

# Northern Central Highlands



Arid deserts to tropical forests, staunchly traditional to 'Americanized' modern, maize to pasta, the region covering the northern central highlands is as varied and colorful as its people, landscapes, food and culture. It was here that former mineral wealth created colonial cities, revolutionary activity left ghost towns in its wake and traditions – festivals, saints' days and celebrations – have survived for centuries.

The region is fondly referred to as the *Cuna de la Independencia* (Cradle of Independence) and it was here that many made their mark in the country's fight for autonomy. The colonial cities have fascinating foci: silver-ridden Guanajuato and Zacatecas, plaza-filled San Luis Potosí, arty San Miguel de Allende and former 'activist' hot spots Dolores Hidalgo and Querétaro.

Once you've had your fill of cobbled streets and pretty plazas, cross the deserts and take in the high and dry 'ghost' towns of Pozos and Real de Catorce, national parks such as Parque de Órganos and (the biggest, most unmissable jewel of all) the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, the eastern arm of Querétaro state. This area boasts over 15 vegetation types and hot off-the-press tourism opportunities, including stunning hikes.

And as for the cuisine...travel a mere few kilometers for yet another take on a trusty tortilla or local dish: each region serves up its own specialties. Culture vultures will be well sated, too. From pre-Hispanic sites to art museums, concerts to nightlife, festivals to *callejoneadas*, this region enjoys pomp and ceremony...and knows how to put on a good (if noisy) party.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Meander through winding cobbled alleys and marvelous museums, and then party it up with students in **Guanajuato** (p613)
- Feed your senses with art, food and fiestas in popular **San Miguel de Allende** (p630)
- Marvel at the missions and amble through near-virgin wilderness in Mexico's protected jewel, the **Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra Gorda** (boxed text, p651)
- Feel the spirits of miners in the picturesque reawakening 'ghost' town of **Real de Catorce** (p608)
- Stroll the alleys of **Zacatecas** (p585) to survey this silver city's colonial architecture and get high on a cable car



■ SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE  
JANUARY DAILY HIGH: 21°C | 70°F

■ LABELSAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE  
JULY DAILY HIGH: 28°C | 82°F



fied by time. Replicating organ pipes, among other shapes, this desert national park offers good camping and hidden hikes and has been used by the Hollywood film industry to depict the Wild West.

The diverse ecological zones within the Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra Gorda (p651), in the eastern part of Querétaro states contain little-explored jewels that reward the efforts required to reach them. Tucked into the cloud forests on the leeward side of the Sierra Madre Oriental are waterfalls, caves and excellent hiking opportunities (with new eco-friendly lodges), interspersed with populated mission towns.

### Getting There & Around

The Aeropuerto Internacional del Bajío, half-way between León and Guanajuato, is the major hub for the region's southern cities. Other airports, all with US flights (some via Mexico City), include Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas. Buses constantly ply the toll roads between Mexico City, Guadalajara, Querétaro and San Luis Potosí. These larger hubs, including Zacatecas and Aguascalientes, also host connections to northern Mexico, the US border and beyond. Frequent local buses efficiently connect the major cities and all points in between.

## ZACATECAS STATE

The state of Zacatecas (zak-a-tek-as) is a dry, rugged, cactus-strewn expanse on the fringe of Mexico's northern semideserts. The state is best known for the wealthy silver city of the same name. Visitors can enjoy the region's historical and natural monuments: the mysterious ruins of La Quemada are a testament to centuries of cultures and the quirky rock formations of Parque Nacional Sierra de Órganos make a fascinating, if remote, getaway. The state is one of Mexico's largest in area (73,252 sq km) but smallest in population (1.37 million); it is believed that as many people again (1.5 million) from the state currently live in the United States.

### ZACATECAS

☎ 492 / pop 123,000 / elevation 2445m

Set amid arid countryside, the most northern of Mexico's fabled silver cities, fascinating Zacatecas – a Unesco World Heritage site – runs along a narrow valley. The large

historic center is jam-packed with opulent colonial buildings, a stupendous cathedral, magnificent museums and steep, winding streets and alleys. Excellent restaurants and fine hotels make it a very comfortable location for any traveler.

The city has a legacy of historical highs and lows: it was here that Pancho Villa defeated a stronghold of soldiers (today he is still much feted by the locals). Here, too, thousands of indigenous slaves were forced by the Spanish to toil in the mines under terrible conditions. Today, travelers can have their own lofty experiences in a *teleférico* (aerial cable car) to the Cerro de la Bufa, an impressive rock outcrop; the trip affords great views of a collage of church domes and rooftops. Alternatively, you can drop below the surface to tour the infamous Edén mine, or vibrate to the rhythms of its underground disco.

### History

Indigenous Zacatecos – one of the Chichimec tribes – mined local mineral deposits for centuries before the Spanish arrived; it's said that the silver rush here was started when a Chichimec gave a piece of the fabled metal to a conquistador. The Spaniards founded a settlement in 1548 and started mining operations that sent caravan after caravan of silver off to Mexico City, creating fabulously wealthy silver barons in Zacatecas.

By the early 18th century, the mines of Zacatecas were producing 20% of Nueva España's silver and the city became an important base for Catholic missionaries.

In the 19th century political instability diminished the flow of silver. Although silver production later improved under Porfirio Díaz, the revolution disrupted it. In 1914 in Zacatecas, Pancho Villa defeated a stronghold of 12,000 soldiers loyal to President Victoriano Huerta. After the revolution, Zacatecas continued to thrive on silver; today, the city's 200-year-old El Bote mine is still productive.

### Orientation

The city center is in a valley between Cerro de la Bufa to the northeast and the smaller Cerro del Grillo to the northwest. Most attractions are within walking distance of the center; the cathedral is a good central landmark. The two busiest streets are Av Hidalgo, running roughly north-south, and Av Juárez,

running roughly east–west across the south end of Av Hidalgo. Av Hidalgo becomes Av González Ortega south of its intersection with Av Juárez.

### Information

Banks in the center have ATMs and change cash and traveler's checks. Telephone *casetas* are in the bus station and around town, including Callejón de las Cuevas, off Av Hidalgo. Most internet cafés charge M\$7 to M\$15 per hour for internet access.

**Fast Clean Lavandería** (Villalpando 203) Wash, dry and delivery M\$14 per kg

**Hospital Santa Elena** (☎ 924-29-28; www.hospital.santaelena.com.mx; Guerrero 143)

**Lavandería El Indio Triste** (Tolosa 826) Wash, dry and fold service M\$15 per kg

**Post office** (☎ 922-01-96; Allende 111; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

**Sanborns** (cnr Avs Hidalgo & Allende) Best international periodicals and book selection.

**State Tourist Office** (☎ 924-05-52, 800-712-40-78; www.turismozacatecas.gob.mx; Av Hidalgo 403; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun) Helpful staff (some speak English); basic maps available.

**Vonex** (Av Hidalgo 737) Internet access and cheap, internet-based long-distance phone calls.

### Sights

This historic city – particularly its Unesco World Heritage-listed central district – has much to detain you for several days, from trips into an old silver mine to excellent museums and a trip to la Bufa by *teleférico*.

### CATEDRAL

Built between 1729 and 1752, the pink-stone **cathedral** (admission free) on the south side of the Plaza de Armas is an ultimate expression of Mexican baroque.

The stupendous main facade is a wall of detailed carvings; this has been interpreted as a giant symbol of the tabernacle. A tiny figure of an angel holding a tabernacle is in the middle of the design, the keystone atop the round central window. Above this, in the third tier, is Christ and above Christ is God. The 12 Apostles feature, as does a smaller Virgin figure above the doorway.

The southern facade's central sculpture is of La Virgen de los Zacatecanos, the city's patroness. The north facade shows Christ crucified, attended by the Virgin Mary and St John.

### PLAZA DE ARMAS

The plaza is the open space north of the cathedral. The **Palacio de Gobierno** on the plaza's east side was built in the 18th century for a colonial family. In the turret of its main staircase is a mural of the history of Zacatecas state, painted in 1970 by Antonio Rodríguez.

Across the road, the **Palacio de la Mala Noche** was built in the late 18th century for a mine owner and now houses state-government offices.

### PLAZUELA FRANCISCO GOITIA

A block south of the cathedral, a broad flight of stairs descends from Av Hidalgo to Tacuba, forming a charming open space. The *plazuela's* terraces are often used as an informal amphitheater by street performers.

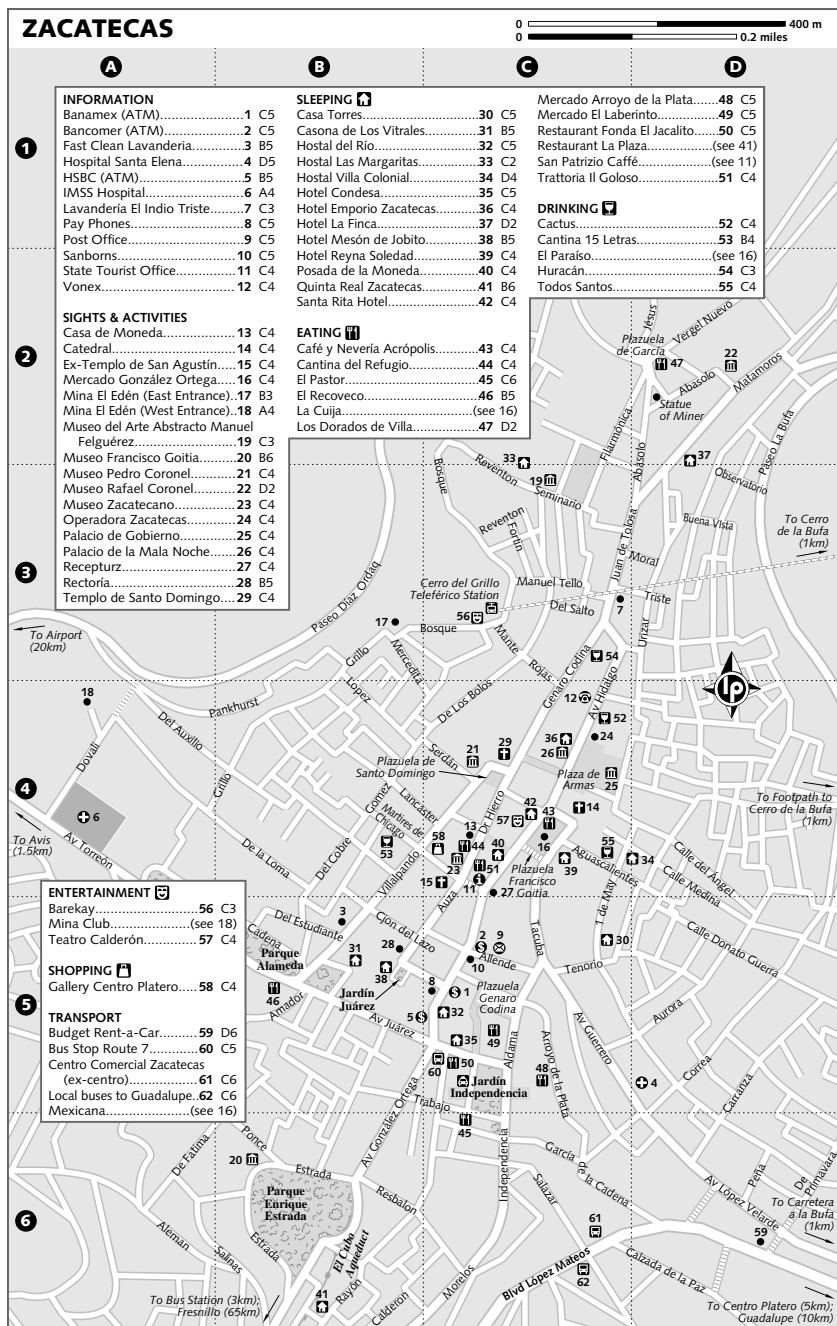
North of the *plazuela*, the **Mercado González Ortega** is an impressive 1880s iron-columned building that used to hold Zacatecas' main market. In the 1980s the upper level was renovated into an upscale shopping center. The lower level was once used as *bodegas* (storage rooms) and now houses several bars and restaurants.

Opposite the *plazuela* on Av Hidalgo, the lovely 1890s **Teatro Calderón** (☎ 922-81-20) dates from the Porfiriato period and is as busy as ever with plays, concerts, films and art exhibitions.

### PLAZUELA DE SANTO DOMINGO

A block west of the cathedral, this *plazuela* is dominated by the **Templo de Santo Domingo**. Although the church is done in a more sober baroque style than the cathedral, it has some fine gilded altars and a graceful horseshoe staircase. Built by the Jesuits in the 1740s, the church was taken over by Dominican monks when the Jesuits were expelled in 1767.

Nearby, the extraordinary **Museo Pedro Coronel** (☎ 922-80-21; Plaza de Santo Domingo s/n; admission M\$20; ☎ 10am-5pm Fri-Wed) is housed in a 17th-century former Jesuit college and is one of provincial Mexico's best art museums. Pedro Coronel (1923–85) was an affluent Zacatecan artist who bequeathed his collection of art and artifacts from all over the world, as well as his own works. The collection includes 20th-century works by Picasso, Rouault, Chagall, Kandinsky and Miró; some entertaining Hogarth lithographs; and fine ink drawings by Francisco de Goya. There are pre-Hispanic Mexican art



tifacts, masks and other ancient pieces from all over the world, including some important Japanese screens.

### CALLES DR HIERRO & AUZA

About 100m south from Plazuela de Santo Domingo is the **Casa de Moneda**, which housed Zacatecas' mint (Mexico's second-biggest) in the 19th century. Nearby, the lovely **Museo Zacatecano** (☎ 922-65-80; Dr Hierro 301; adult/concession M\$15/7.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon) is largely devoted to Huichol art. The patio area displays superb photographs of the Huichol people (including those taken in 1934 by the first explorers to interact with the groups), their ceremonies and daily life (with captions in English). One section features exquisitely colorful pieces of Huichol embroidery and a few pieces of beadwork. A small shop at the entrance sells some Huichol craftwork.

Another 100m south is the **Ex-Templo de San Agustín**, built for Augustinian monks in the 17th century. During the 19th-century anticlerical movement, the church became a casino. In 1882 it was purchased by American Presbyterian missionaries who destroyed its 'too Catholic' main facade, replacing it with a blank white wall. In the 20th century the church returned to the government. Today it hosts art and cultural exhibitions. The adjoining former monastery is now the seat of the Zacatecas bishopric. The church's finest feature is the plateresque carving of the conversion of St Augustine over the north doorway.

The street ends at **Jardín Juárez**, a tiny but charming park. The Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas' administrative headquarters are housed in the neoclassical **Rectoría** building on its west side.

### MINA EL EDÉN

The **Edén Mine** (☎ 922-30-02; tours adult/child M\$60/30; ☎ tours every 15min 10am-6pm), which was once one of Mexico's richest, is a must-see as it provides dramatic insight into the region's source of wealth and the terrible price paid for it. Digging for fabulous hoards of silver, gold, iron, copper and zinc, the enslaved indigenous people, including many children, worked under horrific conditions. Up to five people a day died from accidents or diseases like tuberculosis and silicosis.

El Edén was worked from 1586 until the 1960s. Today the fourth of its seven levels is open to visitors. The lower levels are flooded.

An elevator or miniature train takes you deep inside Cerro del Grillo, the hill in which the mine is located. Then guides (some English-speaking) lead you along floodlit walkways past shafts and over subterranean pools.

The mine has two entrances. To reach the higher one (the east entrance), walk 100m southwest from Cerro de Grillo *teleférico* station; from this entrance, tours start with an elevator descent. To reach the west entrance from the town center, walk west along Av Juárez and stay on it after its name changes to Torreón at the Alameda. Turn right immediately after the IMSS hospital (bus 7 from the corner of Av Hidalgo goes up Av Juárez and past the hospital) and a short walk will bring you to the mine entrance. Tours begin here with a trip on the narrow-gauge railway (540m) after which you walk another 350m or so.

The mine also has a nighttime alter ego, a disco called the Mina Club (see p592).

### TELEFÉRICO

Zacatecas' most exhilarating ride and the easiest way to Cerro de la Bufas's summit is the Swiss-built **able car** (☎ 922-01-70; adult/child/senior M\$24/11/18; ☎ 10am-6pm) that crosses high above the city from Cerro del Grillo. It's a short walk east from Mina El Edén (east entrance) to the *teleférico*'s Cerro del Grillo station. Alternatively, huff up the steep steps of Callejón de García Rojas, which lead straight to the *teleférico* from Genaro Codina. Cars depart every 15 minutes (except when it's raining or when winds exceed 65km/h) and the trip takes seven minutes.

### CERRO DE LA BUFA

The most appealing of the many explanations for the name of the hill that dominates Zacatecas is that 'bufa' is an old Basque word for wineskin, which is certainly what the rocky formation looks like. The views from the top are superb and there's an interesting group of monuments, a chapel and a museum.

The small **Museo de la Toma de Zacatecas** (☎ 922-80-66; adult/concession M\$12/6; ☎ 10am-4:30pm) commemorates the 1914 battle fought on the hill's slopes in which the revolutionary División del Norte, led by Pancho Villa and Felipe Ángeles, defeated President Victoriano Huerta's forces. This gave the revolutionaries control of Zacatecas, which was the gateway to Mexico City.



**La Capilla de la Virgen del Patrocinio**, adjacent to the museum, is named after the patron saint of miners. Above the altar of this 18th-century chapel is an image of the Virgin said to be capable of healing the sick. Thousands of pilgrims flock here each year on September 8, when the image is carried to the cathedral.

Facing the chapel stand three imposing equestrian **statues** of the victors of the battle of Zacatecas – Villa, Ángeles and Pánfilo Natera.

From the right of the statues, a paved path along the foot of the rocky hilltop leads to the **Mausoleo de los Hombres Ilustres de Zacatecas**, with the tombs of Zacatecan heroes from 1841 to the present.

An exciting and convenient way to ascend la Bufa (to the church and museum) is by *teleférico* (see opposite). Alternatively, you can walk up by starting at Calle del Ángel from the cathedral's east end. To reach it by car, take Carretera a la Bufa, which begins at Av López Velarde, a couple of kilometers east of the center. A taxi costs around M\$40. You can return to town by the *teleférico* or by a footpath leading downhill from the statues.

### MUSEO DE ARTE ABSTRACTO MANUEL FELGUÉREZ

This **art museum** (☎ 924-37-05; Ex-Seminario de la Purísima Concepción; adult/concession M\$20/10; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon) is worth visiting for the building alone; originally a seminary, it was later used as a prison and has been renovated to create some remarkable exhibition spaces, transforming the former dark, depressing cells and steel walkways into a beautiful site.

It has a stunning and varied collection of abstract art, particularly the work of Zacatecan artist Manuel Felguérez.

### MUSEO RAFAEL CORONEL

The extraordinary **Museo Rafael Coronel** (☎ 922-81-16; cnr Abasolo & Matamoros; adult/senior M\$20/10; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Tue) is not to be missed. Imaginatively housed in the ruins of the lovely 16th-century ex-Convento de San Francisco, it houses Mexican folk art collected by the Zacatecan artist Rafael Coronel, brother of Pedro Coronel and son-in-law of Diego Rivera. The highlight is the astonishing, colorful display of over 3000 masks (the remaining 7,000 are in storage) used in traditional dances and rituals. Also on display are pottery, pup-

pets, instruments, pre-Hispanic objects and sketches by Rivera.

### MUSEO FRANCISCO GOITIA

The **Museo Francisco Goitia** (☎ 922-02-11; Estrada 101; adult/concession M\$20/10; ☎ 10am-4:45pm Tue-Sun) displays work by several 20th-century Zacatecan artists, including some evocative paintings of indigenous people by Goitia (1882–1960) himself. Other artists represented include Pedro Coronel, Rafael Coronel and Manuel Felguérez. The museum is in a former governor's mansion, above Parque Enrique Estrada and is worth the short walk.

### Tours

Agencies run city tours and excursions to nearby places of interest, such as a city tour including the mine and the *teleférico* (4 hrs, M\$220); Guadalupe (four hours, M\$200); the archaeological site of La Quemada (six hours, M\$250); and Fresnillo/Plateros (four hours, M\$200). Agencies recommended for their longevity and professionalism include:

**Operadora Zacatecas** (☎ 924-00-50; [opzac@prodigy.net.mx](mailto:opzac@prodigy.net.mx); Av Hidalgo 630)

**Recepturz** (☎ 925-24-03; [www.recepturz.com](http://www.recepturz.com); Hidalgo 326-1) English-speaking guides can be arranged.

### Festivals & Events

**La Morisma** Usually held on the last weekend in August. Features a spectacular mock battle commemorating the triumph of the Christians over the Muslims (Moors) in old Spain. Two rival 'armies' – over 2000 participants – parade through the streets in the mornings, then, accompanied by bands of musicians, enact two battle sequences that take place between Lomas de Bracho and Cerro de la Bufa.

**Feria de Zacatecas** Annual fair during the first three weeks in September. Renowned matadors fight famous local bulls. There are also *charreadas* (rodeos), concerts, plays, film festivals and agricultural and craft shows. On September 8 the image of La Virgen del Patrocinio is carried to the cathedral from its chapel on Cerro de la Bufa.

**Festival Internacional de Teatro de Calle** In mid-October, drama takes to the streets in this vibrant week-long celebration of street theater.

### Sleeping

Rates for midrange and top-end accommodations in Zacatecas fluctuate considerably throughout the year. They tend to hike their rates during Zacatecas' high seasons – September's festivals, Christmas and Semana Santa.

**BUDGET**

**Hostal Las Margaritas** (☎ 925-17-11; lasmargarita.shostal@hotmail.com; Calle Segunda de las Margaritas 105; dm/r M\$80/110; ☑) An excellent hostel with a choice of bright dorms and private rooms (all with shared bathroom) and services. There are great places to chill: in a large lounge below or on a massive, sunny rooftop terrace, where there's also a sizeable kitchen. It's in a tranquil part of town behind the Museo el Arte Abstracto Manuel Felguérez.

**Hostal Villa Colonial** (☎ /fax 922-19-80; hostalvilla.colonial@hotmail.com; cnr Calle 1 de Mayo & Callejón Mono Prieto; dm/d M\$90/190, d with bathroom M\$250-350; ☑) This lively, HI-affiliate offers a range of accommodations and is the rendezvous point for travelers. Dorms have bunks with tiny shared bathrooms; newer double rooms have en-suite bathroom and TV and some more recent and comfortable doubles (plus those with kitchenettes) are located nearby. Amenities include two kitchens, a cable TV/DVD, a lounge, bar, rooftop patio and book exchange. Friendly multilingual owner Ernesto and his staff go out of their way to help guests and also arrange tours to nearby areas.

**Hostal del Río** (☎ 924-00-35; Av Hidalgo 116; r/tr M\$275/400) A realty's advertisement would say that this friendly, rambling and centrally located old place has potential. The spacious, worn rooms upstairs have character, but the downstairs dwellings (former stables) have no windows.

**MIDRANGE**

All the places reviewed here have in-room phones and TV.

**Hotel Condesa** (☎ 922-11-60; www.hotelcondesa.com.mx; Av Juárez 102; s/d/tr M\$400/490/530) The Condesa's 60 modern rooms, which surround a massive covered courtyard, are pleasant and good value for the price. Most have external facing windows, but few have views. An attached restaurant serves breakfast (M\$44 to M\$66) and meals.

**Posada de la Moneda** (☎ 922-08-81; Av Hidalgo 413; s/d/ste M\$500/660/950) This imposing old building is a bit like a well-loved sombrero: slightly worn, but comfortable and not tattered enough to discard. The rooms themselves lack old-fashioned charm but the hotel has a perfect location near the cathedral.

**Hotel Reyna Soledad** (☎ /fax 922-07-90; www.hostalreynasoledad.com.mx; Tacuba 170; r M\$820; ☑) Set in a converted 17th-century convent, the colo-

nial patios of this perfectly located place are tranquil and charming. The rooms are rustic (in a pine-furniture kind of way).

**TOP END**

**Casona de los Vitrales** (☎ 92-500-96; www.lacasonadelosvitrales.com; Callejón del Espejo; s/d/ste M\$1170/1520/2106) Travelers report positive experiences in this comfortable – but not over-the-top – hotel. It's in a lovely location overlooking Alameda. Some rooms are small (the suites are better) and have internal-facing windows. Rates listed here are their (highest) Semana Santa rates; they are significantly lower at other times.

**Hotel La Finca** (☎ 925-03-10; www.lafincadelminero.zac.com.mx; Matamoros s/n; r M\$1240) Don't be put off by the price – it halves outside of high season. La Finca's 48 rooms face onto open patios (hurray!) and are simple, but comfortable and light. There's even heating for the cooler winter months.

**Hotel Mesón de Jobito** (☎ /fax 924-17-22, 800-021-00-40; www.mesondejobito.com; Jardín Juárez 143; r/ste from M\$1674/1755; ☑ ☑ ☑) Guests come here to soak up old-fashioned charm, service and a sense of history. This large place has 53 finely decorated, luxurious rooms, two excellent restaurants, bar and lobby (plus a slanting balcony, a legacy of its construction 200 years ago). Its buffet breakfast is popular with the public.

**Quinta Real Zacatecas** (☎ 922-91-04, 800-500-40-00; www.quintareal.com; Rayón 434; ste from US\$300; ☑ ☑ ☑) It's worth seeing red (in terms of your bank balance) to experience this luxury treat. Spectacularly situated and around the country's oldest – now retired – bullring and near El Cubo aqueduct, the 49-room hotel is one of Mexico's most contemporary and fetching. The least expensive rooms are spacious, comfortable master suites. An elegant restaurant and bar, La Plaza (see opposite), is in the former holding pens.

Other recommendations:

**Casa Torres** (☎ 925-32-66; www.hotelcasatorres.com; 1 de Mayo; r M\$900, ste from M\$1380) A small, new and sleek boutique hotel with original artworks and a top-floor restaurant.

**Hotel Emporio Zacatecas** (☎ 925-65-00, 01-800-800-61-61; www.hotelesemporio.com; Av Hidalgo 703; s/d/ste M\$1930/2050/3276; ☑ ☑ ☑) Superb location, luxurious rooms and delightful terrace areas.

**Santa Rita Hotel** (☎ 925-41-41, 800-560-81-15; www.hotelsantarita.com; Av Hidalgo 507A; r M\$1751-



2462, ste M\$2570;   ) A stylish, contemporary and cosmopolitan choice. Disappointingly, some of the 35 suites have internal facing windows.

## Eating

There are some excellent Mexican and international restaurants serving a range of fare. Local specialties feature ingredients like nopal and pumpkin seeds.

In the morning, look around Av Tacuba for *burros* (donkeys) carrying pottery jugs of *aguamiel* (honey water), a nutritional drink derived from the maguey cactus. The two central produce markets are Mercado El Laberinto and Mercado Arroyo de la Plata.

**San Patrizio Caffé** (☎ 922-43-99; Av Hidalgo 403C; drinks & snacks M\$18-60; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 5-10pm Sun) The nicest café in town also does the best cappuccinos. It has relaxing courtyard seating, light snacks, Italian brand coffee and an array of Italian sodas. Plus there's wi-fi.

**El Pastor** (☎ 922-16-35; Independencia 214; mains M\$22-50; ☎ 8am-9pm) You come to this no-nonsense, family-run eatery for the food (not the décor). It dishes out charcoal-roasted chicken and Mexican favorites.

**ourpick Los Dorados de Villa** (☎ 922-57-22; Plazuela de García 1314; mains M\$30-65; ☎ 3pm-1am Mon-Sat, 3-11pm Sun) You may have to fight to get into this popular revolutionary-themed restaurant: knock at the door – it's always locked. It's full of atmosphere and relics and serves up a delicious array of everything – except Pancho Villa himself. Don't miss the *enchiladas valentinas* (M\$60). Oh and for posterity, a flying visit to the toilet may knock you off your perch! (The toilet alcove is filled with birds – you have to walk through the aviary to get to your cubicle.)

**Café y Nevería Acrópolis** (☎ 922-12-84; cnr Av Hidalgo & Plazuela Candelario Huizar; mains M\$31-100) Near the cathedral, this Greek-owned café is popular with locals and visitors more for its location than its meals – light snacks and coffees.

**Restaurant Fonda El Jacalito** (☎ 922-07-71; Av Juárez 18; mains M\$42-80; ☎ 8am-10:30pm) This bright, airy and very local place offers set breakfasts from M\$42, a good *comida corrida* (M\$60) and tasty versions of traditional favorites.

**Cantina del Refugio** (☎ 925-3771; Dr Hierro 409; mains M\$45-120; ☎ noon-3am Mon-Sat) This all-out festive Mexican place has hearty servings of reasonably-priced and tasty Mexican fare, grilled meats and draught beer (with all sorts of drinking deals depending on the day).

**El Recoveco** (☎ 924-20-13; Torreón 513; buffets M\$55-65; ☎ 8:30am-7pm) Popular all-you-can-eat breakfast and lunch buffets with Mexican delights, in a friendly, unpretentious, family-run restaurant.

**Trattoria Il Goloso** (☎ 123-53-99; Dr Hierro 400; mains M\$65-120; ☎ 2-9:30pm Tue-Sat, 1-6pm Sun) Trade the tacos for a tasty Italian pasta in this cozy Sicilian-themed place, behind San Patrizio Caffé. Chef Stefano will whip up *sqisito* Italian dishes with all the trimmings: cracked pepper, Italian oils and balsamic vinegar.

**La Cuija** (☎ 922-82-75; Tacuba 5; mains M\$100-150; ☎ 1-10pm Mon-Sat) This romantic, special-occasion place, below Mercado González Ortega, has white tablecloths and professional, bow-tied waiters.

**Restaurant La Plaza** (☎ 922-91-04; Quinta Real Zacatecas, Rayón 434; mains M\$140-300) The Quinta Real's elegant dining room is especially memorable for its outlook to the aqueduct and bullring, as well as for its refined ambience and superb international cuisine. Charge in for a Sunday brunch (M\$180) or an evening cocktail in the former bull-holding pens. Reservations recommended.

## Drinking

Zacatecas has a particularly good late-night scene. Things hot up after 9pm in bars and 11pm in clubs.

**Cantina 15 Letras** (☎ 922-01-78; Martires de Chicago 309; ☎ 2pm-3am Mon-Fri) Stop for a drink at this sometimes smoky and often crowded classic, filled with bohemians, drunks and poets. Photos portray Zacatecas of old; the art showcases some well-known local artists.

**El Paraíso** (☎ 922-61-64; cnr Hidalgo & Plazuela Goitia; ☎ 2pm-1am Mon-Fri) This smart bar in the southwest corner of the Mercado González Ortega attracts a friendly, varied, mostly 30s clientele; it's busiest on Friday and Saturday.

**Todos Santos** (☎ 925-46-83; Aguascalientes 235; ☎ 2pm-3am Tue-Sat) A foreigner-friendly, fun bar, with a relaxed atmosphere and long hours. Great place to kick back over a few tequilas and excellent mariachi band.

**Huracán** (☎ 925-22-11; Genaro Codina 752; ☎ 6pm-3am) This fun bar is a quirky tribute to both kitsch and Huracán, Mexico's favorite champion of *lucha libre* (wrestling). The walls are covered in funky 1960s-style florals superimposed with Huracán's wrestling mask. You can battle your way through a *misil*, a large cylinder filled with 3½ liters of beer (M\$90).

**Cactus** (☎ 922-05-09; Av Hidalgo 634; 🕒 8:30pm-3am Mon-Sat) Loud and happening, the action takes place in a number of rooms to cater for billiards, karaoke, salsa and drinking.

## Entertainment

Ask at the tourist office for a copy of the monthly *Agenda Cultural*.

**Mina Club** (☎ 922-30-02; Dovali s/n; www.minaeleden.com.mx; cover M\$100; 🕒 10pm-3am Thu-Sat) Strike it lucky in this unique night club – the tunnel of the Mina El Edén. A mix of electronic music and Spanish pop is the soundtrack to the essential Zacatecas nightlife experience. In the high season dig in by 10pm to avoid missing out.

**Teatro Calderón** (☎ 922-81-20; Av Hidalgo s/n; 🕒 10am-9pm) This top venue hosts a variety of cultural events including theater, dance and music performances. Check with the tourist office (p586) for current events.

**Barekay** (☎ 923-80-02; Grillo s/n, bar/disco 10pm-3am Fri & Sat) Mina Club's polar opposite, this happening disco is at the other entrance to the

mine, views overlooking the city. Plays a mix of techno and pop.

## Shopping

Zacatecas is known for silver and leather products and colorful sarapes. Try along Arroyo de la Plata (and its indoor market) or the upmarket Mercado González Ortega (p586).

The Zacatecas silversmith industry is being revived in a number of workshops at the **Centro Platero** (☎ 899-09-94; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat), a few kilometers east of town at the 18th-century ex-Hacienda de Bernardez on the road to Guadalupe. Tour companies (see p589) can arrange visits, or you can make your own way there by taxi (around M\$30 to M\$40). Alternatively, shop in its **gallery** (☎ 925-35-50; Villalpando 406; 🕒 10am-7pm) in town.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Zacatecas' airport is 20km north of the city. Mexicana and Click Mexicana fly direct daily

### DAILY BUSES FROM ZACATECAS

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency
Aguascalientes	1st-class M\$91	2hr	frequent (Futura)
	2nd-class M\$77-64	3hr	hourly (Estrella Blanca, Transportes de Guadalupe)
Durango	1st-class M\$202	4½-6hr	13 daily (Ómnibus de México, Transportes del Norte)
	2nd-class M\$170	7hr	6 daily (Estrella Blanca)
Fresnillo	1st-class M\$35	1-1½hr	hourly (Transportes del Norte)
	2nd-class M\$35	1-1½hr	hourly from main bus station (Estrella Blanca, Camiones de los Altos)
Guadalajara	1st-class M\$261	4-5hr	hourly (Ómnibus de México, Chihuahuenses, Transportes del Norte)
	2nd-class M\$230	7hr	hourly (Estrella Blanca, Rojo de los Altos)
Guanajuato	–	–	Take a León bus and change there for Guanajuato.
León	M\$167	3-4hr	frequent (Ómnibus de México, Futura, Transportes del Norte)
		8hr	4 daily (ETN)
Mexico City (Terminal Norte)	deluxe M\$610	8hr	17 daily (Futura, Chihuahuenses, Ómnibus de México)
	1st-class M\$459	6-8hr	
Monterrey	1st-class M\$293	7hr	9 daily (Transportes del Norte)
	2nd-class M\$250	8hr	4 daily (Estrella Blanca, Rojo de los Altos)
Querétaro	1st-class M\$303	6hr	hourly (Futura, Chihuahuenses)
San Luis Potosí	1st-class M\$120	3hr	hourly (Futura, Ómnibus de México, Chihuahuenses)
	2nd-class M\$110	3½hr	5 daily (Estrella Blanca)

Omnibus de México and Estrella Blanca buses also run to Sombrerete.

to/from Mexico City and Tijuana and weekly to/from Chicago and Los Angeles.

**Mexicana** and **Click Mexicana** (☎ 922-74-29; Av Hidalgo 406-408)

## BUS

Zacatecas' main bus station is on the southwest edge of town, around 3km from the center. Many buses are *de paso* (which means they stop here en route between other cities). The station has a luggage checkroom, a pharmacy and telephone *casetas*. The former bus station, Centro Comercial Zacatecas (the 'ex-centro'), is on Blvd López Mateos and has buses for local destinations including Fresnillo and Villanueva (for La Quemada).

See the table opposite for daily departures. There are also frequent buses to Jerez and Torreón and several a day to Chihuahua, Ciudad Juárez, Saltillo and Nuevo Laredo. Durango-bound buses stop in Sombretete and depart hourly from the central bus station (M\$120).

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Rental prices begin from around M\$600 or M\$700 per day, with week-long discount packages also available.

**Avis** (☎ 922-30-03; López Mateos 103)

**Budget Rent-a-Car** (☎ 922-94-58; Blvd López Mateos 202)

## Getting Around

The easiest way to get to/from the airport is by taxi (M\$200).

Buses 7 and 8 provide a good tour of the center. Bus 8 from the bus station (M\$4) runs directly to the cathedral. Heading out of the center, buses go south on Villalpando. Bus 7 runs from the bus station to the corner of Avs González Ortega and Juárez. Taxis from the bus station to the center cost around M\$30 to M\$40.

## GUADALUPE

☎ 492 / pop 99,572

About 10km east of Zacatecas, Guadalupe boasts a fascinating historic former monastery featuring one of Mexico's best colonial-art collections. The monastery's impressive church attracts pilgrims to honor the country's beloved Virgin. You'll need a couple of hours to wander through the monastery. The quaint plaza, Jardín Juárez, is lined with antique and handicrafts stores.

The **Convento de Guadalupe** was established by Franciscan monks in the early 18th century as an apostolic college. It developed a strong academic tradition and was a base for missionary work in northern Nueva España until the 1850s. The convent now houses the **Museo Virreinal de Guadalupe** (☎ 923-23-86; Jardín Juárez s/n; admission M\$37, Sun free; ⌚ 9am-6pm), with the building's original religious paintings by Miguel Cabrera, Juan Correa, Antonio Torres and Cristóbal Villalpando. Wandering through the building is a delight; note the extraordinary perspective of the paintings in the cloisters from where you stand. Visitors can see part of the library and its 9000 original volumes (the oldest dates to 1529 and thousands are in storage), and step into the choir on the church's upper floor, with its fine carved and painted chairs (being renovated and inaccessible at time of research). The beautifully decorated 19th-century **Capilla de Nápoles**, on the church's north side, is open for special occasions only.

Beside the Museo Virreinal, the **Museo Regional de Historia** (☎ 923-20-89; admission free; ⌚ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) has temporary exhibitions.

The museum hosts a cultural festival at the end of September and the town holds an annual fair during the first two weeks of December, focused on the **Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe** (December 12).

Transportes de Guadalupe buses run between Zacatecas and Guadalupe every few minutes (M\$4, 20 minutes); catch one at the bus stop on Blvd López Mateos opposite the old bus station. Disembark at a small plaza in the center of Guadalupe and walk along Madero for 250m to Jardín Juárez, a sizable plaza. The museums are on the plaza's far side.

## PLATEROS & FRESNILLO

☎ 493 / Plateros pop 4540; Fresnillo pop 110,892

The village of Plateros, 63km north of Zacatecas, is home to the **Santuario de Plateros**, one of Mexico's most-visited shrines. This is due to miracles attributed to *El Santo Niño de Atocha*, a image of baby Jesus (wearing a colonial pilgrim's feathered hat) that sits on the altar of the 18th-century church. Fresnillo, 5km southwest of Plateros, is a busy but unexciting town, and a transportation hub for pilgrims heading to Plateros. If you're interested in Mexican Catholicism, the shrine is interesting. Otherwise, give both places a miss.

The cloisters of Santuario de Plateros are plastered with thousands of old *retablos* (ex-voto paintings) and more recent paraphernalia, giving thanks to the Santo Niño for responding to prayers ranging from surviving traffic accidents to success in business ventures. The streets around the church are lined with stalls selling gaudy religious artifacts.

The few hotels in Plateros for pilgrims planning to attend 7am Mass aren't very restful; Fresnillo has better hotels.

**Hotel Lirmar** (☎ 932-45-98; Durango 400, Fresnillo; s/d/tr M\$200/250/310; (P)) Opposite Fresnillo's bus terminal, this reasonably modern place has clean, comfortable rooms.

**Hotel Casa Blanca** (☎ 932-00-14; García Salinas 503, Fresnillo; s/d/tr M\$396/459/522) Three blocks east of Jardín Hidalgo, this place caters to business travelers.

Tour operators in Zacatecas offer organized trips to Plateros (see p589) To get to/from Platero you must go via Fresnillo. Fresnillo's bus station is on Ébano, 1km northeast of the town center on bus 3. For Plateros, buy a ticket at the Parques Industriales counter for an hourly, 2nd-class bus (M\$7). Local bus 6 (M\$7) also goes to Plateros from Emiliano Zapata, 2½ blocks east of Jardín Madero.

From Fresnillo, regular 1st-class buses serve Durango (M\$152, 3½ hours), Torreón (M\$234, five hours) and Zacatecas (M\$31, one hour); 2nd-class buses are even more frequent.

## JEREZ

☎ 494 / pop 38,624

The delightful country town of Jerez, 30km southwest of Zacatecas, is as Mexican as a tortilla. It is a great place to watch the local action, especially on Sunday – market day – when saddle-bound *rancheros* drink outside the saloons. It has some fine 18th- and 19th-century buildings. Jerez holds a lively 10-day Easter fair, featuring, among other activities, *charreadas* and cockfights.

## Orientation & Information

Jardín Páez, the pretty main plaza, has an old-fashioned gazebo, trees and benches. The **tourist information office** (☎ 945-51-66; Hospicio 73) also has a **kiosk** (🕒 10am–4pm Mon–Sun) in the plaza. **Compu-Centro** (Bizarra Capital 44; per hr M\$10; 🕒 10am–9pm), is a few blocks south of the plaza. Banks (with ATMs) and phones are around the plaza.

## Sights

The 18th-century **Parroquia de la Inmaculada Concepción** and the 19th-century **Santuario de la Soledad** have fine stone carvings. Go one block south from Jardín Páez' southeast corner, then one block west for the shrine, or one block east for the church. Just past the shrine, on Jardín Hidalgo's north side, is the beautiful 19th-century **Teatro Hinojosa**.

## Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation prices can triple during the Easter Festival.

**Hostal del Santuario** (☎ 945-61-94; Santuario 27; s/d/tr M\$150/200/250) A few blocks south of the plaza, this is the best budget option in town, with fancy swan-themed furniture and cable TV.

**Posada Santa Cecilia** (☎ 945-24-12; Constitución 4; s/d M\$200/250/300) Half a block north of the plaza, this great-value rooms feature décor worthy of Marilyn Monroe: spacious rooms, large pieces of mirrored furniture and cable TV.

**Leo Hotel** (☎ 945-20-01; Calzada La Suave Patria s/n; r from M\$350; (P) 📺) East of town on the road to Zacatecas, the modern Leo is the fanciest – but blandest – option. Transportation is recommended; buses don't run on Saturday.

Good eating options include **La Cofradía** (☎ 945-42-86; Constitución 19; mains M\$78–100; 🕒 9:30am–10:30pm), which keeps long hours and an even longer menu of tasty Mexican dishes; and **Hotel Jardín** (☎ 945-20-26), on the plaza.

## Getting There & Around

The Jerez turnoff is near Malpaso, 29km south of Zacatecas on the Zacatecas–Guadalajara road. Zacatecas–Jerez line, Ómnibus de México and Estrella Blanca/Rojo de los Altos have regular services from Zacatecas' bus station to Jerez (M\$28). Jerez' bus station is on the east side of town, 1km from the center along Calzada La Suave Patria. 'Centro-Central' buses (M\$5) run to/from the center. Several daily services run to/from Fresnillo (M\$25).

## LA QUEMADA

The impressive **ruins** (admission M\$37; 🕒 9am–5:30pm) of La Quemada stand on a hill overlooking a broad valley 45km south of Zacatecas, 2km east of the Zacatecas–Guadalajara road. The remote and scenic setting makes the ruins well worth the day trip from the hustle and bustle of Zacatecas. The area is known to have rattlesnakes; keep an eye – and ear! – out. (No-one has yet fallen victim.)

The exact history and purpose of the site are extremely vague. Many suppositions surround the area – one theory is that it was where the Aztecs halted during their legendary wanderings toward the Valle de México. What is known is that the constructions were destroyed by fire and thus their name, La Quemada.

The modern **site museum** (adult/concession M\$8/4; ☎ 10am–4pm) has interesting archaeology exhibits and an excellent video (with English subtitles). It's worth heading here first to contextualize the area and view the museum's miniature site model to get your bearings for your wanderings.

La Quemada was inhabited between about AD 300 and 1200, and it is estimated to have peaked between 500 and 900 with as many as 3000 inhabitants. From around 400 it was part of a regional trade network linked to Teotihuacán (see p209), but fortifications suggest that La Quemada later tried to dominate trade in this region.

Of the main structures, the nearest to the site entrance is the **Salón de las Columnas** (Hall of the Columns), probably a ceremonial hall. Slightly further up the hill are a **ball court**, a steep offering **pyramid** and an equally steep staircase leading toward the site's upper levels. From the upper levels of the main hill, a path leads westward for about 800m to a spur hilltop (the highest point) with the remains of a cluster of buildings called **La Ciudadela** (the Citadel). To return, follow the defensive wall and path back around to the museum. Take water and a hat; it's mighty exposed out there.

## Getting There & Away

From Zacatecas' Ex-Central de Autobus (former station), board a 2nd-class bus for Villanueva (M\$30) and ask beforehand to be let off at *las ruinas*; you'll be deposited at the turnoff, from where it's a 2.5km walk to the site entrance. Returning to Zacatecas, you may have to wait a while for a bus – don't leave the ruins too late. Ómnibus de México and Rojo de los Altos have regular services from Zacatecas' 1st-class bus station to Villanueva and Guadalajara. You can also take an organized tour (M\$250) from Zacatecas (see p589).

## SOMBRERETE

☎ 433 / pop 19,000

Sombrerete is an appealingly archetypal and bustling old Mexican town. Its time-worn co-

lonial buildings and traditional streets reflect its history; the first settlements here were in the 1550s and mines began extracting minerals that financed a rich legacy of churches, mansions and public buildings. Locals claim that Thomas Edison was born here. For further information see [www.sombrerete.com.mx](http://www.sombrerete.com.mx).

Opposite the cathedral, the **municipal tourist office** (☎ 935-14-38; Hidalgo 207) doesn't see many tourists, but the staff can answer questions (in Spanish). Make reservations here if you are interested in guides or transportation in the area, camping or in renting a *cabaña* (with two bedrooms, bathroom and kitchen) in Parque Nacional Sierra de Órganos. Before heading to the park, make sure you visit **La Casa de Usted** (☎ 935-01-81; Hidalgo 321) in Sombrerete and speak with enthusiastic Luis Martínez who has explored the Sierra for over 50 years. He named many of the famous formations and still leads trips on the full moon in October. Next door, the small **Museo Municipal** (Hidalgo 207; admission free; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat & Sun) has folksy but well-displayed history exhibits.

**Hotel Avenida Real** (☎ 935-02-66; Aldama 345; s/d/ste 230/260/290) Conveniently located, this hotel has dated but spacious and, on the whole, reasonable rooms. Its restaurant serves breakfasts and meals.

Buses (Omnibus de México and Estrella Blanca) stop outside their individual offices in Sombrerete's town center; if you're driving, the main street is just south of Hwy 45.

## PARQUE NACIONAL SIERRA DE ÓRGANOS

High on the western edge of Zacatecas state and declared a national park in 2000, the isolated **Sierra de Órganos** (Organ Range; admission M\$10) makes for a fun visit. The region is named for its distinctive rock formations, some of which resemble organ pipes; others are named for their similarity to the likes of ET, Christ and Los Frailes. This archetypal scenery – desert, nopal and rugged rocks – has been an ideal backdrop for hundreds of western movies featuring the likes of John Wayne. Keen campers or hikers may enjoy staying in one of several **campsites** (campsites per person M\$20) or contact the municipal tourist office (above) in Sombrerete to rent a *cabaña* (M\$500). There are also several picnic areas, but no other facilities and no year-round water source. The park is relatively small (2797 acres) and makes a fascinating visit for a couple of days but beware: there are

no maps available, nor designated trails; even experienced hikers require compasses. Be sure to wear a hat and carry food and water.

To get here, turn north off Hwy 45 to San Francisco de los Órganos, 20km west of Sombrerete, then follow the road for 10km to the park entrance (signposted).

## AGUASCALIENTES STATE

The state of Aguascalientes (population 1.1 million) is one of Mexico's smallest; its focus is the city of the same name. According to local legend, a kiss planted on the lips of dictator Santa Anna by the wife of a prominent local politician brought about the creation of a separate Aguascalientes state from Zacatecas.

Beyond the museum-rich city formal tourist sites are few, but it's a pleasant enough drive en route to or from Zacatecas, through fertile lands of corn, beans, chilies, fruit and grain. The state's ranches produce beef cattle as well as bulls, which are sacrificed at bullfights countrywide.

### AGUASCALIENTES

☎ 449 / pop 663,671 / elevation 1800m

This prosperous industrial city is home to more than half of the state's population. Despite its messy outer, at its heart is a fine plaza and handsome colonial buildings. Museums are its strong point: the Museo de los Muertos well justifies a visit, as do those devoted to José Guadalupe Posada and Saturnino Herrán.

### History

Before the Spanish arrived, a labyrinth of catacombs was built here; the first Spaniards called it La Ciudad Perforada (the perforated city). Archaeologists understand little of the tunnels, which are off-limits to visitors.

Conquistador Pedro de Alvarado arrived in 1522 but was driven back by the Chichimecs. A small garrison was founded here in 1575 to protect Zacatecas–Mexico City silver convoys. Eventually, as the Chichimecs were pacified, the region's hot springs sparked the growth of a town; a large tank beside the Ojo Caliente springs helped irrigate local farms that fed hungry mining districts nearby.

Today, the city's industries include textiles, wine, brandy, leather, preserved fruits and car manufacturing.

### Orientation

Aguascalientes city is pancake-flat and very easy to get around. The center of town is Plaza de la Patria, surrounded by some lovely pedestrian streets. Av Chávez/Calle 5 de Mayo is the main north–south artery; it passes through a tunnel beneath Plaza de la Patria. Av López Mateos, the main east–west artery, is a couple of blocks south of the plaza. The outer areas are defined by *anillos* (ring roads).

### Information

#### BOOKSTORES

**Casa Terán** (☎ 994-10-09; Rivero y Gutiérrez 110; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat) Good bookstore; Mexican cultural center and patio café also within the complex.

#### INTERNET ACCESS

Most places charge around M\$15 per hour.  
**Internet 3W** (Centro Paríán; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun)

#### EMERGENCY

**Police** (☎ 910-28-81)

#### LAUNDRY

**Lavandería** (224 Carranza; per kg M\$16; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri; 10am-4:30pm Sat)

#### MEDICAL SERVICES

Several pharmacies in the city center are open 24 hours.

**Hospital Hidalgo** (☎ 918-50-54, 915-31-42; Galeana 465)

#### MONEY

Banks with ATMs are common around Plaza de la Patria and Expoplaza. *Casas de cambio* cluster on Hospitalidad, opposite the post office.

**Money Tron** (Juan de Montoro s/n; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Exchange house half a block east of the plaza with drive-through window.

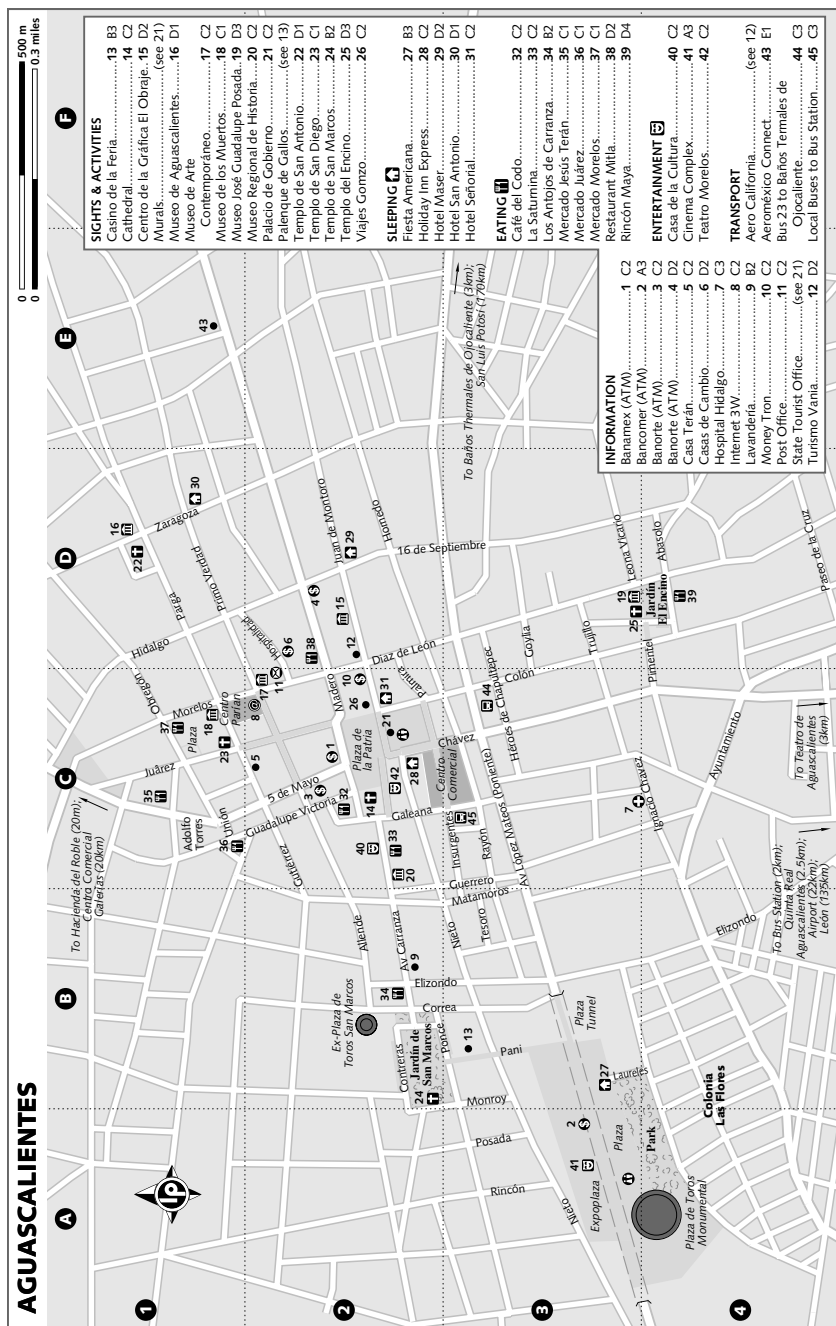
#### POST OFFICE & TELEPHONE

Card phones are numerous in the city center.  
**Post office** (☎ 915-21-18; Hospitalidad 108; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

#### TOURIST INFORMATION

**State tourist office** (☎ 915-95-04, 800-949-49-49; www.aguascalientes.gob.mx; Palacio de Gobierno, Plaza de la Patria; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) Free city maps.





**TRAVEL AGENCIES****Turismo Vania** (☎ 918-76-16; Juan de Montoro 204)**Viajes Gomzo** (☎ 915-41-24; Juan de Montoro 114)**Sights & Activities****PLAZA DE LA PATRIA**

The well-restored 18th-century baroque **cathedral**, on the plaza's west side, is more magnificent inside than out. Over the altar at the east end of the south aisle is a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe by Miguel Cabrera. There are more works by Cabrera, colonial Mexico's finest artist, in the cathedral's *pinacoteca* (picture gallery); ask a priest to let you in.

Facing the cathedral's south side is **Teatro Morelos**, scene of the 1914 Convention of Aguascalientes, in which revolutionary factions led by Pancho Villa, Venustiano Carranza and Emiliano Zapata attempted unsuccessfully to mend their differences. Busts of these three, plus one of Álvaro Obregón, stand in the foyer and there are a few exhibits upstairs.

On the plaza's south side, the red-and-pink stone **Palacio de Gobierno** is Aguascalientes' most noteworthy colonial building. Once the mansion of colonial baron Marqués de Guadalupe, it dates from 1665 and has a striking courtyard with a **mural** of the 1914 convention by the Chilean artist Osvaldo Barra. Barra, whose mentor was Diego Rivera, also painted the mural on the south wall, a compendium of the economic and historic forces that forged Aguascalientes (look for the depiction of the Mexico-US border being drawn).

**JARDÍN EL ENCINO**

The fascinating **Museo José Guadalupe Posada** (☎ 915-45-56; Jardín El Encino s/n; adult/concession M\$10/5, Sun free; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun) is on the north side of Jardín El Encino. Aguascalientes native Posada (1852–1913) was in many ways the founder of modern Mexican art. His engravings and satirical cartoons during the Porfiriato dictatorship broadened the audience for art in Mexico, highlighted social problems and was a catalyst in the later mural phase influencing artists like Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and Alfaro David Siqueiros. Posada's hallmark is the *calavera* (skull or skeleton) and many of his *calavera* engravings have been widely reproduced. There's also a permanent exhibition of work by Posada's predecessor Manuel Manilla (1830–90).

The **Templo del Encino** (Jardín El Encino; ☎ 7am-1pm & 5-7pm), beside the Posada museum, contains a black statue of Jesus that some believe is growing. When it reaches an adjacent column, a worldwide calamity is anticipated. The huge *Way of the Cross* murals are also noteworthy.

**MUSEO DE AGUASCALIENTES**

This **museum** (☎ 915-90-43; Zaragoza 507; adult/concession M\$10/5, Sun free; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun) shouldn't be missed, even if only for the handsome neoclassical building. It houses a permanent collection of work by the brilliant Mexican artist Saturnino Herrán (1887–1918) of Aguascalientes (there are also temporary exhibitions). His works are some of the first to honestly depict the Mexican people. The sensual sculpture *Malgretout* on the patio is a fiberglass copy of the marble original by Jesús Contreras.

**MUSEO DE LOS MUERTOS**

This is one 'near death' experience not to be missed. The recently-opened **Museo de los Muertos** (☎ 139-32-58; Jardín del Estudiante s/n; adult/concession M\$20/10, free Wed; ☎ 10:30am-6:30pm Tue-Sun) exhibits all things relating to Mexico's favorite subject – death – from the skeleton La Catrina to historic artifacts. The contents – over 1200 artifacts, drawings, literature, textiles, toys and miniatures – were donated to the Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes by collector Octavio Bajonero Gil. They span several centuries, from Mesoamerican to contemporary artistic interpretations, across seven rooms. It's far from macabre but a colorful, humorous and insightful encounter and well worth an hour or two.

**TEMPLO DE SAN ANTONIO**

Opposite the Museo de los Muertos, the **Templo de San Antonio** is a crazy quilt of architectural styles built around 1900 by self-taught architect Refugio Reyes. San Antonio's interior is highly ornate, with huge round paintings and intricate decoration highlighted in gold.

**MUSEO REGIONAL DE HISTORIA**

This **history museum** (☎ 916-52-28; Av Carranza 118; adult/student M\$33/free, Sun free; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun) was designed by Refugio Reyes as a family home and features a small chapel. Its several rooms exhibit items from the Big Bang to the Revolution. Anyone interested in Mexican history will appreciate this section. For others,

the temporary exhibitions can be fascinating; pass by to check what's on.

### CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUMS

The small **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo** (☎ 915-79-53; cnr Morelos & Primo Verdad; adult/concession M\$10/5, Sun free; ☎ 11am-5:30pm Tue-Sun), a modern museum displaying the work of Enrique Guzmán (1952–86) as well as temporary exhibitions, is well worth visiting. Nearby, the **Centro de la Gráfica El Obraje** (☎ 994-00-74; Juan de Montoro 222; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri), a workshop-studio-gallery for printmakers, hosts free bimonthly exhibitions.

### EXPOPLAZA & AROUND

Half a kilometer west of Plaza de la Patria, via Av López Mateos or Nieto, Expoplaza is a modern shopping center. On the mall's south side, the wide and soulless pedestrian promenade comes alive during the annual Feria de San Marcos (see below). At its west end, the mammoth **Plaza de Toros Monumental** is notable for its modern-colonial treatment of traditional bullring architecture.

On Expoplaza's east side the pedestrian street Pani runs two blocks north to the 18th-century **Templo de San Marcos** and the pretty, shady **Jardín de San Marcos**. The **Palenque de Gallos**, in the **Casino de la Feria** building on Pani, is the city's cock-fighting arena (only during the *feria*). Near the northeast corner of Jardín de San Marcos the **Ex-Plaza de Toros San Marcos**, the old bullring, is now a school for aspiring matadors.

### THERMAL BATHS

Despite the city's name, the only thermal baths near the center are the charming, if slightly shabby **Baños Termales de Ojocaliente** (☎ 970-07-21; Tecnológico 102; private baths from M\$120 per hr; ☎ 7am-7pm). The restored 1808 architecture truly turns back the clock; the larger baths are more appealing. Take Bus 23 from Mateos.

### Tours

**El Tranvía** (adult/child M\$26/16), an imitation trolley car, offers three different routes through the city (three times daily, Tuesday to Sunday, between 10am and 6pm). Get tickets and information on walking tours from the state tourist office (p596).

### Festivals & Events

Mid-April sees Mexico's biggest annual month-long state fair, the **Feria de San Marcos**.

It centers on Expoplaza and attracts a million visitors with exhibitions, bullfights, cockfights, rodeos, concerts and cultural events, including an international film festival. The big parade takes place on the saint's day, April 25.

During the two-week **Festival de las Calaveras** (the dates vary but always encompass November 1 and 2), Aguascalientes celebrates Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) with an emphasis on the symbolism of *calavera* skeletons.

### Sleeping

Prices skyrocket during the Feria de San Marcos and accommodations are completely booked for the fair's final weekend; residents run a lucrative home-stay service at this time.

### BUDGET

**Hotel San Antonio** (☎ 915-93-41, 916-33-20; Zaragoza 305; s/d/tr M\$180/212; Ⓟ) A sign in this great-value and highly recommended place – with 24/7 drive-through service – is strict about not admitting 'couples without luggage.' Management is courteous, rooms are simple and spotless (rooms are cleaned daily and there's cable TV). Ask for a room at the back to avoid the possibility of car engine noise. The central parking area can be noisy; rooms at the back are fine.

**Hotel Maser** (☎ 915-35-62; fax 915-96-62; Juan de Montoro 303; s/d M\$180/250/270; Ⓟ) A friendly, but as basic an option as you can get, with well-worn and time-tried rooms around a covered courtyard. Surprisingly, some have TV (which costs a few extra dollars).

**Hotel Señorial** (☎ 915-16-30; cnr Colón & Juan de Montoro; s/d M\$220/330) The rooms in this friendly, faded place vary greatly – singles are small, dark and depressing while doubles with balconies are light and airy (note for single travelers – it won't negotiate on price if you want the larger option). All come with cable TV, but quality is still a notch down from Hotel San Antonio).

### MIDRANGE

**Hacienda del Roble** (☎ 915-39-94; hotelhaciendadelroble@prodigy.net.mx; 5 de Mayo 540; s/d/tr M\$350/450/550) This is by far the pick of the midrange choices, with small but modern carpeted rooms, external-facing windows and reasonable bathrooms. The downside is the noisy location – right on 5 de Mayo – but it's only a 10-minute walk to the plaza.

**Holiday Inn Express** (☎ 916-16-66, 800-009-99-00; holidayinnags@prodigy.net.mx; Nieto 102; r from US\$80; ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) The historic center's most comfortable option has 106 rooms with all the modern conveniences and full facilities for business travelers. Discounts of 25% are available some weekends. Note the establishment quotes prices in US dollars.

## TOP END

**Fiesta Americana** (☎ 918-60-10; www.fiestaamericana.com; Laureles s/n, Colonia Las Flores; r from M\$1350; ☐ ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) This luxury chain hotel is a pleasant, if predictable, five-star experience; the 192 rooms feature all the amenities and there's a fitness center and inviting pool. Weekend packages for two cost around M\$1190 and include buffet breakfast.

**Quinta Real Aguascalientes** (☎ 978-58-18; www.quintareal.com; Av Aguascalientes Sur 601; ste US\$150-250; ☐ ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) This is the slickest option of the luxurious resort-style hotels near the industrial zone on the outskirts of the city. Another establishment that prefers US dollars.

## Eating

Four blocks north of the Plaza de la Patria, fresh produce and cheap eats are available in three markets: Mercado Juárez, Mercado Jesús Terán and Mercado Morelos. Av Carranza west of the plaza has a wonderful array of trendy cafés, offering snacks and drinks in the evenings.

**Los Antojos de Carranza** (☎ 994-19-77; Carranza 301; mains M\$35-109; ☒ 8:30am-6pm Sun-Tue, 8:30am-11pm Wed-Sat) This colorful and lively place is appealing for its friendly atmosphere, Mexican music (not live) and good-value Mexican cuisine – all the favorites in generous portions. Sunday lunch is popular with locals and half serves are available for children.

**Café del Codo** (☎ 994-15-87; Callejón del Codo; snacks M\$40-80; ☒ 9am-midnight Mon-Sat, 1-10pm Sun; ☒) The most cosmopolitan café in town, with green broileries and a pretty location under trees. It serves Italian sodas, smoothies plus a range of chais and good baguettes. Has both computers and laptop wi-fi connection.

**Restaurant Mitla** (☎ 916-61-57; Madero 220; mains M\$50-140; ☒ 7am-10pm) This large, pleasant and popular restaurant is caught in a time warp: 1938, the year it started. There are white-coated waiters, excellent service, plus a grand menu with a choice of Mexican specialties, set breakfasts (M\$65) and three-course set lunches (M\$70).

**Rincón Maya** (☎ 916-75-74; Abasolo 113; mains M\$56-100; ☒ 2pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 2-10:30pm Sun) By day, this place has service at La Mestiza Yucateca (open 8am till 2pm), its alter ego next door. Both serve delectable Yucatecan specialties. Don't miss the *sopa de lima* (lime soup; M\$41).

**La Saturnina** (☎ 994-04-49; Carranza 110; mains M\$60-65; ☒ 8:30am-10:30pm) Set in an 18th-century former mansion, this eatery is well known among local diners for its romantic ambience and tasty menu. The name is in honor of the woman Saturnino Herrán so beautifully painted; but tales of tragic love and the tormented ghost of the wealthy hacienda-owner's daughter won't ruin your appetite.

## Entertainment

Pani, the pedestrian street between the Expoplaza and Jardín de San Marcos, is lively most evenings, with a good selection of bars and restaurants.

The trendy nightspots are out in the suburbs; **Centro Comercial Galerías** (☎ 912-66-12; Independencia 2351) is a shopping mall with several bars and discos, including the popular El Reloj, while the main drag for late-night discos is north of town on Av Colosio.

In a fine 17th-century building, the **Casa de la Cultura** (☎ 910-20-10; Carranza 101) hosts art exhibitions, concerts, theater and dance events. The **Teatro Morelos** (☎ 915-19-41; Nieto 113 Plaza de la Patria) and the **Teatro de Aguascalientes** (☎ 978-54-14; cr Chávez & Aguascalientes), south of the center, both stage a variety of cultural events.

There's a **cinema complex** (tickets M\$45) on Expoplaza.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Aéropuerto Jesús Terán** (☎ 915-28-06) is 26km south of Aguascalientes off the road to Mexico City. Aeroméxico Connect has daily direct flights to Guadalajara, Mexico City, Monterrey and Tijuana, plus direct flights to/from Los Angeles and New York. Volaris serves Cancun and Tijuana. Continental has daily flights to Houston and Los Angeles and American flies daily to Dallas.

Airline offices include **Aeroméxico Connect** (☎ 918-21-27; Madero 474).

### BUS

The bus station (Central Camionera) is 2km south of the center on Av Convención. It has

a post office, card phones, a cafeteria and luggage storage. See the box below for daily departures.

There are also frequent services to Ciudad Juárez, Monterrey, Morelia and Torreón and two buses daily to San Miguel de Allende (M\$154).

## Getting Around

Most places of interest are within easy walking distance of each other. Regular city buses (M\$5) run from 6am to 10:30pm. 'Centro' or '5 de Mayo' buses run from the bus station to the city center. Get off at the first stop after the tunnel under Plaza de la Patria, on 5 de Mayo or Rivero y Gutiérrez. From the city center to the bus station, take any 'Central' bus from the corner Galeana (near Insurgentes).

Taxis charge as per metered fares. Between the bus station and the center the taxi fare is around M\$20 to M\$25.

# SAN LUIS POTOSÍ STATE

The historic state capital city, San Luis Potosí, and the fascinating 'ghost town,' Real de Catorce, are on the high and dry expanses of the state's north and west and are the main reasons visitors come to this region. The pretty tropical, verdant eastern region of Huasteca is popular among local tourists.

The state is steeped in history. Before the Spanish conquest, western San Luis Potosí was inhabited by Guachichiles, warlike hunters. In the 18th century the area gained a reputation for maltreatment of indigenous people, partly because the clergy replaced the more compassionate Franciscans.

Today, mining, agriculture, ranching and industry are the economic mainstays of this fairly prosperous state of 2.4 million.

## SAN LUIS POTOSÍ

☎ 444 / pop 685,934 / elevation 1860m

A grand old dame of colonial cities, San Luis Potosí was once a revolutionary hotbed, an important mining town and seat of government. Today she has maintained her poise as the prosperous state capital, orderly industrial center and university seat. A great place to wander through, the city's colonial core is made up of numerous beautiful plazas and manicured parks linked by attractive pedestrian streets. Although not as striking as Zacatecas or Guanajuato, this lively city's cultural elegance is reflected in its delightful colonial buildings, impressive theater and numerous excellent museums.

## History

Founded in 1592, 20km west of the silver deposits in Cerro de San Pedro, San Luis

### DAILY BUSES FROM AGUASCALIENTES

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency
Guadalajara	deluxe M\$242	2¾	4 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$186	2¾	8 daily (Primera Plus)
	1st-class M\$172	3	hourly (México & Futura)
Guanajuato	1st-class M\$147	3hr	1 daily (Primera Plus; 8pm)
León	1st-class M\$104	2hr	every 30 min (Primera Plus)
	2nd-class M\$82	3½hr	every 45 min (Flecha Amarilla)
Mexico City (Terminal Norte)	deluxe M\$510	6hr	9 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$333-433	6hr	frequent (Primera Plus, Futura, Ómnibus de México)
	2nd-class M\$333	8½hr	2 daily (Flecha Amarilla)
San Luis Potosí	1st-class M\$131	3hr	8 daily
	2nd-class M\$101	3½hr	hourly (Estrella Blanca)
Zacatecas	deluxe M\$130	2hr	8 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$90	2hr	9 daily (Transporte del Norte)
	1st-class M\$91	2hr	hourly (Ómnibus de México & Futura)
	2nd-class M\$91	2hr	hourly (Estrella Blanca)

is named Potosí after the immensely rich Bolivian silver town of that name, which the Spanish hoped it would rival.

The mines began to decline in the 1620s, but the city was well enough established as a ranching center to remain the major city of northeastern Mexico until overtaken by Monterrey at the start of the 20th century.

Known in the 19th century for its lavish houses and imported luxury goods, San Luis was twice the seat of President Benito Juárez' government during the 1860s French intervention. In 1910 in San Luis, the dictatorial president Porfirio Díaz jailed Francisco Madero, his liberal opponent, during the presidential campaign. Freed after the election, Madero hatched his Plan de San Luis Potosí (a strategy to depose Díaz), announcing it in San Antonio, Texas, in October 1910; he declared the election illegal, named himself provisional president and designated November 20 as the day for Mexico to rise in revolt – the start of the Mexican Revolution.

## Orientation

Central San Luis stretches west from the Alameda park (east) to Calle Independencia (west). This area is made up of neighboring plazas: Plaza del Carmen, Plaza de Armas, Plaza de San Francisco and Plaza de los Fundadores. Some hotels and restaurants are in the center, with cheaper lodgings near the old train station. An upscale commercial strip runs west from Plaza de los Fundadores along Av Carranza.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS

Most places charge around M\$10 to M\$15 per hour.

**Café Cibernetico** (Av Carranza 416) Reasonable connections and coffee.

**Ciber Café de la Paz** (Guerrero 269)

### LAUNDRY

**Lavandería** (5 de Mayo 870)

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Red Cross** (☎ 815-3635; Calzada de Guadalupe 540)

### MONEY

Banks with ATMs are scattered around town, including the Plaza de Armas and Plaza de los Fundadores. Several *casas de cambio* are along Morelos.

**Banamex** (cnr Obregón & Allende) Like other banks, changes cash and traveler's checks.

### POST OFFICE

**Post office** (☎ 812-72-86; Universidad 526; ☒ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri)

### TELEPHONE

There are many card phones in the center.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Municipal tourist office** (☎ 812-27-70; Palacio Municipal, east side of Plaza de Armas; ☎ 8am-8:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat)

**State tourist office** (☎ 812-99-39, 800 3433887; www.sanluispotosi.gob.mx; Obregón 520; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) Has maps and brochures with some off-the-beaten-track attractions in San Luis Potosí state.

### TRAVEL & TOUR AGENCIES

**Operatour Potosina** (☎ 151-22-01; www.operatourpotosina.com; Juan Sarabia 120) This friendly and knowledgeable English-speaking outfit offers tours around the city, as well as to haciendas, Real de Catorce and the Huasteca Potosina region. Located in the Hotel Napoles.

**2001 Viajes** (☎ 812-29-53; Obregón 604)

## Sights

The best way to see San Luis Potosí is to plaza-hop on foot. The plazas are within close proximity, and each one offers appealing historical and cultural experiences. Most also have a great selection of culinary options.

### PLAZA DE ARMAS & AROUND

Also known as Jardín Hidalgo, this pedestrianized plaza is the city's central square.

The three-nave baroque **cathedral**, built between 1660 and 1730, is on the plaza's east side. Originally it had just one tower; the northern tower was added in the 20th century. The marble apostles on the facade are replicas of statues in Rome's San Juan de Letrán basilica.

Beside the cathedral, the 19th-century **Palacio Municipal** features powerful stone arches. Finished in 1838, it was the home of Bishop Ignacio Montes de Oca from 1892 to 1915. In the rear of the building's patio is a stone fountain carved with the heads of three lions. The city's coat of arms in stained glass overlooks a double staircase.

Behind the cathedral, the **Museo Othoniano** (☎ 812-74-12; Av Othón 225; admission M\$5; ☒ 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) is the birthplace



## SAN LUIS POTOSÍ

<b>INFORMATION</b>		
2001 Viajes.....	1 A3	Museo Orthoniano.....
Banamex (ATM).....	2 B3	Museo Regional Potosino.....
Banorte (ATM).....	3 B3	Palacio de Gobierno.....
Café Cibernetico.....	4 A3	Palacio Municipal.....
Ciber Café de la Paz.....	5 C4	Sala de Profundis.....
Lavandería.....	6 B5	Templo de La Compañía.....
Municipal Tourist Office.....	(see 21)	Templo de la Tercera Orden.....
Operatour Potosí.....	7 C3	Templo de San Francisco.....
Post Office.....	8 B3	Templo de San José.....
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<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		
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Capilla de Loreto.....	10 A3	
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<b>TRANSPORT</b>		
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Tranvía Trolley Stop.....	(see 33)	

of a much celebrated Mexican poet, Manuel José Othón (1858–1906). The 19th-century home is furnished in period style and exhibits Othón's manuscripts and personal effects.

The neoclassical **Palacio de Gobierno**, built between 1770 and 1816, lines the plaza's west side. Its most illustrious lodger was Benito Juárez – first in 1863 when he was fleeing

from invading French forces, then in 1867 when he confirmed the death sentence on the puppet-emperor Maximilian.

### PLAZA DE LOS FUNDADORES & AROUND

The least pretty of the plazas, Plaza de los Fundadores (Founders' Plaza) is where the city was born. On the north side is a large

building constructed in 1653 as a Jesuit college. Today it houses offices of the Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí. It was probably on this site that Diego de la Magdalena, a Franciscan friar, started a small settlement of Guachichiles around 1585.

To the west of these offices is the **Templo de la Compañía**, built by the Jesuits in 1675 with a baroque facade. A little further west is the **Capilla de Loreto**, a Jesuit chapel from 1700 with unusual, twisted pillars.

#### JARDÍN DE SAN FRANCISCO & AROUND

Dominated by its namesake church and convent's bulk, this quiet square is one of the city's most fetching.

The altar of the 17th- and 18th-century **Templo de San Francisco** was remodeled in the 20th century, but the sacristy (the priest's dressing room), reached by a door to the right of the altar, is original and has a fine dome and carved pink stone. The **Sala de Profundis**, through the arch at the south end of the sacristy, has more paintings and a carved stone fountain. A beautiful crystal ship hangs from the main dome.

Along Galeana to the west of Templo de San Francisco, the **Museo Regional Potosino** (☎ 814-35-72; Galeana 450; admission M\$34, Sun free; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 10:30am-7pm Sun) was originally part of a Franciscan monastery founded in 1590. The ground floor has exhibits on pre-Hispanic Mexico, especially the indigenous people of the Huasteca. Upstairs is the lavish **Capilla de Aranzazú**, an elaborate private chapel constructed in the mid-18th century in Churrigueresque style. New monks were ordained here.

The small **Templo de la Tercera Orden** (1694 and restored in 1960) and **Templo del Sagrado Corazón** (1728–31), both formerly part of the Franciscan monastery, stand together at the plaza's south end.

A couple of blocks south and west of the plaza, the **Museo Mariano Jiménez** (Museo de las Revoluciones; ☎ 814-73-93; 5 de Mayo 610; admission M\$5; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) covers some of the most dramatic events in Mexican history. It has a rebellion theme and a good account of indigenous resistance to the Spanish conquest.

#### PLAZA DEL CARMEN

The Plaza del Carmen is dominated by San Luis' most spectacular structure, the

Churrigueresque **Templo del Carmen** (1749–64). On the vividly carved stone facade, hovering angels show the touch of indigenous artisans. The **Camarín de la Virgen**, with a splendid golden altar, is to the left of the main altar inside. The entrance and roof of this chapel are a riot of small plaster figures.

Beside the Templo de Carmen is the **Museo del Virreinato** (☎ 816-09-94; Villerías 155; admission M\$10; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun), which has a large collection of paintings and artifacts from the Spanish vice-regency. More of interest might be its temporary exhibitions – check what's on.

Near the church, the neoclassical **Teatro de la Paz** (1889–94) contains a concert hall and exhibition gallery as well as a theater. Posters announce upcoming events.

When open (it was closed for renovations at the time of writing), the **Museo Nacional de la Máscara** (National Mask Museum; ☎ 812-30-25; Plaza del Carmen; admission M\$5) displays ceremonial masks from all over Mexico with explanations of the dances and rituals in which they are used.

#### JARDÍN DE SAN JUAN DE DIOS

The **Museo Federico Silva** (☎ 812-38-48; Obregón 80; adult/concession M\$30/15; ☎ 9am-6pm Wed-Mon, 10am-2pm Sun) should not be missed. The original 17th-century building on the north side of the Jardín de San Juan de Dios was once a hospital and later a school under *el porfiriato* (Porfiriato period). It has been exquisitely transformed into a contemporary art museum, ingeniously integrating the building's previous neoclassical finish with the monolithic sculptures of Silva. There are also a bookstore and temporary exhibitions of internationally known contemporary sculptors.

#### ALAMEDA & AROUND

The **Alameda Juan Sarabia** marks the eastern boundary of the downtown area. It used to be the vegetable garden of the monastery attached to the Templo del Carmen. Today it's a large, attractive park with shady paths.

Inside the **Templo de San José**, facing the Alameda's south side, lies the image of El Señor de los Trabajos, a Christ figure attracting pilgrims from near and far. Numerous *retablos* around the statue testify to prayers answered in finding jobs, regaining health and passing exams.

The interesting design of **Centro de Difusión Cultural Raul Gamboa** (☎ 816-05-25; cnr Av Universidad &

Negrete; galleries (📍) 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat) was inspired by a spiral seashell. Inside, art galleries show changing contemporary exhibitions.

Just over the railway bridge east of the Alameda is the **Centro Taurino Potosino**, comprising the 7000-seat Plaza de Toros (bullring) and a restaurant decorated with matador paraphernalia (open only when bullfights take place).

## Tours

The **Tranvia** (📞 814-22-26; one-hour trip M\$50), an imitation of an antique trolley, does a loop around the historic center starting from Hotel Panorama (right). Hours vary seasonally.

## Festivals & Events

**Semana Santa** Holy Week is celebrated with concerts, exhibitions and other activities; on Good Friday at 3pm, Christ's passion is re-enacted in the barrio of San Juan de Guadalupe, followed at 8pm by a silent procession through the city.

**Feria Nacional Potosina** San Luis' National Fair, normally in the last three weeks of August, includes concerts, bullfights, rodeos, cockfights and agricultural shows.

**Día de San Luis Rey de Francia** On August 25 the city's patron saint, St Louis IX (King of France) is honored as the highlight of the Feria Nacional. Events include a large parade with floats and *gigantes*.

**Festival Internacional de Danza** This national festival of contemporary dance is held in the last two weeks of September.

## Sleeping

You'll enjoy San Luis more if you choose a hotel in the atmospheric pedestrianized center.

### BUDGET

**Hotel Guadalupe** (📞 128-64-51; Jiménez 253; s M\$300, d M\$315-390; (P)) Around the *zona roja* (red-light district), this might not be to everyone's taste. But it's cheap and 1970s-style modern with small lounge areas and reasonable rooms.

**Hotel de Gante** (📞 812-14-92/93; hotel\_degante@hotmail.com; 5 de Mayo 140; s/d/tr M\$330/380/450; (P)) In an unbeatable location, near the corner of Plaza de Armas, Gante has excellent-value, light and spacious rooms with cable TV. The hot water supply can be a bit hit and miss.

### MIDRANGE

**Hotel María Cristina** (📞 812-94-08, 800-087-07-95; www.mariacristina.com.mx; Sarabia 110; s/d/tr M\$515/560/625; (P) (Q)) The central modern María Cristina

caters to business travelers with a restaurant and small but comfortable carpeted rooms with cable TV, fan and phone. Make sure you request windows; some are like peep holes.

**Hotel Concordia** (📞 812-06-66, 800-711-13-18; concordia@prodigy.net.mx; cnr Avs Othón & Morelos; s/d M\$561/644; (P)) The reliable, 1970s-style Concordia occupies an old building and has white and light corridors and 96 carpeted rooms with cable TV and other amenities. Exterior rooms are nicer than interior ones.

**Hotel Panorama** (📞 812-17-77, 800-480-01-00; www.hotelpanorama.com.mx; Av Carranza 315; r without/with air-con M\$730/860; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) All 126 comfy rooms at this smart hotel opposite the Plaza de los Fundadores have floor-to-ceiling windows. Superior ones on the south side have private balconies overlooking the pool. A marble-clad lobby, restaurant and piano bar make it popular with business travelers.

### TOP END

There are several upscale places east of the city fronting the highway near the bus station.

**Camina Real** (📞 102-50-00; www.caminoreal.com/sanluis\_j/main.php; Carretera a Guadalajara 1100, Fracc. La Loma; r from US\$100; (P) (Q)) This five-star complex is out on a limb in more ways than one. It's on the western edges of town next to La Loma sporting complex and offers a standard five-star chain-hotel experience in plush surroundings. Guests may use the sports club's extensive facilities.

**Our pick** **Hotel Museo Palacio de San Agustín** (📞 811-77-77; Galeana, esq 5 de Mayo; r US\$200-300) 'Warning': this lush and plush experience comes with a snob rating index. This extraordinary place goes beyond a boutique hotel – it is a 'museum.' Formerly part of the San Agustín monastery, it has been restored to its original condition (think hand-painted gold leaf finishes, crystal chandeliers and 700 certified European antiques). Hotel staff in period costume transport you back in time. The *pièce de résistance* has to be the hotel's own replica of the San Agustín facade and *capilla* (we won't spoil the surprise). It's no time for subtleties: this place is for 'appropriate' clientele only and management reserves the right to refuse entry.

## Eating

One local specialty is *tacos potosinos* – red, chili-impregnated tacos stuffed with cheese or chicken and topped with chopped potato,

carrots, lettuce and loads of *queso blanco* (white cheese). The best, most varied and upscale restaurants are west of the center along Av Carranza ('La Avenida').

**Chaires** (☎ 811-32-91; Plaza de Armas; snacks M\$12-35; ☎ 8am-10pm) The best ice creamery and café for good quality snacks and surveying the local scene.

**Café Pacífico** (☎ 812-30-50; Constitución 200; snacks M\$15-70) Worth mentioning because of its hours – it's open 24/7 – and serves up snacks and set breakfasts to a loyal clientele. It's light, bright and the nearest thing to a local version of a US diner.

**El Pozole** (☎ 814-99-00; cnr Carmona & Arista; mains M\$25-60; ☎ noon-3pm) The place to try the local *enchiladas potosinas* – the tortilla dough is red (from mild chili). This place was started by a woman selling antojitos in her home in the 1980s. Demand for her goods was so high she has since opened three restaurants specializing in what she knows best – tacos rojos, pozole, *quesadillas de papa*... Yes, they're that good.

**Café Tokio** (☎ 814-61-89; cnr Zaragoza & Guerrero; mains M\$30-50; ☎) Along the same lines as Pacífico, this bright and sizable café has Japanese owners but Mexican and fast-food standards. Popular for a cheap set lunch.

**Fonda Orizatlán** (☎ 814-67-86; Hernández 240; mains M\$36-90; ☎ 8:30am-11pm Mon-Sat, 8:30am-7pm Sun) Eight blocks south of the center, the dated but colorful Fonda Orizatlán is locally renowned for its first-class Huasteca-style cuisine. Sunday afternoons from 4pm to 5pm feature folkloric dances. Sunday buffet lunches are M\$120.

**Frida Mexicana** (☎ 811-46-03; www.elmexicodefrida.com; Valentin Gama 646; mains M\$45-190; 1pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun) Although painted in Kahloesque colors, this restaurant is not Frida-kitsch. Rather, the tasteful and tasty menu serves up scrumptious Mexican fare. Try the *chiles ventilla* (M\$58), chilies with cheese and the most tantalizing creamy sauces. It's 3km along (and just south of) Carranza.

**Shiroie** (☎ 128-24-44; Av Carranza 1335; mains M\$47-70; ☎ 2pm-1am Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun) Unusual name, unusual dishes. Wonderful Japanese fusion creating sushi and sashimi and California rolls with a twist (try the 'matador roll' with beef fillet; M\$70). Has a modern, upbeat atmosphere with a red-and-black theme. It's 2km west along Carranza.

**Apikus** (☎ 128-69-91; Mariana Escobedo 305; mains M\$90-185) Sleek and stylish and *a la moda*. Its minimalist setting on the terrace is beautifully

offset against the colonial architecture of surrounding buildings. Modern fusion cuisine includes sushi, pasta and meats. Definitely worth the splurge.

**La Virreina** (☎ 812-37-50; Av Carranza 830; mains M\$100-200; ☎ 1pm-midnight Tue-Sat, 1-6pm Sun) A long-established gourmet favorite, the charmingly old-fashioned Virreina has a classic menu including both international and Mexican dishes, delicious desserts and an excellent reputation. The rumoured-to-be-90-something-year-old owner still presides over quality checks.

## Entertainment

San Luis has a reasonably active cultural scene. Ask in the tourist office about what's on and keep your eye out for posters. The free monthly *Guiarte* booklet and posters detail cultural attractions. For a night of dancing, San Luis is steeped in Latin rhythms; if you like salsa, then you are in luck. Other popular discos, bars and music venues are found further west along Av Carranza and Jiménez.

**Play Club** (☎ 812-56-92; Av Carranza 333; ☎ 11pm-3am) Within walking distance of the center on Av Carranza, Play Club is all the go.

**El Ultimo Barrio** (☎ 812-38-73; Jiménez 380A; ☎ 9pm-3am) Try this one for live rock and pop covers.

**Teatro de la Paz** (☎ 812-52-09; Villeras 2) This neoclassical, 1500-seat venue presents a variety of local and visiting dance, theater and music ensembles most nights.

**Orquesta Sinfónica** (☎ 814-36-01; tickets from M\$30) Symphony comes to Teatro de la Paz September through November.

A couple of options for dancing to live Caribbean music:

**El Gallinero** (☎ 812-15-32; Hernández 210; ☎ 10pm-2am)

**La Corriente** (Av Carranza 700)

Concerts, theater, exhibitions and cultural events are also presented at places like the **Teatro de la Ciudad**, an open-air theater in Parque Tangamanga I, and the **Museo Francisco Cossio** (☎ 813-22-47; Carranza 1815), 2½km west of Plaza de los Fundadores.

## Shopping

The main shopping district is between the Plaza de Armas and the Mercado Hidalgo. A few blocks further northeast is the larger, interesting Mercado República. Look out for the local specialty, milky sweets.

**Fonart** (☎ 812-39-98; Jardín Guerrero 5) Like other shops in the government-run chain, this outlet has a good selection of quality handicrafts from all over Mexico.

**La Casa del Artesano** (☎ 814-89-90; Jardín Colon 23) For more local products try this shop full of *potosino* pottery, masks, woodwork and canework.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Aeropuerto Ponciano Arriaga** (☎ 822-00-95) is 10km north of the city off Hwy 57. Aeroméxico Connect offers direct service to/from Monterrey with connecting flights to San Antonio, Texas and Mexico City. Aeromar and Mexicana and Click Mexicana serve Mexico City several times daily.

Airline offices:

**Aeroméxico Connect** (☎ 822-22-29; airport)

**Aeromar** (☎ 817-50-62; Carranza 1030)

**Click Mexicana** (☎ 833-04-31; Carranza 1115-1)

### BUS

The **Terminal Terrestre Potosina** (TTP; ☎ 816-45-96; Carretera 57), 2½km east of the center, is a busy transportation hub that has deluxe, 1st-

class and some 2nd-class bus services passing through. It's available facilities include card phones, 24-hour luggage storage and two cafés.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Car-rental prices range from US\$50 to US\$85 per day. There are also vans and weeklong packages available.

**Alamo** (☎ 822-83-20; Av Carranza 1415)

**Hertz** (☎ 812-32-29; Obregón 670)

### Getting Around

Taxis charge around M\$150 to M\$210 for the half-hour trip to/from the airport.

To reach the center from the bus station, take any 'Centro' bus. A convenient place to get off is on the Alameda, outside the train station. A booth in the bus station sells taxi tickets (M\$25 to M\$35) to the center.

From the center to the bus station, take any 'Central TTP' bus southbound on Av Constitución from the Alameda's west side.

City buses run from 6:30am to 10:30pm (M\$5). For places along Av Carranza, catch a 'Morales' or 'Carranza' bus in front of the train station.

## DAILY BUSES FROM SAN LUIS POTOSÍ

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency
Guadalajara	deluxe M\$335	5-6hr	12 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$257	6hr	hourly (Transportes del Norte)
	2nd-class M\$229	6hr	2 daily (Estrella Blanca)
Guanajuato	M\$142	5hr	4 daily (Flecha Amarilla)
	Matehuala	1st-class M\$121	2½hr
Mexico City (Terminal Norte)	2nd-class M\$105	2½hr	2 daily (Estrella Blanca)
	deluxe M\$385	5-6hr	12 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$308	5-6hr	hourly (Primera Plus)
Monterrey	2nd-class M\$265	6½hr	7 daily (Flecha Amarilla)
	deluxe M\$440	6hr	2 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$336	7hr	hourly (Transporte del Norte & Futura)
Querétaro	2nd-class M\$336	7hr	3 daily (Estrella Blanca)
	deluxe M\$290	2½hr	3 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$154	3½hr	frequent (Primera Plus, Futura & Ómnibus de México)
San Miguel de Allende	2nd-class M\$120	4hr	16 daily (Flecha Amarilla)
	M\$126	5hr	7 daily (Flecha Amarilla)
Tampico	1st-class M\$316	7hr	regular (Oriente Ómnibus de México or Futura)
	2nd-class M\$316	7-8hr	14 daily (Vencedor)
Zacatecas	1st-class M\$120	3hr	12 daily (Ómnibus de México)
	2nd-class M\$120	3hr	hourly (Estrella Blanca)

Daily buses also go to Aguascalientes, Ciudad Juárez, Ciudad Valles, Ciudad Victoria, Chihuahua, Dolores Hidalgo, León, Morelia, Nuevo Laredo, Saltillo and Torreón.

## MATEHUALA

☎ 488 / pop 70,150 / elevation 1600m

The only town of any size on Hwy 57 between Saltillo and San Luis Potosí, Matehuala is a pleasant but unremarkable place. It is a compulsory changing point on this route for buses to Real de Catorce.

If you do find yourself stuck here, the bus station is just west of the highway, 2km south of the center. To walk to the center, turn left out of the bus station and continue along Av 5 de Mayo for 1½km, then turn left on Insurgentes for a few blocks to reach the Plaza de Armas. Alternatively, take a microbus marked 'Centro'; minibuses marked 'Central' head in the direction of the terminal (both M\$4.50). A taxi costs about M\$25.

All essential services (ATMs, phones, internet etc) are around the main plazas – the shady Plaza de Armas and the busy Placita del Rey 300m to its north, which features a neo-Gothic-neoclassical **cathedral**. Cheaper hotels and the town's restaurants are in this area.

**Hotel María Esther** (☎ 882-07-14; Madero 111; s/d M\$250/290; Ⓟ) is a family-run place with rooms facing a plant-filled patio out back behind the restaurant. It's a block north and a block east of Placita del Rey. **Las Palmas Midway Inn** (☎ 882-00-01/02; www.laspalmas.netfirms.com; Carretera 57 Km 617; RV sites M\$270, s M\$610-816, d M\$760-940; Ⓟ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎), out by the highway, is a family-oriented place with nice rooms around landscaped gardens. Features a pool, mini-golf and a level trailer park with full hookups. Also has a **tourist office** (☎ 882-50-05) with English-speaking staff.

To appease grumbling stomachs, try the bustling and long-standing local favorite **Restaurant Santa Fe** (☎ 882-07-53; Morelos 709; mains M\$32-70) on Plaza de Armas, where bow-tied waiters will serve you a variety of Mexican standards or breakfast deals (M\$55 to M\$68).

From Matehuala, there are daily bus departures to Mexico City Terminal Norte (M\$420, 7½-8 hours, 13 1st-class direct); to Monterrey hourly by 1st-class (M\$213, 4½ hours), or two 2nd-class (M\$173, five hours); to Saltillo (M\$173, 3¼ hours, six 1st-class); to San Luis Potosí hourly 1st-class (M\$121, two hours), three 2nd-class (M\$105, 2¾ hours); and Querétaro (M\$121, seven daily). For bus schedules to/from Real de Catorce see p612.

## REAL DE CATORCE

☎ 488 / pop 1105 / elevation 2756m

Energy – in a spiritual sense – is a word commonly ascribed to the alluring village of Real de Catorce. This stark, compact and functioning 'ghost town' sits high on the fringes of the magical Sierra Madre Oriental. It was a wealthy silver-mining town of 40,000 people until early last century. Not long ago, it was nearly deserted, its streets lined with crumbling buildings, its mint a ruin and a few hundred people eking out an existence from the annual influx of pilgrims and old mine tailings.

Over the last few decades Real has experienced a revival; it has attracted several well-to-do Mexicans and foreigners (especially Europeans) who run some of the businesses and hotels in town. Many locals have built dwellings on the town's outskirts. Real is making a gradual comeback, so the 'ghost town' label hardly applies, although doors in abandoned buildings still creak in the breeze, dusty cobblestone streets end abruptly and many buildings are still in ruins.

To soak up its magic and unique atmosphere, you need to stay a night here, longer if you wish to explore the surrounding hills on foot or horseback.

## History

Real de Catorce translates as 'Royal of 14': the '14' may have come from 14 Spanish soldiers killed here by indigenous resistance fighters around 1700. The town was founded in the mid-18th century and the church built between 1790 and 1817.

The town reached its peak in the late 19th century, vying to surpass the famed Valenciana mine of Guanajuato. It had opulent houses, a bullring and shops selling European luxury goods.

Just why Real became a ghost town within three decades is a mystery. Some locals claim (as they do in many ghost towns) that during the revolution (1910–20) *bandidos* hid out here and scared off other inhabitants. A more plausible explanation is that the price of silver slumped after 1900.

## Orientation

You arrive in Real at the western end of the 2.3km Ogarrin tunnel. From the parking lot, follow the road up to the right to Lanzagorta, a dusty, stony street heading west past the





church, to the center of town. Real is easy to get around – you can see the town limits from wherever you stand. Streets are in a grid; Lanzagorta and Constitución are the main drags. The municipal buildings are on Constitución and the plaza and Casa de la Moneda are between the two. Libertad heads north out of town to the cemetery and former bullring.

## Information

See [www.realdecatorce.net](http://www.realdecatorce.net) for a good overview of the town. Card phones are located around Plaza Hidalgo. There's an ATM in the Municipal building, but on busy weekends it occasionally runs out of money; best to bring cash.

**Café El Quemado** (Libertad 5; ☎ 10am-2pm, 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 2-8pm Sat & Sun; closed Wed) Internet café which shows occasional films (free).

**Mesón de la Abundancia** (☎ 887-50-44; Lanzagorta 11) This hotel changes US dollars, traveler's checks and euros.

**Super La Nueva Sorpresa** (Lanzagorta 2; ☎ 8am-8pm) Changes US dollars if it has pesos on hand.

**Telephone caseta** (east side Plaza Hidalgo)

**Tourist office** (☎ 887-50-71; Palacio Municipal, Constitución s/n; ☎ 9am-8pm) Opening hours are a little flexible; simple flier and good regional map available.

## Sights & Activities

The ambience of the desert setting makes up for the lack of actual sights around town. If you're into walking or horseback riding, there's plenty to keep you occupied here for several days.

### TEMPLO DE LA PURÍSIMA CONCEPCIÓN

This charming *parroquia* (parish church) is an impressive neoclassical building. The attraction for thousands of Mexican pilgrims is the reputedly miraculous image of St Francis of Assisi on one of the side altars. A cult has grown up around the statue, whose help is sought in solving problems and cleansing sins.

Walk through the door to the left of the altar to find a roomful of *retablos*, small pictures depicting threatening situations from which St Francis has rescued the victim, with a brief description of the incident – car accidents and medical operations, for example –

and some words of gratitude. *Retablos* have become much sought after by collectors and are very occasionally seen in antique shops. Sadly, most of those on sale have been stolen from churches.

Opposite the church's facade, the **Casa de la Moneda** (admission M\$10; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed-Sun), the old mint, made coins for a couple of years in the 1860s. This classic monument has been exquisitely restored over the last few years. It now houses a cultural center-cum-gallery with several levels of temporary exhibitions, often on loan from museums in Mexico City. There are plans to incorporate the town's former museum (currently closed) into the site.

Just up the street from the *parroquia* on Juárez there is a local silver workshop, **Taller de Platería**.

### GALERÍA VEGA M57

Real's only **art gallery** (Zaragoza 3; ☎ 11am-4pm Sat, until 3pm Sun) hosts exhibitions and installations of contemporary work in a variety of media in a restored colonial building.

### PALENQUE DE GALLOS & PLAZA DE TOROS

A block northwest of the plaza lies a monument to the town's heyday – the **Palenque de Gallos** (Xicotencatl s/n; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm), a cockfighting ring, built like a Roman amphitheater. It was restored in the 1970s and sometimes hosts theater or dance performances. Follow Zaragoza-Libertad north to the edge of the town where there are remains of the former bullring **Plaza de Toros**; the **Capilla de Guadalupe** (☎ 8am-5pm) and *panteón* (cemetery) across the street are free and worth a look.

### HIKING

If you prefer to do your own hikes, you can head out from Real in almost any direction. The hike closest to home includes that up the hill to the **Pueblo Fantasma** (Ghost Town), on the hill behind – and clearly visible from – the town center. Head along Lanzagorta and stay left (avoid the road that veers right to the car park). The track you follow was the former entrance to town before the tunnel existed. Allow at least one hour to get to the top – there is another section around 100m further on behind those ruins visible from the town. Beware that there are two large shafts (about 50m deep) in the ruins.

To extend this hike, head northwest along the ridge to the antennas and to the cross over

the town (make sure you note this from the town before you leave as it becomes obscured when on the ridge). Follow the path *behind* the cross before you weave your way down to the cemetery (allow three to four hours).

Another shorter hike is to **Socavón de Purísima**, a large chimney of a former mine. Head down Allende and veer right at its end. You are on the road to Estación de Catorce. Follow this road until you reach the chimney (about 45 minutes one way). The road passes through a cut or split rock, the Cerro Trocado. To enter the mine, speak to the caretaker family (a tip is gratefully received). To return, it's a longer and harder slog back up the hill (one hour one way; on weekends you might be able to grab a lift in a Willys Jeep). Caution: be prepared – tell others where you're headed, take water, a hat and strong footwear; it's dry and unforgiving country.

### HORSEBACK RIDING

Ride 'em cowboy! Numerous trails lead out into the dry, stark and fascinating desert-scapes – hilly and flat – around Real. The most popular guided trail ride is the three-hour trip to **El Quemado**, the sacred mountain of the Huichol. Here you'll find expansive views of the high-desert plateau and a small shrine to the sun god.

Horse guides now belong to a union, approved by the municipality; if unsure, ask for a guide's credentials. The aim of the union is to standardize prices and safety. Rates are around M\$60 per hour. Note that no protective hats are provided; you clomp off at your own risk.

The horses and guides congregate every morning around Plaza Hidalgo. Willys jeep trips can also be arranged to many of the same locations, mainly on weekends. Ask any of the drivers along Lanzagorta or Allende, or at the tourist office. Rates vary according to numbers.

### Festivals & Events

Real is quiet during the week and busier on weekends. Semana Santa and Christmas are big events and the **Fiesta de San Francisco** is huge. Between September 25 and October 12, 150,000 pilgrims pay homage to the figure of St Francis of Assisi in the town's church. Many of them just come for the day while thousands stay in the town, filling every rentable room and sleeping rough in the plazas. The streets

are lined with stalls selling religious souvenirs and food, while many of the town's more up-market restaurants close for a month. Tourists who desire the more tranquil 'ghost-town experience' should keep well away during this period. The **Festival del Desierto** cultural festival begins the second week in September and features folkloric music and dance performances in towns all around the region.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

It can be very cold here in winter in the cheapest digs; bring a sleeping bag or request extra blankets.

**Hotel Real de Álamos** (Hospedaje Familiar; ☎ 887-50-09; Constitución 21; s/d M\$150/250) This place – run by friendly owner Antonia – has small, basic but clean rooms with concrete walls and private bathroom. The terrace provides excellent views of town.

**Rincón Mágico** (☎ 887-51-13; cnr Libertad & Zaragoza; d without/with bathroom M\$400/500). It's almost worth the price just to see the breath-taking and expansive valley views from the patio of this otherwise basic but *simpático* (friendly) place. Its five rooms have a relaxed, slightly disorganized, hippie feel. It's a bit of a dusty walk to get here.

### MIDRANGE

**Hostal Alcazaba** (☎ 887-50-75; Libertad (Zaragoza 33); camping per person M\$20, apt M\$650-1000; ☑) Opposite the cemetery, this option has four bright, light *casitas*, some with kitchen and all with private bathroom and panoramic views. There's also a house (previously the owners' and great for families). The enormous garden hosts excellent desert flora, but has been better days.

**Hotel El Real** (☎ 887-50-58; www.hotelreal.com; Morelos 20; s M\$650, d M\$750-800; ☑) This comfortable (if ever-so-slightly tired) restored place has pleasant rooms on three floors crowded around an open courtyard. Some (pricier rooms) have views over the town and the hills. There's a good restaurant. The hotel's second 'branch' – along similar lines but with a bar in front – is on Juárez and Iturbide.

**El Corral del Conde** (☎ 887-50-48; Constitución 17; r/ste from M\$650/850) The original 11 spacious stone-walled rooms somehow miss the mark on the boutique hotel front. There's the odd bit of exposed piping and cracked steps, but it's got character. Its second hotel, El Corral

del Conde II – just down the hill on Morelos & Lanzagorta – has another 13 newer rooms.

### TOP END

Real has seen a recent surge of restoration of old buildings into inviting upmarket accommodations.

**Hotel Shantiniketan** (Morada de Paz; ☎ 887-50-98; moradadepaz@realdecatorce.net; cnr Zaragoza & Lerdo; r M\$550-1500) There's a definite karma about this recently restored place: the nine rooms are named after Indian spiritual leaders. Each is minimalist and unfussy and surrounds a lovely garden courtyard.

**Mesón de Abundancia** (☎ 887-50-44; Lanzagorta 11; d M\$650-950, tr M\$1000, ste M\$1000-1200, f M\$1500) Re-live the town's bonanza era on the desert plateau in this stone citadel. The 19th-century former treasury (*tesorería*) building has been renovated into a hotel and restaurant. All 11 rooms are simply and tastefully decorated with local crafts (minus TV). Rates are cheaper on weekdays (excluding holidays). Ironically, given its cash-oriented past, the hotel accepts some credit cards, except American Express.

Other recommendations:

**Hotel El Ángel y El Corazón** (☎ 887-50-77; elangel@realdecatorce.net; Iturbide 3; r M\$750-1300) In a tranquil location with some stylish, light rooms and two apartments.

**Mesón de Refugio** (☎ 887-50-68; Ramón Corona s/n; r M\$850-1150) More contemporary design than the other renovated options, but some rooms are cramped.

## Eating & Drinking

At the entrance to Lanzagorta there are cheap local joints for the ubiquitous Mexican snacks. Several restaurants compete (with each other and with the better hotels) to do the best Italian and Mexican cuisine. Some close during the week if business is slow.

**Café Azul** (Lanzagorta 27; snacks M\$20-50; ☎ 9am-9pm Thu-Tue) Open all day, this Swiss-run scene is perfect for breakfasts and snacks and light meals including excellent crepes and organic salads.

**El Cactus Café** (☎ 887-50-56; Plaza Hidalgo; mains M\$40-90; ☒) This cheery eatery is run by an Italian cook and his Mexican wife. It has a friendly ambience and long wooden bench tables and seats. The menu features homemade bread and pasta (of course), plus there are good Mexican and veggie options.

**El Tolentino** (☎ 887-50-81; Terán 7; mains M\$60-130; ☎ 9am-9:30pm) This Mexican-themed place serves good country specialties and decent

breakfasts. The local atmosphere is enhanced during weekends by live music. During the day, head upstairs to the terrace.

**Malambo** (Lanzagorta 2; mains M\$65-140; ☎ 2:30pm-9:30pm Mon-Fri, noon-11pm Sat & Sun) With a quaint outdoor setting by a fountain (as well as plainer indoors), this pleasant place serves up a range of delights, including Mexican dishes and Italian pastas. The salads – containing *cabuche* (cactus flower) – are particularly tasty (M\$40).

**Eucalipto** (☎ 887-50-51; Cnr Lerdo & Libertad; mains M\$80-160; ☎ 1-10pm Wed-Sun) Named after the droopy looking eucalyptus gum tree in the courtyard, this pleasant place conjures up a perkier range of pastas and an array of meat dishes (thankfully, not koala) – from rib eye to T-bone – and a selection of wines, from Chile to France. It's one of the priciest in town, but it's excellent quality cuisine.

There are several cozy eating areas at the restaurant in Mesón de Abundancia (p611), one with a bar and fireplace. The hearty (read massive) servings of Italian and Mexican dishes are *muy rico* (delicious). It's open all day, including for breakfast (M\$25 to M\$50).

## Shopping

Dotted around town are numerous *artesanías* shops – jewelry, silverwork and leather products. Many of these are owned by the town's restaurant or hotel proprietors and the selection and quality varies greatly. Worth checking out for Huichol pieces is **Artisanal Wixarita Wirikuta** (Lanzagorta s/n).

## Getting There & Away

Sendor runs 1st-class buses from Matehuala's bus station to Real de Catorce (M\$47, two hours) at 7:45am, 9:45am, 11:45am, 1:45pm and 5:45pm; the bus can be caught in town 15 minutes later at the Sendor's office on Guerrero, a little east of and across the street from Hotel Álamo on Méndez. Upon arrival in Matehuala, ask if you need to buy a ticket to Real in advance. Return tickets can be purchased in Matehuala only if you are coming back on the same day.

On arrival in Real, buses park at the east entrance of the Ogarrio tunnel. There, in order to pass through the tunnel, you change to a smaller bus which drops off (or picks up if returning to Matehuala) at the western end of the tunnel, in Real. Confirm the return bus schedule upon arrival.

Return buses from Real to Matehuala were at 7:45am, 11:45am, 1:45pm and 5:45pm (M\$47, two hours). Tickets are purchased on board the bus at the tunnel's western entrance in Real.

If driving from Hwy 57 north of Matehuala, turn off toward Cedral, 20km west. After Cedral, you turn south to reach Catorce on what must be one of the world's longest cobblestone roads. It's a slow but spectacular zigzag drive up a steep mountainside. The Ogarrio tunnel (M\$20 per vehicle) is only wide enough for one vehicle; workers stationed at each end with telephones control traffic flow between 8am and 11pm. If it's really busy, you'll have to leave your car at the eastern tunnel entrance and continue by pick-up or cart. If you drive through, you must leave it in the dusty parking area to the left of the market.

Vintage Willys jeeps leave Real around noon (and on demand), downhill from the plaza along Allende, for the rough but spectacular descent to the small hamlet of Estación de Catorce (M\$30, one hour). From there, buses head to San Tiburcio, where there are connections for Saltillo and Zacatecas.

# GUANAJUATO STATE

The rocky highland state of Guanajuato (population 4.9 million) is full of riches of every kind. In colonial times, mineral resources attracted Spanish prospectors to mine for silver, gold, iron, lead, zinc and tin. For two centuries the state produced enormous wealth, extracting up to 40% of the world's silver. Silver barons in Guanajuato city enjoyed opulent lives at the expense of indigenous people who worked the mines, first as slave labor and then as wage slaves. Eventually, resenting the dominance of Spanish-born colonists, the well-heeled criollo class of the Guanajuato and Querétaro states contributed to plans for rebellion (see boxed text, p629).

These days, the state's treasures are the quaint colonial towns of Guanajuato and San Miguel de Allende. The industrial town of León is important economically as a center of leather production. Visitors to this region can enjoy its precious legacies: stunning colonial architecture, established cultural scenes and a stream of never-end-

## HUICHOL VISIONS

The remote Sierra Madre Occidental, in and around the far north of Jalisco, is the home of the Huichol, one of Mexico's most distinctive and enduring indigenous groups. Fiercely independent people, they were one of the few indigenous groups not subjugated by the Aztecs. Traditionally, they lived by hunting deer and cultivating scattered fields of corn in the high valleys.

The arrival of the Spanish had little immediate effect on the Huichol and it wasn't until the 17th century that the first Catholic missionaries reached the Huichol homelands. Rather than convert to Christianity, the Huichol incorporated various elements of Christian teachings into their traditional animist belief systems. In Huichol mythology, gods become personalized as plants, totem animal species and natural objects, while their supernatural form is explored in religious rituals.

Every year the Huichol leave their isolated homeland and make a pilgrimage of some 400km across Mexico's central plateau to what is now northern San Luis Potosí state. In this harsh desert region, they seek out the *mescal* cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*), known as peyote cactus. The rounded peyote 'buttons' contain a powerful hallucinogenic drug (whose chief element is mescaline) that is central to the Huichol's rituals and complex spiritual life. Most of the buttons are collected, dried and carried back to the tribal homelands, but a small piece is eaten on the spot, as a gesture to the plant. Small amounts of peyote help to ward off hunger, cold and fatigue, while larger amounts are taken on ritual occasions, such as the return from the annual pilgrimage. In particular, peyote is used by shamans whose visions inform them about when to plant and harvest corn, where to hunt deer or how to treat illnesses.

Peyote is illegal in Mexico. Under Mexican law, Huicholes are permitted to use it for their spiritual purposes. For the Huicholes, it has great cultural and spiritual significance; indiscriminate use is regarded as offensive, even sacrilegious.

Traditionally, the main Huichol art forms were telling stories, making masks and detailed geometric embroidery, or 'yarn pictures.' In the last few decades, the Huichol have been depicting their myths and visions graphically, using brightly colored beads pressed into a beeswax-covered substrate. This exquisite artwork is sold in craft markets, shops and galleries. Prices are usually fixed and the Huichol don't like to haggle. This art may be expensive compared to some (of the tackier) souvenirs, but each takes a long time to produce and each piece is unique. To see the best work, visit one of the specialist museums or shops in Zapopan (Guadalajara), Tepic, Puerto Vallarta or Zacatecas.

ing festivals...not to mention friendly, proud locals and lively university scenes.

## GUANAJUATO

☎ 473 / pop 70,798 / elevation 2017m

The extraordinary Unesco World Heritage city of Guanajuato was founded in 1559 due to the region's rich silver and gold deposits. Opulent colonial buildings, stunning tree-filled plazas and brightly-colored houses are crammed onto the steep slopes of a ravine. Excellent museums, handsome theaters and a fine marketplace punctuate the cobblestoned streets. The city's 'main' roads twist around the hillsides and plunge into tunnels, formerly rivers.

The city is best known internationally for its acclaimed annual international arts festival, the Festival Cervantino. Yet this colorful and lively place holds center stage all year long; much of the youthful vibrancy and prolific cultural activ-

ities – *callejoneadas*, films, theater and orchestras – can be attributed to the 20,000 students of the city's own University of Guanajuato.

The city usually boasts fine weather during the day, but beware of cold and windy nights in the winter.

## History

One of the hemisphere's richest silver veins was uncovered in 1558 at La Valenciana mine; for 250 years the mine produced 20% of the world's silver. Colonial barons benefiting from this mineral treasure were infuriated when King Carlos III of Spain slashed their share of the wealth in 1765. The king's 1767 decree banishing the Jesuits from Spanish dominions further alienated both the wealthy barons and the poor miners, who held allegiance to the Jesuits.

This anger was focused in the War of Independence. In 1810 rebel leader Miguel

Hidalgo set off the independence movement with his Grito de Independencia (Cry for Independence) in nearby Dolores (see boxed text, p629). Guanajuato citizens joined the independence fighters and defeated the Spanish and loyalists, seizing the city in the rebellion's first military victory. When the Spaniards eventually retook the city they retaliated by conducting the infamous 'lottery of death,' in which names of Guanajuato citizens were drawn at random and the 'winners' were tortured and hanged.

Independence was eventually won, freeing the silver barons to amass further wealth. From this wealth arose many of the mansions, churches and theaters.

In the late 1990s the state prospered under its PAN (National Action Party) governor, Vicente Fox Quesada, with Mexico's lowest unemployment rate and an export rate three times the national average. Fox was chosen as the PAN candidate for the 2000 presidential election and his popularity sealed the victory (he retired in 2006).

## Orientation

Guanajuato's center is quite compact, with a few major streets and lots of tiny *callejones*. It's ideal for walking, but tricky to drive around. The main street, running roughly east–west, is called Juárez from the Mercado Hidalgo to the basilica on Plaza de la Paz. East of the basilica, this street continues as a pedestrian street called Obregón to the Jardín de la Unión (the city's main plaza), then continues further east as Sopeña.

Roughly parallel to Juárez/Obregón is another long street, running from the Alhóndiga to the university and bearing the names 28 de Septiembre, Pocitos and Lascuráin de Retana along the way. Hidalgo (aka Cantarranas) parallels Sopeña and is another important street. Once you know these streets you can't get lost – just walk downhill until you find one of them. You can, however, have a great time getting lost among the maze of crooked *callejones* winding up the hills from the center.

Traffic on these main arteries is one-way, traveling east to west. Vehicles (including public buses) going west to east must use the main underground roadway, Subterránea Padre Miguel Hidalgo, a one-way route along the dried-up Río Guanajuato riverbed. (The river was diverted after it flooded the city in 1905.) At least eight other tunnels have been constructed to cope with increasing traf-

fic. The Túnel Noreste Ingeniero Ponciano Aguilar and Túnel Santa Fe, running one-way east to west, enable vehicles to bypass the city center altogether.

Surrounding central Guanajuato is the winding Carretera Panorámica, offering great views of the town and surrounding hills.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS

Several internet places are on Plaza Mexi-amora. There are many others around town; most charge M\$10 per hour.

**Internet Mexiquito** (Independencia 6; ☎ 10am–10pm) A chill atmosphere with coffee.

### LAUNDRY

**Lavandería Automática Internacional** (Doblado 28; ☎ 9:30am–8pm Mon-Fri, 10am–5pm Sat) Load of 3kg for M\$50.

**Lavandería del Centro** (Sopeña 26; ☎ 9am–8:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am–4pm Sat) Costs M\$30 per 1–3kg or M\$50 per 3–5kg.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Hospital General** (☎ 733-15-73, 733-15-76; Carretera a Silao, Km 6.5)

### MONEY

Banks along Av Juárez change cash and traveler's checks (but some only until 2pm) and have ATMs. Banorte is diagonally opposite the tourist office.

**Divisas Dimas** (Juárez 33A; ☎ 10am–8pm Mon-Sat) Convenient *casa de cambio*.

**Viajes Georama** (☎ 732-51-01; Plaza de la Paz 34) American Express agent that books and confirms tickets, but doesn't exchange traveler's checks.

### POST OFFICE

**Post office** (☎ 732-03-85; Ayuntamiento 25)

### TELEPHONE & FAX

Card phones are on Pasaje de los Arcos, an alley off the south side of Obregón near the tourist office.

**Computel** (Ayuntamiento 25) Opposite the post office, with fax and internet.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**State tourist office** (☎ 732-19-82; www.guanajuato-travel.com, www.guanajuato.gob.mx; Plaza de la Paz 14; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon-Fri, 10am–4pm Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) Friendly staff, with free city maps and brochures (in Spanish & English).





## Sights

### CENTRAL PLAZAS

A wander around the beautiful main plazas, the bustling hubs of Guanajuato's social life, is a good introduction to Guanajuato's historic center. Pretty **Jardín de la Unión**, surrounded by restaurants and shaded by Indian laurel trees, is the social heart of the city. Here, tourists and well-to-do locals congregate in the late afternoon, along with buskers, shoe shiners and mariachis.

The elegant Teatro Juárez sits on its southeast corner. Walk west on Obregón to **Plaza de la Paz**, the small triangle beside the basilica, surrounded by the former homes of wealthy silver lords.

Meander west and south along the curving Av Juárez to **Plazuela de los Ángeles**, where the steps and ice-cream stands are popular gathering spots for students. The Callejón del Beso (see right) is just a few meters uphill from here.

Continue on Juárez to three picturesque spaces: the handsome **Jardín de la Reforma**, behind the row of classical columns; **Plaza San Roque**, where *entremeses* (theatrical sketches) are performed in the Cervantino festival (p619); and nearby is the pleasant, shady **Plazuela de San Fernando**.

Head further west on Av Juárez to the bustling area in front of Mercado Hidalgo. A block north, **Plaza Alhóndiga** is a usually empty space with wide steps leading up to the Alhóndiga. From there, wander back east along 28 de Septiembre (which changes names several times), past museums and the university, with a few twists and turns, to **Plaza del Baratillo** with its Florentine fountain. A right turn and a short block south from there will bring you back to Jardín de la Unión.

### THEATERS

Don't leave without visiting the magnificent **Teatro Juárez** (☎ 732-01-83; Sopena s/n; adult/concession M\$35/15; 🕒 9am-1:45pm & 5-7:45pm Tue-Sun when no performances are scheduled). It was built between 1873 and 1903 and inaugurated by the dictator Porfirio Díaz, whose lavish tastes are reflected in the plush red and gold interior. The outside is festooned with columns, lamp posts and statues; inside the impression is Moorish, with the bar and lobby gleaming with carved wood, stained glass and precious metals. Video/camera use is M\$60/30.

The **Teatro Principal** (☎ 732-15-23; Hidalgo s/n) and **Teatro Cervantes** (☎ 732-11-69; Plaza Allende s/n) are not as spectacular as Teatro Juárez, but they host a full schedule of performances during the Cervantino festival and less-regular shows at other times. Statues of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza grace the small Plaza Allende, in front of Teatro Cervantes.

### CALLEJÓN DEL BESO

Narrowest of the many narrow alleys that climb the hills from Guanajuato's main streets is this callejón (the Alley of the Kiss), where the balconies of the houses on either side of the alley practically touch. In a Guanajuato legend, a fine family once lived on this street and their daughter fell in love with a common miner. They were forbidden to see each other, but the miner rented a room opposite and the lovers exchanged furtive *besos* (kisses) from these balconies. Inevitably, the romance was discovered and the couple met a tragic end. From the Plazuela de los Ángeles on Av Juárez, walk about 40m up Callejón del Patrocinio to see the tiny alley on your left.

### ALHÓNDIGA DE GRANADITAS

The site of the first major rebel victory in Mexico's War of Independence is now a history and art **museum** (☎ 732-11-12; 28 de Septiembre; admission M\$43, Sun free; 🕒 10am-5:45pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2:45pm Sun). The Alhóndiga was a massive grain-and-seed storehouse built between 1798 and 1808. In 1810 it became a fortress for Spanish troops and loyalist leaders. They barricaded themselves inside when 20,000 rebels led by Miguel Hidalgo attempted to take Guanajuato. It looked as if the outnumbered Spaniards would be able to hold out. Then, on September 28, 1810, a young miner named Juan José de los Reyes Martínez (aka El Pípila), under orders from Hidalgo, tied a stone slab to his back and, thus protected from Spanish bullets, set the gates ablaze. While the Spaniards choked on smoke, the rebels moved in and took the Alhóndiga, killing most of those inside. (El Pípila probably perished in the battle, but some versions of the story have it that he lived to a ripe old age.)

The Alhóndiga was used as a prison for a century, beginning in 1864, but it became a museum in 1967. Don't miss José Chávez Morado's dramatic murals of Guanajuato's history on the staircases. Video or camera use costs M\$60.

### MUSEO Y CASA DE DIEGO RIVERA

Diego Rivera's birthplace is now an excellent **museum** (☎ 732-11-97; Pócositos 47; adult/student M\$15/5; ☎ 10am-6:30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2:30pm Sun) honoring the painter (the Marxist Rivera was *persona non grata* here for years); it's worth spending an hour or so here, longer if you're a Rivera fan.

Rivera and a twin brother were born in the house in 1886 (his twin died at the age of two) and lived here until the family moved to Mexico City six years later. The museum's ground floor is the Rivera family home, with 19th-century antiques and fine furniture.

The 1st and 2nd floors feature a permanent collection of his original works and preliminary sketches (completed for some of his famous murals in Mexico City), plus there's a nude of Frida Kahlo. The newer renovated upper floors host temporary exhibitions of work by Mexican and international artists. An intimate theater upstairs has occasional films and features B&W photographs of Kahlo and Rivera.

### MUSEO ICONOGRÁFICO DEL QUIJOTE

Surprisingly interesting, this **museum** (☎ 732-33-76; Doblado 1; admission M\$20; ☎ 10am-6:30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2:30pm Sun) is worth half an hour of your time. It fronts the tiny plaza in front of the Templo de San Francisco. Every exhibit relates to Don Quixote de la Mancha, the notorious Spanish literary hero, depicted in numerous different media by different artists in different styles. Paintings, statues, tapestries, even chess sets, clocks and postage stamps all feature the quixotic icon and his bumbling companion Sancho Panza.

### UNIVERSIDAD DE GUANAJUATO

The main building of this **university** (UGTO; ☎ 732-00-06 ext 8001; www.ugto.mx; Lascuráin de Retana 5), whose ramparts are visible above much of the city, is on Lascuráin de Retana, one block up the hill from the basilica. The distinctive multistory white-and-blue building with the crenelated pediment dates from the 1950s. The design was (and some might say, continues to be) controversial as this dominating structure impedes the characteristic, historic cityscape.

### MUSEO DEL PUEBLO DE GUANAJUATO

Located between the university, this **art museum** (☎ 732-29-90; Pócositos 7; adult/student M\$15/5; ☎ 10am-

6:30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) displays a collection of Mexican miniatures, 18th- and 19th-century art and a room featuring works by Guanajuatan painter Hermenegildo Bustos. The museum occupies the former mansion of the Marquesses de San Juan de Rayas, who owned the San Juan de Rayas mine. The private church upstairs in the courtyard contains a powerful mural by José Chávez Morado.

### CHURCHES

The **Basilica de Nuestra Señora de Guanajuato** (Plaza de la Paz s/n), a block west of Jardín de la Unión, contains a jewel-covered image of the Virgin, patron of Guanajuato. The wooden statue was supposedly hidden from the Moors in a cave in Spain for 800 years. Felipe II of Spain gave it to Guanajuato in thanks for the wealth it provided to the crown. Next door, the small **Galería Mariana** (Plaza de la Paz s/n; admission M\$20; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon & Thu-Sun) is dedicated to images of Mary and other Catholic relics.

Other fine colonial churches include the **Templo de San Diego** (Jardín de la Unión s/n), opposite the Jardín de la Unión; the **Templo de San Francisco** (Doblado s/n); and the large **Templo de la Compañía de Jesús** (Lascuráin de Retana s/n), which was completed in 1747 for the Jesuit seminary whose buildings are now occupied by the University of Guanajuato.

### FUNICULAR

This **incline railway** (Plaza Constancia s/n; one-way/round-trip M\$12/24; ☎ 8am-9:45pm) inches up (and down) the slope behind the Teatro Juárez to a terminal near the El Pípila monument. Heading up is fun, but to descend, save your pennies and walk down (there are two obvious well-paved routes).

### MONUMENTO A EL PÍPILA

The monument to El Pípila honors the hero who torched the Alhóndiga gates on September 28, 1810, enabling Hidalgo's forces to win the first victory of the independence movement. The statue shows El Pípila holding his torch high over the city. On the base is the inscription 'Aún hay otras Alhóndigas por incendiar' ('There are still other Alhóndigas to burn').

Two routes from the center of town go up steep, picturesque lanes. One goes east on Sopena from Jardín de la Unión, then turns right on Callejón del Calvario (this becomes Pochote; turn right at Subida San Miguel).

Another ascent, unmarked, goes uphill from the small plaza on Alonso. Alternatively, the 'Pípila-ISSSTE' bus heading west on Juárez will let you off right by the statue, or you can ride up in the funicular.

### TEMPLO LA VALENCIANA & BOCA MINA SAN RAMÓN

On a hill overlooking Guanajuato, 5km north of the center, is the magnificent **Templo La Valenciana** (Iglesia de San Cayetano). Its facade is spectacular and its interior dazzles with ornate golden altars, filigree carvings and giant paintings. One legend says that the Spaniard who started the nearby San Ramón mine promised San Cayetano that if it made him rich, he would build a church to honor the saint. Another says that the silver baron of La Valenciana, Conde de Rul, tried to atone for exploiting the miners by building the ultimate in Churrigueresque churches. Whatever the motive, ground was broken in 1765 and the church was completed in 1788.

The **Boca Mina San Ramón** (adult/concession M\$20/10; ☎ 10am-7pm) is part of the famous Valenciana mining district (the best known mine, Boca Mina Valenciana, was closed to visitors at the time of research). Silver was discovered here in 1548. The small visitor's center is worth a quick half-hour. It features some dusty displays and pieces of old mining equipment. More exciting is to descend the steps into a mine shaft to a depth of 60m (note: not for claustrophobics).

To get to Boca Mina San Ramón, take a regular 'Cristo Rey' or 'Valenciana' bus from the bus stop on the corner of Alhóndiga and 28 de Septiembre. Get off at Templo La Valenciana and walk past the church to the mine entrance.

### EX-HACIENDA SAN GABRIEL DE BARRERA

To escape Guanajuato's bustling streets, head 2.5km west to this magnificent colonial home which is now a **museum** (☎ 732-06-19; Camino Antiguo a Marfil Km 2.5; adult/concession M\$22/15; ☎ 9am-6pm) with stunning gardens. This tranquil retreat is well worth a couple of hours. Video/camera use costs M\$25/20.

Built at the end of the 17th century, this was the grand hacienda of Captain Gabriel de Barrera, whose family was descended from the first Conde de Rul of the famous La Valenciana mine. Opened as a museum in 1979, the hacienda, with its opulent period

European furnishings, provides an insight into the lives of the wealthy of the time.

The large, shady grounds, originally devoted to processing ore from La Valenciana, were converted in 1945 to a series of beautiful terraced gardens based on international designs, with pavilions, pools, fountains and footpaths.

Take one of the frequent 'Marfil' buses heading west in the subterranean tunnel under Juárez and ask the driver to drop you at Hotel Misión Guanajuato.

### MUSEO DE LAS MOMIAS

This famous **museum** (Museum of the Mummies; ☎ 732-06-39; Explanada del Panteón Municipal s/n; adult/child M\$50/30; ☎ 9am-6pm) is one of the most bizarre (some might say grotesque) at the *panteón*. This popular place is a quintessential example of Mexico's obsession with death; visitors come from all over to see disinterred corpses. A sense of humor may be necessary, not least because some of the descriptions make light of the unfortunate individuals' fates.

While technically these are mummified remains – due to the high levels of lime and clay in the soil which inhibits decomposition – the bodies are not thousands of years old. The first remains were dug up in 1865 to make room for more bodies in the cemeteries. What the authorities uncovered were not skeletons but flesh mummified (many feature grotesque forms and facial expressions). Today the museum displays more than 100 mummies.

The complex is on the western edge of town, a 10-minute ride from Av Juárez on any 'Momias' bus.

### CRISTO REY

*Cristo Rey* (Christ the King) is a 20m bronze statue of Jesus erected in 1950 on the summit of the Cerro de Cubilete, 15km west of Guanajuato. It is said to be the exact geographical center of Mexico. The statue is a popular attraction for Mexican tourists; there is a special significance in having Jesus at the heart of their country.

Tour agencies offer 3½-hour trips to the statue (see opposite), but you can go on your own from the center. Buses marked 'Cubilete' or 'Cristo Rey' depart every hour or so from in front of the Alhóndiga, Calle Alhóndiga (M\$15).

## Courses

Guanajuato is a university town and has an excellent atmosphere for studying Spanish. Group classes average around US\$6.50 per hour and private lessons average US\$15 an hour. Schools can arrange homestays with meals for around US\$20 per day. Additional costs may include registration and/or placement test fees, excursions and extracurricular activities.

The Universidad de Guanajuato (p617) offers Spanish courses with classes in Mexican and Latin American culture. Summer courses (June and July), semester-long courses (beginning January and August) and monthly courses available.

**Academia Falcón** (☎ /fax 731-07-45, 731-10-84; www.academiafalcon.com; Paseo de la Presa 80) Well-established language institute, 3km south of the center. Spanish classes have not more than five; private classes also available.

**Escuela Mexicana** (☎ 732-50-05; www.escuelamexicana.com; Potrero 12) Small school with classes in Spanish (grammar, conversation, literature) and other topics from pre-Hispanic culture to dance and cooking. Homestay and onsite accommodations available. Supports local orphanages and old people's home (visits possible for students).

**Instituto Tonali** (☎ 732-73-52; Juárez 4) Spanish classes at all levels; homestays organized for around US\$20 per day.

## Tours

Several agencies offer similar tours of Guanajuato's major sights (usually in Spanish). You can reach all the same places on local buses, but if your time is limited a tour may be useful.

**Transporte Exclusivo de Turismo** (☎ 732-59-68; cnr Av Juárez & Calle 5 de Mayo), in a kiosk, and **Transportes Turísticos de Guanajuato** (☎ 732-21-34; cnr Obregón & El Truco), below the front courtyard of the basilica, both offer daily Guanajuato colonial tours, which include the mummies, La Valenciana mine and church, the Pípila monument and the Carretera Panorámica. These depart three times daily, last 3½ hours and cost M\$100. A three-hour tour heads up to Cristo Rey (M\$100; see opposite). The eight-hour 'independence circuit' runs through Dolores Hidalgo and San Miguel de Allende (M\$200). Five-hour night tours (M\$90) take in Guanajuato's views and nightspots and the street parties called *callejoneadas* (see p624).

## Festivals & Events

See [disfruteguanajuato.com](http://disfruteguanajuato.com) for forthcoming events under 'Noticias.'

**Baile de las Flores** The Flower Dance takes place on the Thursday before Semana Santa. The next day, mines are open to the public for sightseeing and celebrations. Miners decorate altars to La Virgen de los Dolores, a manifestation of the Virgin Mary who looks after miners.

**Fiestas de San Juan y Presa de la Olla** The festivals of San Juan are celebrated at the Presa de la Olla park in late June. The 24th is the big bash for the saint's day itself, with dances, music, fireworks and picnics. Then on the first Monday in July, everyone comes back to the park for another big party celebrating the opening of the dam's floodgates.

**Día de la Cueva** Cave Day is a country fair held on July 31, when locals walk to a cave in the nearby hills to honor San Ignacio de Loyola and enjoy a festive picnic.

**Fiesta de la Virgen de Guanajuato** This festival on August 9 commemorates the date when Felipe II gave the people of Guanajuato the jeweled wooden Virgin that now adorns the basilica.

**Festival Internacional Cervantino** (www.festivalcervantino.gob.mx) In the 1950s the arts festival was merely *entremeses* from Miguel Cervantes' work performed by students. It has grown to become one of Latin America's foremost arts extravaganzas. Music, dance and theater groups arrive from around the world, performing diverse works (mostly non-Cervantes related). The festival lasts two to three weeks starting around the second week of October. Tickets for single events range from US\$10 to US\$50. Tickets and hotels should be booked in advance. Advance tickets are available through the **ticketmaster website** (www.ticketmaster.com.mx). In Guanajuato, buy tickets from the ticket office on the southeast side of Teatro Juárez.

## Sleeping

The most classy in-town address is Jardín de la Unión, where a couple of 'opulent' colonial-style hotels have rooms, bars and restaurants facing the lively but traffic-free plaza. Many centrally-located budget and midrange options are in converted homes. During the Cervantino Festival in October, prices can go above the normal high-season rates given here, which apply during the Christmas, Semana Santa and summer holiday periods. Prices can be significantly less outside the high seasons.

## BUDGET

**Casa Bertha** (☎ /fax 732-13-16; www.paginasprodigy.com/casabertha; Taboras 9; r per person without/with private bathroom from M\$150/180, apt per person M\$200-250) This family-run *casa de huéspedes* is a labyrinth of various sized rooms (a couple have internal-facing windows) and three family-size apartments with cable TV. Travelers praise friendly owner Juan for his hospitality and for



## LIVING WITH MOJIGANGAS

*Mojigangas* (often called *gigantes*, *marmotas*, *monos*, *papa güevos* and – inaccurately – giant puppets) are massive caricature figures 11-13ft high. They were brought to Mexico by the Spanish conquerors around 1600 to represent respected public figures and to cheer along local religious festivities.

According to Guanajuato artists Felipe Olmos, 41, and Japanese-born Mika Matsuishi, 35, the tradition of high-quality *mojigangas*, while heralded in Spain, had languished in Mexico over the years. Felipe was determined to change this. He recalled as a child when *mojigangas* danced during festivals in his village, San Juan de Los Lagos, in Jalisco. In 2002 (by then himself a sculptor and studying at San Miguel de Allende's School of Bellas Artes) Felipe decided to produce and donate 20 *mojigangas* – made with the help of a team of 130 people – to his home town's 2003 Spring parade. 'My project was to bring good quality *mojigangas* back to life.'

Meanwhile, Mika and he romanced over a *mojiganga*; she was studying ceramics alongside Felipe in San Miguel, but was unaware that he was the creator of these beautiful figures that won her heart in one of the town's festivals. 'I saw my first *mojiganga* and thought, *woowww!*' Later, she was invited by Felipe to help design and create *mojigangas* and a professional and personal partnership began. Their creations have received coverage as far away as France, Japan and the US. Creating *mojigangas* is an involved and time-consuming process. Each figure can take up to a month to complete. The artists sketch an idea and then make a plasticine figure. Then they construct a giant bamboo, metal, polyurethane and clay model (up to 200kg of clay can be used), from which a mould is made. This is covered with layers of papier mâché then, when dry, the figure is painted and, finally, dressed.

keeping a homelike and clean place, with great rooftop terrace, town vistas and wireless internet. Head up beside Teatro Principal to Plaza Mexiamora and look for the 'Casa Bertha' sign and arrow painted on a wall. Prices are around M\$20 lower out of season.

**El Hostelito** (☎ 732-54-83; [hostalitogto@hotmail.com](mailto:hostalitogto@hotmail.com); Sangre de Cristo 9; dm M\$200, r M\$250-300; ☑) Just look at the travelers' comments book to see that this centrally located, well-run, HI-affiliated hostel is 'one of the nicest in Mexico.' It has helpful staff, a kitchen, private rooms with bathroom, single-sex dorms, cable TV, breakfast and (dare we admit) even your beds are made for you. Prices are significantly less in low season and there are discounts for HI members and two or more nights.

**Casa de Dante** (☎ 731-09-09; [www.hospedajedante.com](http://www.hospedajedante.com); Callejón de Zaragoza 25; dm & s/d incl breakfast M\$250/500) 'This house is your house' greets the owner of this ultra-friendly family-run hostel. You can opt for a dormitory or for one of eight well-kept rooms (some with private bathrooms) plus there's a kitchen, DVD movie lounge, an outdoor BBQ on the terrace and hospitality (read frequent farewell parties for longer-term guests who rave about this place). It's a little out of town and up 156 steps, but – phew! – worth the effort. Head up the *callejón* next to Hotel Independencia on Paseo de la Presa.

**Casa de Pita** (☎ 732-15-32; [www.casadepita.com](http://www.casadepita.com); Cabecita 26; dm M\$180, r & apt M\$350-450) A literal maze of atmospheric guest rooms in this centrally located converted house. The dormitory has a private bathroom and includes breakfast (M\$25 extra for those in rooms). Internet wi-fi connection available.

## MIDRANGE

**Hotel Molino del Rey** (☎ 732-22-23; [mach1@avantel.net](http://mach1@avantel.net); cnr Campanero & Belauzaran; s/d/tr M\$400/570/730) An easy stroll from the center, the 'King's Mill' is notable for its quiet, convenient location. Its 40 rooms are set around a patio, and some rooms are nicer than others (and some face into the patio). A small ground-floor restaurant serves tasty, inexpensive meals.

**Hostal Cantarranas** (☎ 732-51-41; [www.hostalcantaranasgtocapital.com](http://www.hostalcantaranasgtocapital.com); Cantarranas 50; r M\$450, with kitchenette M\$590) An old building with pleasant rooms (mostly apartments) and a sunny rooftop.

**Motel de las Embajadoras** (☎ 731-01-05; cnr Embajadoras & Paseo Madero; s/d/tr M\$450/750/850; ☑) This reliable motel-style option looks more like an hacienda of the 1970s, around a courtyard of plants, with simple but clean rooms set under a verandah. It's great if you're driving and want to avoid the tunnels and downtown and it's only five minutes from the center on an 'Embajadoras' or 'Presa' bus. The res-



According to Felipe, despite the pre-planning of the figures, they transpire gradually. He says that they only have hearts – and therefore come alive – when they are completely finished. And *mojigangas* never die. 'Although they are very fragile – for example, they can fall in the street and be damaged – they live in the minds of the people who see them or interact with them,' says Felipe.

Included among those who can be said to interact 'intimately' with *mojigangas* are the people who perform inside them. 'Regardless of the character you inhabit – whether Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, La Catrina (the skeleton who represents Death in Mexico's Day of the Dead celebrations) – the important thing is that the people inside are having fun. If they are having fun, the character is having fun.' Mika says, 'Being anonymous inside the figure gives you much more energy. Men often prefer to be a female character because they are anonymous and can play up their feminine sides.'

Felipe and Mika are proud that *mojigangas* are being recognized as important work and as a form of art, as opposed to simply being a quaint hobby. 'The process is one of sculpture. We transfer it to paper, so that it is functional and so that people can dance, but they are still sculptures.' While they also work in other mediums, including bronze, Felipe and Mika say they like the fact that *mojigangas* seem more alive. 'Bronze statues can't dance – bronze bust sculptures [in public areas] can get shat on by birds. But with *mojigangas* it is different: people can dance and everyone – dancers or viewers – can enjoy themselves. The public speak to the characters (Diego often gets reprimanded for the way he treated Frida!), or they kiss and sympathize with Don Quixote.'

restaurant serves inexpensive food. During Cervantino Festival prices are M\$100 more and no singles are available.

**Hotel El Insurgente** (☎ 732-31-92; [www.hotelinsurgente.com/](http://www.hotelinsurgente.com/); Juárez 226; s/d/tr M\$475/620/710) A practical and comfortable option just west of center, this place fills up its 80 rooms fast during holidays and festivals (packages are available for Easter and the Cervantino Festival). It is generally good value though and the upper rooms have fine views of the city.

**Mesón del Rosario** (☎ /fax 732-32-84; Av Juárez 31; d/tr M\$540/630) The knights in shining armor standing in this atmospheric medieval-style entrance (we're not talking bellboys here) promise big things. However, travelers' views differ on this choice. It's centrally located, but some of the 34 rooms are small and dark, while others are more generous in size and light. Check before committing to avoid a duel with the friendly staff.

**El Zopilote Mojado** (☎ 732-53-11; [www.elzopilote.mojado.com/](http://www.elzopilote.mojado.com/); Plaza Mexiamora 51 & 53; r/apt M\$550/900) The various sleeping options have the feel of a stylish B&B minus the steep prices. Eight tastefully-decorated rooms are located above the Café Zopilote Mojado and in a house nearby. All rooms are cosy and comfortable; those in the house share a delightfully modern and spacious communal kitchen,

lounge/dining area and outdoor terraces. The lion's head mounted above the fireplace is anomalous; that said, this comfortable place is guaranteed to have you purring. Two chic (if dark) apartments and a family house are also near the plaza.

**Hostería del Frayle** (☎ /fax 732-11-79; [www.hosteriadelfrayle.com/](http://www.hosteriadelfrayle.com/); Sopeña 3; s/d/tr M\$800/1000/1400; ☐) A block from the Jardín, this historic hotel (it was built in 1673 as the Casa de Moneda) has 37 attractive but dark rooms with high wood-beamed or boveda ceilings and satellite TV. The décor is showing a few signs of wear, but the service is friendly and the thick adobe walls keep things quiet.

**Mesón de los Poetas** (☎ 732-07-05; [www.mexonline.com/poetas.htm](http://www.mexonline.com/poetas.htm); Positos 35; d/ste M\$950/1500) Built against the hillside, this labyrinth of rooms – each named after a poet – offer, on the whole, comfortable, clean lodgings. You may not wax lyrical about the light (some rooms are dark), but with a kitchenette and bright décor, this option is good value for the price bracket.

## TOP END

Some quaint old buildings in various parts of town have been restored as small boutique hotels. The road to La Valenciana has several posh places in lofty locations. Other upmarket places are in Marfil, a 15-minute drive or bus

ride west of town. The following prices can be significantly lower during low season.

**Hotel Casa del Agua** (☎ 734-19-74; Plaza de la Compañair 4; r from M\$1155, ste M\$1287-2715; (P)) This remodeled colonial building has been finished with contemporary ambient touches. The floor of the interior courtyard is a quirky glass-covered pool (empty during our visit). The 16 suites are simple, elegant and include all the modern conveniences. Centrally located near the university, this is a good-value option for this range.

**Hotel Luna** (☎ 732-97-25; www.hotelluna.com.mx; Jardín de la Unión 6; interior r from M\$1505, exterior r from M\$1820, ste from M\$2306) This elegant 100-year-old hotel facing the plaza boasts a stunning foyer. Beyond that, the rooms have an old-style ambience with contemporary facilities, but vary in standard; the internally facing rooms are less appealing. Rates include breakfast; there's a 10% discount if you pay by cash.

**ourpick Villa María Cristina** (☎ 731-21-82; www.villamariacristina.com.mx; Paseo de la Presa de La Olla 76; ste M\$1850-4100) Recently opened, this stunning converted mansion reeks of expensive perfume. The décor in the spacious rooms features neo-classical French designer furniture, original paintings (by local artist Jesús Gallardo) and beds and bathrooms with all the 'fluffy and puffy' trimmings (there are even Bvlgari toiletries). Outside, various patios and terraces feature everything from fountains and wicker chairs to Jacuzzis plus views of La Bufa. The main patios are covered in the original – and exquisite – tiles. This luxurious option is situated in La Presa, a 15-minute walk from the center.

**Antiguo Vapor** (☎ 732-32-11; www.hotelavapor.com; Galarza 5; r M\$1900) For those with dosh and who want a more personal feel to their accommodations experience, the rooms in this newly-built nest (each room has a bird name) are uniquely decorated in contemporary Mexican with brightly colored bedcovers, tiles and boveda ceilings. Some have much better views than others; some in the rear have high, opaque windows.

**Quinta Las Acacias** (☎ 731-15-17, in Mexico 800-710-89-38, in USA 888-497-4129; www.quintalascacias.com.mx; Paseo de la Presa 168; ste with breakfast M\$2800-4830; (P) (A) (B) (C)) This hideaway combines attentive service and intimate luxury in a former 19th-century French-colonial summer residence. The older style rooms are located in the original house and feature brass

bedsteads (and are more or less charming depending on your taste), while the new-ish master suites located behind the house have hydro-massage tubs. The most peaceful and modern suites (some with LCD TV and all with small patios) have been recently constructed around a stunning protected cactus garden.

## Eating

For fresh produce and cheap snacks and lunches, head to the Mercado Hidalgo, a five-minute walk west of the main plaza on Juárez. Another two blocks further down on the right is Central Comercio, with a large supermarket.

## JARDÍN DE LA UNIÓN & AROUND

The Jardín de la Unión has good upscale restaurants where you can enjoy the atmosphere of the plaza. But there are other more hidden surprises.

**ourpick Truco 7** (☎ 732-83-74; Truco 7; mains M\$25-80; ☎ 8:30am-11:30pm) This intimate, artsy café-restaurant featuring artifacts, paintings and a collection of old radios, is one of the most reliable around – in terms of opening hours and reasonable quality. It attracts everyone from students to travelers and serves Mexican food in a great atmosphere. Set lunches are inexpensive (M\$37 to M\$42).

**Bagel Cafetin** (☎ 733-97-33; Potrero 2; bagels M\$30; ☎ 9am-late Mon-Sat) This colorful spot, next to Templo de San Francisco, serves up bagels with a huge choice of fillings, reasonable coffee and wi-fi internet connections (minimum consumption M\$20).

**Santo Café** (Puente de Campanero; mains M\$30-40; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-8pm Sun) Stop by this cozy, slightly funky spot on the quaint Venetian-style bridge and check the latest university vibe. It serves good, cheap snacks and drinks overlooking the alley below and there is music of all styles. Musicians sometimes play on weekends.

**El Café** (☎ 732-25-66; Sopeña 10; mains M\$30-80; ☎ 8am-midnight) This popular hangout is the place to socialize alfresco over cocktails or a light meal. Perfect for people-watching from their tables under umbrellas across the street, alongside Teatro Juárez.

**El Gallo Pitagórico** (☎ 732-94-89; Constanza 10; mains M\$70-140; ☎ 2-11pm) South of the Jardín, up the path (and then steps) behind Templo San Diego, this romantic restaurant is chock-a-

block with folkloric artifacts, friendly atmosphere and fine city views. The Italian cuisine includes assorted antipasti, a range of pastas and great meat dishes. The lengthy wine list can hike the price, but service is good and it's a reliably pleasant experience.

**La Capellina** (☎ 732-72-24; Sopena 3; mains M\$90-130; ☎ 1:30-11pm Mon-Thu, 1:30-midnight Fri & Sat, 1:30-7pm Sun) The French chef in this smart 'special occasion' place creates international (mainly French, Italian and Mexican) fusion-cuisine. The menu is à la carte featuring pizzas, pasta and other 'specialties' (all identified by the word 'capellina' in their name).

## AV JUÁREZ & AROUND

**Restaurant La Carreta** (☎ 732-43-58; Av Juárez 96; mains M\$25-50; ☎ 8am-10pm) Follow your nose to La Carreta, an unpretentious café, whose street-front grill spins out a super-scrumptious *pollo al pastor* (grilled chicken) and *carne asada* (grilled beef), served with large portions of rice and salad.

**Tasca de La Paz** (☎ 734-22-25; Plaza de la Paz 28; mains M\$60-110; ☎ 8am-10pm) This place opposite the basilica has outdoor tables on picturesque Plaza de la Paz for tapas, paella and other Spanish specialties. It's a bit pricey, but worth it for the authentic flavors and European ambience.

**Il Romanico** (☎ 732-27-72; Av Juárez 24; mains M\$70-160; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri & Sat, 8am-10pm Sun) A modern Italian-style, all-in-one type place where you can get your morning juice, lunch-time crepes and a gelato snack. In the evening, grab a pizza or pasta and then hit the hip bar, La Juanita, upstairs (open 6pm until late).

## PLAZUELA SAN FERNANDO

This little plaza is home to an ever-changing slate of hip hangouts and is a delightful place in the evening for a drink, a snack or a meal.

**our pick El Midi** (Plazuela San Fernando; snacks M\$11 per 100g; ☎ 10:30-6pm Sun-Wed, 10:30am-11:30pm Thu-Fri) This French-run café-restaurant is hard to go past for its fresh delights. *Tartes*, salads and a huge array of daily offerings can be enjoyed on the perfectly pretty plaza under brollies. Morning croissants available; the salad bar starts at 1pm.

**Bossanova Café** (☎ 732-56-74; Plazuela San Fernando 24; mains M\$25-60; ☎ 10am-11pm) This friendly eatery has a quaint setting on the plaza and intimate interior atmosphere. Be sure to sample

its selection of teas and a huge range of coffees with a house-specialty crepe.

**Clave Azul** (☎ 3-10pm) For an authentic experience of Mexican drinking with accompanying *botanas* (tapas-like snacks served free with drinks, in this case between 1pm and 5pm), head to this artifact-filled, atmospheric *cantina* up a small alley to the left of Bossanova Café.

## OTHER

**Café Tal** (☎ 732-62-12; www.cafetal.com.mx; Temezcuítate 4; snacks M\$15-30) This slightly grungy, American-owned coffee spot is the wi-fi-enabled study spot for students. It roasts, grinds and serves excellent coffees (*barista* is a word used here!) Don't miss the *beso negro* (black kiss), ultra-concentrated hot chocolate (M\$12).

**Café Carcamanes** (☎ 732-51-72; Plazuela Carcamanes 8; snacks M\$22-30; ☎ 8am-11pm) Near the uni, this cozy place serves a delicious range of snacks (baguettes, gourmet teas, coffees and breakfasts all recommended). Wi-fi connection makes it popular with students.

**El Zopilote Mojado** (☎ 732-53-11; Plaza Mexiamora 51; snacks M\$30-40; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat) A stylish and intimate place with rustic wooden décor, overlooking the tranquil Plaza Mexiamora. Classical music, copies of the *New York Times* and good coffee make it a pleasurable experience.

**Yamuna** (☎ 732-18-73; Calle del Sol 10; mains M\$50-70; ☎ noon-7pm Mon-Sat; ♻) A great range of quality veg food, most – such as the generous *comida corrida* (M\$40-50) – with a very Indian/Hindu influence and flavor. Great baguettes for M\$35.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Every evening, the Jardín de la Unión comes alive with people crowding the outdoor tables, strolling and listening to the street musicians. International films are screened in several locations, including the Teatro Principal, Teatro Cervantes and Museo y Casa de Diego Rivera.

## BARS

**Bar Ocho** (☎ 732-71-79; Constanza 8; ☎ 3pm-3am) Locals, expats and visitors seem to love this friendly, unpretentious place. It has seating inside and out, good music and snacks and a pool table upstairs.

**Bar Fly** (Sostenes Rocha 30; ☎ 7pm-2am; Wed-Sat) A grungy place to go for reggae, ska, rap and electronic grooves and a hippie, trippy vibe.

**Bora Bora** (Constancia 6; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat)

This trendy place attracts young students who love accessibly priced mixed drinks (the ‘TNT’ is a brain fryer) and *micheladas* (beer, chili salsa and lime juice). It’s beside Bar Ocho.

**DISCOS & NIGHTCLUBS**

Drinking and dancing establishments in Guanajuato generally start late and end in the wee hours.

**Cuba Mia** (Truco; M\$25 on Fri; ☎ 9pm-5am) *The* salsa place in town, where hips, dirty dancing and loud salsa music make the crowds bop ‘til they drop.

**Guanajuato Grill** (☎ 732-02-85; Alonso 4) This rather selective disco and drink spot admits affluent, energetic students who like loud dance music. It’s packed after midnight on Friday and Saturday.

**Capitolio** (Juárez 71; cover M\$50; ☎ 10:30pm-3am Wed-Sat) A similar scene to Guanajuato Grill.

**La Dama de las Camelias** (☎ 732-75-87; Sopeña 32; ☎ 8pm-4am Mon-Sat) For live and recorded Latin sounds and a dose of slinky salsa and merengue moves in an artsy, gay-friendly atmosphere, check out La Dama.

On Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings at around 8pm (or daily during festivals), the wonderfully fun *callejoneadas* (or *estudiantinas*) depart from in front of San Diego church on the Jardín de la Unión (see boxed text, below).

**PERFORMING ARTS**

A program of events include theater, music, opera and dance runs from March to December. (It’s marketed under ‘La Viva La Magia,’ but not everybody knows this name.) Ask at Teatro Juárez if the tourist office doesn’t know.

Guanajuato has three fine centrally located theaters, the 100-year-old Teatro Juárez (p616), Teatro Principal (p616) and Teatro Cervantes (p616). Check their posters to see what’s on.

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

Guanajuato is served by the Aeropuerto Internacional del Bajío, which is about 30km west of the city, halfway between León and Silao. See p626 for detailed flight information.

**BUS**

Guanajuato’s Central de Autobuses is around 5km southwest of town. It has card phones, a luggage storage (in the café) and a tourist desk. Deluxe and 1st-class bus tickets can be bought in town at **Viajes Frausto** (☎ 732-35-80; Obregón 10). See the box opposite for daily departures.

**Getting Around**

A taxi to Bajío International Airport will cost around M\$300 to M\$350. A cheaper option is a frequent bus to Silao (M\$20) and a taxi from there (M\$150).

Between the bus station and city center, around-the-clock ‘Central de Autobuses’ buses run constantly. From the center, you can catch them heading west in the tunnels below Juárez (there are several entries: El Jardín, Mercado Hidalgo and Plaza Baratillo). A taxi to the bus station costs around M\$30 to M\$40.

City buses (M\$4) run from 7am to 10pm. Taxis are plentiful in the center and charge about M\$25 to M\$30 for short trips around town.

**CALLEJONEADAS – THE TRADITIONAL WAY TO PARTY, PARTY, PARTY!**

The *callejoneada* tradition is said to have come from Spain. A group of professional singers and musicians, dressed in traditional costumes, starts up in a central location such as a plaza, a crowd gathers, then the whole mob winds through the alleyways, streets and plazas playing, dancing and singing heartily. In Guanajuato, they are also called *estudiantinas*. Stories and jokes (in Spanish) are told in between songs often relating to the legends of the alleys. In Zacatecas, there are no stories, but hired bands (in uniform, not traditional dress) lead dancing revelers. On special occasions a burro laden with wine is brought along. Often, strangers are just expected to join the party and the crowd swells. Occasionally, the organizers foot the bill, sometimes you pay a small amount for the wine you drink (or you bring your own!). In Guanajuato, the groups themselves or tour companies sell tickets (around M\$90) for the *callejoneadas* and juice (not alcohol) is provided. It’s great fun and a traditional way to party hearty!

## DAILY BUSES FROM GUANAJUATO

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency
Dolores Hidalgo	M\$41	1½hr	every 20 min, 5:30am-10:20pm (Flecha Amarilla)
Guadalajara	deluxe M\$320	4hr	6 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$246	4hr	10 daily (Primera Plus)
	2nd-class M\$205	4hr	5 daily (Flecha Amarilla)
León	deluxe M\$50	1hr	6 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$36	1hr	9 daily (Primera Plus)
	2nd-class M\$30	1¼hr	every 15 min, 5:30am-10pm (Flecha Amarilla or Flecha de Oro)
Mexico City (Terminal Norte)	deluxe M\$371	4½hr	9 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$287	4½hr	11 daily (Primera Plus)
San Luis Potosí	M\$142	5hr	2 daily (Flecha Amarilla)
San Miguel de Allende	deluxe M\$106	1½hr	3 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$81	1½hr	7 daily (Primera Plus)
	2nd-class M\$61	2hr	8 daily (Flecha Amarilla)

There are also hourly 2nd-class Flecha Amarilla buses to Celaya, plus two to Querétaro. For Morelia, catch an Irapuato-bound bus and change there.

## LEÓN

☎ 477 / pop 1.14 million / elevation 1854m

If you are into bargain shopping, then León is a purchaser's paradise. This industrial city, 56km west of Guanajuato, is on the Mexican map for its massive leather industry: shoes, saddles and everything in between. It has a long history of supplying goods: in the 16th century it was the center of Mexico's ranching district, providing meat for the mining towns and processing hides. It has a small but attractive historic center with a lovely plaza.

## Orientation &amp; Information

The heart of the city is the wide main Plaza de los Mártires del 2 de Enero (aka Plaza Principal), a well-groomed pedestrian area with the Palacio Municipal on its west side. The adjoining Plaza de los Fundadores and several nearby streets are also pedestrian zones with shops, cafés and restaurants.

If you're walking to the center from the bus station, drop into the **regional tourist office** (☎ 763-44-00/01, 800-716-53-66; www.leon-mexico.com; Lopez Mateo Ote 1511; ☎ 8am-3pm & 5-7pm) for maps and other (shopping-based) information. Otherwise, in the plaza, a **tourist information booth** (☎ 10am-8pm) has a free city map. Other essentials like banks, ATMs and card phones are around the plazas. The tourist office's website (at www.leon-mexico.com) is a useful source.

## Sights

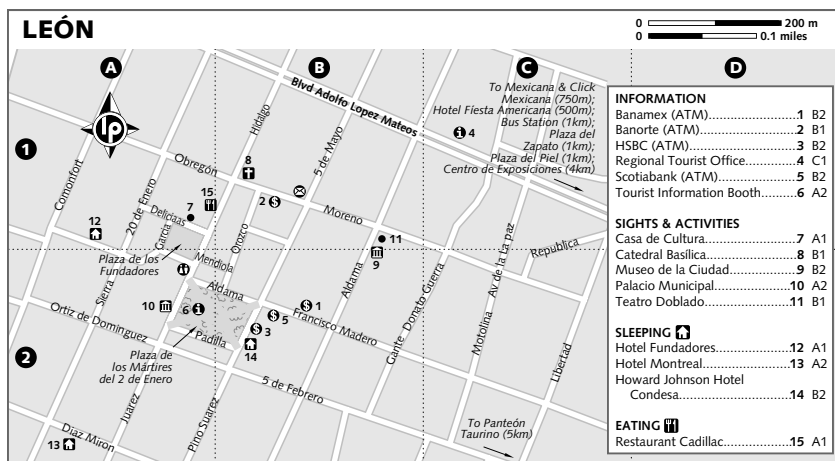
Shopping and walking around León's pretty historic heart, where fine architectural buildings abound, are among the main attractions of the city.

The neoclassical **Casa de Cultura** (☎ 714-43-01; www.leon.gob.aix/icl) faces the Plaza de los Fundadores, and the big, twin-towered, baroque **Catedral Basílica** (cnr Obregón & Hidalgo) is a block northeast of the Casa de Cultura. The neoclassical 1869 **Teatro Doblado** (☎ 716-43-01; cnr Aldama & Moreno) still stages concerts, dance and drama. The **Museo de la Ciudad** (☎ 714-50-22; Aldama 134; admission M\$2; ☎ 9:30am-2:30pm & 5-7:30pm Tue-Fri, 9:30am-2pm Sat & Sun) exhibits contemporary work by Mexican and international artists.

## Festivals &amp; Events

In January and February, the **Guanajuato State Fair** attracts millions of visitors each year with agricultural displays, music, dancing, carnival rides and bullfights. Hundreds of shoemakers display their wares in the **Centro de Exposiciones** (Conexpo; ☎ 771-25-00; cnr López Mateos & Francisco Villa) during the fair.

Like Guanajuato, León also celebrates a Cervantino cultural festival, starting mid-October. If you happen to be in the area, the annual **Festival del Globo** hot-air balloon gathering in November-December is a bit of neck-craning fun.



## Sleeping & Eating

Many hotels are located around the bus station, catering to commercial buyers of leather goods attending the fair. The Centro Histórico also has various accommodation options.

**Hotel Fundadores** (☎ 716-17-27; fax 713-37-01; Ortiz de Domínguez 218; r M\$195-290) The two-star Fundadores offers budget rooms with few frills except TV.

**Hotel Montreal** (☎ 716-37-86; www.hotel-montreal.com.mx Reforma 215; s/d/tr M\$400/460/530) Hotel Montreal has 54 clean and modernish (if plain) rooms with cable TV. Suites with air-con cost M\$160 extra.

**Howard Johnson Hotel Condesa** (☎ 788-39-29, 800-710-39-64; www.hjleon.com; Portal Bravo 14; r/ste M\$995/1500; P) On the main plaza, this excellent-value option has comfortable rooms. The restaurant has outdoor tables and a popular buffet lunch (M\$100). Frequent 50% discounts are on offer and free airport pick-up if you reserve in advance.

**Hotel Fiesta Americana** (☎ 719-80-00; www.fiestaamericana.com.mx; López Mateos Ote 1102; r from M\$2135; P) León's luxurious accommodations extravaganza looks more like a shopping mall than a hotel. It's on López Mateos, which runs east from the center and becomes Hwy 45 to the airport.

**Restaurant Cadillac** (☎ 713-87-30; Hidalgo 107; mains M\$35-100; ☎ 8am-10pm) Movie posters and bright pink chairs feature in this quirky place, located on a pedestrian street north of the plaza. The set meals (M\$60 to M\$80) of Mexican favorites are good value.

**Panteón Taurino** (☎ 713-49-69; Calz de los Héroes 408; mains M\$70-100). Olé! Charge into this restaurant-bar-museum to eat at the 'crypts' (read homages) of former famous *toreros* (bullfighters). No brave behavior, please – catch a cab at night.

## Shopping

Great quality leather buys – shoes and general items – can be found in the main leather district near the bus station, off Blvd Hilario Medina, or further south in the shopping malls of **Plaza del Zapato** and **Plaza Piel** (cnr López Mateos & Hilario Medina).

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Aeropuerto Internacional del Bajío** is 20km southeast on the Mexico City road. Aeroméxico Connect, Aeroméxico, American, Continental, Mexicana and Click Mexicana offer flights to Acapulco, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Puerto Vallarta and Tijuana, plus a host of cities in the US (often via Mexico City). Magnicharters flies twice a week from Bajío to Cancún.

**Mexicana** and **Click Mexicana** (☎ 714-95-00; López Mateos 308) have an in-town office, but most other airline offices are at Bajío airport.

### BUS

The **Central de Autobuses** (Blvd Hilario Medina s/n), just north of Blvd López Mateos 2½km east of the city center, has a cafeteria, left luggage, money exchange and card phones. There are



regular services to many places in northern and western Mexico.

Daily departures:

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency
Guanajuato	deluxe	1hr	6 daily (ETN)
	M\$45		
	1st-class	1hr	hourly
	M\$36		(Primera Plus)
Mexico City (Terminal Norte)	2nd-class	1hr	every 15 min
	M\$30		(Flecha Amarilla)
	deluxe	5hr	15 daily (ETN)
	M\$375		
San Miguel de Allende	1st-class	5hr	hourly (Primera Plus), 11 daily
	M\$310		(Futura)
	2nd-class	8hr	every 2 hours
	M\$254		(Flecha Amarilla)
San Miguel de Allende	deluxe	2¼hr	2 daily (ETN)
	M\$145		
	1st-class	2¼hr	6 daily
	M\$119		(Primera Plus)

## Getting Around

No bus service operates between Bajío airport and central León. Those without too much luggage can opt to walk from the airport to the intersection of the main road and the airport road (10 minutes on foot) and hail a local bus from there (around M\$25). A taxi to León from the airport costs about M\$250. The closest long-distance-bus station to the airport is in Silao; a taxi there from the airport will cost about M\$150.

From the bus station, turn left (south) and walk 150m to López Mateos, where 'Centro' buses (M\$4) go west to the city center. To return to the bus station, catch a 'Central' bus east along López Mateos, two blocks north of Plaza Principal. A taxi between the center and the bus station costs M\$35.

## DOLORES HIDALGO

☎ 418 / pop 57,089 / elevation 1955m

Dolores Hidalgo is a compact town with a pretty plaza, an extremely authentic ambience and an important history. It has acquired pilgrimage status for Mexicans; the Mexican independence movement began in earnest in this small place. At 5am on September 16, 1810, Miguel Hidalgo, the parish priest, rang the bells to summon people to church earlier than usual and issued the Grito de Dolores, also known as the Grito de Independencia. His precise words have been lost to history but their essence was 'Death to bad govern-

ment and the *gachupines*!' ('*Gachupines*' was a derisive term for the Spanish-born overlords who ruled Mexico.)

Today, Hidalgo is one of Mexico's most revered heroes. Dolores was renamed in his honor in 1824. Mexicans swarm here for Independence Day (September 16), during which time accommodation prices can more than double.

The town's *centro histórico* is worth a day visit from San Miguel de Allende, not only for its interesting independence-themed museums, but also for its colored Talavera ceramics and handmade ice-cream.

## Orientation & Information

Most things of interest are within a couple of blocks of the Plaza Principal, known as the *centro histórico*, while the ceramics workshops are several more blocks away and accessible on foot.

The **tourist office** (☎ 182-11-64; 🕒 10am-4pm) is on the Plaza Principal's north side, in the Presidencia Municipal. The helpful staff provides maps and information.

Cash and traveler's checks can be changed at several banks (with ATMs) around the plaza. There are some *casas de cambio* too. **Ciber Antique** (Mexico 7) has internet connections at M\$8 per hour. Card phones are located around the town and at the Flecha Amarilla bus station. The **post office** (☎ 182-08-07; 🕒 9am-2pm Mon-Sat) is on the corner of Puebla and Veracruz.

## Sights

### PLAZA PRINCIPAL & AROUND

The **Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de Dolores**, the church where Hidalgo issued the Grito, is on the north side of the plaza. It has a fine 18th-century Churrigueresque facade. Legends surround his 'cry'; some say that Hidalgo uttered his famous words from the pulpit, others claim that he spoke at the church door to the people gathered outside.

Adjacent to the church is the **Presidencia Municipal**, which has two colorful murals on the theme of independence. The plaza contains an **Hidalgo statue** (in Roman garb, on top of a tall column) and also a tree that, according to the plaque beneath it, was a sapling of the tree of the Noche Triste (Sad Night), under which Cortés is said to have wept when his men were driven out of Tenochtitlán in 1520.

The **Casa de Visitas**, on the plaza's west side, was the residence of Don Nicolás Fernández del Rincón and Don Ignacio Díaz de la Cortina, the two representatives of Spanish rule in Dolores. On September 16, 1810, they became the first two prisoners of the independence movement. Today, this is where Mexican presidents and other dignitaries stay when they come to Dolores for ceremonies.

### MUSEO DE LA INDEPENDENCIA NACIONAL

This **museum** (National Independence Museum; ☎ 182-77-50 ext 150; Zacatecas 6; adult/concession Mon-Sat M\$15/7.50, Sun free; ☎ 9am-4:45pm) has few relics but plenty of information on the independence movement. The exhibition spans eight rooms and charts the appalling decline in Nueva España's indigenous population between 1519 (an estimated 25 million) and 1605 (1 million) and identifies 23 indigenous rebellions before 1800 as well as several criollo conspiracies in the years leading up to 1810. There are vivid paintings, quotations and details on the heroic last 10 months of Hidalgo's life.

### MUSEO CASA DE HIDALGO

Miguel Hidalgo lived in this **house** (☎ 182-01-71; cr Hidalgo & Morelos; Tue-Sat M\$27, Sun free; ☎ 10am-5:45pm Tue-Sat, 10am-4:45pm Sun) when he was Dolores' parish priest. It was here, in the early hours of September 16, 1810, that Hidalgo, Ignacio Allende and Juan de Aldama conspired to launch the uprising against colonial rule. It is now something of a national shrine.

One large room is devoted to a collection of memorials to Hidalgo. Other rooms contain replicas of Hidalgo's furniture and independence-movement documents, including the order for Hidalgo's excommunication.

### Festivals & Events

Dolores is the scene of major **Día de la Independencia** (September 16) celebrations, when the Mexican president may officiate – according to tradition – in his fifth year of office. The dates of the **Fiestas Patrias** festivities change annually, but always run for 10 days that encompass September 16.

### Sleeping

Prices can double (even triple) for the independence celebrations in September and at Easter.

**Posada Dolores** (☎ 182-06-42; Yucatán 8; s/d without bathroom M\$60/130, s/d M\$130/220) This *casa de huéspedes* has the cheapest sleeps in town. The cell-like and humid downstairs rooms would suit hardy backpackers only; the larger, upstairs rooms with TV are more appealing.

**Casa Mia** (☎ 182-25-60; www.hotelcasamia.com.mx; San Luis Potosí 9B; s/d M\$260/340) The newest hotel on the block, this restored house (with a B&B feel) offers unpretentious, pleasant rooms set around a bougainvillea-courtyard. Excellent value.

**Posada Cocomacán** (☎ 182-60-86; www.posadacocomacan.com.mx; Plaza Principal 4; s/d/tr M\$330/440/550) The centrally located and positively pink Cocomacán is a reliable option. The 36 clean

## DOLORES HIDALGO

0 300 m  
0 0.2 miles

### INFORMATION

Banamex (ATM).....	1	D2
Bancomer (ATM).....	2	D1
Banorte (ATM).....	3	D2
Ciber Antique.....	4	D1
HSBC (ATM).....	5	C1
Post Office.....	6	D2
Tourist Office.....	7	D1

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Casa de Visitas.....	8	C1
Museo Casa de Hidalgo.....	9	C2
Museo de la Independencia Nacional.....	10	C1
Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de Dolores.....	11	D1
Presidencia Municipal.....	(see 7)	
Statue of Hidalgo.....	12	D1

### SLEEPING

Casa Mia.....	13	D1
Hotel Posada Hidalgo.....	14	C2

Posada Cocomacán.....	15	D1
Posada Dolores.....	16	C1

### EATING

Café La Taberna.....	(see 23)	
El Carruaje Restaurant.....	17	D2
Fruti Yoghurt.....	18	C2
Ice Cream Stand.....	19	D1
Ice Cream Stands.....	20	D2
Ice Cream Stands.....	21	D1
Restaurant El Delfín.....	22	D2
Restaurant Plaza.....	23	D2

### SHOPPING

La Casa de las Artesanías.....	24	D2
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### TRANSPORT

Herradura de Plata/Pegasso Plus Bus Station.....	25	C2
Primera Plus/Flecha Amarilla Bus Station.....	26	C2



### MIGUEL HIDALGO: ¡VIVA MEXICO!

The balding head of the visionary priest Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla is familiar to anyone who's ogled Mexican statues or murals. A genuine rebel idealist, Hidalgo sacrificed his career and risked his life on September 16, 1810, when he launched the independence movement.

Born on May 8, 1753, son of a criollo hacienda manager in Guanajuato, he earned a bachelor's degree and, in 1778, was ordained a priest. He returned to teach at his alma mater in Morelia and eventually became rector. But he was no orthodox cleric: Hidalgo questioned many Catholic traditions, read banned books, gambled, danced and had a mistress.

In 1800 he was brought before the Inquisition. Nothing was proven, but a few years later, in 1804, he found himself transferred as priest to the hick town of Dolores.

Hidalgo's years in Dolores show his growing interest in the economic and cultural welfare of the people. He started several new industries: silk was cultivated, olive groves were planted and vineyards established, all in defiance of the Spanish colonial authorities. Earthenware building products were the foundation of the ceramics industry that today produces fine glazed pots and tiles.

When Hidalgo met Ignacio Allende from San Miguel, they shared a criollo discontent with the Spanish stranglehold on Mexico. Hidalgo's standing among the mestizos and indigenous people of his parish was vital in broadening the base of the rebellion that followed.

Shortly after his Grito de Independencia, Hidalgo was formally excommunicated for 'heresy, apostasy and sedition.' He defended his call for Mexican independence and stated furthermore that the Spanish were not truly Catholic in any religious sense of the word but only for political purposes, specifically to rape, pillage and exploit Mexico. A few days later, on October 19, Hidalgo dictated his first edict calling for the abolition of slavery in Mexico.

Hidalgo led his growing forces from Dolores to San Miguel, Celaya and Guanajuato, north to Zacatecas, south almost to Mexico City and west to Guadalajara. But then, pushed northward, their numbers dwindled and on July 30, 1811, having been captured by the Spanish, Hidalgo was shot by a firing squad in Chihuahua. His head was returned to the city of Guanajuato where it hung in a cage for 10 years on an outer corner of the Alhóndiga de Granaditas, along with the heads of independence leaders Allende, Aldama and Jiménez. Rather than intimidating the people, this lurid display kept the memory, the goal and the example of the heroic martyrs fresh in everyone's mind. After independence the cages were removed and the skulls of the heroes are now in the Monumento a la Independencia in Mexico City.

rooms have TV and phones. Rooms on the upper levels, with windows onto the street, are brighter than those on the ground floor. The restaurant is also recommended.

**Hotel Posada Hidalgo** (☎/fax 182-04-77; www.hotelposadahidalgo.com; Hidalgo 15; s/d/tr/ste M\$348/398/448/900; P) The reception feels a bit like a doctor's surgery, but this super-clean and well managed place offers a comfortable and 'eighties-modern' stay. It's conveniently located between the bus stations and the Plaza Principal. Rates include use of a gym and steam baths downstairs, also open to the public (M\$50).

### Eating

Don't leave without sampling a hand-turned ice-cream from an **ice-cream** (M\$15) vendor on the plaza or around town. You can test your taste-buds on the flavors: *mole*, *chichar-*

*rón* (fried pork skin), avocado, corn, cheese, honey, shrimp, beer, tequila and tropical fruits. The market on the corner of Chihuahua and Michoacan serves up some satisfying corn-based snacks.

**FrutiYoghurt** (Hidalgo 2; snacks M\$12-22; ☎ 8am-10pm) This small café sells good-value and healthy yoghurts, fresh juices and sandwiches.

**Café La Taberna** (☎ 182-00-55; Plaza Principal 18; mains M\$15; ☎ noon-midnight Sun-Fri, 5pm-midnight Sat) The younger crowd may like this super-cheap café and bohemian hangout, where young local artists display their talent.

**El Carruaje Restaurant** (☎ 182-04-74; Plaza Principal 8; mains M\$30-105) This colorful place on the plaza caters to day-tripping families with a M\$70 set lunch, live music from Wednesday to Saturday (Thursday to Saturday evenings) and a popular weekend breakfast buffet (M\$60) and lunch buffet (M\$90).

**Restaurant El Delfín** (☎ 182-22-99; Veracruz 2; mains M\$48-80; 🕒 9am-7pm) This spotless place, one block east of the plaza, dares to be different, serving seafood from the Gulf of Mexico. Get hooked on a selection of tasty fish dishes, *sopa de mariscos* and shrimps.

**Restaurant Plaza** (☎ 182-02-59; Plaza Principal 17B; mains M\$50-140; 🕒 8am-10pm) A central and OK place serving set breakfasts and lunches, as well as meat dishes, pasta and *antojitos*.

## Shopping

Talavera ceramics have been the signature handicraft of Dolores ever since Padre Hidalgo founded the town's first ceramics workshop in the early 19th century. On the plaza, **La Casa de las Artesanías** (☎ 182-22-66) sells a selection of items. For better prices and variety, head to the workshops along Av Jimenez, five blocks west of the plaza, or (by car) to Calzada de los Heroes, the exit road to San Miguel de Allende. Some workshops here make 'antique,' colonial-style furniture.

## Getting There & Away

Nearly all buses to/from Dolores are 2nd-class. The Primera Plus/Flecha Amarilla station is on Hidalgo, 2½ blocks south of the plaza. The Herradura de Plata/Pegasso Plus station is on Chiapas at Yucatán.

Daily departures include Guanajuato (M\$41, 1¼ hours, every 20 minutos from 5:20am to 9pm, Flecha Amarilla), Mexico City's Terminal Norte (1st-class M\$242, five hours, noon, Pegasso Plus; 2nd-class M\$200, five to six hours, every 40 minutes, Herradura de Plata or Flecha Amarilla) and San Miguel de Allende (M\$26, 45 minutes, frequent, Flecha Amarilla or Herradura de Plata).

There are also regular 2nd-class connections to Querétaro (M\$66), León (M\$71) and San Luis Potosí (M\$96).

## SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

☎ 415 / pop 62,034 / elevation 1840m

Many people say that San Miguel is a bit like a Mexican Disneyland for foreign (mainly American) retirees. Indeed, this is a stunning and neat city, with colonial architecture, enchanting cobblestone streets and striking light. Regular festivals, fireworks and parades dominate the local scene.

The town's cosmopolitan panache is reflected in its excellent restaurants and high-class, colonial-style accommodation options.

Numerous galleries are stocked with some of the best of Mexican *artesanías* and cultural activities are on tap for residents and visitors. There are few sights: as a Mexican-declared national monument, San Miguel is the sight.

Economically speaking, this is no budget destination and is a far cry from the 1940s, when beatniks and artists shackled up here on a shoestring to pursue their creative ventures. Visitors still flock here to study at the art institutions – Bellas Artes and the Instituto Allende. While the foreign influence is pervasive (more than 10,000 foreigners are believed to live or have houses here), on the whole the population coexists comfortably.

Beneath the smart B&Bs and fancy shops, an authentic (and sometimes poverty-stricken) Mexico exists. You only have to laze in the main plaza, visit the food market or interact with the local people to sense an ambience, color and vibe that is nothing but Mexican.

The climate is agreeable: cool and clear in winter and warm and clear in summer, with occasional thunderstorms and heavy rain.

## History

The town, so the story goes, owes its founding to a few over-heated dogs. These hounds were loved by a Franciscan friar, Juan de San Miguel, who started a mission in 1542 near an often-dry river 5km from the present town. One day the dogs wandered off from the mission; they were found reclining at the spring called El Chorro. The mission was moved to this superior site.

San Miguel was then central Mexico's most northern Spanish settlement. Tarascan and Tlaxcalan allies of the Spanish were brought to help pacify the local Otomí and Chichimecs. San Miguel was barely surviving the fierce Chichimec resistance, until in 1555 a Spanish garrison was established to protect the new road from Mexico City to the silver center of Zacatecas. Spanish ranchers settled in the area and it grew into a thriving commercial center and home to some of Guanajuato's wealthy silver barons.

San Miguel's favorite son, Ignacio Allende, was born here in 1779. He became a fervent believer in the need for Mexican independence and was a leader of a Querétaro-based conspiracy that set December 8, 1810, as the date for an armed uprising. When the plan

was discovered by the authorities in Querétaro on September 13, a messenger rushed to San Miguel and gave the news to Juan de Aldama, another conspirator. Aldama sped north to Dolores where, in the early hours of September 16, he found Allende at the house of the priest Miguel Hidalgo, also one of the coterie. A few hours later Hidalgo proclaimed rebellion from his church. After initial successes Allende, Hidalgo and other rebel leaders were captured in 1811 in Chihuahua. Allende was executed, but on independence in 1821 he was recognized as a martyr and in 1826 the town was renamed San Miguel de Allende.

The Escuela de Bellas Artes was founded in 1938 and the town started to take on its current character when David Alfaro Siqueiros began mural-painting courses that attracted artists of every persuasion. The Instituto Allende opened in 1951, also attracting foreign students. Many were American veterans (who could settle here under the GI Bill); an influx of artists has continued ever since.

## Orientation

The *centro histórico* is compact and straight-forward. The Plaza Principal, called El Jardín, is the town's focal point and many places of interest are within easy walking distance of here. The neo-Gothic spires of the *parroquia* beside the Jardín provide the perfect landmark. Most streets change names at the Jardín. Canal/San Francisco on its north side and Umarán/Correo, on the south side, are among the main streets.

## Information

### BOOKSTORES & LIBRARIES

**Biblioteca Pública** (☎ 152-02-93; Insurgentes 25; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) As well as housing one of the largest collection of books and magazines in English in Latin America, this excellent public library functions as a cultural center. Its financial enterprises (*Atención San Miguel* newspaper, house & garden tours and its onsite café) provide for children's scholarships.

**El Colibrí Bookstore** (☎ 152-07-51; Diez de Sollano 30; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm) Paperbacks, magazines and art books in English and Spanish.

**El Tecolote Bookstore** (☎ 152-73-95; Jesús 11; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Has titles in English and Spanish.

### EMERGENCY

**General Emergencies** (☎ Ambulance, Fire & Police 152-09-11)

## INTERNET ACCESS

**Border Crossings** (☎ 152-24-97; www.bordercrossingsma.com; Mesones 57A; M\$15 per hr; ☎ 9am-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Good internet access as well as mail-forwarding and phone-message services.

**Internet Café Punto G** (☎ 152-16-19; Hidalgo 23; M\$20 per hr; ☎ 9:30am-midnight Mon-Sat, 11am-midnight Sun) Also known as the Hookah Bar (for its huge hookah pipes). M\$65 per pipe-full – internet speed may become irrelevant.

**Internet Tranvi\_net** (cnr Umarán & El Jardín, 1st fl) Good internet services with scanning and printing.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Atención San Miguel** (www.atencionsanmiguel.org) Weekly semi-bilingual newspaper that runs an excellent website.

**Portal San Miguel** (www.portalsanmiguel.com) A commercial website with a good overview of the town.

## LAUNDRY

Laundromats charge around M\$45 to wash and dry up to 4kg.

**Lavandería Arco Iris** (☎ 152-53-86; Pasaje Allende, local N; ☎ 9am-2pm, 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Inside arcade off Mesones.

**Lavandería El Reloj** (☎ 152-38-43; Reloj 34A; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat)

## MEDICAL SERVICES

**Hospital de la Fe** (☎ 152-22-33; Libramiento a Dolores Hidalgo 43)

## MEDIA

Don't contemplate spending time in town without buying the weekly semi-bilingual (English/Spanish) newspaper, **Atención San Miguel** (M\$8). Published every Friday, it's chock-a-block with what's on for the coming week including tours, concerts and gallery openings. It also lists yoga, Spanish, art and dance class schedules (plus ads for local businesses, galleries and real estate). You can buy it at the public library and many cafés or from roaming vendors.

## MONEY

Most banks have their own ATMs and are located on, or within two blocks east of, the Jardín. There are also *casas de cambio* on Correo.

## POST

**Post office** (cnr Correo & Corregidora) Mexpost express mail next door; DHL is nearby on Correo.





## TELEPHONE & FAX

Card phones are plentiful in the center. Faxes can be sent from Border Crossings (p631). Cell phone SIM cards ('chips') can be purchased from any Telcel outlet.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourist office** (☎ 152-09-00; www.turismosanmiguel.com.mx; Plaza Principal s/n; ☎ 8:30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 10am-5:30pm Sun) On the northern side of El Jardín. Good for maps of the town and promotional pamphlets.

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

**Viajes San Miguel** (☎ 152-25-37; www.viajessanmiguel.com; Diez de Sollano 4-Interior 3; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Good deals including airport shuttle service.

**Viajes Vertiz** (☎ 152-18-56; www.viajesvertiz.com; Hidalgo 1A; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) American Express agent (but does not cash traveler's checks); sells domestic and international air tickets.

## Sights

### PARROQUIA DE SAN MIGUEL ARCÁNGEL

The parish church's pink 'wedding cake' towers dominate the Jardín. These strange pinnacles were designed by indigenous stonemason Zeferino Gutiérrez in the late 19th century. He reputedly based the design on a postcard of a Belgian church and instructed builders by scratching plans in the sand with a stick. The rest of the church dates from the late 17th century. In the chapel to the left of the main altar is the much-revered image of the *Cristo de la Conquista* (Christ of the Conquest), made in Pátzcuaro from corn-stalks and orchid bulbs, probably in the 16th century. Irish visitors will be pleased to find a statue of St Patrick, a tribute to the Irish who changed sides to fight alongside the locals in the civil war. The adjacent **Iglesia de San Rafael** was founded in 1742.

### MUSEO HISTÓRICO DE SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

Near the *parroquia* is the house where Ignacio Allende was born, now the **history museum** (☎ 152-24-99; Cuna de Allende 1; admission M\$34; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun). Exhibits relate the interesting history of the San Miguel area, with special displays on Allende and the independence movement. A Latin inscription on the facade reads *Hic natus ubique notus*, which means 'Here born, everywhere known.'

### CASA DEL MAYORAZGO DE CANAL

This historic **house** (cnr Hidalgo & Canal), one of San Miguel's most imposing old residences, now houses Banamex offices. It's a handsome neoclassical structure with some late baroque touches. The original entrance is at Canal 4 and retains beautiful carved wooden doors based on a tapestry design.

### TEMPLO DE SAN FRANCISCO

This **church** (cnr San Francisco & Juárez; admission free; ☎ hours vary) has an elaborate late-18th-century Churrigueresque facade. An image of St Francis of Assisi is at the top.

### CAPILLA DE LA TERCERA ORDEN

Built in the early 18th century, this **chapel** (Chapel of the Third Order; cnr San Francisco & Juárez; admission free), like Templo de San Francisco, was part of a Franciscan monastery complex. The main facade shows St Francis and symbols of the Franciscan order.

### ORATORIO DE SAN FELIPE NERI

This multi-towered and domed 18th-century **church** (Plaza Cívica) is near the east end of Insurgentes. The pale-pink main facade is baroque with an indigenous influence. A passage to the right of this facade leads to the east wall, where a doorway holds the image of *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad* (Our Lady of Solitude). You can see into the cloister from this side of the church.

Inside the church are 33 oil paintings showing scenes from the life of San Felipe Neri, the 16th-century Florentine who founded the Oratorio Catholic order. In the east transept is a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe by leading colonial painter Miguel Cabrera. In the west transept is a lavishly decorated 1735 chapel, the **Santa Casa de Loreto**, a replica of a chapel in Loreto, Italy, legendary home of the Virgin Mary. If the chapel doors are open (unfortunately, this is rarely) you can see tiles from Puebla, Valencia and China on the floor and walls and gilded cloth hangings. Behind the altar, the *camerán* (chapel behind the main church) has six elaborately gilded baroque altars. In one is a reclining wax figure of San Columbano; it supposedly contains the saint's bones.

### TEMPLO DE LA SALUD

This **church** (Plaza Cívica), with a dome tiled blue and yellow and a big shell carved above its entrance, is just east of San Felipe Neri.

The facade is early Churrigueresque. The church's paintings include one of San Javier by Miguel Cabrera. San Javier (St Francis Xavier, 1506–52) was a founding member of the Jesuits. It was once part of the Colegio de Sales (see below).

### COLEGIO DE SALES

Once a college, founded in the mid-18th century by the San Felipe Neri order, **Colegio de Sales** (Plaza Cívica; ☎ 8am–2pm, 5–8pm) regained its educational status; it currently houses part of the University of León. Many of the 1810 revolutionaries were educated here. Spaniards were locked up here when the rebels took San Miguel.

### TEMPLO DE LA CONCEPCIÓN

This splendid **church** (Church of the Conception; cnr Zacateros & Canal) has a fine altar and several magnificent old oil paintings. Painted on the interior doorway are a number of wise sayings to give pause to those entering the sanctuary. The church was begun in the mid-18th century; its dome, added in the late 19th century by the versatile Zeferino Gutiérrez, was possibly inspired by pictures of *Les Invalides* in Paris.

### ESCUELA DE BELLAS ARTES

This **school** (School of Fine Arts; Centro Cultural Nigromante; ☎ 152-02-89; Hernández Macías 75; admission free; ☎ 9am–7pm) is housed in the beautiful former monastery of La Concepción church, which was converted into a fine-arts school in 1938. It's officially named the Centro Cultural Ignacio Ramírez, after a leading 19th-century liberal thinker. His nickname was El Nigromante (The Sorcerer) and the center is also commonly called by this name.

### INSTITUTO ALLENDE

This large 1736 **complex** (Ancha de San Antonio 20 & 22) has recently been divided between a school of higher education and an area focusing on Mexican culture and tourism. Several patios, gardens and an old chapel divide the original home of the Conde Manuel de la Canal. Later it was used as a Carmelite convent, eventually becoming an art and language school in 1951. Above the entrance is a carving of the Virgin of Loreto, patroness of the Canal family.

### MIRADOR & PARQUE BENITO JUÁREZ

One of the best views over the town and surrounding country is from the **mirador** (overlook) southeast of town. Take Callejón del

Chorro, the track leading directly downhill from here, and turn left at the bottom to reach **El Chorro**, the spring where San Miguel was founded. Today it gushes out of a fountain built in 1960 and there are public washing tubs here. A path – Paseo del Chorro – zigzags down the hill to the shady **Parque Benito Juárez**, a lovely place to relax and meander through.

### JARDÍN BOTÁNICO EL CHARCO DEL INGENIO

On the hilltop 1.5km northeast of town is the 220-acre **botanic garden** (☎ 154-47-15; www.elcharco.org.mx; off Antigua Camino Real a Querétaro; admission M\$30; ☎ dawn–dusk). This wildlife and bird sanctuary, an ongoing project thanks to the efforts of local volunteers, was created to conserve a natural area around the town and to provide a recreational and ceremonial space for the community. Pathways head through magnificent areas of cacti and native plants, through wetlands and above a canyon where lies the namesake freshwater spring, the **Charco del Ingenio**. A map with the pathways and explanations is provided upon entrance. The route incorporates the **Conservatory of Mexican Plants**, which houses a wonderful array of cacti and succulent species, some of which are endangered species. Excellent two-hour tours (in English) depart every Tuesday at 9am (M\$50).

Getting to the garden can seem slightly prickly business, thanks to new urban development on the town's outskirts that blocks the original route, but it's worth persevering. Walk uphill from Mercado El Nigromante along Homobono and Cuesta de San José. Fork left up Montitlan past a housing development (known as Los Balcones). Continue for another 15 minutes to the main gate. Be sure to keep the garden boundary fence on your left as much as possible. (Occasionally you may have to head around the new houses on sidewalks, after which you head back to the fence.)

Alternatively, a 2km vehicle track leads north from the Gigante shopping center, 2.5km east of the center on the Querétaro road. Gigante can be reached on 'Gigante' buses from the bus stop on the east side of Jardín de San Francisco. A taxi to the gardens from the center costs around M\$25.

### Activities

See the Tours section (opposite) for agencies that rent out bicycles and offer other enticing active options.

Posada de la Aldea opens its **swimming pool** (☎ 152-10-22; Ancha de San Antonio 15; admission M\$50; ☎ 9am-6pm) to nonguests most days, but it's more enjoyable to visit the *balnearios* (bathing spots) in the surrounding countryside (see p642).

**Rancho La Loma** (☎ 152-21-21; rancholaloma@hotmail.com; Carretera Dolores Hidalgo s/n; per hr M\$200) rents horses (experience required) and can arrange instruction and guides.

## Courses

Several institutions offer Spanish courses, with group or private lessons and optional classes in Mexican culture and history. Most private lessons start around US\$15 an hour; group and long-term rates are much lower. There are also many courses in painting, sculpture, ceramics, music and dance. Most courses are available year-round, except December. The Escuela de Bellas Artes has courses in art, dance, crafts and music in Spanish and English, and cost around M\$1000 a month, plus materials. Registration is at the beginning of each month. Some classes are not held in July and there are none in August.

**Academia Hispano Americana** (☎ 152-03-49; www.ahaspeakspanish.com; Mesones 4) This place runs quality courses in the Spanish language and Latin American culture (also taught in elementary Spanish). Private language classes are also available. Homestays with Mexican families – a private room and three meals per day – cost around US\$23 per day.

**Centro Bilingüe** (☎ 152-54-00; www.centrobilingue.com; Correo 46) Offers Spanish instruction; some courses have emphasis on Mexican culture.

**Habla Hispana** (☎ 152-1535; Calzada de la Luz 25) Offers language classes and can incorporate walking tours and cooking classes.

**Instituto Allende** (☎ 152-01-90; www.instituto-allende.edu.mx; Ancha de San Antonio 22) Offers courses in fine arts, crafts and Spanish. Arts courses can be joined at any time and usually entail nine hours of attendance a week. Spanish courses for groups begin every four weeks and range from conversational to intensive. Private lessons (total impact) cost US\$14 per hour.

**Warren Hardy Spanish** (☎ 154-40-17; www.warrenhardy.com; San Rafael 6) Offers Spanish instruction using flash cards.

## Tours

The tourist office has promotional pamphlets of private English-speaking tour guides.

**Aventuras San Miguel** (☎ 415 152 6406; aven.turasma@yahoo.com; Recreo 9) Offers tours around the

region including horseback riding, hiking and camping trips; minimum two people.

**Bici-Burro** (☎ 152-15-26; www.bici-burro.com; Hospicio 1; trips M\$700-1350) Friendly and professional, English-speaking owner Alberto conducts excellent guided mountain-bike tours for groups of two or more. Popular trips include six- or seven-hour excursions to Atotonilco or Pozos. Bike rental also available (M\$500 per day).

**House and Garden Tour** An English-language tour of the loveliest private homes and gardens (mostly of expatriates) in San Miguel begins at noon every Sunday from the Biblioteca Pública (Insurgentes 25). The cost is M\$150 for the two-hour tour, with three different houses visited weekly. Proceeds support the library's enterprises.

**Centro de Crecimiento** (☎ 152-03-18; www.centrodecrecimiento.org) Runs 'Saturday Adventures' every Saturday at 10:30am to ranches, haciendas, vineyards, monasteries and Talavera factories. Tickets are purchased from El Jardín on Fridays 10:30am-12:30pm and Saturdays 9:30am. Proceeds go to the organization, a rehabilitation center for children with disabilities.

**Tranvía Turístico** (Tourist trolley; Transportadora Turística Imperial; ☎ 154-54-08; www.transtur-imperial.com; Plaza Principal 18, 1st fl; adult/child M\$60/40) See the main sights in 1½ hours from the comfort of an original tram. Of the six departures, one is bilingual and departs at 4pm.

**Walking Tour** This excellent tour takes place every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 10am, departing from the Jardín (tickets go on sale in the Jardín at 9:45am; M\$100). The English-speaking volunteer guides provide a fascinating historical and cultural commentary on the main sights of town. Proceeds go to Patronato Pro Niños (www.patronatoproninos.org), a children's charity.

## Festivals & Events

San Miguel is well endowed with churches and patron saints (it has six) and enjoys a multitude of festivals, many imbued with strong spiritual themes. You'll probably learn by firework bursts while you're here. For programs, ask at the tourist office or check the website [www.turismosanmiguel.com.mx](http://www.turismosanmiguel.com.mx).

**Señor de la Conquista** The image of Christ in the *parroquia* is feted on the first Friday in March, with scores of dancers in elaborate pre-Hispanic costumes and plumed headdresses.

**Semana Santa** A week of religious activities. Two Sundays before Easter, pilgrims carry an image of the Señor de la Columna (Lord of the Column) from Atotonilco, 11km north, to San Miguel's church of San Juan de Dios, departing at midnight on Saturday. During Semana Santa, the many activities include the solemn Procesión del Santo Entierro on Good Friday and the burning or exploding of Judas effigies on Easter Day.

**Fiesta de la Santa Cruz** This deeply spiritual spring festival has its roots in the 16th century. It happens towards the end of May at Valle del Maíz, 2km from the center of town. Oxen are dressed in lime necklaces and painted tortillas and their yokes festooned with flowers and fruit. A mock battle between 'Indians' and 'Federales' follows. There are *mojigangas* (see boxed text, p620), dancing and musicians, not to mention 96 hours worth of fireworks.

**Fiesta de los Locos** Part of the *Festividad de San Antonio de Padua* in mid-June, the festival of the crazies is a colorful Carnavalesque parade through town with floats, blaring music and costumed dancers throwing out candy to (sometimes at!) the crowd.

**Expresión en Corto** Shared with the city of Guanajuato, this short-film festival in July is internationally recognized.

**Chamber Music Festival** The *Escuela de Bellas Artes* sponsors an annual festival of chamber music in the first two weeks of August.

**Fiestas Patrias** Two months of cultural programs kick off in mid-August, with Independence Day in the middle. Check with the tourist office for a full event schedule.

**San Miguel Arcángel** Celebrations honoring the town's chief patron saint are held around the weekend nearest September 29. The party is celebrated with an *alborada*, an artificial dawn created by thousands of fireworks around the cathedral and turns into an all-night festivity with extraordinary pre-Hispanic dances.

**Festival of Jazz and Blues** November sees the recently revived jazz and blues festival with big name acts from the US and jam sessions in restaurants.

**San Miguel Music Festival** This largely classical music festival toward the end of December presents a daily program with Mexican and international performers in the *Teatro Ángela Peralta* (see p640).

## Sleeping

Accommodations are often full, especially during festivals and high season, so reserve ahead. Many hotels offer discounts to long-term guests. If you decide to stay a while, there are plenty of houses, apartments and rooms to rent (see p638). If you can pull the purse-strings for accommodations, this is the place to do it.

## BUDGET

**Hostal Alcatraz** (☎ 152-85-43; Reloj 54; dm from M\$100, r M\$280; 📺) San Miguel's only HI-affiliated hostel is centrally located, with basic dorms and a shared kitchen. Travelers rave about the friendly staff. The owner has recently opened a new associated hostel (Hostel Inn) at *Calzada de La Luz 31A* charging the same prices.

**Casa de Huéspedes** (☎ 152-13-78; Mesones 27; s/d M\$200/300) This upstairs hostelry has seven sim-

ple rooms, two apartments and a rooftop terrace with good views. If you're a light sleeper, opt for rooms at the back; the street is noisy. Two rooms have basic 'kitchenettes' for the same price.

## MIDRANGE

**Parador de San Sebastián** (☎ 152-70-84; Mesones 7; s/d/tr M\$300/400/520; 📺) The odd globe is missing here and there, but this place has a great atmosphere. The older rooms around the leafy courtyard are more spacious than the newer (darker) ones. You might want to pick your own rather than reserve by phone.

**Hotel Sautto** (☎ 152-00-52; hotelsautto@yahoo.com.mx; Hernández Macías 59; s/d/tr M\$300/500/600) This delightful former hacienda may be a bit scruffy around the edges, but its lack of pretensions and Mexican feel – a lovely courtyard, garden (complete with bougainvillea and lorikeets) – makes up for any shortcomings for the basic but adequate rooms.

**El Mayorazgo** (☎ 152-13-09; posadamayorazgo@hotmail.com; Hidalgo 8; r M\$400; 📺) Don't let the unconventional entrance put you off (it resembles an ugly concrete bunker). This centrally located 1980s-style place has plain, but modern(ish) and light rooms. Rates are M\$50 cheaper from Monday through Thursday.

**Huéspedes Feliz** (152-08-54; Codo 30; s/d M\$400/500) For those happy to trade a hotel's room service for independence, a street taco for a home-cooked meal and colonial architecture for more modern design, then this is for you: a choice of four extremely secure and squeaky clean, (but slightly dark) rooms – each with fully equipped kitchen – set neatly behind the owner's house.

**Posada de las Monjas** (☎ 152-01-71; www.posadalasmonjas.com; Canal 37; s from M\$420, d M\$500-600; 📺) This quirky sprawling monastery-turned-motel remains one of San Miguel's top values. The 65 carpeted rooms are comfortable and simply decorated; rooms in the 'newer' section out back have the edge over the others. Numerous terraces give wonderful views over the valley. Meals are available for an extra cost but readers have warned against the breakfast.

**Hotel Quinta Loreto** (☎ 152-00-42; www.quinta loreto.com; Loreto 15; s/d/tr M\$450/550/650; 📺) This motel-style place at the back of the artisans' market is spread around large, leafy grounds. Some of the 40 pleasant rooms have a small private patio. TV costs extra and there's a restaurant (open for breakfast and lunch 8am

to 11am and 1pm to 5:30pm). Stays of a week or longer net a 10% discount.

**La Mansión del Bosque** (☎ 152-02-77; www.infosma.com/mansion; Aldama 65; s US\$47-65, d US\$91-95, tr US\$152) Located opposite Parque Benito Juárez and run by the gracefully ageing matriarch Ruth, this long-running guesthouse has 23 unique rooms that still appear c 1968 – and you wouldn't want them to change. Each room has decent, sometimes quirky décor and original art. Rates are higher in winter (December through March), when the breakfast and dinner meal plan (US\$20) is mandatory.

**Casa Carmen** (☎ 152-08-44; www.infosma.com/casacarmen; Correo 31; s/d M\$700/950) As the name suggests, this centrally located colonial place is more of a traditional guesthouse than an up-market B&B. The charming rooms with eclectic Mexican-style décor don't appear to have changed much in decades. There's a pleasant courtyard with a fountain, flowers and orange trees. Rates include breakfast and lunch.

**Hotel Casa Bonita** (☎ 152-06-46; El Cardo 10; www.casabonitasma.com; d M\$850; (P) (Q)) The six rooms in this Mexican-run B&B-style option are light, airy and bright. The spacious bathrooms, generous breakfast (choice of continental or full American) and quiet location (slightly out of the central district, between Anche de San Antonio and Parque Benito Juárez) are a bonus. Prices are M\$50 less per night for week-long stays, or if you pay by cash.

## TOP END

**Posada Carmina** (☎ 152-88-88; www.posadacarmina.com; Cuna de Allende 7; s/d/ste from M\$890/1110/1290) This former rambling colonial mansion features 12 newer and 12 older rooms at the back. All have tiled bathroom, phone and TV. It's not luxurious, but attractive and comfortable with olde world charm.

**Casa Quetzal** (☎ 152-05-01; www.casaquetzalhotel.com; Hospicio 34; d US\$175-351) This American-owned boutique hotel is in a compact space, but oozes elegance. It's a good alternative to the B&B scene and offers similar trimmings. Each room is themed (from the ubiquitous Frida suite to the Zihua room) and some have kitchenette with microwave, mini-refrigerator and coffee maker. There's a minimum two-day stay on weekends and extra persons cost US\$35.

**La Puertecita** (☎ 152-50-11; www.lapuertecita.com; Santo Domingo 75; r from US\$227; (P) (Q)) This secluded property meanders along the forested valley

just above town and *los pocitos* (spring water fountains). The classical rooms – spread along the hillside gardens – range from luxurious 'basic' with fire place and balcony, to suites with full kitchens. The public can indulge in a Sunday buffet breakfast (M\$120; 8am to 11am) or lunch (M\$165; 1pm to 4pm) in its restaurant overlooking the luxuriant greenery.

**Casa de Sierra Nevada** (☎ 152-70-40; www.casa-desierranevada.com; Hospicio 35; r from M\$3175; (P) (Q)) The most luxurious hotel in town has 32 rooms and suites located in five converted colonial mansions including Casa Parque, on Parque Benito Juárez. It has a heated outdoor pool, two fine restaurants, views over the town, superbly appointed rooms and flawless service.

## BOUTIQUE B&BS

San Miguel is the mecca for luxury B&Bs. These plush places reek of modern colonial grandeur with stylish décor and luxuriant gardens or courtyards. The prices match their high style (ie top end) and little distinguishes them in opulence, comfort and service, other than their breakfasts and themed décor such as Asian Zen and stylish folkloric Mexican. Some of those on offer:

**Casa Luna** (☎ 152-11-11; www.casaluna.com; Pila Seca 11 & Quebrada 117; r US\$135-176) This lavish place has more themed décor than a home show. Frida Kahlo has a room devoted to her in this eclectic place, as do stars and saints.

**Casa de la Cuesta** (☎ 154-43-24; www.casadela-cuesta.com; Cuesta de San José 32; r US\$145) Perched on the hill just up from the market, no detail was spared in this highly ornate and elegant place and themed rooms. The lavish breakfast is an experience in itself. The owners display their large collection of masks in a nearby museum, 'The Other Face of Mexico' (by appointment only); admission fee goes to charity.

**Casa Schuck** (☎/fax 152-06-57; www.casaschuck.com; Garita 3; r from US\$169-249) Stylish & slightly opulent rooms with great ambience, ample gardens and fantastic views.

**Corazón** (☎ 152-01-82; www.posadacorazon.com.mx; Aldama 9; d US\$150-170, tr US\$170-200) This place is set behind an inconspicuous wall in a delightful plant and sculpture garden. The home's spacious open plan living area, complete with library, can be shared by guests and rooms along a deck are simple and stylish.

**Dos Casas** (☎ 154-40-73; Quebrada 101; d US\$270-390; (P) (Q)) One of the newest and sleekest in town, this option oozes contemporary style – there are lots of cream and black hues, plus Jacuzzis and private terraces.



## LONG-TERM ACCOMMODATIONS

A rental house or apartment is a good option for longer-term stays. Rates start at around US\$600 a month for a stylish two-bedroom house (much less for a room in a Mexican home). Check the notice boards and fliers around town, scan the free newspapers or contact a local real-estate office. **Remax** (☎ 152-73-63; www.realestate-sma.com; Portal Guadalupe 12) is a good place to make initial enquiries.

## Eating

San Miguel's numerous eateries serve a startling variety of quality Mexican and international cuisine. Thrifty travelers enjoy more traditional places catering to loyal crowds of local families. Cafés are the latest trend in San Miguel and many serve good local meals at reasonable prices (M\$20 to M\$110). Good, inexpensive places are still found in the *centro*.

## BUDGET

**Los Burritos** (Mesones 69A; M\$4-25; ☎ 10:30am-6pm Mon-Sat) You definitely don't head here for the décor (although note the carved donkey heads on the chairs), but instead for the vast array of cheap *antojitos* and the mouthwatering, made-to-order *guisados* with a huge selection of delectable fillings from *mole* to *chipotle* and potato.

**El Ten Ten Pie** (☎ 152-71-89; Cuna de Allende 21; mains M\$15-52; ☎ 9am-midnight) This unpretentious hangout is a great choice for home-style Mexican cooking with superb chili sauces – at a less spicy price. Try the inexpensive set lunch (M\$80) or the fresh tortillas stuffed to the brim with delicious fillings. Excellent breakfasts and veggie options also.

**Café Colón** (Mesones 25; set meals M\$30-50; ☎ 8am-5pm) This café, run by local character, Irma, is popular with locals for its cheap set breakfasts and lunches.

**Café Olé Olé** (☎ 152-08-96; Loreto 66; mains M\$40-120; ☎ 1-9pm) Charge in to this brightly decorated restaurant – bullfighting posters, matador jackets and a massive bull's head adorn the walls. It's been eternally popular for its special: grilled chicken and beef fajitas.

**El Tomato** (☎ 154-60-57; Mesones 62; mains M\$55-80; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat; ♻) One of the few wholly vegetarian places, the Tomato serves healthy light meals such as pasta, whole-wheat sandwiches and salads, using fresh and tasty organic ingredients. There are also fresh-squeezed juices and a good-value set lunch (M\$80).

## MIDRANGE

There are lively places facing the Jardín where you pay a premium for the mariachis and ringside location, but don't be fooled: the best food can be found in hidden locations.

**Rincón de Don Tomás** (☎ 152-37-80; Portal de Guadalupe 2; mains M\$50-130; ☎ 8:30-10pm) An oldie but a goody. This long-standing joint has a solid following and a menu of classic Mexican dishes such as chicken with *moles* and cordites. Given its position on the Jardín, it's not bad value.

**La Posadita** (☎ 154-88-62; Cuna de Allende 13; M\$65-120; ☎ noon-10pm Thu-Tue) This delightful eatery gets five stars for its excellent service, Mexican fare, reasonable prices and location – near the *parroquia*. Head up a steep set of stairs to the restaurant or the wonderful rooftop terrace with great vistas. It serves delicious margaritas, enchiladas and *filete a la tampiqueña*, to name a few.

**Tao** (☎ 152-29-49; Pila Seca 16; M\$70-90; ☎ noon-9pm Tue-Sun) If you need a break from tortillas and tacos, head to this Korean/Japanese eatery for tantalizing tofu, tempura and sushi dishes.

**Berlin** (☎ 152-94-32; Umarán 19; mains M\$60-160; ☎ 1pm-1am) Stop in this cool, artsy spot for a tasty blend of German and Mexican food. The bar is very Euro and if you eavesdrop, you may get the scoop on where to find the next hip art opening.

**Planta Baja** (☎ 154-65-55; Canal 28; mains M\$80-165; ☎ 1pm-midnight) You don't come here to be in Mexico; this contemporary-style place serves eclectic Mexican-Mediterranean fusion fare in funky surroundings by excellent waiters. The experimental dishes (such as caramelized swordfish) are tastier than the more straightforward grilled fish.

## TOP END

When money is no object, San Miguel is one of the country's best places to take a break from the lard and savor some fine cuisine.

**Bella Italia** (☎ 152-49-89; Canal 21; mains M\$85-280) Rome meets San Miguel in this smart, slightly old-fashioned place set within an attractive courtyard. Think handmade pasta, mussels in white wine and grilled lamb chops – just as Mama used to make. Excellent musicians perform nightly.

**Chamonix** (☎ 154-83-63; Diez de Sollano 17; dishes M\$90-215; ☎ 1-10pm Tue-Sat) Enter through the pink and orange organza curtains into a pretty garden atmosphere for an unusual but high-



quality menu with Mexican with French and Asian flavors. The restaurant also has a pleasant street-side lounge.

**Tio Lucas** (☎ 152-49-96; Mesones 103; mains M\$100-260; ☎ noon-11:30pm) About as Mexican as George W Bush, this stylish place with a silver-star-covered courtyard is known for its beef, especially the fillet steak, and for being 'reliable.' Happy hour runs from 6pm to 8pm on weekdays, and there's live blues or jazz nightly.

**Nirvana** (☎ 150-00-67; Mesones 101; dishes M\$120-180; ☎ 8:30am-11pm Wed-Mon) Artistically prepared international fusion served in one of two settings (one more contemporary than the other). Think venison in black chili seasoning and salmon in mango chutney. The menu indicates a red chili for spicy meals and a heart for low fat dishes.

**La Capilla** (☎ 152-06-98; Cuna de Allende 10; mains M\$150-300; ☎ 1-11pm Wed-Mon) This elegant restaurant's atmosphere and location – in a former chapel of the *parroquia* – is unbeatable. The restaurant's fairy-lighted rooftop terrace affords romantic and spectacular sunset views. The menu, which offers truly international cuisine, doesn't always live up to the location's lofty heights; it gets mixed reviews. Downstairs there's a classy café-bar and counter selling quality chocolates.

## CAFÉS

**Café de La Parroquia** (☎ 152-31-61; Jesús 11; ☎ 8am-4pm Tue-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) Expats love this place for its tranquil and shaded courtyard setting with fountain and reliable food. In the evening it morphs into La Brasserie (open from 5pm to 10pm, Tuesday to Saturday).

**El Buen Café** (☎ 152-58-07; Jesús 23; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) This simple place does excellent healthy breakfasts, Mexican specialties and sweet home-baked gourmet-style goodies. Think French toast with blackberry sauce (M\$60) or thick oatmeal topped with blackberries and crème brûlée.

**ourpick San Agustín** (☎ 154-91-02; San Francisco 21; ☎ 8am-11pm) A 'don't leave San Miguel without...' experience. A sweet tooth's paradise and the best place to go in Mexico for chocolate and churros (M\$33).

**Petit Four** (☎ 154-40-10; Mesones 99-1; ☎ 10am-8:30pm Tue-Sun) Another wonderful place to get your sugary hit: French pastries that you can enjoy in a cosy environment. Coffee costs M\$15.

**Las Musas** (Hernández Macías 75; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) The setting, within the courtyard of Bellas Artes, is among the most beautiful in town, which makes up for the rather average food.

**Bagel Cafe** (☎ 154-65-24; Correo; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) An understated place and a fave of expats. It serves cheap bagels (M\$10) and egg breakfasts (M\$55).

**Café Santa Ana** (Reloj 50-A; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-2pm Sat, 8:30-noon Sun) Another relaxing place popular with culture vultures and in the library annex. Good set breakfasts (M\$50); try the *pan árabe*.

**Café Internet Etc** (☎ 154-86-36; Reloj 37; ☎ 9:30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Local expats like this place for its casual atmosphere, good snacks and Juan's extensive music and movie library.

## GROCERIES & QUICK EATS

Snack carts on the Jardín offer cheap, tasty Mexican fare like *elutes* (steamed corn ears), hot dogs, fresh fruit salads, *tamales* and hamburgers (locals and expatriates rave about these). Reliable juice stands front the small plaza off Insurgentes.

Downhill toward Instituto Allende, on the corner of Ancha San Antonio and tree-shaded Calle Nueva, several reliable food stands alternate in the mornings and evenings, selling great tasting juice, *gorditas*, burritos and tacos.

Excellent bakeries include **La Buena Vida** (Hernández Macías 72-5; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) and **La Colmena Bakery** (Reloj 21; ☎ Mon-Sat).

**Mercado El Nigromante** (Colegio s/n) Has good produce stands and market eateries. It's centrally located, but light years away from the gringo scene.

## Drinking & Entertainment

In San Miguel, drinking and entertainment are often synonymous. Many bars (and restaurants) host live music. Most of the action is on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, but some places will have live music nightly.

## CAFÉS

**Café** (154-72-91; Correo 37; cappuccinos M\$20; ☎ 8:30am-9pm Mon-Sat) This place is serious about its coffee. Come here for the best coffee in town and wi-fi connection.

**La Ventana** (Diez de Sollano 11) Stroll up to the window for a take-away coffee (or sit inside) and stock up on your organic roasted beans from Chiapas.

**BARS**

**La Azotea** (☎ 152-82-75; Umarán 6) Above the restaurant Pueblo Viejo, this terrace is more of a laid-back lounge and tapas bar, with a smart, gay-friendly crowd and a less-touristy vibe.

**Limerick Pub** (☎ 154-86-42; Umarán 24) Young Mexicans have some craic in this traditional Irish pub, which has all the paraphernalia to fit the bill: a pool table, darts, 1980s tunes and Guinness. Oh and did you hear the one about the belly dancer? (She sometimes makes an appearance, too.)

**Mama Mia** (☎ 152-20-63; Umarán 8) This perennially popular place has separate areas to host its weekly schedule of different gigs. Hit Mama's Bar for live rock/funk (Friday and Saturday), or join a more sophisticated crowd in the restaurant patio for live folk music, including South American music (Tuesday to Sunday), salsa (Friday and Saturday) and jazz (Sunday). Up front, Bar Leonardo's shows big-screen sports and La Terrazza, the terrace bar, offers a fine view of the town. Serious nightlife gets going around 11pm.

**NIGHTCLUBS**

**El Ring** (☎ 152-19-98; Hidalgo 25; 🕒 10pm-5am Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat, nightly in high season) Young locals come here for a club fix and a blast of Latin, US and European dance music. On Wednesday it's open from 8:30pm to midnight and swings to salsa rhythms for a more refined crowd.

**El Grito** (☎ 152-00-48; Umarán 15; 🕒 10pm-4am Fri & Sat) An oversized face above the doorway of this upscale disco shouts out 'high prices' to the young, fashionable Mexican crowd queuing outside.

**Chocolate Lounge** (Mesones 99-1; 🕒 10pm-3am Wed-Sat) The Chocolate Lounge is for disco divas, with all the action happening after 11pm. Upstairs, the separate **Liquid Zoo Lounge** (M\$60; 🕒 11pm-5am), with its funky leopard skin seating, caters to a cool hip-hop, martini-loving crowd. Both are gay-friendly establishments.

**THEATER & CULTURAL EVENTS**

It's one big cultural party in San Miguel; the town seems to host more events than NYC. Check out what's on in *Atención San Miguel*. The Escuela de Bellas Artes (p634) and the Biblioteca (in the Sala Quetzal) host a variety of cultural events, many in English; check their notice boards for schedules.

**Teatro Ángela Peralta** (☎ 152-63-85; cnr Mesones & Hernández Macías) Built in 1910, this elegant venue

often hosts local productions. The ticket office is around the corner in Hernández Macías 62 (8:30am to 4pm Monday to Saturday). Tickets range from gratis to M\$200 depending on the production.

**La Carpa** (☎ 154-69-81; Aurora s/n; 🕒 10am-2pm) This dynamic circus tent sometimes hosts activities such as alternative dance classes, as well as monthly openings including live music, theater, art and circus acts.

**CINEMA**

**Teatro Santa Ana** (☎ 152-02-93; Reloj 50A; tickets M\$50-150) This small theater inside the Biblioteca Pública plays host to a good selection of independent and international films, as well as local plays.

**Villa Jacaranda** (☎ 152-10-15; Aldama 53; tickets M\$75) Projects recent releases of US and Bollywood movies on a big screen in a ballroom-type setting at 7:30pm daily. Entry includes a drink and popcorn.

**Shopping GALLERIES**

Part of the joy of wandering around San Miguel is to stumble upon the many galleries tucked away in streets around town; there are more commercial galleries than cafés (and perhaps, real estate agents) in San Miguel. The largest concentration of contemporary art galleries and design studios (mainly expatriates' work) is housed in the trendy **Fábrica La Aurora** (☎ 152-13-12; Aurora s/n; 🕒 10am-6pm), a remodeled raw-cotton factory on the north end of town. One of the town's first commercial galleries is **Galería San Miguel** (☎ 152-04-54; Plaza Principal 14; 🕒 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat). Many galleries are promoted in local papers but otherwise, be guided by your whim.

**CRAFT SHOPS**

San Miguel has a mind-boggling number of craft shops, selling folk art and handicrafts from all over the country. Local crafts include tin ware, wrought iron, silver, brass, leather, glassware, pottery and textiles. Many shops are along Canal, San Francisco and Zacateros. Price and quality can vary widely.

**Casa Maxwell** (☎ 152-02-47; www.maxwell.freeservers.com; Canal 14; 🕒 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) This rambling store (considered an institution in San Miguel) offers a tremendous array of decorative and household goods.

**FAI** (Save the Children; ☎ 152-36-86; faisavethechildren.com; Hidalgo 13; ☎ 10:30am-6pm) has a great range of handicrafts, many of which are made locally. Proceeds from sales go to the charity.

**Mujeres Productoras** (Female Producers; ☎ 150-00-25; www.globaljusticecenter.org/mujeres\_productoras; Calzada de la Luz 42) is a rural women's co-operative from surrounding municipalities which sells a range of handmade goods, the source of income (often the only one) for the family.

The **Mercado de Artesanías** (Colegio s/n) is a collection of handicraft stalls of varying quality in the alleyway between Colegio and Loreto; prices can be on par with the town's shops and quality varies. The local market **Mercado El Nigromante** (Colegio s/n) sells fruit, vegetables and assorted goods.

Be sure to hit the **Tianguis** (Tuesday market), the biggest weekly outdoor extravaganza, beside the Gigante shopping center, 2.5km east of the center on the Querétaro road. Take a 'Gigante' or 'Placita' bus (10 minutes) from Mesones, near Plaza Civica.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The nearest tarmac is the Aeropuerto Internacional del Bajío (p626), between León and Silao, around 1½ hours away by car.

## BUS

The small Central de Autobuses is on Canal (Calzada de la Estación), 3km west of the center. Tickets can be purchased at the station. Primera Plus (and Flecha Amarilla) tickets can be bought at **Transportadora Turística Imperial** (☎ 154 5408; www.transtur-imperial.com; Plaza Principal 18, 1st fl; ☎ 9am-8pm). Tickets for ETN and Primera Plus can be purchased from larger hotels.

## CAR

If you need a car for more than a few days, it may be worth organizing one through rental agencies in Querétaro. The only San Miguel-based agency is **Hola Rent-a-Car** (☎ 152-01-98; www.holarentacar.com; Hotel San Francisco; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm), inside Posada San Francisco. Prices start around M\$620 per day including insurance. Reserve at least a week ahead, especially during the high season.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

A few agencies provide shuttle transportation to/from Bajío Airport. These include **Viajes Vertiz** (☎ 152-18-56), **Viajes San Miguel** (☎ 152-25-37) and **Transportadora Turística Imperial** (☎ 154-54-08). Alternatively, take a bus to Silao and get a taxi from there to the airport. For Mexico

### DAILY BUSES FROM SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency
Celaya	M\$42	1¾hr	every 15 min (Flecha Amarilla)
Dolores	M\$26	1hr	every 40 min 7am-8pm (Flecha Amarilla Hidalgo or Herradura de Plata)
Guadalajara	deluxe M\$405	5¼hr	3 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$336	5½hr	6 daily (Primera Plus)
Guanajuato	deluxe M\$100	1-1¼hr	3 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$81	1-1½hr	7 daily (Primera Plus)
	1st-class M\$78	1-1½hr	1 daily (Ómnibus de México)
	2nd-class M\$61	1-1½hr	10 daily (Flecha Amarilla)
León	deluxe M\$145	2¼hr	3 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$119	2¼hr	7 daily (Primera Plus)
Mexico City (Terminal Norte)	deluxe M\$260	3½-4hr	4 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$212	3½hr	2 daily (Primera Plus), 1 daily (Herradura de Plata)
	2nd-class M\$173	4¼hr	every 40 min 7am-8pm (Herradura de Plata)
Querétaro	deluxe M\$75	1hr	3 daily (ETN)
	2nd-class M\$42	1¼hr	every 40 min 7am-8pm (Flecha Amarilla or Herradura de Plata)

Other 1st-class buses serve Aguascalientes, Monterrey and San Luis Potosí. Americanos buses depart for Texas at 6pm daily (US\$70 to US\$130).

City airport, get a bus to Querétaro and a bus direct to the airport from there.

No bus service operates between Bajío airport and central León. Those without too much luggage may opt to walk from the airport to the intersection of the main road and the airport road (10 minutes on foot) and hail a local bus from there (around M\$25). A taxi to León costs about M\$250. For San Miguel, make a bus connection in León.

### TO/FROM THE CENTER

Local buses (M\$4) run from 7am to 9pm daily. 'Central' buses run regularly between the bus station and the town center. Coming into town these end at the eastern end of Insurgentes after winding through the streets. Heading out of the center, you can pick one up on Canal. A taxi between the center and the bus station costs around M\$25, as do most trips around town.

## AROUND SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

### Hot Springs

The surroundings of San Miguel are blessed with hot mineral springs. Their original spiritual significance, if any, seems to have been lost; they've been developed as commercial *balnearios*, swimming pools. Here, you can soak amid pleasant surroundings, including landscaped gardens and picnic grounds. Most places are crowded with local families on weekends but *muy tranquilo* (very peaceful) during the week.

The *balnearios* are accessed via the highway north of San Miguel and all are clearly signposted. The most convenient, but expensive, transportation is taxis (around M\$100 each way; you can ask the driver to return for you at an appointed time). Alternatively, take a Dolores Hidalgo bus from the San Miguel bus station, or a local bus marked 'Santuario' (hourly) from Calzada de la Luz. These buses will stop out front, or at the turnoffs to all the main *balnearios*. To return to town, hail a bus heading along the highway.

**Taboada** (☎ 152-08-50; admission M\$50; ☎ 9am-6pm Wed-Mon), 8km north then 3.25km west is popular for its Olympic-size swimming pool (with very warm water), plus there's a smaller pool for children and a hot thermal spa. A snack kiosk and a bar provide refreshments. Hourly 'Nigromante' minibuses, departing from Calzada de la Luz, will get you within 1.5km of Taboada; alternatively, jump off

where the bus turns to Nigromante and walk the remaining 1.5km to the hot springs.

Nearby, the family-oriented **Balneario Xote** (☎ 155-81-87; www.xoteparqueacuatico.com.mx; adult/child M\$70/35; ☎ 9am-6pm) water park is 3.5km off the highway down the same cobblestone road as Taboada.

Two kilometers further on and 1km west up a gravel road **Escondido Place** (☎ 185-20-22; www.escondidoplace.com; admission M\$80; ☎ 8am-5:30pm) has seven small outdoor pools and three connected indoor pools, each progressively hotter. The picturesque grounds have plenty of picnicking space and there's a kiosk for drinks and snacks.

Just past Parador del Cortijo at Km 9.5, **La Gruta** (☎ 185-20-99; admission M\$6.50; ☎ 8am-5pm) is justifiably a local and tourist favorite; it has three small pools where a thermal spring is channeled. The hottest is in a cave entered through a 27m tunnel, with water gushing from the roof, lit by a single shaft of sunlight.

### Santuario de Atotonilco

The hamlet of Atotonilco, 11km north of San Miguel and 3km west off the Dolores Hidalgo highway, is dominated by an extremely important sanctuary, at least in the eyes of Mexicans. The sanctuary was founded in 1740 as a spiritual retreat and Ignacio Allende married here in 1802. Eight years later he returned with Miguel Hidalgo and a band of independence rebels en route from Dolores to San Miguel to take the shrine's banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe as their flag.

A journey to Atotonilco is the goal of pilgrims and penitents from all over Mexico and the starting point of an important and solemn procession two weekends before Easter, in which the image of the Señor de la Columna is carried to the church of San Juan de Dios in San Miguel. Inside, the sanctuary has six chapels and is vibrant with statues, folk murals and paintings. Traditional dances are held here on the third Sunday in July.

From San Miguel, taxis charge around M\$100 to M\$120 for a one-way trip (some will wait for one hour). Local buses depart from Calzada de La Luz every hour (M\$7; 45 minutes).

### Pozos

☎ 412 / pop 2261 / elevation 2305m

Less than 100 years ago, Mineral de Pozos was a flourishing silver-mining center of around

70,000 people, but with the 1910 revolution and the flooding of the mines, the population dwindled. Empty houses, a large and unfinished church (note the dome!) and discarded mine workings and shafts were the legacy of abandonment. Today, this tiny place is trying valiantly to win a place on the map. Visitors can explore the crumbling buildings and tour the fascinating surrounds, including several mine ruins, by mountain bike or horse (warning: many mine shafts are unfenced and, at 150m deep, are extremely dangerous). Several expat artists run galleries here.

The town's tourism efforts also includes an 'art walk', a tour of the town's main galleries and craft workshops (some are rudimentary, but support underprivileged community members; maps of the walk are available at hotels and shops). Several workshops make pre-Hispanic musical instruments. For further information on the area, history and lists of festivals and local guides, see [www.mineraldepozos.com](http://www.mineraldepozos.com).

On the plaza, **Casa Mexicana Hotel** (☎ 293-00-14; [www.casamexicanahotel.com](http://www.casamexicanahotel.com); Jardín Principal 2; r from M\$862; (P)) is an inviting 100-year-old hacienda with a luxuriant garden. The unique and artistic rooms – some of which feature original Picasso lithographs (the owner was a former art dealer) – are elegant and spacious. One room even has a tree growing inside. In high season, it houses Café des Artistes. Next door, the stunning antique stone building of **Casa Montana** (☎ 293-00-32; [www.casamontanahotel.com.mx](http://www.casamontanahotel.com.mx); Jardín Principal 4A; r/ste M\$850/1150) houses a plush and stylish B&B, courtyard and restaurant. Don't miss the *molcajete* (M\$120).

The restored 19th-century hacienda, **Posada de las Minas** (☎ 293-02-13; [www.posadadelasminas.com](http://www.posadadelasminas.com); Doblado 1; r/apt M\$1100/1300), offers ornate rooms or apartments in a colonial setting. There's a bar, restaurant with a retractable roof (mains M\$70 to M\$110) and small but impressive cactus garden.

An excellent alternative to the trendy B&B restaurant scene is **Los Famosos de Pozos** (☎ 293-01-12; [www.mineraldepozos.com](http://www.mineraldepozos.com); Hidalgo 10B; mains M\$48-118; ☎ 11am-8pm) where you can relax on the terrace and enjoy the view and some good-value Mexican fare.

Pozos is 14km south of San Luis de la Paz, a detour east of Hwy 57. To get here by bus from San Miguel, go first to Dolores Hidalgo, then to San Luis de la Paz and then take a third bus to Pozos. By car it's about 45 minutes

from San Miguel. Bici-Burro (see p635) offers bike tours to the town and mines.

## QUERÉTARO STATE

Querétaro state (population 1.6 million) is full of surprises. Billed primarily an agricultural and ranching state – with the handsome Querétaro city as its capital – it is packed with diverse geography, quirky sights and historical gems. Natural phenomena, such as the world's third-largest monolith, La Peña de Bernal, plus pre-Hispanic ruins and a jewel of Mexico, the stunning Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, are located in the state's 11,770 sq km. The reserve protects several mission towns, from where the local people run some excellent, new community-owned tourism activities, a must for the more intrepid traveler.

### QUERÉTARO

☎ 442 / pop 596,450 / elevation 1762m

As far as the silver cities go, Querétaro is sometimes intimated to be the ugly sibling. Indeed, the rather frantic outskirts with their busy freeways can give a misguided first impression. The city's large, historic heart is characterized by charming pedestrian streets, stunning plazas and interesting churches. The city's sophisticated restaurant scene whips up quality cuisine and the museums reflect the city's important role in Mexican history.

### History

The Otomí founded a settlement here in the 15th century that was soon absorbed by the Aztecs, then by Spaniards in 1531. Franciscan monks used it as a missionary base not only to Mexico but also to what is now southwestern USA. In the early 19th century, Querétaro became a center of intrigue among disaffected criollos plotting to free Mexico from Spanish rule. Conspirators, including Miguel Hidalgo, met secretly at the house of Doña Josefa Ortiz (La Corregidora), who was the wife of Querétaro's former *corregidor* (district administrator).

When the conspiracy was uncovered, the story goes, Doña Josefa was locked in her house (now the Palacio de Gobierno) but managed to whisper through a keyhole to a co-conspirator, Ignacio Pérez, that their colleagues were in jeopardy, leading



to Padre Hidalgo's call to arms (see boxed text, p629).

In 1917 the Mexican constitution was drawn up by the Constitutionalist faction in Querétaro. The PNR (which later became the PRI, the Institutional Revolutionary Party) was organized in Querétaro in 1929, dominating Mexican politics for the rest of the 20th century.

## Orientation

The historic center comprises *andadores* (pedestrian streets) linking a number of lively plazas which make for pleasant strolling. All the plazas are busy hearts: Jardín Zenea, the main plaza, has Av Corregidora, the large downtown street, running along its east side. Plaza de Armas (aka Plaza de la Independencia) is two blocks east and the small Jardín de la Corregidora is a block north. The large and shady Alameda is several blocks south.

## Information

There are card phones on Jardín Zenea, Plaza de Armas and elsewhere around the center. Handy no-name internet places are at Libertad 32 and Carranza 9; both charge around M\$10 per hour. There are several banks with ATMs around Jardín Zenea. *Casas de cambio* are along Juárez and Colón.

**Hospital Luis Martín** (☎ 214-25-71; Zaragoza Pte 88)

**Lava Express** (☎ 212-27-48; Gutiérrez Nájera; M\$14 per kg) Tucked in a shopping plaza east of Gutiérrez Nájera, north of Mercado la Cruz

**Librería Cultural del Centro** (☎ 224-24-61; cnr 16 de Septiembre & Corregidora; ☎ 9am-8:30pm Mon-Fri, 9:30am-5pm Sat) This central bookstore has a great selection of cultural titles, some of which are in English.

**Post office** (☎ 212-01-12; Artega 5)

**Tourist office** (☎ 212-12-41, 238-50-67, 800-715-17-42; www.queretaro.travel; Pasteur Nte 4; ☎ 9am-8pm) Has city maps and brochures.

**Turismo Beverly** (☎ 216-15-00; Tecnológico 118) The American Express agent, which also books airplane tickets.

## Sights

### TEMPLO DE SAN FRANCISCO

This impressive **church** (cnr Av Corregidora & Andador 5 de Mayo; ☎ 8-10am & 4-9pm) fronts Jardín Zenea. Pretty colored tiles on the dome were brought from Spain in 1540, around the time construction of the church began. Inside are some fine religious paintings from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

### MUSEO REGIONAL

This **museum** (☎ 212-20-31; cnr Av Corregidora & Jardín Zenea; admission M\$30; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is beside the Templo de San Francisco. The ground floor holds interesting exhibits on pre-Hispanic Mexico, archaeological sites, Spanish occupation and the state's various indigenous groups.

Upstairs exhibits reveal Querétaro's role in the independence movement and post-independence history (plus religious paintings). The table at which the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848, ending the Mexican-American War, is on display, as is the desk of the tribunal that sentenced Emperor Maximilian to death.

The museum is housed in part of what was once a huge monastery and seminary. Begun in 1540, the seminary became the seat of the Franciscan province of San Pedro y San Pablo de Michoacán by 1567. Building continued until at least 1727. Thanks to its high tower, in the 1860s the monastery was used as a fort both by imperialists supporting Maximilian and by the forces who defeated him in 1867.

### MUSEO DE ARTE DE QUERÉTARO

Adjacent to the Templo de San Agustín, Querétaro's **art museum** (☎ 212-23-57; Allende Sur 14; M\$30, Tue free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) occupies a splendid baroque monastery built between 1731 and 1748. It is worth visiting to see the building alone: angels, quirky gargoyles, statues and other ornamental details abound, particularly around the stunning courtyard.

The ground-floor display of 16th- and 17th-century European paintings traces influences from Flemish to Spanish to Mexican art. On the same floor you'll find 19th- and 20th-century Mexican paintings. The top floor has works from 16th-century Mannerism to 18th-century baroque. There's a good bookstore-cum-gift-shop.

### MUSEO DE LA CIUDAD

Inside the ex-convent and old prison that held Maximilian, the 11-room **Museo de la Ciudad** (☎ 212-47-02; Guerrero Nte 27; admission M\$5, students free; ☎ 11am-6:30pm Tue-Sun) has some good alternating contemporary art exhibits. If you can read Spanish or are a real history buff, check out the **Museo de la Restauración de la República** (☎ 224-30-04; Guerrero Nte 23; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), next door, which covers Querétaro's role in Mexico's history, particularly the





French occupation and the eventual ousting of Emperor Maximilian.

### TEATRO DE LA REPÚBLICA

This lovely old and functioning **theater** (☎ 212-03-39; cnr Juárez & Peralta; 🕒 10am-3pm & 5-8pm), complete with impressive chandeliers, was where a tribunal met in 1867 to decide the fate of Emperor Maximilian. Mexico's constitution was also signed here on January 31, 1917. The stage backdrop lists the names of its signatories and the states they represented. In 1929, politicians met in the theater to organize Mexico's ruling party, the PNR (now the PRI).

### CONVENTO DE LA SANTA CRUZ

Ten minutes' walk east of the center is one of the city's most interesting sights. The **monastery** (☎ 212-03-35; cnr Acuña & Independencia; donation requested; 🕒 9am-2pm, 4-6pm Tue-Sat, 9am-4:30pm Sun) was built between 1654 and about 1815 on the site of a battle in which a miraculous appearance of Santiago (St James) led the Otomí to surrender to the conquistadors and Christianity. Emperor Maximilian had his headquarters here while under siege in Querétaro from March to May 1867. After his surrender and subsequent death sentence, he was jailed here while awaiting the firing squad. Today it's used as a religious school.

You can visit with a guide – ask at the entrance – although an English tour will need to be arranged beforehand (donation requested). The site's main legend is the growth of the **Árbol de la Cruz**, an ancient tree in the convent's garden whose thorns are in the shape of crosses. This miracle was the result of a walking stick stuck in the earth by a pious friar in 1697.

### ACUEDUCTO & MIRADOR

Walk east along Independencia past Convento de la Santa Cruz, then fork right along Ejército Republicano, to the **mirador**. There's a fine view of 'Los Arcos', Querétaro's emblematic 1.28km-long **aqueduct**, with 74 towering sandstone arches built between 1726 and 1738. The aqueduct runs along the center of Av Zaragoza.

Across the street from the mirador is the **Mausoleo de la Corregidora** (Ejército Republicano s/n; 🕒 9am-6pm), the resting place of Doña Josefa Ortiz and her husband, Miguel Domínguez de Alemán.

### OTHER CENTRAL SIGHTS

Plaza de la Corregidora is dominated by the **Monumento a la Corregidora** (cnr Corregidora & Andador 16 de Septiembre), a 1910 statue of Doña Josefa Ortiz bearing the flame of freedom.

A block west of Jardín Zenea is the **Fuente de Neptuno** (Neptune's Fountain; cnr Andador Madero & Allende), designed by noted Mexican neo-classical-architect Eduardo Tresguerras in 1797. Adjacent, the 17th-century **Templo de Santa Clara** (cnr Andador Madero & Allende) has an ornate baroque interior. Two blocks west on Madero is the rather plain 18th-century **cathedral** (cnr Madero & Ocampo).

At the intersection of Arteaga and Montes is the 18th-century **Templo de Santa Rosa de Viterbos**, Querétaro's most splendid baroque church, with its pagoda-like bell tower, unusual exterior paintwork, curling buttresses and lavishly gilded and marbled interior. The church also boasts what some say is the earliest four-sided clock in the New World.

The **Casa de la Zacatecana** (☎ 224-07-58; Independencia 59; admission M\$20; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is a finely restored 17th-century home with a fine collection of 18th- and 19th-century furniture and decorations (and its own murder mystery – skeletons were discovered in the basement).

### Courses

The **Olé Spanish Language School** (☎ 214-40-23; www.ole.edu.mx; Escobedo 32) offers a range of courses with homestay options and extra-curricular programs. Prices start at around US\$14 per hour and week-long courses range from moderate group classes for 15 hours from US\$142, to intensive 35 one-hour private classes for US\$365.

### Tours

An excellent self-guided audio-walking tour (M\$50) of the city is available from the tourist office (p644). You follow a trail along city pavements, marked with gold disks (with the letter 'Q'). The audio-commentary – in several languages including English – provides background on the sites and sights. A credit card is required as security. **Guided tours** of the city center on the Tranvía bus in Spanish (M\$70 for one hour, M\$80 for two hours), leave from Jardín Zenea, near Plaza Constitución. For details, ask at the tourist office or at the **information kiosk** (☎ 212-34-52) in Plaza Constitución. Also offered are longer

trips (M\$120 for two hours) to regional attractions. For Spanish speakers, several different companies run fun night tours, **Myths & Legends** (Leyendas & Mitos, or similar names), where actors in period costume dramatically reveal the legends and secrets of their dark lanes and buildings. For details, ask at the tourist office.

## Festivals & Events

Querétaro's **Feria Internacional**, one of Mexico's biggest state fairs, happens in the first two weeks of December. It focuses on livestock, but also hosts cultural events.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

**Mesón de la Luna** (☎ 212-14-39; [www.hotelesmeson.delaluna.com](http://www.hotelesmeson.delaluna.com); Escobedo 104; s/d M\$310-330/370-400; (P) ) The attractive plant-filled lobby and warm welcome makes up for the odd bit of dodgy wiring in the basic, clean rooms. With cable TV, it's excellent value.

**Home B&B** (☎ 183-91-39; [www.queretarobandb.com](http://www.queretarobandb.com); 16 de Septiembre 104; r inc breakfast from M\$350 (X) (P) ) This friendly Canadian-run place is central and very social. Breakfast is a treat in two respects: it's included in the price and the owner, a former professional chef, prepares morning feasts (eaten communally at 9am). Rooms vary in shape and size, all are light and airy and some have private bathroom. Note: by reservation only.

Other recommendations:

**Hostal de Santa Clara Hotel** (☎ 212-03-90; Allende 13 Norte; dm M\$120, s/d from M\$250/450) This hotel-cum-hostal resembles a convent – it's plain but sparkling clean – and has choice of shared or private bathroom.

**Hotel Posada Diamante** (☎ 212-66-37; Allende Sur 45; s M\$260, d M\$315-345, tr M\$365-415) Simple, clean and respectable and only a short walk to the pedestrian plazas and the Alameda.

**Hotel Plaza** (☎ 212-11-38; [www.travelbymexico.com/quer/hotelplaza](http://www.travelbymexico.com/quer/hotelplaza); Juárez Nte 23; s/tr from M\$320/530, d M\$350-380) Hotel Plaza's glory days are over, but its 29 rooms are still tidy, if a little charm-free. For a few more pesos, you can get those facing the Jardín, offering French doors and balconies (and plenty of light, air and noise).

### MIDRANGE

**Hotel Mesón de Obispaño** (☎ 224-24-64; Andador 16 de Septiembre 13; s/d/tr M\$450/570/690) The former bishop of this central old place – located on

a lively pedestrian street – would still feel at home here. The rooms feature a few ceremonial touches, such as a faux Louis XV-style bed heads. You might be tempted by the restaurant's brunch buffet; you literally pass through it to access the courtyard and your lodgings.

**Hotel Amberes** (☎ 212-86-04; [hamberes@prodigy.net](mailto:hamberes@prodigy.net).mx; Corregidora Sur 188; s/d/tr M\$495/620/720; (P) (X) (P) ) This remodeled four-star hotel, opposite the Alameda Hidalgo, is a business-traveler favorite. It's got lots of marble, an odor of cleaning agents and carpeted rooms, with air-con, cable TV and phone. Some rooms have park views.

**Hotel Señorial** (☎ 214-37-00; [www.señorial-hotel.com](http://www.señorial-hotel.com); Guerrero Nte 10A; s M\$540-560, d M\$585-700; (P) ) It resembles a prison from the outside, but the inside is more appealing, with clean and neat modern rooms, cable TV and extremely friendly staff. It's a US Peace Corps haunt.

**Hotel Mirabel** (☎ 214-35-35, 800-401-39-00; [www.hotelmirabel.com.mx](http://www.hotelmirabel.com.mx); Av Constituyentes Ote 2; s/d/ste M\$645/830/950; (P) (X) (P) ) More demanding business travelers prefer the slick Mirabel. The comfy, carpeted standard rooms (some with park views) have air-con and there's room service.

## TOP END

**La Casa de la Marquesa** (☎ 212-00-92; [www.lacasa.delamarquesa.com](http://www.lacasa.delamarquesa.com); Madero 41; ste from M\$2100 (P) (X) ) For aficionados of fine antiques and history, don't go past this magnificent 1756 baroque-Mudéjar mansion. It is full of legends (of course!), plus lavish period furnishings, carved stonework, tiles and frescoes. The 25 singular suites have names such as Alhambra and Maximiliano y Carlota, with style to match. Rates include continental breakfast and a welcome cocktail.

**Doña Urraca Hotel & Spa** (☎ 238-54-00, in Mexico 800-021-71-16, in USA 877-278-8018; [www.donaurraca.com.mx](http://www.donaurraca.com.mx); Calle 5 de Mayo 117; ste inc breakfast from M\$2940; (P) (X) (P) (X) ) Perfect for people who prefer to be pampered. The 23 spacious suites are lavished with all the right 'fluffy features': bath robes and handmade herbal soaps plus sound systems and cable TV. There's a gym, heated pool and outdoor Jacuzzi and the restaurant's wine cellar morphs into a romantic, private dining room for two. Separate luxury packages include holistic spa treatments.

Other recommendations:

**Mesón de Santa Rosa** (☎ 224-26-23; Pasteur Sur 17; r/ste from US\$119/168; (P) (P) (X) ) A finely restored

17th-century building built around three patios and located on the Plaza de Armas. Has received mixed traveler reports; our experience is positive. US dollars preferred.

**Gran Hotel** (☎ 251-80-50; www.granhoteldequeretaro.com.mx; Juárez Sur 5; r/stc from M\$1410/2000) Querétaro's newest luxury option; Mexican sleek in a nicely renovated building.

## Eating

The central plazas and surrounding pedestrian streets, particularly around Plaza de Armas, are lined with restaurants catering to all tastes and budgets. They have outdoor tables and a vibrant evening atmosphere with live music (sometimes clashing with each other). After 5pm, the cheapest and most genuine eating experiences can be found at the **Mercado de la Cruz** (Gutierrez Nájera).

### AROUND PLAZA DE ARMAS

Plaza de Armas has some excellent, more upscale restaurants and cafés with both indoor and outdoor tables.

**Restaurante Bar 1810** (☎ 214-33-24; Andador Libertad 62; mains M\$85-175; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri & Sat, 8am-10:30pm Sun) Covered with fairy lights, this canopied place overlooking the pretty plaza is *the* eatery for excellent steaks or a variety of pastas and seafood dishes. Live crooners complement (or otherwise) your meal.

**our pick La Casona de los Cinco Patios** (☎ 224-27-60; www.lacasona.com.mx; Andador 5 de Mayo 39) It's hard to go past trying one of these diverse eating and drinking options, all under the auspice (and location) of a mansion with five patios:

**La Antojeria** (mains M\$25-75) At the entrance to Cinco Patios and at the other end of the pricing scale, this family-friendly, fun and Mexican-themed place serves up every style of *antojito* known in Mexico.

**San Miguelito** (mains M\$100-150; ☎ 1pm-midnight Tue-Sat, 1-6pm Sun) Locals rave about this for its food, old-fashioned service, ambience and décor: each table has different chairs and is decorated with themed hand-painted wooden platters. Popular dishes include *filete de res en salsa de mezquite* (beef fillet with mesquite plant sauce; M\$110)

### NEAR THE ACUEDUCTO

After the exertions of walking along the aqueduct (and its busy road), take a break at the following:

**Café Tulipe** (☎ 213-63-91; Calzada de los Arcos 3; M\$50-80; ☎ 8am-10pm) This Mexican teashop serves up French-style fare, including quiche, crepes

and cheese fondue. There's an excellent afternoon tea deal between 4pm and 7pm – tea or coffee with a huge slab of the cake of your choice (M\$37 to M\$42).

**Amadeus** (☎ 213-64-03; Zaragoza 306; mains M\$65-110; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sun) A temporary refuge from the din of Zaragoza, this German-Mexican café offers local and German treats. It's halfway along the aqueduct.

### ELSEWHERE

**Nevería La Mariposa** (☎ 212-11-66; Ángela Peralta 7; snacks M\$17-55; ☎ 8am-9:30pm) Unchanged since 1940 (as the photos will testify), this Querétaro institution is more about the quaint atmosphere than the food. Don't leave without trying the mouthwatering *mantecado* (vanilla ice-cream; M\$30).

**Restaurante Ibis Natura** (☎ 214-22-12; Juárez 47 Nte; mains M\$25-50; ☎ 8am-9:30pm; ♻) Vegetarians and natural-food fans will enjoy wonderfully fresh and reasonably priced veggie food, especially the good-value *comida corrida* (M\$45) or the soyburgers with mushrooms and cheese.

**El Nido del Colibri** (☎ 214-43-36; Arteaga 21-9; mains M\$30-45; ☎ 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) The bright yellow décor in this happy place provides a good lunching nest ('nido') for a non-nonsense yet filling *comida corrida* (M\$35).

**Neblinas Ecolienda & Café** (☎ 156-90-25; Río de la Loza 1; snacks M\$35-55; ☎ from 10am Mon-Sat, 5-10pm Sun; ♻) This extraordinary shop, café, gallery and cultural center supports communities in the Sierra Gorda. Everything here has an eco-friendly and sustainable message: the café serves delicious snacks (don't miss the hamburgers with the handmade endangered animal shaped rolls or the *penca de nopal*, cactus plate), the neat restaurant-gallery's décor resembles a semi-desert environment and the shop sells organic produce. Cultural performances include live jazz and dance.

**Café del Fondo** (☎ 212-09-05; Pino Suárez 9; everything under M\$40; ☎ 8am-10pm) This relaxed, rambling alternative hangout is popular with newspaper-reading elder statesmen, chess-heads and chatterboxes. Decent set breakfasts go for only M\$27. Snacks and a four-course *comida corrida* are also on the menu.

**Casa Real** (☎ 212-00-92; cnr Madero & Allende; mains M\$60-160; ☎ 9am-5pm) Popular among the mature Mexicans, La Casa de la Marquesa's attractive courtyard bistro (up the road from the hotel itself) boasts a gurgling fountain, fine

food, superlative service and a good upscale *comida corrida* (M\$110).

**El Arcángel** (☎ 212-65-42; Guerrero Norte 1; mains M\$60-115; ☎ 8am-10pm) Join local businessfolk, families and everyone in between at this old-fashioned place. You can enjoy the strains of Mozart over good breakfasts plus a great-value four-course set lunch (weekdays M\$89, weekends M\$110 to M\$119).

**Harry's** (☎ 214-26-20; Hidalgo 12; Plaza Constitución s/n; mains M\$60-250; ☎ 12:30pm-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-midnight Sat & Sun) Move to the groove at this New Orleans-style café-cum-bar. You can watch the crowds amble by from the patio tables over a jambalaya or a cocktail.

**Alda (Punto) Café** (☎ 224-40-77; Río de la Loza 4; mains M\$75-100; ☎ 2-10:30pm) It seems to have an identity crisis with its name (called Alda by the staff; the signs say Punto), but the modern food here is more grounded. Serves up fabulous focaccias, salads and healthy sandwiches (with hefty prices).

## Drinking

There's a thriving bar scene in Querétaro. Bars and clubs are popping up (and sometimes down) in the historic center and beyond. Calle 5 de Mayo is the fashionable drinking strip in the center; trendy barflies hit these places after 10pm. A slew of trendy bars and night clubs can be found further out along Av Constituyentes and Blvd Bernardo Quintana, the city's eastern and western ring roads – take a taxi. Late-night gay bars line Bernardo Quintana.

**La Viejateca** (La Casona de los Cinco Patios, Andador 5 de Mayo 39) Whatever you do, don't miss your nightly liquid dose at this former pharmacy, now 'barmacy.' It's worth going for the décor alone – apothecary jars, former household paraphernalia and much more – besides which, it's good old-fashioned fun.

Other good options along Calle 5 de Mayo:

**Wicklow** (☎ 307-60-63; Calle 5 de Mayo 86) This Irish pub is a longstanding favorite.

**Thai Bar** (☎ 214-61-25; Calle 5 de Mayo 56)

**Alquimia Bar** (☎ 212-1791; Calle 5 de Mayo 71A) Has some great areas to lounge.

## Entertainment

Querétaro is action-packed with cultural activities. For the latest in what's happening around town, look out for posters on bulletin boards, or ask the tourist office. On Sundays,

free concerts take place in Plaza de Armas at 1pm and in the evenings in Jardín Zenea.

**Casa de la Cultura** (☎ 212-56-14; 5 de Mayo 40) Sponsors concerts, dance, theater and art events; stop by during office hours to view the bulletin board. The Teatro Principal has regular symphony concerts most Fridays (M\$6 to M\$12).

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Aeropuerto Internacional** (☎ 192-55-00), 8km northeast of the center, is a M\$250-to-M\$280 taxi-ride away. Primera Plus also runs from the bus terminal to Mexico City airport (M\$235; three hours). Aero California runs regular domestic flights to/from Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey while Continental has flights to Los Angeles, San Antonio and Houston in the US.

In-town airline offices include **Aeroméxico Connect** (Av Tecnológico 100, San Ángel) and **Mexicana** and **Click Mexicana** (☎ 215-3907; Av Tecnológico 102, San Ángel).

### BUS

Querétaro is a hub for buses in all directions; the modern Central Camionera is 5km southeast of the center. There's one building for deluxe and 1st-class (labeled A), one for 2nd-class (B) and another for local buses (C). Facilities include a café, telephone *casetas*, shops and luggage storage.

See the table on page 650 for daily departures from Querétaro.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If you want a car to explore the Sierra Gorda, English-speaking **Express Rent-a-Car** (☎ 242-90-28; Hotel Real de Minas, Av Constituyentes Pte 124) has competitive rates. **Budget** (☎ 213-44-98; Av Constituyentes Ote 73) is also worth checking.

## Getting Around

Once you have reached the city center, you can easily visit most sights on foot. City buses (M\$5) run from 6am until 9pm or 10pm. They gather in an area at end of the bus terminal; turn right from the 2nd-class terminal, or left from the 1st-class side. Several routes go to the center including buses 8 and 19, both of which go to the Alameda Hidalgo then up Ocampo. For a taxi, get a ticket first from the bus station booth (M\$35 for up to four people).



## DAILY BUSES FROM QUERÉTARO

Destination	Fare	Duration	Frequency
Guadalajara	deluxe M\$345	4½	9 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$284	5½hr	hourly (Primera Plus)
	2nd-class M\$284	5½hr	frequent (Flecha Amarilla), 10 daily (Oriente)
Guanajuato	1st-class M\$137	2½-3hr	3 daily (Primera Plus)
	2nd-class M\$91	2½-3hr	6 daily (Flecha Amarilla)
Mexico City (Terminal Norte)	deluxe M\$210	3hr	every 30 min 5am-10pm (ETN)
	1st-class M\$173	3hr	every 20 min 4:45am-11:30pm (Primera Plus)
	1st-class M\$160	3½ hr	hourly (Ómnibus de México)
	2nd-class M\$138	4½hr	every 40 min (Herradura de Plata)
	2nd-class M\$135	3-4hr	(Flecha Amarilla)
Mexico City Airport	\$135	3½hr	25 daily (Aeroplus)
Morelia	M\$131	3-4hr	hourly (Primera Plus/Servicios Coordinados)
San Luis Potosí	deluxe M\$190	2½hr	3 daily (ETN)
	1st-class M\$154	2½hr	21 daily (Primera Plus/Servicios Coordinados)
	2nd-class M\$154	2¾hr	hourly (Flecha Amarilla)
San Miguel de Allende	deluxe M\$75	1hr	4 daily (ETN)
	2nd-class M\$42	1½hr	every 40 min 6am-11pm (Herradura de Plata or Flecha Amarilla)
Tequisquiapan	M\$34	1hr	every 30 min 6:30am-9pm (Flecha Azul)

To get to the bus station from the center, take city bus 19, 25 or 36 from Zaragoza, or any labeled 'Terminal de Autobuses' heading south on the east side of the Alameda Hidalgo.

## AROUND QUERÉTARO

### El Cerrito

If you happen to be interested in archaeology, check out **El Cerrito** (Little Hill; admission free; ☎ 9am-2:30pm Tue-Sun), a 30m-high pyramid-like structure sitting atop a small hill, located in El Pueblito, 7km from central Querétaro. Archaeologists, who are still excavating the site, believe it was occupied between 600 and 1600 by the Teotihuacán, Toltec, Chichimec, Otomí and Tarasca cultures. Besides the pyramid, there are the remains of a possible ball court and some outlying structures. A later fort-type construction on its top dates from 1876.

Local legend links El Cerrito to the history of the Virgin of El Pueblito, the patron saint of Querétaro.

At the site there are free guides (in Spanish; small tip appreciated) and a small museum. To get there, take a 64 bus (M\$5, 25 minutes) from Avenida Constituyentes on the south side of Alameda. It passes through the village and will drop you at the entrance. A taxi costs around M\$45.

## Bernal

☎ 441/ pop 3750/ elevation 2080

The town of Bernal is quaint, if over-touristy. Its draw card is the 350m-high rock spire, the **Peña de Bernal**, the third-largest monolith in the world and considered mystical by many Mexicans. During the vernal equinox thousands of pilgrims descend on the rock to take in its positive energy. Visitors can climb to the rock's halfway point (allow one hour both ways); only professional rock-climbers can climb to its peak.

Beyond that, you can see Bernal in an hour or so. The town has several **churches** and **El Castillo**, a 16th-century viceregal building. For a more in-depth explanation of the area, the small **tourist office** (☎ 296-41-26; Hidalgo 2; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Tue) organizes excellent local Spanish-speaking guides. **La Aurora** (Jardín Principal 1; www.bernalmagico.com; ☎ 10am-8pm) is an interesting *artesanías* shop; request permission to see the weavers at work at their looms in the workshop behind the shop.

The town comes to life during the weekends; many things are closed on weekdays. If you get stuck here, try the basic and friendly **Posada Peña** (☎ 296-41-49; Iturbide 3; s/d M\$250/350).

There are regular Flecha Amarilla buses from/to Querétaro (M\$22, one hour). The last return bus to Querétaro departs from the main road at 6pm. For connections to



Tequisquiapan, head to Esquivel Montes (M\$12, 30 minutes).

## TEQUISQUIAPAN

☎ 414 / pop 26,858 / elevation 1880m

This small town (teh-kees-kee-*ap*-an), 70km southeast of Querétaro, is a quaint weekend retreat from Mexico City or Querétaro. Tequisquiapan used to be known for its thermal springs – Mexican presidents came here to ease their aches and tensions. Today, despite the presence of cool water pools in hotel gardens, it's more known for its pretty, bougainvillea-lined streets, colorful colonial buildings and excellent markets. In March, the town holds the **Feria del Toro de Lidia**, a week of bullfights and activities.

## Orientation & Information

The bus terminal is around 2km north from the center in the new part of town. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 273-02-95; www.tequis.info; east side Plaza Principal; ☎ 9am-7pm) has town maps and information on Querétaro state. On the plaza's southeast side, there's a Bancomer ATM.

## Sights & Activities

The wide and attractive Plaza Miguel Hidalgo is surrounded by *portales* (arcades), overlooked by the 19th-century neoclassical **La Parroquia de Santa María de la Asunción** (Plaza Miguel Hidalgo; ☎ 7am-8:30pm) with its pink facade and decorated tower.

Three interesting markets – the **Mercado de Artesanías** (Crafts Market; ☎ 8am-7pm), **Barra y Mumbre** (household items) and the **Guadalupana** (for food) – are all on Carrizal, a block north and northeast of the plaza. The large, verdant **Parque La Pila** is a short distance past the Mercado de Artesanías along Ezequiel Montes.

Many hotels have swimming pools but the popular public pool, **La Vega** (admission M\$30; ☎ 8am-6pm), 1.4km north of town, has expansive lawns, a large pool and water slides for the kids. To get there, take a micro from the bus shelter in front of the markets on Carrizal.

On weekends head off on guided horse trails into the surrounding countryside (M\$100 per hour). Guides and their hacks congregate on Fray Junípero, just north of Parque La Pila.

## THE GREEN JEWEL OF CENTRAL MEXICO

Biosphere reserves are a unique conservation strategy seeking to blend sustainable human use with natural area protection (see p116). In the case of the **Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra Gorda**, covering the northeastern third of Querétaro state, over 90% of its 3836 sq km are privately owned and 95,000 people live in its mission towns and scattered mountain villages.

Despite its mixed land use, this rugged arm of the Sierra Madre Oriental encompasses extensive tracts of wilderness, including old-growth cloud forests covered in orchids; semideserts with endemic cactuses and wild oregano; and tropical forests home to jaguars and prolific bird life. With fifteen vegetation types this is the most ecosystem-diverse protected area in Mexico.

Conservation of the Sierra Gorda has always been community-based. Grassroots efforts by local citizens led to the reserve's establishment in 1997 and today numerous communities are engaged in sustainable livelihood activities, including developing a locally-owned and operated ecotourism infrastructure with cabins, camping areas and guides.

Visitors can enjoy hiking to the **Sótano del Barro**, a 410m-deep vertical cave to see resident macaws, camping on the ridge of Cuatro Palos for expansive views, forging the Río Escanela to Puente de Dios waterfall and cavern and experiencing the traditional way of life in rural mountain communities.

*Buffy and Ben Lenth*

## Tours into Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra Gorda

Travelers with time can experience the above activities in this fascinating area departing from Jalpan or other locations (advance notice required for all) with **Sierra Gorda Ecotours** (☎ 441-296-0242; www.sierragorda.net), part of Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda, the nonprofit organization which co-manages the reserve. Alternatively, from Querétaro, day trips to the missions plus other longer guided trips can also be arranged through the private tour operator, **Promotur** (☎ 442-212-89-40; www.promoturqueretaro.com.mx; Río de la Loza 21 Norte, Querétaro).

## Festivals & Events

**Feria del Toro de Lidia** (Bullfights) A week of bullfighting activity in March.

**Feria Internacional del Queso y del Vino** (International Wine and Cheese Fair) From late May to early June; includes tastings and music.

**Fiesta de la Asunción** Commemorates the town's patron saint on August 15.

## Sleeping & Eating

The best budget accommodation options are the posadas along Moctezuma. Demand is low Monday to Thursday, when you may be able to negotiate a discount. Many restaurants around the plaza offer *comida corrida*s. The **Mercado Guadalupana** a block east of the plaza has *fondas* (food stalls).

**Posada Tequisquiapan** (☎ 273-00-10; Moctezuma 6; s/d M\$250/500; 📶 (P)) A good-value place with simple but spacious and clean rooms and cable TV. The sprawling gardens have a grotto-like pool – great for families.

**Hotel La Plaza** (☎ 273-00-56; www.tequisquiapan.com.mx/la\_plaza; Juárez 10; re M\$620-928, ste M\$1030-1300; (P) 📶) Facing the plaza, this slightly worn but pleasant hotel has 15 rooms of varying sizes and an upscale restaurant.

**Hotel Hacienda Las Delicias** (☎ 273-00-17; www.tequisquiapan.com.mx/lasdelicias; 5 de Mayo 1; s/d M\$1500/1600; (P) 📶) A block south of Plaza Principal, the stylish Las Delicias is constructed around a manicured garden with pool. Weekend packages with two meals also available.

**K'puchinos** (☎ 273-10-46; Morelos 4; mains M\$50-90) On the plaza's east side, this active place holds happy hours, salsa nights, live music

and good snacks and meals – mainly standard Mexican fare.

## Getting There & Around

Tequisquiapan is 20km northeast on Hwy 120 from the larger town of San Juan del Río. Local buses 1, 2 and 5 (M\$4) from outside the bus station run to the markets on Carrizal, one block northeast of the Plaza Principal.

Flecha Azul runs half-hourly to/from Querétaro between 6:30am and 8pm (M\$34, one hour). Buses also run to Esquivel Montes (change here for Bernal; M\$12, 20 minutes). ETN has deluxe buses to/from Mexico City's Terminal Norte (M\$165, three hours, eight daily). Flecha Amarilla and Flecha Roja have 2nd-class services to the same destination (M\$121, three hours, regular departures).

## NORTHEAST QUERÉTARO STATE

Those with a hankering to get off the beaten track – or if you're heading to/from northeast Mexico or to the lush Huasteca (see p657) – shouldn't miss heading to the scenic Sierra Gorda via Hwy 120 northeast from Tequisquiapan. It's possible to get to most places on the way by bus, but it's much easier with your own transportation.

## Highway 120

Heading north from Tequisquiapan, you pass the dusty, agricultural town of Ezequiel Montes. More interesting is the next stop, the winery **Cavas de Freixenet** (☎ 441-277-01-47; www.freixenetmexico.com.mx; 📶 tours 11am-3pm), where you can see wine being made by *método champenoise* during free 40-minute tours.

The next big town is Cadereyta, 38km from Tequisquiapan. On the east edge of town, signs point to the **Quinta Fernand Scholl** (📶 10am-5pm), a botanic garden with over 4400 varieties of cactus.

Continuing another 38km on Hwy 120, there's a turnoff going east to the quaint town of **San Joaquín**. Follow the good, but very winding, road from the turnoff for 32km through the rugged mountains; stay on that road through San Joaquín and continue a few steeply climbing kilometers to the little-visited archaeological site of **Ranas** (admission M\$2.50; 📶 9am-5pm), with well-built walls and circular steps incorporated into a steep hillside. There are ball courts and a small hilltop pyramid. Dating from as early as the 8th century, the site is appealing for its rugged

### MEXICAN MORSELS – TOP FIVE AUTHENTIC EATERIES

- **El Pozole** (p606) Get your mouth around some of the best *antojitos* in Mexico
- **Cinco Patios** (p648) Take your pick of fine dining, local *antojitos*, or a quirky bar
- **Los Dorados de Villa** (p591) Enjoy some of the best Mexican enchiladas in the state
- **Clave Azul** (p623) Snack on a genuine *botana* (tapas) experience and a great margarita
- **San Agustín** (p639) Indulge in the sweetest treat of all: churros and chocolate

forest setting. San Joaquín has basic lodgings and eateries.

### JALPAN

Within the magnificent Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, Hwy 120 winds up to a height of 2300m at **Pinal de Amoles** and makes dramatic ups and downs (and 860 turns!) before reaching **Jalpan** at 760m. The attractive town centers on the **mission church**, constructed by Franciscan monks and their indigenous converts in the 1750s (see Sierra Gorda Missions, right). The excellent **Museo de la Sierra Gorda** (☎ 441-296-01-65; Fray Junípero Serra 1; adult/child M\$10/5; 🕒 10am-3pm & 5-7pm) explores the region's pre-Hispanic cultures and the mission-building period and has superb reduced-size replicas of the mission churches.

On the plaza opposite the church, **Hotel María del Carmen** (☎ 441-296-03-28; Independencia 8; r M\$290; (P) 🚰 🚰) has clean, comfortable rooms; those with air-con in the new part cost around M\$140 more. On the plaza's west

side, the attractive **Hotel Misión Jalpan** (☎ 441-296-02-55; www.hotelesmision.com.mx; Fray Junípero Serra s/n; r from M\$855; (P) 🚰 🚰) has a good restaurant and pleasant rooms, although beware the karaoke bar within the complex – it can get noisy. On the main road, **Restaurante Carretas** (☎ 296-03-68; mains M\$40-150; 🕒 8am-10pm) serves up a great feed.

### SIERRA GORDA MISSIONS

In the mid-18th century, Franciscans established five beautiful missions in this remote region including Jalpan. These were inscribed as a Unesco World Heritage site in 2003. Founder Fray Junípero Serra went on to found the California mission chain. The restored churches are notable for their extraordinary and colorful facades carved with symbolic figures. East from Jalpan on Hwy 120, there are missions at **Landa de Matamoros** (1760–68); **Tilaco** (1754–62), 10km south of the highway; and **Tancoyol** (1753–60), 20km north of the highway. The mission of **Concá** (1754–58) is 35km north of Jalpan on Hwy 69.

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