

# Spain Lives In Puebla

## Mexico's City Of Angels

Our guide's voice came through loud and clear over the microphone as we left Mexico City, the largest urban centre in the world, for the city of Puebla. "My name is Manuel, but I'm always confused about my name. When I enter a room where my friends are gathered, I always hear the comment, 'Jesus! It's him again!' Now I sometimes think my name is Jesus. Take your pick!" Everyone in our group of twelve broke into laughter as Manuel continued to entertain us until we reached Cholula, a town of some 80,000 on the outskirts of Puebla.

Our first stop was the Great Pyramid of Cholula, made up of seven superimposed pyramids. Measuring 450 m (1476 ft) per side and 65 m (313 ft) high, it has the largest dimension at its base of any pyramid in the world- four times the size of the Cheops Pyramid in Egypt.

Topped by a church after the Spanish conquest, it appears today as a gigantic grassy mound. To examine the pyramid's construction, archaeologists have dug 8km (5.3 mi) of tunnels at its base - now used by tourists. Behind this huge structure, dedicated to the god Quetzalcóatl, is a vast 17 ha (43 ac) temple complex, partially excavated.

Before the Spanish conquest, Cholula was one of Mexico's largest cities: a pottery manufacturing centre as well a sacred city which beside the Great Pyramid, had 400 other temples. The Spanish razed these temples to the ground, to erase the vestiges of the pagan religions and built from their stones many of today's 128 town churches. After visiting the colourful church of Santa María Tonanzintla with its magical atmosphere, we drove into the heart of the city of Puebla - the most Spanish of all the Mexican cities which is said to have been built because of a vision. According to legend, the Bishop of Tlaxcala, Julián Garcés, in a dream saw angels leading him to a beautiful valley and indicating to him where to build a city. Following the angels' directions he travelled to the valley and founded the city which became known as 'Pueblo of the Angles'. ▶



Talave  
سیرامیک تالافیرا

Fables aside, the 2,134 m (7,000 ft) high Cuetlaxcoapan plains where Puebla is located is believed to be the place where maize was first grown, hence, becoming the heartland of the Olmeca and Totonaca cultures. When the Conquistadors came, they erected Puebla in 1531 as a fortress town at a strategic point on the Veracruz - Mexico City route. It is one of the few places in Mexico where the Spanish did not build atop a city erected by one of the Indian civilizations.

Overlooked by three imposing volcanoes, Puebla, located, 120 km (75 mi) from Mexico City, with its 3 million inhabitants, is the fourth largest city in the country and the capital of the state with the same name. Soon after its establishment, it grew into an important Spanish-Catholic town and eventually became a colonial jewel - today the pride of modern Mexico. The city's greatest event occurred on 5 May 1862 when a makeshift Mexican force, led by General Ignacio Zaragoza, now the town's hero, repelled the French army sent by Napoleon III.

Today, religious structures, vestiges from the Spanish centuries, saturate the old city. Thousands of colonial buildings and at least 70 churches overwhelm the visitor with their appealing architecture. The city, a living museum, has more chapels, churches, convents and monasteries per square mile than any other place in the country. At the centre of all these renowned buildings is the Historic Town Centre, spreading out from Zócalo, the town's main square, bedecked with exquisitely arranged gardens. These ornate edifices, topped by a monumental cathedral, incorporate all the architectural styles of the colonial period including gothic, Herreriano, neoclassical, plateresque and renaissance. However, above all, the city is noted, for its idiosyncratic Baroque structures built from red brick and gray stone, in a variety of forms. Many are embellished with an elaborate white stucco - an 18th century popular ornamentation called Alfeique, from the Arabic (al-fanid - sugar paste), a candy made from egg whites and sugar. This is best reflected in the exquisite and striking Alfeique House.



Talavera Ceramics

سيراميك تالافيرا

Most of these eye-catching structures are also decorated with the attractive hand-painted Talavera tiles - the symbol of Puebla. Spanish settlers from the Talavera de la Reina region in Spain, famous for their manufacture of ceramics and tiles, introduced by the Arabs to Spain, brought the art with them. Today, the city is noted for these Arab-Spanish influenced tiles with which many of the colonial buildings are adorned. An artistic art par excellence, they are to be found decorating both old and new: church domes, façades, fountains, kitchens, rooftops, and many inside and outside walls.

Today, Puebla, which has always played an important role in Spanish affairs, besides its colonial past, is a charming, pleasant and modest tourist centre. The people, even though some of the Spanish descendant families have a reputation for their snobbishness, are as a whole friendly. The only inconvenience in the city is the curse of traffic jams. However, its attractiveness and liveliness overwhelm this 20th century drawback. ▶

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Pueblas Cathedral

كنيسة بويلا

The historic section has been largely restored and has a prosperous and appealing aura. A stroll through the streets of this section gives visitors a wonderful opportunity to admire the architectural styles of the buildings with their decorative combination of tiles, wrought iron grills, and white plastic embellishments and reliefs. Adding to Puebla's appeal is its well-known culinary art. Romantically, since it is labeled as the 'City of Angels', its gastronomic dishes are said to be flavoured with celestial seasonings. One would think that this is so when dining on two of its renowned dishes: Chiles en Nogada, chiles filled with mincemeat and slices of fruit, then covered with eggs and a Castile nut sauce; and Poblano-Mole, turkey covered with a special Puebla sauce. Visiting

'Puebla of the Angels', a town delineated by fantasy, is to travel back in time to rediscover a historic accumulation of splendid attractions. For more than four centuries the city has carefully preserved its colonial aura inherited from its days of splendour. Without doubt, it has well earned its designations as 'Shrine of America' and, since 1987, 'World Heritage Site'. ■

## IF YOU GO

### Tips:

- 1) The official Mexican currency is the peso currently trading at around - 10.5 pesos to a US dollar - 9 pesos to a CDN dollar.
- 2) When you leave Mexico there is a 'Departure Tax' of about \$18.00 US per person but this tax is usually included in your airline ticket.

3) Tip baggage handlers and bellboys \$1.00 per suitcase; maids \$1.00 per day and 50 cents tip for washroom attendants are usual.

4) Puebla's tourist facilities are excellent, the city is safe and the climate all year-round is very agreeable.

5) Puebla is noted for its cuisine, besides the dishes mentioned, some of the others visitors should try are: cemita, toasted bread rolls with cheese, chilli, chicken and vegetables; camotes, a local fruit made from sweet potatoes and fruit; and Pan árabe taco, Puebla's improvement on the taco. An excellent place to try local dishes is at the Fonda Santa Clara - a fine reasonably priced eating-place - cost of average meal about US\$15.

### Some of the Important Sites in Puebla:

Museo Amparo - housed in an 18th century building, it contains an extraordinary collection of Prehispanic art.

Iglesia de San Francisco - has a beautiful churrigueresque façade.

Casa de los Muecos - exhibits the early use of Talavera ceramics to decorate the outside of buildings with lay themes.

Capilla del Rosario - part of the Iglesia de Santo Domingo, it constitutes the greatest achievement of the Baroque art in New Spain and is classified as one of the wonders of the world.

Uriarte Talavera Factory - an authentic ceramic and tile factory, founded in 1824, it is a great tourist stopping point.

Santa Rosa Museum - boasts a splendid cloister and one of the most beautiful fountains in Puebla. Also, its Talavera-tiled kitchen is a favoured tourist attraction.

Barrio del Artista - a picturesque colonial corner with studios of artists.

Principal Theatre - considered to be the oldest theatre in the Americas.

African Safari - a drive-through Safari Park containing a wide variety of wild animals, running free, from around the world.



Regional Wear from Puebla

منتوجات محلية من بويبلا

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