



Explore The History And Culture Of Oaxaca, Mexico

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The southern Mexican state of Oaxaca is a magical destination with plenty to offer travellers who are curious about Mexican history and culture. Home to more than a dozen Indigenous communities, Oaxaca is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse states in the country. It is also where you can see some of Mexico's most well-preserved Mesoamerican ruins and colonial architecture, visit its beautiful beaches, and enjoy its unique and delicious culinary offerings like *mole* (Mexican sauce), and *mezcal* — a distilled spirit made from agave. If you're planning a vacation to Mexico, here are some reasons why Oaxaca should be on your list.

HISTORY & CULTURE

Oaxaca was occupied by the Aztecs in the 15th century before it was conquered by Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés and colonised by Spain in 1529. Today, the state is home to 16 different Indigenous cultures, each with their own language, traditions, and customs. A good place to start your historical and cultural explorations is Oaxaca City, where you can check into the Hotel Escondido Oaxaca — a gorgeous 12-room contemporary boutique hotel located within a 19th-century residence.



Visit the city's most famous landmark — the Templo de Santo Domingo de Guzmán. One of the most magnificent New Spanish Baroque churches in Mexico, this edifice was constructed over three decades between 1572 and 1608, and has a finely carved façade and interiors covered with intricate gilt sculptural reliefs. Next to the church is a monastery that houses the Museum of the Cultures of Oaxaca, where you can view artefacts and sculptures that date back to pre-Hispanic and colonial times. There is also the Jardín Etnobotánico de Oaxaca, a beautiful botanical garden where you can see plants that are unique to Oaxaca, native agricultural crops like cacti and agave, and local medicinal plants and herbs.

Not far away is Calle Macedonio Alcalá, a romantic street lined with colonial buildings that now house cafes, restaurants, bars, galleries, and boutiques. This street is especially enchanting in the evening, so take a stroll through it before stopping at La Azotea Grill House for a sumptuous dinner with spectacular views from a rooftop terrace.



A 30-minute drive west from the city will take you to Monte Albán, a massive pre-Columbian archaeological site set on a low mountainous range in the Oaxacan Valley. One of the most important ancient ruins in Mesoamerica, Monte Albán was the metropolis of the ancient Zapotec people between 500 BC and AD800, and today you can still see the remains of their impressive pyramids, terraces, plazas, and canals.

CRAFT VILLAGES, FESTIVALS & BEACHES

Oaxaca is home to many small villages producing enchanting folk art and handicraft. Head to the village of Santa María Atzompa for its unique green glazed ceramics (made with a lead monoxide glaze), and San Bartolo Coyotepec, which is known for its black clay pottery called Barro Negro. There's also San Martín Tilcajete, a village famous for its copal wood carving, and Ocotlán de Morelos, which is known for its craft metalware. For woven and embroidered textiles and garments, you'll find interesting selections in Santo Tomás Jalieza and San Antonio Castillo Velasco.



Oaxacans love a good party, so if you're visiting during a local festival, you should join in the festivities. In July, there is the Oaxaca Mezcal Festival, and the Guelagueta Festival, which celebrates the state's 16 different ethnic groups. In November, there is the Day of the Dead, or Día de los Muertos, where locals dress up in elaborate Halloween-like costumes and light candles to remember those who have passed on.

Not to be missed are Oaxaca's beaches, which are popular among surfers or sun-lovers looking to spend long lazy afternoons on the sand. Puerto Escondido has two of the best: Zicatela Beach, which is popular with surfers for its barreling tube waves, and La Punta Beach, which is perfect for those looking for a peaceful spot for swimming and sunbathing.



TRADITIONAL DELIGHTS

Oaxaca is known for traditional dishes such as *tlayudas*, a large semi-dried tortilla topped with refried beans, avocados, tomatoes, and some variation of seasoned meat; and *enfrijoladas*, corn tortillas stuffed with cheese and topped with a flavourful bean sauce. But it is most famous for *mole* — complex, rich sauces made with a variety of dried chillies, spices, fruits, and seasonings.

Nicknamed "the land of the seven moles", Oaxaca is where you can sample the seven most beloved *moles* of Mexico: *mole negra*, made with dark chocolate and four types of chillies; *mole amarillo*, made with chillies and dried fruits; *mole coloradito*, which combines chillies, chocolate, fruits, seeds, and spices; *mole manchamante*, which includes chorizo and sometimes pineapple; *mole rojo*, made with red chillies, raisins, and nuts; *mole verde*, which gets its bright green colour from cilantro, jalapenos, pumpkin seeds, and tomatillos; and *mole chichilo*, which is typically made with *chilhuacle* and ancho chili peppers, tomatoes, tomatillos, garlic, avocado leaves, cloves, cumin, and beef stock. To sample all seven *moles*, visit Restaurante Los Pacos Reforma, where you can purchase pre-packed *moles* as souvenirs.



Oaxaca is also famous for *mezcal*, a distilled spirit made from the agave plant. While the most well-known type of mezcal is tequila — which is made from a specific variety of agave called Blue Weber — *mezcal* in Oaxaca is made from 40 different varieties of agave, each with its own distinct flavour profile. A great way to learn about — and taste — *mezcal* is to join Mezcal Explorer Tour or The Mezcal Journey for a tour of an agave plantation and *mezcal* distilleries.

With so much to see, do, buy, and taste, Oaxaca is a destination that has something for everyone.