Italian restaurant.

**Plaza Santa Rosa Hotel** (☎ 222-247-03-41, 247-77-19; psrosa\_reserv@yahoo.com.mx; Portal Guerrero 5; s&d M\$400, t&q M\$500; (P) (A)) Unusually located inside a shopping arcade just on the side of the **zócalo**, the Plaza Santa Rosa has 27 rather dark rooms but they're spacious and comfortable with phones and TV. Free parking and wi-fi is included in the price.

**Villa Arqueológica Cholula** (☎ 222-273-79-00, 800-514-82-44; Calle 2 Pte 601; r Sun-Wed M\$850, Thu-Sat \$950, ste from \$1200; (P) (B)) This boutique 44-room Club-Med property is within walking distance of the pyramid, across a large field of flowers. Rooms are well furnished and most come with one double bed and one single bed. Other attractions include lush gardens, tennis courts, cozy fireplace-lit common areas and a good international restaurant.

## Eating & Drinking

**Café Enamorada** (mains M\$30-60) Facing the **zócalo**, this café is one of the most popular places in town, at least on weeknights and for its Sunday brunch buffet. There's live music most nights and decent doses of the usual sandwiches, tacos and quesadillas.

**Güero's** (☎ 222-247-21-88; Av Hidalgo 101; mains M\$35-80; ☎ 9am-11pm) Decorated with antique photos of Cholula, Whitey's is a lively family-friendly hangout. Besides pizza, pasta and burgers, hearty Mexican choices include *pozole*, *cemitas* and quesadillas, all served with a delicious *salsa roja*.

**Los Jarrones** (☎ 222-247-10-98; Portal Guerrero 7; mains M\$45-90) Underneath the plaza's attractive arcade, this casual indoor-outdoor eatery serves set breakfasts and a wide menu of good-value regional dishes. There's a great terrace overlooking the plaza that is a favorite meeting point for young Cholulans.

**La Lunita** (cnr Calz San Andrés & 6 Sur) is a fantastic family run bar (with good food too), decorated with an incredible collection of old advertising posters and other knick-knacks. It makes for a great drinking spot in the shadow of the Pyramid.

**Bar Reforma** (cnr Av 4 Nte & Calz San Andrés) Attached to Hotel Reforma, Cholula's oldest drinking spot is a classic, smoky corner abode with swinging doors, specializing in

iceless margaritas and freshly prepared sangrias. After 9pm, it's popular with the pre-clubbing university crowd.

## TEPOZTLÁN

One weekend trip from the capital that rarely disappoints is to gorgeous Tepoztlán, a wonderfully situated small town with a well-preserved historic centre surrounded by soaring jagged cliffs. As the birthplace of Quetzalcóatl, the omnipotent serpent god of the Aztecs, over 1200 years ago according to Mesoamerican legend, Tepoztlán is a major Náhuatl center and something of a Mecca for New Agers who believe the place has a creative energy. What is indubitable is that this *pueblo mágico* boasts a very impressively located pyramid, a great crafts market and a host of charming restaurants and hotels. It also retains indigenous traditions, with some elders still speaking Náhuatl, and younger generations learning it in school, making it quite unlike most of the other towns ringing the Mexican capital.

The uncontented main sight in town is the 10m-high **Pirámide de Teopozteco** (admission M\$34, video camera M\$35, free on Sun; ☎ 9am-5:30pm), although it's actually some 400m *above* the town, perched atop a sheer cliff at the end of a very steep path that begins at the end of Av Teopozteco. Built in honor of Teopoztécatl, the Aztec god of the harvest, fertility and *pulque*, the pyramid is more impressive for its location than for its actual size. Be warned that strenuous 2km climb is only recommended for the physically fit. At the top, depending on haze levels, you may be rewarded with a panorama of the valley.

The **Ex-Convento Dominicó de la Natividad** (admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) and the attached church were built by Dominican priests between 1560 and 1588. The plateresque church facade has Dominican seals interspersed with indigenous symbols, floral designs and various figures. The monastery's arched entryway is adorned with an elaborate **seed mural** of pre-Hispanic history and symbolism. Every year, during the first week of September, local artists sow a new mural from 60 varieties of seeds.

Behind the Dominican church, the **Museo Arqueológico Carlos Pellicer** (☎ 739-395-10-98; González 2; admission M\$10; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) has a small but interesting collection of pieces from around the country, donated by Tabascan poet Carlos Pellicer Cámara. The stone fragments depicting a pair of rabbits – the symbol for

## TRANSPORTATION: TEPOZTLÁN

- Distance from Mexico City – 80km
- Travel time – 1½ hours
- Direction – south
- Bus – Pullman de Morelos/OCC (☎ 739-395-05-20; www.pullman.com.mx) runs 1st-class buses to/from Mexico City's Terminal Sur (M\$63, hourly 5am to 8pm).

Ometochtli, one of the 400 *pulque* gods – were discovered at the Tepozteco pyramid site.

During the five days preceding Ash Wednesday (46 days before Easter Sunday), **Carnaval** features the colorful dances of the Huehuenches and Chinelos with feather headdresses and beautifully embroidered costumes. On **September 7** an all-night celebration goes off on Tepozteco hill near the pyramid, with copious consumption of *pulque* in honor of Tepoztécatl. The following day is the **Fiesta del Templo**, a Catholic celebration featuring theater performances in Náhuatl. The holiday was first intended to coincide with – and perhaps supplant – the pagan festival, but the *pulque* drinkers get a jump on it by starting the night before.

## Sleeping

**Hotel Posada Ali** (☎ 739-395-19-71; Netzahualcóyotl 2C; s/d M\$400-600; (P) (Q) (E)) The best-value option in town, Ali's is a family-run, friendly set-up with 13 good rooms, all with some element of attractive design, most with double beds and cable TV. There's a communal sitting room, *frontón* (court for jai alai, a game like handball) and a small pool.

**Hotel Chinelos** (☎ 739-395-36-53, www.hotelchinelos.com; Netzahualcóyotl 4A; r M\$500; (P) (Q) (E)) Named after the famous dancers of Morelos, this 15-room hotel is excellently located and looks much better on the inside than it does from the street. The airy, spacious and super-clean rooms are set around a charming garden. During the week there's a M\$100 discount on the room cost.

**Posada Nican Mo Calli** (☎ 739-395-31-52; Netzahualcóyotl 4A; s/d M\$850/1050, ste from M\$1000; (P) (Q) (E)) This is just the place for a romantic weekend away. Brightly painted public areas, a heated pool, stylish rooms (some with balconies and great mountain views) and plenty of animals to keep you company, this is one of the best options in town.

**Posada del Valle** (☎ 739-395-05-21; www.posadadelvalle.com.mx; Camino a Mexititla 5; r M\$1725, d with spa packages daily M\$4800; (P) (Q) (E)) Posada del Valle has

quiet, romantic rooms and a good Argentine restaurant. Spa packages include two nights at the hotel, breakfast, massages and a visit to the *temascal* (indigenous Mexican steam bath). Children under 16 are not allowed. It's 2km east of town: take Av Revolución 1910 east and follow the signs for the final 100m to the hotel.

**our pick Posada del Tepozteco** (☎ 739-395-00-10; www.posadadeltepozteco.com; Paraíso 3; r/ste from M\$1890/2640-3900; (P) (Q) (E)) This gorgeous hotel was built as a hillside hacienda in the 1930s and is the society hotel of choice for Tepoztlán. The 20-rooms are airy and individually decorated in a pared-down way – most with great views over the town. In the age of boutique luxury, some of the rooms may be underwhelming, but the focus of this old-world place is its refined atmosphere, wonderful garden and pool.

## Eating & Drinking

**Tepoznieves** (Av Revolución 1910 s/n; scoops M\$10-20) This homegrown ice-cream emporium scoops out some 200 heavenly flavors, including exotics like cactus and pineapple-chili. It's an obligatory stop and has a couple more branches on the road to the pyramid, plus many imitators around town.

**Los Buenos Tiempos** (☎ 395-05-19; Av Revolución 1910 10; pastries M\$10-30) For the best pastries in the state, head here. There's also good coffee and a lively social scene, and it's a great place to buy a pastry breakfast to take up to the pyramid with you.

**Govinda Ram** (cnr Av Tepozteco & La Cumbre; snacks & set meals M\$30-55; (V)) As if you needed it, here's proof that Tepoz is well and truly central Mexico's biggest hippie haunt. A Hindu-inspired vegetarian café, Govinda Ram does a range of snacks and full meals, including an excellent Ayurvedic buffet, good coffee and warming evening meals.

**Los Colorines** (☎ 395-01-98; Av Tepozteco 13; mains M\$60-90; ☎ 9.30am-9pm) Specializing in *la comida sabrosar* (simply put, 'tasty food'), this is a big two-floor place, vibrantly painted and with a large menu of great Mexican home cooking.

**Axitle** (☎ 395-05-19; Av Tepozteco; mains M\$60-100; ☎ 10am-7pm Wed-Sun) This place is definitely the oddest in town, a Swiss Family Robinson-style sprawling site amid the thick forest. There's a good selection of breakfasts available (M\$50) and a comprehensive Mexican and international menu. Avoid the coffee.

**our pick La Luna Mexтли** (☎ 395-11-14; Av Revolución 1910 16; mains M\$50-190) Yet another beautifully decorated and adorned space, La Luna Mexтли is stuffed with local art, including its own in-house gallery. The food here is also excellent and good value, from Mexican

standards to an entire list of different Argentinean steaks and Argentine-style *parillada* (mixed grill).

**El Ciruelo** (☎ 395-12-03; www.elciruelo.com.mx; Zaragoza 17; mains M\$115-196; ☎ 1-6pm Mon-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat, to 7pm Sun) Beautifully set out in a courtyard, this long-standing super-smart favorite serves an impressive upscale menu of dishes from *camarones al curry* and *salmón chileno a la mantequilla* to good pizzas, salads and international dishes. Reservations recommended – ask for a table with views of the pyramid.

## Shopping

Tepoz has a fantastic, atmospheric daily market that convenes on the *zócalo*, although it's at its fullest on Wednesday and Sunday. As well as the daily fruit, vegetable, clothing and crafts on sale, Saturday and Sunday sees stalls around the plaza sell a huge range of handicrafts, including sarapes (blanket-like shawls), carvings, weavings, baskets and pottery. Shops lining adjacent streets also have interesting wares (some from Bali and India) at more upmarket prices. Popular local craft products are miniature villages carved from the cork-like spines of the pochote tree.

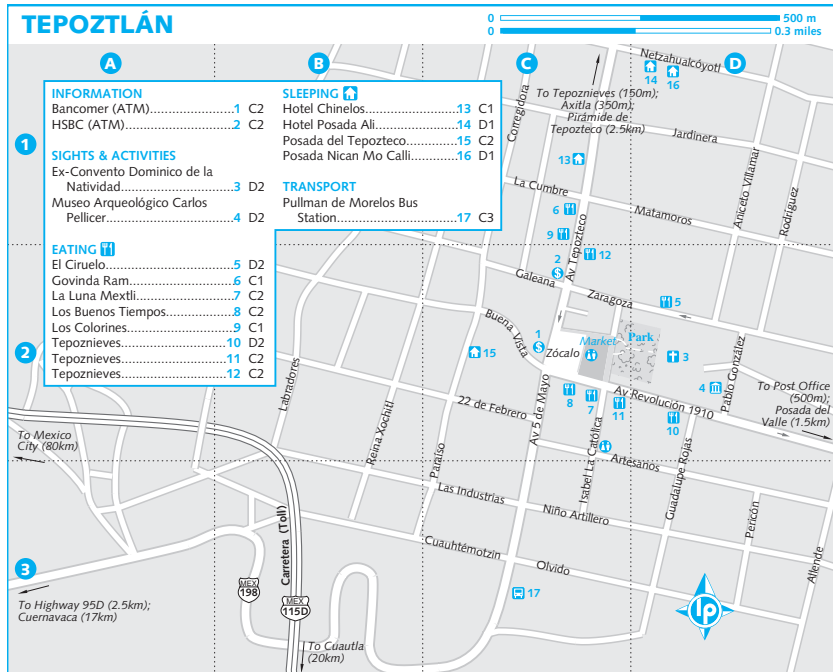
## TEPOZOTLÁN

This little charmer is the easiest single day trip possible from Mexico City, but it's hard to imagine anywhere less like the chaotic streets of the capital, despite the fact that urban sprawl gets closer and closer to Tepozotlán's colonial streets every year.

There's a very simple reason to visit: the wonderful **Museo Nacional del Virreinato** (National Museum of the Viceregal Period; ☎ 5876-2771; Plaza Hidalgo 99; admission M\$43, Spanish-only audioguides M\$40; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun), comprised of the restored Jesuit **Iglesia de San Francisco Javier** and an adjacent monastery.

Once occupied by a Jesuit college of Indian languages, the complex dates from 1606, although various additions were made over the following 150 years. Among the folk art and fine art on display are silver chalices, pictures created from inlaid wood, porcelain, furniture and fine religious paintings and statues.

Don't miss the **Capilla Doméstica**, whose main altarpiece boasts more mirrors than a carnival fun house. The biggest crowds arrive on Sunday, when a crafts market convenes out front. The Iglesia de San Francisco, an extreme example of Churrigueresque architecture, was originally built between





## TRANSPORTATION: TEPOTZOTLÁN

- Distance from Mexico City – 45km
- Travel time – 1 hour
- Direction – north
- Bus – from Mexico City's Terminal Norte, Auto transportes Valle del Mezquital (AVM) buses stop at the Tepotzotlán tollbooth every 15 minutes en route to Tula. From there, catch a local bus (M\$4) or taxi (M\$30), or walk west for about 20 minutes along Av Insurgentes.
- Pesero – peseros to Tepotzotlán leave from Mexico City's Rosario metro station (M\$15). In Tepotzotlán, returning 'Rosario' buses depart from Av Insurgentes opposite Posada San José.

1670 and 1682; elaborations carried out in the 18th century made it one of Mexico's most lavish places of worship. The facade is a phantasmagoric array of carved saints, angels, plants and people, while the interior walls and the Camarín del Virgen adjacent to the altar are swathed with a circus of gilded ornamentation.

Tepotzotlán's highly regarded Christmas *pastorelas* (nativity plays) are performed inside the former monastery in the weeks leading up to December 25. Tickets, which include Christmas dinner and piñata smashing, can be purchased at La Hostería de Tepotzotlán (see below), or via [Ticketmaster](#) (☎ 5325-9000; www.ticketmaster.com.mx, in Spanish).

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Posada San José** (☎ /fax 5876-03-40; Plaza Virreinal 13; r M\$185, with view \$250) Within a gorgeous old colonial building on the south side of the *zócalo*, this well-run hotel has a great atmosphere, charming tiled bathrooms and decent rooms, although the furniture is not always as evocative of the colonial-era complex as it could be. Avoid rooms 8 and 9, which are directly below the building's noisy water pump.

**Posada Castro** (☎ 5876-09-64; Av Insurgentes 11; r M\$300-500; (P)) This friendly, family-run place has 17 smart and comfy rooms a short walk from the *zócalo*, all with bathroom and TV. The Virgin Mary adorns almost every wall and a selection of religious icons and crucifixes completes the decor of each room.

**La Hostería de Tepotzotlán** (☎ 5876-0243; Plaza Virreinal 1; mains M\$60-150; ☎ 12:30-5.30pm Tue-Sun) The town's most atmospheric place for lunch is the restaurant housed within the monastery in a delightful little court-

yard. It serves hearty soups along with original main courses like *huitlacoche* crepes for brunch and lunch.

**Restaurant-Bar Pepe** (☎ 5876-0520, Plaza Virreinal; mains M\$80-140) Facing the Iglesia de San Francisco Javier across the *zócalo*, Pepe's place has a great terrace and an intimate, gently buzzing interior. Specialties include *camarones empanizados* (breaded shrimp) and there are good breakfasts for around M\$65.

Otherwise, join the locals at the *taquerías* (taco stalls) west of the plaza, or in the market behind the Palacio Municipal, where food stalls serve rich *pozole* (a thin stew of hominy, pork or chicken, and avocado), *gorditas* (fried stuffed tacos in fat handmade blue corn tortillas), and fresh-squeezed juices all day long.

## TAXCO

The first sight of Taxco across the steep valley as you approach it on the curvy road from Mexico City is enough to take your breath away – scattered down a precipitous hillside, its perfectly preserved colonial architecture and the twin belfries of its baroque masterpiece, Parroquia Santa Prisca, make for one of the most beguiling views anywhere in the central highlands.

Taxco (*tahss-ko*) has ridden the waves of boom and bust associated with the fantastically wealthy silver deposits discovered here in the 16th century and then again repeatedly until the early 20th century. With its silver almost all gone now, the town has turned to tourism as an economic mainstay, and any day of the week you'll find visitors wandering the narrow cobblestone streets peering into the endless rows of silver shops, while at the weekends Taxco is often flooded with weekenders from Mexico City. Nevertheless, Taxco remains a fabulous destination and one of the best weekend trips you can do from Mexico City. Unlike many colonial-era Mexican towns, Taxco has not become engulfed by industrial suburbs, and its status as a national historical monument means that even new buildings must conform to the old in scale, style and materials.

Taxco was called Tlachco (Ball Playing Place) by the Aztecs, who dominated the region from 1440 until the Spanish arrived. Among the town's first Spanish residents were three miners – Juan de Cabra, Juan Salcedo and Diego de Nava – and the carpenter Pedro Muriel. In 1531, they established the first Spanish mine in North America.

The Spaniards came searching for tin, which they found in small quantities, but by

1534 they had discovered tremendous lodes of silver. That year the Hacienda El Chorrillo was built, complete with water wheel, smelter and aqueduct – the remains of which form the old arches (Los Arcos) over Hwy 95 at the north end of town.

The prospectors quickly depleted the hacienda's first silver veins and fled Taxco. Further quantities of ore were not discovered until 1743. Don José de la Borda, who had arrived in 1716 from France at the age of 16 to work with his miner brother, accidentally unearthed one of the region's richest veins. According to legend, Borda was riding near where the Templo de Santa Prisca now stands, when his horse stumbled, dislodged a stone and exposed the precious metal.

Borda introduced new techniques of draining and repairing mines, and he reportedly treated his indigenous workers better than most colonial mines. The Templo de Santa Prisca was the devout Borda's gift to Taxco. His success attracted more prospectors, and new silver veins were found and played out. With most of the silver gone, Taxco became a quiet town with a dwindling population and economy.

In 1929, an American architect and professor named William (Guillermo) Spratling arrived and, at the suggestion of then-US ambassador Dwight Morrow, set up a silver workshop as a way to rejuvenate the town. The workshop evolved into a factory, and Spratling's apprentices began establishing their own shops. Today, Taxco is home to hundreds of silver shops, many producing for export.

The **Parroquia de Santa Prisca** (☎ 9am-6pm) is the symbol of Taxco and was a labor of love for town hero José de la Borda. The local Catholic hierarchy allowed the silver magnate to donate this church to Taxco on the condition that he mortgage his mansion and other assets to guarantee its completion; the project nearly bankrupted him, but the risk was well worth it – the resulting building is one of Mexico's most beautiful and striking pieces of baroque architecture. Perhaps Santa Prisca's most striking feature is the contrast between its belfries with their elaborate Churrigueresque facade overlooking the Plaza Borda and the far more simple, constrained and elegant nave, when viewed from side-on. The rose-colored stone used on the facade is extraordinarily beautiful in the sunlight – look out for the oval bas-relief depiction of Christ's baptism above the doorway. Inside

the intricately sculpted, gold-covered altarpieces are equally fine Churrigueresque specimens.

Off an alley behind Santa Prisca, the **Museo Guillermo Spratling** (☎ 762-622-16-70; Delgado 1; admission M\$27; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sat, to 3pm Sun) holds a small but excellent collection of pre-Hispanic jewelry, art, pottery and sculpture from American silversmith William Spratling's private collection. The phallic cult pieces are a particular eye-opener. On the basement floor there are examples of Spratling's designs using pre-Hispanic motifs.

The rather rag-tag **Museo de Arte Virreinal** (☎ 762-622-55-01; Ruiz de Alarcón 12; adult/student M\$20/15; ☎ 10am-5.45pm Tue-Sat, to 3.45pm Sun) is in a wonderful old house that is often referred to as Casa Humboldt, even though the famous German explorer and naturalist Friedrich Heinrich Alexander von Humboldt slept here for only one night in 1803! The restored building now houses a small but well-displayed collection of colonial religious art labeled in English and Spanish. There's also an interesting display on the Manila Galleons, which pioneered trade between the Americas and the Far East.

Built by José de la Borda in 1759, the **Casa Borda** (☎ 762-622-66-34; Plaza Borda; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) serves as a cultural center hosting experimental theater and exhibiting contemporary sculpture, painting and photography by Guerrero artists. The building, however, is the main attraction. Due to the unevenness of the terrain, the rear window looks out on a precipitous four-story drop, even though the entrance is on the ground floor.

From the north end of Taxco, near Los Arcos, a Swiss-made **teleférico** (cable car; one-way/round-trip M\$20/30; ☎ 7:45am-7pm) ascends 173m to the Hotel Monte Taxco resort (p232), affording fantastic views of Taxco and the surrounding mountains. To find the entrance, walk uphill from the south side of Los Arcos and turn right through the Instituto de Artes Plásticas gate.

## Information

**Net X Internet** (Ruiz de Alarcón 11; per hr M\$10)

**Post office** (Palacio Municipal, Benito Juárez 10)

**Secretaría de Fomento Turístico** (Tourist information office; ☎ 622-50-73; Av de los Plateros; ☎ 9am-3pm & 4-6pm) At north end of town. English- and French-speaking staff arrange guided tours of Taxco.

**TAXCO**

0 200 m  
0 0.1 miles

**INFORMATION**

Banamex (ATM).....	1	B4
Banamex ATM.....	2	A5
Bancomer (ATM).....	3	A5
Net X Internet.....	4	B4
Post Office.....	(see 8)	

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

Casa Borda (Centro Cultural Taxco).....	5	B4
Museo de Arte Virreinal (Casa Humboldt).....	6	B4
Museo Guillermo Spratling.....	7	B4
Palacio Municipal.....	8	B4
Parroquia de Santa Prisca.....	9	B4

**EATING**

Acerto.....	10	A5
Café Borda.....	11	A5
Café Sacha.....	12	B4
Del Ángel Inn.....	13	B4
Del Convento.....	14	B4
Hostería Bar El Adobe.....	15	A5
La Casona.....	(see 13)	
La Concha Nostra.....	(see 26)	
La Hamburguesa.....	16	A5
Pozolería Tía Calla.....	17	B4
Restaurant Santa Fe.....	18	A5
Sotavento.....	19	B4

**DRINKING**

Bar Berta.....	20	A5
----------------	----	----

**SHOPPING**

Emilia Castillo Silver Shop.....	(see 27)	
Joyería Elena de los Ballesteros.....	21	B4
Mercado de Artesanías Plata.....	22	B5
Patío de las Artesanías.....	(see 17)	
Pineda's.....	(see 21)	

**SLEEPING**

Casa de Huéspedes Arellano.....	23	B5
Hotel Agua Escondida.....	24	A4
Hotel Best Western Taxco.....	25	A5
Hotel Casa Grande.....	26	A5
Hotel Emilia Castillo.....	27	B4
Hotel Los Arcos.....	28	B4
Hotel Meléndez.....	29	A5
Hotel Mi Casita.....	30	B4
Hotel Posada San Javier.....	31	B4
Hotel Real de San Diego.....	32	C3
Hotel Santa Prisca.....	33	A5
Posada de la Misión.....	34	D3
Posada Los Balcones.....	35	A4

**TRANSPORT**

Estrella de Oro Bus Station.....	36	A6
Futura/Estrella Blanca Bus Station.....	37	C5

To Secretaría de Fomento Turístico (750m); Los Arcos (800m); Teleférico to Hotel Monte Taxco (800m); Cuernavaca (80km); Mexico City (160km)

Av. de los Plateros

Reforma

Estacadas

Plaza Taxco

Ex-Rastro

Las Estacadas

Funerías

Bécar y Tanco

Av. de los Plateros

Veracruz

El Fresno

Los Pajaritos

El Fresno

Luis Montes de Oca

Santa Ana

Parque Vicente Guerrero

Novillos

Colegio Militar

Calle del Conjugado

To Hotel Victoria (250m)

To PEMEX (500m); Taxco El Viejo (14km); Acapulco (266km)

## Sleeping

Taxco has a wealth of hotels, from large four- and five-star hotels to charming family-run posadas. It's always best to reserve ahead, and often essential at the weekend, when the hoards arrive from el DF.

**Casa de Huéspedes Arellano** (☎ 762-622-0365; Los Pajaritos 23; dm \$12, s with/without bathroom M\$160/140, d M\$220/180) There's a large variety of basic but clean rooms in this, Taxco's most backpackery option. The ground floor rooms are the very cheapest as they have no balcony. Other rooms can sleep up to six people and most others have balconies. It's well tended, with lots of flowers, caged birds, a variety of rooms and ample terraces for relaxing.

**Hotel Casa Grande** (☎ 762-622-09-69; Plazuela de San Juan 7; s with/without bathroom M\$230/155, d M\$355/230; 📺) The basic rooms here are very clean, and it's almost worth staying just for the superb terrace overlooking the square. However, it's an extremely noisy place due to both the traffic and the music for La Concha Nostra downstairs. The apartments around the back are quieter, but also a bit rundown – the one with three bedrooms (M\$530) is recommended.

**Posada Los Balcones** (☎ 762-622-02-50; posada\_balcones@hotmail.com; Estacadas de los Gallos 5; s/d/t M\$300/450/550) This good value, centrally located place has some surprisingly charming rooms, and – as the names suggests – many of these have balconies overlooking the boisterous street below, just moments from Santa Prisca. All 15 rooms have TV and bathroom.

**Hotel Santa Prisca** (☎ 762-622-00-80; htl\_staprisca@yahoo.com; Cena Obscuras 1; s/d/t M\$350/500/550; 📺) The 31-room Santa Prisca has very sweet, traditionally Mexican decor within the walls of a gorgeous old hacienda complete with courtyard garden. It has a great location too, right in the thick of things. Rooms are smallish but most have breezy private balconies with good views. All have two beds and newer, sunnier ones fetch a bit more. The parking lot is reached via a tunnel at the hotel's uphill end.

**Hotel Emilia Castillo** (☎ /fax 762-622-67-17; www.hotelemiliacastillo.com; Juan Ruiz de Alarcón 7; s/d/t M\$400/450/500) The 14 rooms here all have beautiful Mexican tiled bathrooms and are spotlessly clean. Owned by a famous family of silver workers, this intimate place opposite Hotel Los Arcos offers colonial charm at reasonable rates. Sadly it's in a noisy location – ask for a room at the back but don't miss the views from the rooftop terrace.

**Hotel Meléndez** (☎ 762-622-00-06; Cuahtémoc 6; s/d M\$395/480) Because of its location, street noise penetrates the exterior rooms at this reliable family-run favorite. Upsides include its attractively tiled public areas, a sunny terrace, great views from larger upper-level rooms and an unbeatable central location.

**Hotel Los Arcos** (☎ 762-622-18-36; www.hotellosarcos.net; Juan Ruiz de Alarcón 4; s/d/ste M\$425/475/550; 📺) This rustic hotel is full of character. A gorgeous 17th-century former monastery, it is furnished in a traditional style. All 26 rooms are charming, if not much more than basic, and the location is excellent.

**Hotel Loma Linda** (☎ 762-622-02-06; www.hotellomalinda.com; Av de los Plateros 52; s/d M\$410/480, r Fri & Sat M\$650; 📺) The rooms here are larger than most, but it's also not entirely conveniently located, perched as it is on the edge of a vast chasm 1km north of town. At least the back rooms at this well-run motel have some good valley views. There's a restaurant, a heated pool, easy parking and cable TV in the 71 rooms, some of which have terraces.

**Hotel Posada San Javier** (☎ 762-622-31-77; posada\_sanjavier@hotmail.com; Estacadas 32; s/d/ste from \$460/490/605-1405; 📺 📺) This bizarrely huge place is a combination of hotel and holiday apartments built around a very pleasant, shady garden and pool. There are 22 rooms and numerous different apartments in different corners of the complex. Rooms are comfortable but nothing special, the real attraction is the excellent location and pool.

**Hotel Real de San Diego** (☎ 762-627-23-30; realde\_sandiego@hotmail.com; Av de los Plateros 169; s/d/t M\$440/500/560; 📺) Go for the rooms on the 2nd floor if you stay here – they're bigger and some have balconies. This place is on the main road into Taxco a short walk from the town center. There's a small pool, newly installed bathrooms in the rooms and cable TV.

**our pick Hotel Mi Casita** (☎ 762-627-17-77; www.hotelmicasita.com; Altos de Redondo 1; s/d incl breakfast from M\$550/650; 📺) This absolute gem has 12 beautifully and individually decorated rooms just moments from the *zócalo* and with great views over the cathedral. A colonial-style home run by a family of jewelry designers, this is one of the best bets in town, but bring your earplugs. The comfortable rooms feature original hand-painted bathroom tiles and some have private terraces. Three rooms have rustic Talavera bathtubs, and all have fans and cable TV.

**Hotel Victoria** (☎ 762-622-00-04; www.victoriataxco.com; in Spanish; Nibbi 5-7; r/ste from M\$550/850; 📺) This odd place was totally deserted on our last visit. Its 50 rooms are scattered along the hillside amid a dank, overgrown garden that feels more like a primordial forest. Rooms are large and of good quality though, especially the suites with their huge walk-out balconies. The bathrooms are a bit the worse for wear.

**Hotel Agua Escondida** (☎ 762-622-07-26, 800-504-03-11; www.aguaescondida.com; Plaza Borda 4; s/d M\$614/760; 📺 📺) Facing the *zócalo*, the 'Hidden Water' has a couple of pools and a café-bar on a high terrace with unmatched views of Santa Prisca. The 60

## TRANSPORTATION: TAXCO

- Distance from Mexico City – 160km
- Travel time – 2½ hours
- Direction – southwest
- Bus – Estrella de Oro and Estrella Blanca run hourly 1st-class buses between Mexico City's Terminal Sur and Taxco (M\$105). In Taxco, the Estrella de Oro station is at the south end of town, while the Estrella Blanca terminal is downhill from the main market.
- Combis – combis (M\$4) are frequent and operate from 7am to 8pm. 'Zócalo' combis depart from Plaza Borda, go down Cuauhtémoc to Plazuela de San Juan, then head down the hill on Hidalgo. They then turn right at Morelos, left at Av de los Plateros, and go north until La Garita, where they turn left and return to the zócalo. 'Arcos/Zócalo' combis follow the same route except that they continue past La Garita to Los Arcos, where they do a U-turn and head back to La Garita. Combis marked 'PM' (for Pedro Martín) go to the south end of town, past the Estrella de Oro bus station.
- Taxi – taxis cost M\$15 to M\$30 for trips around town.

comfy, if sterile, rooms (some remodeled, some not) have Mexican furnishings, cable TV and phones. Rooms with balconies overlooking the street suffer bad traffic noise – try for a room at the back. Prices rise at the weekend.

**Hotel Best Western Taxco** (☎ 762-627-61-94, 800-561-2663; www.bestwesterntaxco.com; Nibbi 2; s/d M\$999/1100, ste M\$315-1515; 📞 📺 📺) If you're not looking for a particularly colonial vibe this rather stylish and well-run Best Western is a good option. Large rooms have small bathrooms but the odd boutique flourish make for a comfortable stay right in the centre of town. Upstairs rooms are larger but lack balconies. No matter, everyone enjoys access to the rooftop sun deck with 360-degree city views.

**Posada de la Misión** (☎ 762-622-00-63, 800-008-29-20; www.posadamision.com; Cerro de la Misión 32; s/d incl breakfast M\$1500/1650; 📞 📺 📺) A short way from the town centre on the top of a steep hilllock, the large, rambling grounds of Posada de la Misión are an ideal weekend escape. The charming rooms (some of which have great balconies with breathtaking views of the town) are large, airy and bright. There's also a large pool and Jacuzzi under a beautiful mosaic of Cuauhtémoc and an excellent restaurant with more stunning views. Sadly, the hotel can be over-run with tour groups, although given the space available it's likely you can escape them.

**Hotel Monte Taxco** (☎ 762-622-13-00, 800-980-0000; www.montetaxco.com.mx; Lomas de Taxco; s/d from M\$1638/1735; 📞 📺 📺) This improbably located country club, accessible via a cable car from the edge of Taxco, is where to come and find the golfing classes. It's hard to see what all the fuss is about though – the hotel is nothing special, and while good for views and a relaxed weekend away, the rooms are plain and somewhat neglected, while Taxco itself is too much of an effort to get to – it'd be much better just drinking by the poolside. Use of the nine-hole golf course is extra.

## Eating & Drinking

**Café Sacha** (☎ 762-628-51-50; Juan Ruiz de Alarcón 1A; mains M\$45-85; 📞) This wonderfully decorated hangout enjoys low lighting, little balcony tables and free wi-fi as well as a collection of antique Lonely Planet guides to most of Central America. It's a good place to come anytime of day – it can get lively in the evenings – while the good vegetarian selection and Thai and Indian specialties grab diners at other times.

**La Hamburguesa** (☎ 762-622-09-41; Plazuela de San Juan 5; hamburgers from M\$15; 📞 closed Wed) For a light meal or a quick lunch, try this popular place on the west side of Plazuela San Juan. It sells burger-and-fries combos and excellent enchiladas.

**Pozolería Tia Calla** (☎ 762-622-56-02; Plaza Borda 1; mains M\$20-40; 📞 1:30-11pm Wed-Mon) There are no fine vistas or breezy terraces here... just authentic, no-nonsense white Guerrero-style *pozole*, served up in Auntie Calla's basement. Pick your poison: chicken or pork. Pork comes loaded with *chicharrón* (fried pork skin), avocado and all the fixings. No matter your meat choice, the broth is always pork-based. The beer steins are chilled and there's *fútbol* on the *tele*. What more could you ask for?

**Café Borda** (☎ 762-627-20-73; Plaza Borda 6; mains M\$40) This tiny place has the single best view of Santa Prisca going, and if you're lucky you can get the one balcony table and own it temporarily. Good breakfasts, strong coffee, sandwiches and Mexican *antojitos* (snacks) are served here by the friendly family owners.

**La Casona** (☎ 762-622-10-71; Muñoz 4; mains M\$60; 📞 8am-8pm) Cheaper than its neighbor Del Ángel, La Casona is also less touristy, more relaxed and more traditional in its menu choices. There are equally superb views from the tables at the back, although our favorite table is the one you share with the cigar-smoking skeleton! The excellent *menu del día* is a winner for M\$80.

**La Concha Nostra** (☎ 762-622-79-44; Plazuela de San Juan 5; pizzas M\$60) On the 2nd floor of the Casa Grande Hotel, this popular pizza and pasta restaurant serves food and drink until 1am. You can watch the action on Plazuela San Juan from the balcony. Live rock music shakes the house every Saturday night.

**Restaurant Santa Fe** (☎ 762-622-11-70; Hidalgo 2; mains M\$55-90) In business for over 50 years, Santa Fe is a favorite with locals, serving fairly priced traditional Mexican fare, such as *conejo en Chile ajo* (rabbit in garlic chili) and fresh shrimp. It offers four different set breakfasts, a hearty four-course *comida corrida* (set menu; \$6) and three styles of *pozole* daily after 6pm. The walls are bedecked with photos of local patrons and some excellent black-and-white photos of ye olde Taxco.

**Del Convento** (☎ 762-622-32-72; Estacadas 32; mains M\$40-105) For one of the best views in town, the restaurant of the Posada San Javier is hard to beat, with its vast roof terrace setting. Come by for the elaborate breakfasts, evening meal or cocktail.

**Hostería Bar El Adobe** (☎ 762-622-14-16; Plazuela de San Juan 13; mains M\$45-110) Views here are less captivating than at neighboring touristy eateries, but the interior decor is lovely and there's a bar full of cocktails.

Specialties include Taxco-style *cecina* (salted strip steak) and shrimp-spiked garlic soup.

**Sotavento** (☎ 762-627-12-17; Juárez 12; mains M\$50-145) Next door to the Palacio Municipal, the Sotavento has a great terrace and a peaceful interior garden as well as a good in-house art gallery. From breakfasts to cocktails, from enchiladas de *mole* to prime rib, it's all served up here.

**Acerto** (☎ 762-622-00-64; Plaza Borda 7; mains M\$90-190) This strikingly modern, sleek (and rather orange) conversion of a long-standing local favorite now functions as a restaurant, cocktail bar and internet café. The main attraction is the fantastic view across the Plaza Borda to Santa Prisca, although its delicious menu of salads, soups, *antojitos* and *moles* and its superior cocktail making are also good reasons to drop by.

**Del Ángel Inn** (☎ 762-622-55-25; Muñoz 4; mains M\$130-150) Think tour groups and mariachi bands here, at one of Taxco's most enduringly popular restaurants. Despite this, the superb views over the town from the 2nd floor roof terrace are hard to beat, and food quality is good, with a range of Mexican and international cuisine on offer.

**Bar Berta** (Cuauhtémoc; 📞 11am-8pm) By rights Berta should be flooded with lost-looking tourists, but remarkably there's a clientele of tough-looking locals knocking

## ¡QUE VIVA ZAPATA!

A peasant leader from Morelos state, Emiliano Zapata (1879–1919) was the most radical of Mexico's revolutionaries, fighting for the return of hacienda land to the peasants with the cry '*¡Tierra y Libertad!*' (Land and Freedom!). The Zapatista movement was at odds both with the conservative supporters of the old regime and their liberal opponents. In November 1911, Zapata disseminated his *Plan de Ayala*, calling for restoration of all land to the peasants. After winning numerous battles against government troops in central Mexico (some in association with Pancho Villa), he was ambushed and killed in 1919. The following route traces some of Zapata's defining moments.

### Ruta de Zapata

In Anenecuilco, 6km south of Cuautla, what's left of the adobe cottage where Zapata was born (on August 8, 1879), is now the **Museo de la Lucha para la Tierra** (Av Zapata; donation requested; 📞 8am-9pm), which features photographs of the rebel leader. Outside is a mural by Roberto Rodríguez Navarro that depicts Zapata exploding with the force of a volcano into the center of Mexican history, sundering the chains that bound his countrymen.

About 20km south of Anenecuilco is the Ex-Hacienda de San Juan Chinameca (in a town of the same name), where in 1919 Zapata was lured into a fatal trap by Colonel Jesús Guajardo, following the orders of President Venustiano Carranza, who was eager to dispose of the rebel leader and consolidate the postrevolutionary government. Pretending to defect to the revolutionary forces, Guajardo set up a meeting with Zapata, who arrived at Chinameca accompanied by a guerrilla escort. Guajardo's men gunned down the general before he crossed the abandoned hacienda's threshold.

The hacienda, with a small **museum** (Cárdenas; donation requested; 📞 9:30am-5pm), is on the left at the end of the town's main street, where there's a statue of Zapata astride a rearing horse. The exhibits (photos and newspaper reproductions) are pretty meager, but you can still see the bullet holes in the walls.

From Chinameca, Hwy 9 heads 20km northwest to Tlaltzapán, site of the **Cuartel General de Zapata** (Guerrero 67; donation requested; 📞 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), the main barracks of the revolutionary forces. It contains relics from General Zapata's time, including the bed where he slept, his rifle (the trigger retains his fingerprints) and the outfit he was wearing at the time of his death (riddled with bullet holes and stained with blood).

From Cuautla, yellow 'Chinameca' combis traveling to Anenecuilco and Chinameca (M\$6) leave from the corner of Garduño and Matamoros every 10 minutes.

back stiff drinks and watching *fútbol* instead. There's a tiny upstairs terrace for people watching over the *zócalo* should you not fancy the charming green painted downstairs bar. Try a *berta* (tequila, honey, lime and mineral water), the house specialty.

## Shopping

There are several silver shops in the **Patio de las Artesanías** (Plaza Borda) building. **Pineda's** (☎ 762-622-32-33; Muñoz 1) is justly famous; next door, **Joyería Elena de los Ballesteros** (☎ 762-622-37-67; Muñoz 4) is another worthwhile shop.

Inside Hotel Emilia Castillo, the tableware in the showroom of **Emilia Castillo** (☎ 762-622-34-71; Ruiz de Alarcón 7) is a unique blend of silver and porcelain. For quantity rather than quality, trawl the vast, haphazardly displayed masses of rings, chains and pendants at the **Mercado de Artesanías Plata** (🕒 11am-8pm).

## CUERNAVACA

There's always been a formidable glamour surrounding Cuernavaca (kwehr-nah-vah-kah), the high-society capital of Morelos State. With its vast gated haciendas, year-round warmth, clean air and attractive architecture, it has in the past attracted everyone from the Shah of Iran to Charles Mingus.

Today this tradition continues, even though urban sprawl has put a decisive end to the clean air and you're less likely to meet international royalty and great artists in the street, and far more likely to see vacationing Americans and college students studying Spanish on month-long courses.

While Cuernavaca has lots going for it, including some fantastic boutique hotels, good nightlife and fascinating nearby pre-Hispanic sites, it's fair to say that it's not the most accessible destination for those just passing through. Many of its most beautiful buildings are inaccessible to most visitors behind thick walls in private estates, so unless you're well connected in Mexico City high society or able to spend several weeks getting to know the city, then you may come away underwhelmed. However, the city has a great atmosphere, and definitely merits a stop on your way through.

Around AD 1200, the first settlers in the valleys of modern Morelos developed a highly productive agricultural society based at Cuauhnáhuac (Place at the Edge of the Forest). Later, they were conquered by the Mexica (Aztecs) who called them 'Tlahuica,' which

means 'people who work the land.' Under their Aztec overlords, the Tlahuica traded extensively and prospered. Their city was a learning and religious center, and archaeological remains suggest they had a considerable knowledge of astronomy.

When the Spanish arrived, the Tlahuica were fiercely loyal to the Aztecs. In April 1521 they were finally overcome and Cortés torched the city. After destroying the city pyramid, Cortés used the stones to build a fortress-palace, the Palacio de Cortés, on the pyramid's base. He also erected the fortress-like Cathedral de la Asunción from the rubble. Soon the city became known as Cuernavaca, a Spanish-friendly version of its original appellation.

In 1529, Cortés received his belated reward from the Spanish crown when he was named Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca, with an estate that covered 22 towns, including Cuernavaca, and 23,000 indigenous Mexicans. After he introduced sugar cane and new farming methods, Cuernavaca became a Spanish agricultural center, as it had been for the Aztecs. Cortés' descendants dominated the area for nearly 300 years.

With its salubrious climate, rural surroundings and colonial elite, Cuernavaca became a refuge for the rich and powerful, including José de la Borda, the 18th-century Taxco silver magnate. Borda's lavish home was later a retreat for Emperor Maximilian and Empress Carlota. Cuernavaca also attracted many artists, and achieved literary fame as the setting for Malcolm Lowry's 1947 novel, *Under the Volcano*.

Cuernavaca's *zócalo*, **Plaza de Armas**, is flanked on the east by the **Palacio de Cortés**, on the west by the **Palacio de Gobierno** and on the northeast and south by restaurants and roving bands of mariachis. Although you can't enter the Palacio de Gobierno, it is a nice spot to contemplate some attractive architecture and enjoy the music. It's the only main plaza in Mexico without a church, chapel, convent or cathedral overlooking it.

Adjoining the northwest corner is the smaller **Jardín Juárez**, where the central gazebo (designed by tower specialist Gustave Eiffel) houses juice and sandwich stands, and hosts band concerts on Thursday and Sunday evening from 6pm. Roving vendors sell balloons, ice cream and corn on the cob under the trees, which fill up with legions of cacophonous grackles at dusk. Even more entertaining are the guitar *trios* who warm up their voices and instruments before heading to the *café*s across the street to serenade willing

### CUERNAVACA

**INFORMATION**

Banamex (ATM).....	1	B3
Bancomer (ATM).....	2	B3
Main Post Office.....	3	B3
Municipal Tourist Office.....	A1	
State Tourist Office.....	5	B3
State Tourist Office.....	6	B6

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

Capilla Abierta de San José.....	7	B3
Capilla del Carmen.....	8	B3
Jardín Juárez.....	9	B3
Museo Regional Cuauhnáhuac.....	10	B3
Museo Robert Brady.....	11	B3
Palacio de Cortés.....	(see 10)	
Palacio de Gobierno.....	12	B3
Parroquia de Guadalupe.....	13	A3
Plaza de Armas.....	14	B3
Plazuela del Zacate.....	15	B3
Recinto de la Catedral.....	16	B3
Templo de la Asunción de María.....	17	B3
Templo de la Tercera Orden de San Francisco.....	18	B3

**EATING** 🍴

Casa Hidalgo.....	19	B3
El Barco.....	20	B3
Gaia.....	21	B3
La Comuna.....	22	B3
La Cueva.....	23	B3
La India Bonita.....	24	A3
La Strada.....	25	B3
La Universal.....	26	B3
Reposado.....	27	B3
Restaurant Las Mañanitas.....	(see 38)	
Restaurant y Cafetería Los Arcos.....	28	B3
Trattoria Marco Polo.....	29	B3

**DRINKING** 🍷

Club Memories.....	30	A4
NB Club.....	31	B3

**SLEEPING** 🛏

Casa Colonial.....	32	B4
Hostería del Sol.....	33	B3
Hotel Antigua Posada.....	34	B4
Hotel Iberia.....	35	B3
Hotel Laam.....	36	A4
Hotel Posada María Cristina.....	37	B4
Las Mañanitas.....	38	A1

**TRANSPORT**

Local Buses.....	39	C2
Pullman de Morelos (Casino de la Selva) Bus Station.....	40	C1
Pullman de Morelos (Downtown) Bus Station.....	41	B4

lonelyplanet.com

DAY TRIPS & EXCURSIONS CUERNAVACA

234

235

patrons. You too can request a ballad or two, for around M\$75.

Cortés' imposing medieval-style **palacio** stands opposite the southeast end of the Plaza de Armas. Erected between 1522 and 1532, the two-story stone edifice was set atop the base of the pyramid that Cortés had destroyed, still visible from various points on the ground floor. Cortés resided here until he turned tail for Spain in 1540. Today the palace houses the excellent **Museo Regional Cuauhnáhuac** (admission M\$37; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun, last ticket 5.30pm), with two floors of exhibits highlighting Mexican cultures and history. On the ground floor, exhibits focus on pre-Hispanic cultures, including the local Tlahaica and their relationship with the Aztec empire. Most labeling is in Spanish only.

Upstairs, exhibits cover events from the Spanish conquest up to the present. On the balcony is a fascinating mural by Diego Rivera, commissioned in the mid-1920s by Dwight Morrow, the US ambassador to Mexico. From right to left, scenes from the conquest up to the 1910 revolution emphasize the cruelty, oppression and violence that have characterized Mexican history.

Cuernavaca's cathedral stands in a large high-walled **recinto** (compound) – the entrance gate is on Hidalgo. Like the Palacio de Cortés, the cathedral was built in a grand fortress-like style, in an effort to impress, intimidate and defend against the natives. Franciscans started work on what was one of Mexico's earliest Christian missions in 1526, using indigenous labor and stones from the rubble of Cuauhnáhuac. The first construction was the **Capilla Abierta de San José**, an open chapel on the cathedral's west side.

The cathedral itself, the **Templo de la Asunción de María**, is plain and solid, with an unembellished facade. The side door, which faces north to the compound's entrance, shows a mixture of indigenous and European features – the skull and crossbones above it is a symbol of the Franciscan order. Inside are frescoes rediscovered early in the 20th century. Cuernavaca was a center for Franciscan missionary activities in Asia, and the frescoes – said to show the persecution of Christian missionaries in Japan – were supposedly painted in the 17th century by a Japanese convert to Christianity.

The cathedral compound also holds two smaller churches. On the right as you enter is the **Templo de la Tercera Orden de San Francisco**; its exterior was carved in 18th-century baroque style by indigenous artisans, and its interior has ornate, gilded decorations. On the left as

you enter is the 19th-century **Capilla del Carmen**, where believers seek cures for illness.

The one-time home of American artist and collector Robert Brady (1928–86), **Museo Robert Brady** (☎ 777-316-85-54; www.brady-museum.org; Netzahualcóyotl 4; admission M\$30; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is a wonderful place to spend time appreciating the exquisite taste of one man. Brady lived in Cuernavaca for 24 years after a spell in Venice, but his collections range from Papua New Guinea and India to Haiti and South America. Every room, including the two gorgeous bathrooms and kitchen, is bedecked in paintings, carvings, textiles, antiques and folk arts from all corners of the earth. Among the treasures are works by well-known Mexican artists, including Rivera, Tamayo, Kahlo and Covarrubias, as well as Brady's own paintings (check out his spot-on portrait of his friend Penny Guggenheim). The gardens are lovely too, with a very tempting swimming pool in one of them and a little café in the other.

Beside the 1784 **Parroquia de Guadalupe**, the extravagant **Jardín Borda** (☎ 777-318-82-50; Av Morelos 271; adult/child M\$30/15, free Sun; ☎ 10am-5:30pm Tue-Sun) was designed after Versailles in 1783 for Manuel de la Borda, as an addition to the stately residence built by his father, José de la Borda, the Taxco silver magnate. From 1866, Emperor Maximilian and Empress Carlota entertained their courtiers here, and used the house as a summer residence.

From the entrance, you can tour the house and gardens to get an idea of how Mexico's aristocracy lived. In one wing, the **Museo del Sitio** has exhibits on daily life during the empire period, and original documents with the signatures of Morelos, Juárez and Maximilian. Several romantic paintings in the **Sala Manuel M Ponce**, a recital hall near the entrance, show scenes of the garden in Maximilian's time. One of the most famous paintings depicts Maximilian in the garden with La India Bonita, the 'pretty Indian', who later became his lover.

The gardens are formally laid out on a series of terraces, with paths, steps and fountains, and they originally featured a botanical collection with hundreds of varieties of ornamental plants and fruit trees. The vegetation is still exuberant, with large trees and semitropical shrubs, though there is no longer a wide range of species. Because of a city water shortage, the baroque-style fountains only operate on weekends. You can hire a **row boat** (M\$30 per hour), or take tea at the **restaurant** (mains M\$50-95) inside the entrance without purchasing a ticket.

The city's best art gallery, the **Centro Cultural Muros** (☎ 777-310-38-48; www.muros.org.mx, in Spanish; Guerrero 205, Colonia Lomas de la Selva; admission M\$30, free Tue & Sun; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is home to restored murals from Cuernavaca's Hotel Casino de la Selva, and a private collection of more than 320 paintings, sculptures, videos and photographs. Highlights include Frida Kahlo's *Diego en mi Pensamiento*, and works by Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco, Tamayo and emerging 21st-century artists.

In the five days before Ash Wednesday (late February or early March), Cuernavaca's colorful **Carnaval** celebration features parades, art exhibits and street performances by Tepoztlán's Chinelo dancers. In late March and early April, the **Feria de la Primavera** (Spring Fair) includes cultural and artistic events, concerts and a beautiful exhibit of the city's spring flowers.

## Information

**Hospital INOVAMED** (☎ 777-311-24-82/83/84; Cuauhtémoc 305) In Colonia Lomas de la Selva, 1km north of town.

**Main post office** (Plaza de Armas; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) On the south side of the plaza.

**Municipal tourist office** (☎ 777-318-75-61; http://mac.cuernavaca.gob.mx/turismo, in Spanish; Av Morelos 278; ☎ 9am-5pm) Also has a tourist police office.

**State tourist office** (☎ /fax 777-314-38-72/81, 800-987-82-24; www.morelostravel.com; Av Morelos Sur 187) and (☎ 314-39-20; Hidalgo; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, Sat 10am-1pm), between Galeana and Juárez.

## Sleeping

A steady stream of upmarket boutique hotels have opened up in recent years, and some of the best in the country are here, squarely aimed at weekend refugees from the capital. On Friday and Saturday nights and holidays, the town fills up with visitors from Mexico City, so it's best to arrive with prior reservations.

**Hotel Iberia** (☎ 777-312-60-40; www.hoteliberia.com.mx; Rayón 7; s/d M\$290/370; ☎) While rooms may be a little small at this good value student favorite, they have a modicum of style with their iron bedsteads and matching fittings. Staff within the Talavera-tiled reception area are pretty indifferent, however.

**our pick** **Hostería del Sol** (☎ 777-318-32-41; Callejón de la Bolsa del Diablo; r with/without bathroom M\$400/300; ☎) The moment you enter this perfectly located little charmer it's clear what's wrong with most of

Cuernavaca's other budget accommodation. Here prices are rock-bottom, but everything is spotless and beautifully decorated throughout in traditional blue and yellow tones. With just six rooms (half of which share facilities), it's best to ring ahead, although staff don't speak a word of English.

**La Casa Mediterránea B&B** (☎ 777-317-11-53; www.lacasamediterranea.com; Acacias 207, Colonia La Pradera; s/d incl breakfast \$350/500; ☎) Popular with language students on courses, this seven-room family home is 3km out of town, but features large, well-maintained rooms and a friendly welcome. It's excellent value for the money – you'd be paying twice as much were it in the town center.

**Villa Calmecac** (☎ 777-313-29-18; www.villacalmecac.com; Zacatecas 114, Colonia Buenavista; dm/d incl breakfast \$450/650; ☎) Crafted from adobe and surrounded by organic gardens, this ecofriendly hostel is 7km from Cuernavaca's center. Yoga classes are offered, breakfast is an all-natural buffet and the bunks are in rustic-style rooms. It's 800m west of Hwy 95, a 20-minute ride from the corner of Av Morelos and Calle Degollado on a Ruta 1, 2 or 3 bus. Zacatecas is two blocks past the Zapata monument on the left. Visitors must check in before 9pm.

**Hotel Antigua Posada** (☎ 777-310-21-79; www.hotelantiguaposada.com; Galeana 69; r M\$800, ste M\$950-1100; ☎) This exclusive little hideaway boasts just 11 rooms behind its unpromising exterior, a short walk from the center of town. However, once inside there's a lovely courtyard and great service, and all the rooms are of very high standard, complete with wooden beams, rustic touches and full facilities, including free wi-fi, breakfast and valet parking.

**Hotel Laam** (☎ 777-314-44-11; www.laamhotel.com; Morelos 239; r M\$850; ☎) This new addition to the Cuernavaca hotel scene has the feel of a motel, but its rooms are comfortable, if a little sterile, and some have huge terraces. It's set back from the main road so noise isn't a big problem, although the setting isn't exactly charming either. A small pool and delightful staff compensate though.

**La Casa Azul** (☎ 777-314-21-41, 314-36-34; www.hotelcasazul.com.mx; Arista 17; r/ste M\$850/1880; ☎) This 24-room boutique hotel is a short walk from the town center and has lots of charm, although the suites are a big price jump from the rooms, and they frankly aren't that much bigger. Originally part of the Guadalupe Convent, the hotel has soothing fountains, two pools, free wi-fi and a great selection of local arts and crafts throughout. The staff are delightful, the setting is tranquil and the decor is classic Mexican.

**Casa Colonial** (☎ 777-312-70-33, 800-623-08-43; www.casacolonial.com, in Spanish; Netzahualcóyotl 37; r from M\$985, ste from M\$1215; ☎) One of the best places in town, the 16-room Casa Colonial oozes thought

and style. Set in a charming garden around a large pool, this 19th-century mansion has been lovingly restored and cleverly updated, with beautifully furnished rooms, some of which feature saunas and fireplaces. The cheaper bungalows at the back are still of an excellent standard.

**Hotel Jacarandas** (☎ 777-315-77-77/76, in Mexico City ☎ 55-5544-3098; www.jacarandas.com.mx; Cuauhtémoc 133, Colonia Chapultepec; rfrom M\$1400, ste M\$2600-4400; (P) (E)) This large five-star place is a true getaway from city life. Set in rambling grounds graced with lots of trees, exuberant gardens, a good restaurant, and three pools of varying temperatures, it makes a great (if pricey) weekend option. It's 1.3km east of the center.

**Hotel Posada María Cristina** (☎ 777-318-57-67, 800-713-74-07; reservasiones@maria-cristina.com; Juárez 300; r/ste from M\$1887/2900; (P) (E)) This centrally-located 16th-century estate is one of Cuernavaca's long-time favorites. Highlights include 20 tastefully appointed rooms in a nicely restored colonial building, the charming *nueva cocina mexicana* restaurant and bar Calandria with its popular Sunday champagne buffet, and an inviting pool and Jacuzzi amidst lovely hillside gardens.

**Hotel Hacienda de Cortés** (☎ 777-316-08-67, 800-220-76-97; www.hotelhaciendadecortes.com; Plaza Kennedy 90; r/ste from M\$2350/3525; (P) (E)) Built in the 16th century by Martín Cortés, who succeeded Hernán Cortés as Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca, this former sugar mill was renovated in 1980. It boasts 23 rooms of various levels of luxury, each with its own private garden and terrace. There's a swimming pool built around old stone columns. Although several guests have complained that the rooms weren't in the best state when they visited, this is still an incredible place for a memorable night or two.

**Las Mañanitas** (☎ 777-362-00-00, in Mexico City 800-221-52-99, in US ☎ 888-413-91-99; www.lasmananitas.com.mx; Linares 107; ste incl breakfast Sun-Thu M\$2260-4642, Fri & Sat M\$2623-5061; (P) (E)) This utterly stunning place is where to head if you plan to impress someone. It's very much a destination hotel – you may not leave it for the whole weekend, after all – and so the fact that it's not in the very center is irrelevant. The rooms are large and beautifully decorated yet understated. Many feature large terraces overlooking the sumptuous private gardens, stuffed full of peacocks and featuring a heated pool. As you'd expect it's a home away from home to Mexico's upper crust.

## Eating

**La Comuna** (☎ 777-318-27-57; Morrow 6; mains M\$20-30; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat) One of the friendliest places in town, La Comuna is decorated with handicrafts and serves up excellent organic coffee, as well as cheap beer, cocktails, pies, tamales and fruit salads with granola. Drop by for the daily buffet breakfast, a generous set midday meal, or to browse its small gift shop.

**La Cueva** (no phone; Galeana; mains M\$20-75; ☎ 8am-11pm) This no-nonsense sloped bar opens onto the bustling crowds of Galeana and serves up superb *pozole* and a range of other delicious snacks and light meals. It's a great place to come and eat with the locals at local prices. It's also an excellent place for breakfast, with a range on offer for just M\$25.

**El Barco** (☎ 777-313-21-31; Rayón 5F; mains M\$30-90; ☎ 11am-midnight) This popular, no-nonsense joint specializes in Guerrero-style *pozole*, the all-curing Mexican version of matzo-ball soup. Small or heaping clay bowls are accompanied by fine oregano, mildly hot red chili, shredded lettuce, limes and chopped onions. Specify *pollo* (chicken), and *maciza* (unless you'd like your soup to include bits of fat), plus *especial* if you enjoy avocado. For refreshment, there's ice-cold beer, pitchers of *agua de jamaica* (hibiscus water) and top-shelf tequila.

**La Strada** (☎ 777-318-60-85; Salazar 38; mains M\$70-150) On the walking street also known as Callejón del Cubo, this inviting slice of Rome presents authentic Italian-Mediterranean cuisine in a covered interior courtyard. The napkins are linen, the wine cellar is well-stocked, the lettuce is organic and service is attentive. Considering its location near the Palacio de Cortés, it's not too touristy. Romance fills the air Friday and Saturday nights, when there's live violin music and opera singing.

**La India Bonita** (☎ 777-318-69-67; Morrow 115; mains M\$75-150; ☎ 8am-11pm Tue-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun & Mon) Cuernavaca's oldest restaurant is also undoubtedly one of its most charming, set in a lovely courtyard, although with the option of indoor dining available too. The staff are friendly and the traditional Mexican menu with a twist is enticing – from *brocheta al mezcal to chile en nogada*. There's an elaborate Sunday buffet brunch, full bar and live folkloric ballet Saturdays from 7pm.

**La Universal** (☎ 777-318-59-70; cnr Gutenberg & Guerrero; mains M\$100) The Universal enjoys a strategic position on the corner of the two central plazas, with tables under an awning facing the Plaza de Armas. This popular place is all about location – the people-watching is great, but you can find better eats elsewhere.

## TRANSPORTATION: CUERNAVACA

- Distance from Mexico City – 89km
- Travel time – 1¼ hours
- Direction – south
- Bus – Pullman de Morelos (www.pullman.com.mx) runs frequent 'deluxe' (M\$63) and 'executive' (M\$75) class buses between Mexico City's Terminal Sur and Cuernavaca's downtown and Casino de la Selva terminals. (From the latter, local Ruta 17 buses head downtown.) The same company offers direct service every 10 minutes to/from the Mexico City airport (M\$125).

**Restaurant y Cafetería Los Arcos** (☎ 777-312-44-86; Jardín de los Héroes 4; mains M\$40-120) Right in the thick of things off the Plaza de Armas, Los Arcos is a European-style café which makes for a great meeting place. The huge terrace is nearly always packed. Whether you come for early-morning coffee, late-night cocktails or a meal in between, you'll find friendly and efficient service. There's also a *geletería* here serving up great ice cream. Happy hours run from 2pm to 4pm and again from 8pm to 10pm.

**our pick Casa Hidalgo** (☎ 777-312-27-49, www.casa.hidalgo.com; Hidalgo 6; mains M\$160) Directly opposite the Palacio de Cortés with a great terrace and an even better upstairs balcony, this is one of Cuernavaca's most popular eateries and attracts a well-heeled crowd of local socialites and wealthy visitors. The menu is eclectic (try shrimp tacos with beans wrapped in banana skin, or braided red snapper and salmon in an orange and parsley sauce, for example). Super friendly staff, a strong wine list and great views make this one of the best place in town for a meal.

**Reposado** (☎ 777-169-72-32; www.reposado.com.mx; Netzahualcōyotl 33; mains M\$80-165; ☎ 7pm-1am Tue-Sat, 4-11pm Sun) Reposado is synonymous with its celebrity chef Ana García, a local girl who has made a name for herself both in Mexico and the US with her promotion of *alta cocina mexicana*. Don't miss a chance to come to her intimate and charming restaurant and to try her ever-changing menu of traditional Mexican cooking with exciting twists and innovations. Tables are scattered throughout the colonial complex and romantically candlelit. There's a stylish sofa-bed cocktail lounge in a loft overlooking the pool. Those really interested can organize to stay in the small on-site hotel here and take cookery courses with Chef García – see the website for details.

**Gaia** (☎ 777-312-36-56, www.gaiarest.com.mx; Juárez 102; mains M\$190; ☎ 2pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun) This gorgeous, stylish place has a very impressive international menu with dishes such as linguini with shrimp in cilantro sauce and 'fish trilogy' with tamarind and chili, all served in a delightful colonial building that was once the mansion of comic actor Mario Moreno, aka Cantinflas. Reserve a table with a view of the Diego Rivera mosaic that adorns the bottom of the swimming pool. Delivery and take-out is also available.

**Trattoria Marco Polo** (☎ 777-318-40-32; Hidalgo 30; mains M\$60-120, pizza M\$45-200; ☎ 1-10:30pm Sun-Thu, 1pm-midnight Fri & Sat) This handy little place does decent Italian dishes in an attractive setting just across from the cathedral. The pizza list alone is huge, and there's friendly service and a decent choice of wine as well. Try for a table by the balcony.

**Restaurant Las Mañanitas** (☎ 777-314-14-66; Linares 107; breakfast M\$60-160, mains M\$400; ☎ 1-5pm & 7-11pm) The restaurant and bar of the town's most famous

hotel is open to all, and it shouldn't be missed if you want a memorable, romantic dinner in ultra-smart surroundings. The menu has a heavy French accent, with *entrecôte bourguignonne* and Royal Magret (duck breast) to tempt you, not to mention sumptuous desserts. Choose between tables inside the mansion or on the terrace, where you can watch the wildlife wander around the emerald-green garden among fine modern sculptures. Reservations are recommended.

## Drinking & Entertainment

The most accessible bars are around Plazuela del Zacate and the adjacent alley Las Casas. Most offer live music or karaoke and typically don't shut their doors until around sunrise.

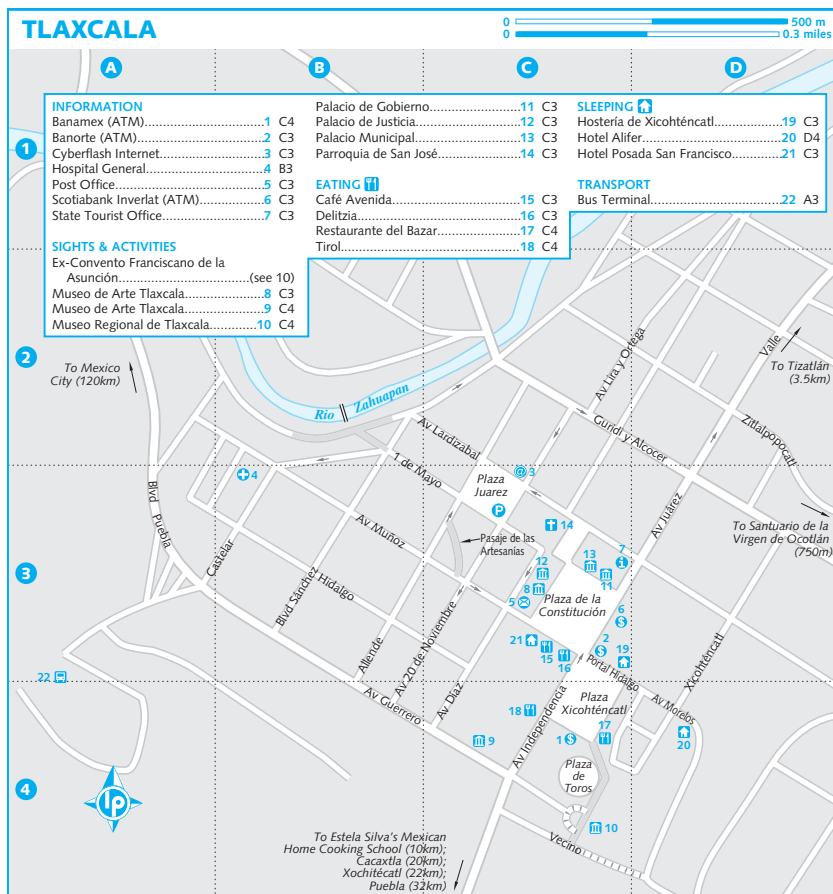
The better discos charge a cover of at least M\$50, but women often get in free. Some enforce dress codes, and trendier places post style police at the door. Things really get going after 11pm. Some recommended venues are **Barba Azul** (☎ 311-55-11/55; Prado 10, Colonia San Jerónimo; ☎ 10pm-late Fri & Sat), with fab indoor gardens; centrally located and large **NB Club** (☎ 318-89-29; Plaza de Armas); and upscale **Club Memories** (☎ 318-43-80; Av Morelos 241; ☎ 10pm-late Wed, Fri & Sat).

## TLAXCALA

Tlaxcala is a delightful Mexican anomaly – despite being less than two hours from Mexico City, the capital of Mexico's smallest state remains a calm and traffic-free place, especially at the weekend. Though there's nothing in particular to warrant a detour here, many visitors fall for the town's refreshingly tourist-free ambience.

In the last centuries before the Spanish conquest, numerous *señorios* (small warrior kingdoms) arose in and around Tlaxcala. Some of them formed a loose federation that remained independent of the Aztec empire as it spread from the Valle de México in the 15th century. The most important kingdom seems to have been Tizatlán, now on the northeast edge of Tlaxcala city.

When the Spanish arrived in 1519, the Tlaxcalans fought fiercely at first, but ultimately became Cortés' staunchest allies against the Aztecs (with the exception of one chief, Xicoténcatl the Younger, who tried to rouse his people against the Spanish and is now a Mexican hero). The Spanish rewarded the Tlaxcalans with privileges and used them to help pacify and settle Chichimec areas to the north. In 1527, Tlaxcala became the seat of the first bishopric in Nueva España, but a



plague in the 1540s decimated the population and the town has played only a supporting role ever since.

Tlaxcala's shady, spacious *zócalo* is one of Mexico's most fetching. The 16th-century **Palacio Municipal**, a former grain storehouse, and the **Palacio de Gobierno** occupy most of its north side. Inside the latter are vivid murals of Tlaxcala's history by Desiderio Hernández Xochitiotzin. The 16th-century building on the plaza's northwest side is the **Palacio de Justicia**, the former Capilla Real de Indios, built for the use of indigenous nobles. The handsome mortar bas-reliefs around its doorway include the seal of Castilla y León and a two-headed eagle, symbol of the Hapsburg monarchs who ruled Spain in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Off the northwest corner of the *zócalo* is the pretty-in-pink tile, brick and stucco **Parroquia de**

**San José**. As elsewhere in the Centro Histórico, bilingual signs explain the significance of the church and its many fountains.

Up along a shaded path from the southeast corner of Plaza Xochitlécatl, the **Ex-Convento Franciscano de la Asunción** was one of Mexico's earliest monasteries, and its church – the city's cathedral – has a beautiful Moorish-style wooden ceiling. Next door is the **Museo Regional de Tlaxcala** (☎ 462-02-62; admission M\$37, students free; ☞ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun), with a large collection of religious paintings and a few pre-Columbian artifacts.

The new **Museo de Arte de Tlaxcala** (☎ 246-466-03-52, www.mat.org.mx; Plaza de la Constitución 21 & Guerrero 15; adults/students/under 12 M\$20/10/free, Sunday & every day at Guerrero 15 free; ☞ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun) is a fantastic addition to the town's cultural scene. The main collection on the *zócalo* contains an

excellent cache of early Frida Kahlo paintings. This part of the museum holds excellent temporary exhibits and has a good permanent collection of modern Mexican art. The **smaller space** (Guerrero 15; admission free) is interactive and aimed at children.

Visible from most of town, the hilltop **Santuario de la Virgen de Ocotlán** (admission free; ☞ 9am–6pm) stands 1km northeast of the *zócalo*. One of Mexico's most spectacular churches, it's an important pilgrimage site owing to the belief that the Virgin appeared here in 1541 – her image stands on the main altar in memory of the apparition.

The classic Churrigueresque facade features white stucco 'wedding cake' decorations, contrasting with plain red tiles. During the 18th century, indigenous Mexican Francisco Miguel spent 25 years decorating the altarpieces and the chapel beside the main altar. To reach the santuario, walk north on Av Juárez for three blocks, then turn right onto Zitlal-

popocatl. Alternatively, catch an 'Ocotlán' *colectivo* from near the corner of Avs Guerrero and Independencia.

## Information

**Hospital General** (☎ 246-462-00-30/34-00)

**Cyberflash Internet** (Av 20 Noviembre; per hr M\$15) Between Avs Lardizabal and Guridi y Alcocer.

**Police** (☎ 246-464-52-56/57)

**Post Office** (cnr Avs Muñoz & Díaz)

**State Tourist Office** (☎ 246-465-09-60 ext 1519, 800-509-65-57; www.tlaxcala.gob.mx/turismo; cnr Avs Juárez & Lardizabal; ☞ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun) English-speaking staff are keen to sell you tickets to bullfights, as well as to give out a good free map of the town and book you on tram tours of the town (M\$20, Friday to Sunday).

Several banks around the *zócalo* exchange dollars and have ATMs.

## DETOUR: TEXCOCO

An outing to the little-visited area around Texcoco, 21km northeast of Mexico City's airport, will give you a chance to survey some of Diego Rivera's most spectacular work, as well as a pair of interesting historical sites.

A major city before the arrival of the Spanish, Texcoco proved an important ally of the Aztecs, as part of the Triple Alliance along with Tlacopan. Under the reign of poet-king Nezahualcōyōtl in the 15th century, it flourished as a center of music, art and architecture.

Between 1925 and 1927, Diego Rivera painted murals for the **Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo**, an agriculture school just outside Texcoco that occupies the estate buildings of a former hacienda. Two dozen of Rivera's panels cover the walls and ceiling of the hacienda **chapel**, now part of the university's administration building (admission M\$30; ☞ 10am–3pm Mon–Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun). These sensual tableaux intertwine images of the Mexican struggle for agrarian reform with the earth's fertility cycles. One depicts buried martyrs of reform symbolically fertilizing the land and thus the future. The curator will give you a brief description (in Spanish) of the murals upon request.

Established in 1585 as the first wheat mill in the region, the Molino de Flores, 3km east of Texcoco, later served as a *pulque* hacienda, before being expropriated by the government in 1937. Many of its buildings are in ruins, but some have been partly restored and opened for exploration within the **Parque Nacional Molino de Flores**. Works of local artists are exhibited in the *tinacal* (tank) where *pulque* was processed. A walk past the main building will take you to an unusual little church built into the side of a gorge, accessible on one side by a hanging bridge.

The little known archaeological site of **Baños de Nezahualcōyōtl** (Admission free; ☞ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun), 3km east of Molino de Flores, is what's left of a palatial complex built by Nezahualcōyōtl, whose engineering skills rivaled his flair for poetry. Ascending to the hilltop site, you'll come across the remains of the spring-fed aqueducts that irrigated the king's terraced gardens in the 15th century. The moderate 2km hike to the summit rewards climbers with views as far as Xochimilco – at least when smog levels are low.

Buses depart every 10 to 15 minutes from Mexico City's TAPO terminal to downtown Texcoco (M\$20), from which there is transport to each of the three destinations. The Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo is about 2.5km south, at Km 38.5 on Carretera Federal México-Texcoco (Highway 136). From Calle Fray Pedro de Gante in Texcoco, catch a 'Los Reyes/La Paz' or 'Aeropuerto/Zaragoza' microbus and ask to be left off at Chapingo.

To get to the Parque Nacional Molino de Flores, take a 'Molino de Flores' combi from downtown Texcoco. For the Baños de Nezahualcōyōtl, get on a 'Tlaminca' combi and ask to get off at the church. From there, it's a short walk to the park entrance and another 1.5km to the summit. Though there's no public transport between Molino de Flores and the Baños, a taxi between the two points should not cost more than M\$50.

## TRANSPORTATION: TLAXCALA

- Distance from Mexico City – 118km
- Travel Time – 2 hours
- Direction – east
- Bus – ATAH runs 1st-class 'expresso' buses (M\$90) to/from Mexico City's TAPO terminal every 20 minutes until 9pm.

## Courses

**Estela Silva's Mexican Home Cooking School** (☎ /fax 246-468-09-78; www.mexicanhomecooking.com; courses US\$1200, nonstudent guests US\$600) offers an intimate five-day gastronomic course, with hands-on instruction in the preparation of classic Mexican dishes. Tuition includes all meals, drinks, live music, transfers from Puebla and a trip to local markets, plus six nights of B&B lodging in comfortable private rooms with fireplaces. The bilingual lessons focus on the preservation of traditional French-inflected Puebla cuisine, and take place in the Talavera-tiled kitchen of fun-loving Estela's quaint hacienda-style country home, in a village 10km south of Tlaxcala.

## Sleeping

**Hosteria de Xicohténcatl** (☎ 246-466-47-16; Portal Hidalgo 10; s/d M\$350/450, ste M\$600-1100; (P)) Of the 16 rooms at this relative newcomer, half are suites. All rooms are clean and quite large, if a little sterile. Staff are friendly enough and location is excellent, just off the *zócalo*. Check out the collection of crosses in the lobby!

**Hotel Alifer** (☎ 246-462-56-78; www.hotelalifer.com, in Spanish; Av Morelos 11; s/d M\$350/450; (P)) One of the best budget options is the reasonable Hotel Alifer, up a small hill just a minute from the *zócalo*. Some rooms can be a bit dingy and dark (avoid bottom-floor rooms that face echo-chamber hallways and lack exterior windows), but they are clean and spacious with TV, phone and free wi-fi.

**Hotel Posada San Francisco** (☎ 246-462-56-22; www.posadasanfrancisco.com, in Spanish; Plaza de la Constitución 17; s/d/ste M\$980/1155/1700; (P)) The Posada San Francisco is the kind of place where you'd expect to find a famous author drinking himself to death (in a good way) – check out the stained glass lobby roof, the beautiful bullfight-themed bar, the large pool and the airy restaurant. While it's definitely the best place to stay in town, the rooms are something of a letdown.

## Eating

**Delitzia** (☎ 466-38-88; Plaza de la Constitución 14; sandwiches M\$40-60; ☎ noon-midnight Tue-Sun) Just next

door to Café Avenida is this great lunch option, serving up good baguettes, crepes, salads and mole in a funky space with outdoor tables overlooking the *zócalo*. It's also a good bet for a post-sightseeing cocktail.

**Tirol** (☎ 246-462-37-54; Av Independencia 7A; set menu M\$65-90) This sleek place overlooking Plaza Xicohténcatl is all white tablecloths and attentive service and the gourmet Mexican food is excellent. If you don't fancy an elaborate set meal, just get take-out from the gourmet taco stand out front.

**Restaurante del Bazar** (Plaza Xicohténcatl 7B; mains M\$80-90) A new addition to Tlaxcala's eating scene, this upmarket restaurant offers dining in a gorgeous setting with stylish decor and excellent service. The menu is a large and frequently changing roll-call of Mexican favorites with a modern twist.

**our pick** **Café Avenida** (☎ 246-466-36-69; Plaza de la Constitución 16; mains M\$48-110) On the south side of the *zócalo*, the Café Avenida makes a refreshing break from the all-day brunches on the square's eastern flank. Its pretty wooden interior is painted green and patronized by a friendly local crowd. The home-cooked three-course lunch for M\$56 is a great deal, and on top of that there's a huge choice of Mexican specialties, as well as a full cocktail bar.

## MALINALCO

Word has slowly got out about this *pueblo mágico*, but come soon and you'll still get to enjoy it without the weekend crowds that descend on its more easily accessible cousins. True, there are already a clutch of hippie stores and a couple of boutique hotels, but for the most part life in Malinalco is a far cry from that in Tepoztlán.

In fact the drive to Malinalco is one of the most enjoyable to be had in the area, with dramatic scenery south of Toluca lining the road. The village itself has a charming colonial core set around a well-preserved convent and two central plazas. A short but bracing hike up the mountainside above Malinalco takes you

## TRANSPORTATION: MALINALCO

- Distance from Mexico City – 95km
- Travel time – two hours
- Direction – southwest
- Bus – three buses a day run to/from Mexico City's Terminal Poniente (M\$52). Otherwise, catch one of the more frequent buses to Tenancingo, and ask the driver to let you off for the colectivo to Malinalco (M\$15, 1 hour).
- Car – if driving from Mexico City, turn south at La Marquesa and follow the signs to Malinalco.

## DETOUR: TULA

The probable capital of the ancient Toltec civilization is best known for its fearsome 4.5m-high stone warrior figures. Though less spectacular and far smaller than Teotihuacán, Tula is still a fascinating site and well worth the effort of a day trip. The modern town of Tula de Allende is surrounded by a PEMEX refinery and an odoriferous petrochemical plant, but the center is pleasant enough for an overnight stay.

Tula was an important city from about AD 900 to 1150, reaching a peak population of 35,000. It was evidently a place of some splendor – legends speak of palaces of gold, turquoise, jade and quetzal feathers, of enormous corn cobs and colored cotton that grew naturally. It was abandoned by the early 13th century, seemingly after violent destruction by the Chichimecs.

The **ruins** (☎ 732-0705; admission M\$37, use of video M\$35; ☎ 9am-5pm) of the main ceremonial center of Tula are perched on a hilltop with good views over rolling countryside. These make up just a small part of the 16 sq km site, but are where all the sites of interest are located. From the main road, it's a 300m walk to the ticket office and the excellent site **museum** (entrance included in site ticket price) displaying ceramics, metalwork, jewelry and large sculptures.

Also known as the temple of Quetzalcóatl or Tlahuizcalpantecuhli (Morning Star), **Pirámide B** can be scaled via steps on its south side. At the top of the stairway, the remains of three columnar roof supports – that once depicted feathered serpents with their heads on the ground and their tails in the air – remain standing. The four basalt warrior-telamones at the top and the four pillars behind supported the temple's roof. Wearing headdresses, butterfly-shaped breastplates and short skirts held in place by sun disks, the warriors hold spear-throwers in their right hands, and knives and incense bags in their left. The telamon on the left side is a replica of the original, now in Mexico City's Museo Nacional de Antropología (p80).

Now roofless, the **Gran Vestíbulo** (Great Vestibule) extends along the front of the pyramid, facing the plaza. The stone bench carved with warriors originally ran the length of the hall, possibly to seat priests and nobles observing ceremonies in the plaza.

The **plaza** in front of Pirámide B would have been the scene of religious and military displays. At its center is the *adoratorio* (ceremonial platform). On the east side of the plaza, **Pirámide C** is Tula's biggest structure, and was in the early stages of excavation at the time of research. To the west is **Juego de Pelota No 2**, central Mexico's largest ball court at more than 100m in length.

First-class Omnibus buses go to/from Mexico City's Terminal Norte (M\$52, 1½ hours, every 30 to 40 minutes). Autotransportes Valle ded Mezquital (AVM) runs 2nd-class buses (M\$40) to the capital every 15 minutes.

to one of the country's few reasonably well-preserved **Aztec temples** (admission M\$37; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun, tickets sold to 5pm) from where there are stunning views of the valley and beyond.

From the main square follow signs to the *zona arqueológica*, which takes you up the hillside on a well-maintained footpath with signs in Spanish, English and Náhuatl. The site itself is fascinating, and includes *El Paraíso de los Guerreros*, a mural that once covered an entire wall, depicting fallen warriors becoming deities and living in paradise.

The Aztecs conquered the region in 1476 and were busy building a ritual center here when they were themselves conquered by the Spanish. El Cuauhcalli, thought to be the Temple of Eagle and Jaguar Warriors – where sons of Aztec nobles were initiated into warrior orders – survived because it's hewn from the mountainside itself. The entrance is carved in the form of a fanged serpent.

Near the site entrance, the **Museo Universitario Dr Luis Mario Schneider** (☎ 714-147-12-88; admission M\$10;

☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) explores the region's history and archaeology in a beautifully set out modern space. The highlight is a mock up of the mural from the temple site and a replica of the Cuauhcalli chamber you aren't able to enter in the temple proper.

A well-restored 16th-century **Augustinian convent** (admission free), fronted by a tranquil tree-lined yard, faces the central plaza. Impressive frescoes fashioned from herb- and flower-based paint adorn its cloister.

## Sleeping

**El Asoleadero** (☎ 714-147-01-84; cnr Aldama & Comercio; s/d/q from M\$300/350/450; (P)) This old-timer offers excellent value for money if you're not looking for a boutique place to stay. The spacious and airy rooms, some with balconies, look over the quiet street, while views from the courtyard overlooking the pool are spectacular.

**Hotel Santa Mónica** (☎ 714-147-00-31; Hidalgo 109; r M\$350) Moments from the *zócalo* towards the archaeological zone, the Santa Mónica is one of the better budget



© Lonely Planet Publications

options, with clean rooms all with private bathroom and TV scattered around a pretty garden courtyard.

**Villa Hotel** ( 📞 714-147-00-01; Guerrero 101; s/d M\$300/600) Hardly romantic, the friendly Villa has six rooms: some have cliff views while others (some with better beds) face the plaza. Some rooms were suffering from damp on our last visit. You get a M\$50 reduction if you don't have a TV in your room.

**Casa Mora** ( 📞 714-147-05-72; www.casamora.net; Calle de la Cruz 18; ste M\$1800-2000; (P) 📺 ) This beautifully appointed oasis is a hotel where you feel more like a house guest than a tourist. It's the pet project of a local artist, who maintains five beautiful rooms, all of which enjoy an intimate and romantic atmosphere.

**our pick Casa Limón** ( 📞 714-147-02-56; www.casalimon.com, in Spanish; Río Lerma 103; r/ste incl breakfast from M\$2100/2500; (P) 📺 📺 ) Malinalco's most famous hotel features beautifully styled, modern, minimalist rooms, enhanced with individually picked pieces of art and the odd antique. A slate swimming pool, classy bar and excellent restaurant complete the scene.

## Eating & Drinking

**Restaurant El Puente** ( 📞 714-147-17-43; Hidalgo 104; mains M\$40-90; 🕒 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, to midnight Fri & Sat, to 7pm Sun) Just after the tiny bridge as you leave the *zócalo* for the ruins, this atmospheric colonial house has two smart dining rooms, as well as a great back garden, where you can try a selection of *antijitos*, pastas, soups and steaks.

**Ehécatl** (Hidalgo 10; mains M\$55-70; 🕒 9am-6pm; (V) ) A beautiful space with a gorgeously verdant courtyard,

Ehécatl is named after the Aztec god of the wind and rain and is one of Malinalco's best choices. As well as good breakfasts (M\$40 to M\$50) and a large range of fresh fish, it also offers a complete list of traditional Mexican cooking.

**Beto's** ( 📞 714-147-03-11; Morelos 8; mains M\$50-95; 🕒 noon-8pm Tue-Sun) At Beto's you'll get the best seafood in town by a long way (the fresh trout is superb), as well as ice-cold beer served with salt on the rim. The friendly owner-chef couple will fuss over you until you're stuffed and then bring you a *beso de ángel* (coffee liqueur and condensed milk on ice, dusted with cinnamon) with the check.

**Casa Limón** ( 📞 714-147-02-56; Río Lerma 103; mains M\$140-180; 🕒 noon-10pm Thu-Sun) The restaurant of Malinalco's smartest hotel is also superb: a classy indoor/outdoor space with white tablecloths, silver service but a friendly atmosphere. Mains are classic international fare – from *coq au vin* to almond trout – and the wine list is superb.

**Koi** ( 📞 714-147-16-21; Morelos 18; mains M\$140-170; 🕒 11am-10pm Fri-Sun) Fusion cookery has arrived in Malinalco in the form of this very trendy (and not particularly cheap) restaurant. The exciting menu runs from *camarones al coco* to pad thai and fish tempura, all served within a minimalist space you'd frankly not normally expect to find in a Mexican village.

**Café La Fé** ( 📞 714-147-01-77; Guerrero; 🕒 11am-8pm Fri-Sun) Between the museum and *zócalo*, this coffee shop and juice bar is a great place for a drink after having scaled the cliffside to visit the Aztec ruins. Everything sold on site is 100% organic, including locally grown coffee beans.

© 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.'