



**SOMETHING'S AFOOT  
IN MEXICO,  
PART I**

**The Art Nouveau bandstand in the Plaza de Armas, with the Cathedral of Guadalajara in the background. This French-designed bandstand was a gift to the city from dictator Porfirio Diaz in the 1890's**

by Lynne Doyle

*Lynne Doyle is a frequent contributor to Mexico File, with a number of book reviews and accounts of her searches for Mexican folk art. She hails from Maine. This is the first part of a two-part series. Watch for Part II in the April 2004 issue.*

I spent most of the autumn of 2003 roaming Mexico, going to places I had visited before and one I never had, and while I can't put my finger on just what it is, something is going on south of the border. I had not had an opportunity to wander at leisure in Mexico since the early spring of 1998, when I spent six weeks traveling around the Yucatan, seeing all the little places off the beaten track that I had missed over the years. At that time, Mexico seemed as it always has to me – overflowing with marvelous folk art, warm friendly kind people, the slower pace we all associate with our southern neighbor. Aside from one relatively harrowing ride through the jungle with a Mexican man seeking to avoid the toll station on the new highway between Merida and Cancun, Mexico was Mexico, and I experienced no problems at all finding just what it is that has always made this country so spiritually “home” to me.

This time, however, there are big changes in the air, and I found them everywhere. We started our journey in Guadalajara, a city I had never been to

before, but which had always been spoken of fondly and with great affection to me by fellow Mexicophiles who know the city well. As they say, every set of binoculars is set up a little differently, and not every place can be your favorite, but as my husband observed, if not for the palm trees and everyone speaking Spanish, we might well have been in Kansas, Toto.

We stayed at the very delightful Hotel de Mendoza (\$85 a night for a double), which is housed in the former convent attached to the church of Santa Maria de Gracia, one of Guadalajara's oldest and most graciously beautiful churches. The rooms are large, the pool area tiny but beautifully planted, and the exemplary service is offered by young, hip, perfectly dressed and coiffed hotel employees. We found only the restaurant wanting – service was the same as elsewhere in the hotel, but the food was mediocre at best. Perhaps the Mendoza's most important quali-

*Continued on page 2*



**CEDAM commemorative plaque to John Lafitte**

*Quintana Roo's  
Pirates of the Caribbean*

by Jeanine Lee Kitchel

*Jeanine Lee Kitchel is an ex-pat living in Puerto Morelos. Her nonfiction travel adventure, **Where the Sky is Born: Living in the Land of the Maya**, is available at amazon.com or direct from the publisher, [www.yucantales.com](http://www.yucantales.com).*

*Contact her at [casamaya@yahoo.com](mailto:casamaya@yahoo.com)*

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Pirates. Images of swashbucklers with gold teeth, black eye patches, and peg legs come to mind. Or Johnny Depp. But in reality, many of the pirates who navigated the waters just off Quintana Roo's shores from as early as the 1600's were men with unlikely backgrounds for the sport they took on. A handful were full-fledged gentlemen, most had seafaring backgrounds. Many were sanctioned by queens or governments. A few even ended up with titles, and some were hailed as heroes.

The word “privateer” better describes these romantic buccaneers. In an era when spices,

*Continued on page 6*

**INSIDE**

Más o Menos 2  
 Virgin de Juquila 4  
 Restaurante La Cabaña 5  
 About Mexico 8

# más o menos

by David Simmonds

For twenty years or so the major border flow issue has centered around all of the Mexicans who come to the U.S., often illegally, to find work. We catch about 500,000 of them a year and many more go unapprehended. No one seems to have an answer that will satisfy everyone, so on it goes.

But the story for the past couple of years, especially since 9/11, has been the number of baby boomers and retirees who are heading south. No longer just a hideout for scofflaws on the lam and happy-hour devotees, it is estimated that up to a million North Americans are now calling Mexico home at least part of the year.

This trend is here to stay for a long time, especially now that Alan Greenspan has floated the Bush trial balloon warning everyone that the Social Security fund is growing broke (more tax cuts anyone?) and that we had better start planning for it. A typical pension in the U.S. now runs about \$1,000 per month, and you're not going to retire on a SoCal or Florida beach on that. However, you can live damn handsomely in a warm coastal Mexican village on that money, as many happy expats can testify.

Also appealing to many, especially to us boomers, is the more "relaxed" daily rules of life that Mexico offers. Yes, it's still terribly corrupt if you're trying to run a business or must have daily dealings with the Byzantine bureaucracy. But you usually won't get pulled over for a missing tail light or a little late night walk weaving after a trip to the cantina. Most people leave you alone and let you live your life without criticism and judgment. This is very appealing to those of us who were raised listening to Dylan and reading Kesey and Hunter S.

Many of the challenges in living in Mexico in the past have disappeared with better infrastructure, American food product availability, bottled water everywhere, internet access and satellite dishes. Couple that with Mexico's natural beauty, interesting history and architecture, kind and helpful people, and you have what many of us are now, or will soon be, calling home.



## Afoot in Mexico *Continued*



**The dome and yellow-tiled spires of the Cathedral de Guadalajara**

Historico, while what there is of it is indeed impressive, there isn't much and the buildings are interspersed with clunky, modern concrete and glass structures. My impression is that Guadalajara has, much like many of the cities of its ignorant northern neighbor, destroyed a lot of its historic past and replaced it with ugly strip malls.



**The dome of the Cathedral de Guadalajara**

There is the city's signature cathedral – magnificent with its twin yellow-tiled spires, the Palacio del Gobierno and the Hospicio Cabanas with their dark and gloomy Orozco murals, the fantastic Teatro Delgollado – home of Guadalajara's unsurpassed Folkloric Ballet – and the imposing Rotonda de los Hombres Ilustres – resting place and monument to many of Guadalajara's



**The facade of the Palacio del Gobierno, facing the bandstand at Plaza de Armas**

favorite sons, and now also (we were told by a female Mendoza employee with great pride) sporting a statue in tribute to a favored daughter of the city. There are several other colonial-era buildings found here and there throughout the Centro, but also, the many lovely fountains of the Plaza Liberacion are fronted almost exclusively by contemporary, not especially attractive, stores and offices. The atmosphere of the Hospicio Cabanas with its seventeen gorgeous patios was almost destroyed for me by the huge blocky brick and glass structures housing Guadalajara's very prosperous jewelry outlets that face it.

Anyone who has ever read anything I've written for *The Mexico File* knows that a big part of Mexico for me is hunting down folk art, and because of this habit

**Part of the mural of Miguel Hidalgo, father of Mexican independence, painted by Guadalajara's native son, Jose Clemente Orozco. This mural**



**is housed above the staircase in the Palacio del Gobierno**

of mine, Guadalajara was a huge draw, as it is home to several of the artists who participated in Fomento/Banamex's exhibition of Great Masters that has been touring the world for the last three years. Thus I was very shocked to learn that the city itself, while the place to be if you are shopping for shoes, is bereft of any of

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**The Rotondo de los Hombres Ilustres, where sixteen of Jalisco's most distinguished sons (and one daughter) are immortalized by white columns and bronze statues**

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*Continued on page 3*



**The facade of the magnificent neo-classical Teatro Degollado, with Apollo and the nine muses adorning its pediment, lit up after a concert at night. This 19th century building is famous for its plush decor and outstanding acoustics, as well as for being the home of the world-renowned Ballet Folklórico de la Universidad de Guadalajara**

the little shops ordinarily found on every corner in most cities in Mexico that peddle art of varying quality from throughout the country. We did manage to find the El Palomar factory – an amazingly primitive operation considering the high-end glorious ceramic house wares it produces – and also the extremely upscale Casa de las Artensanias, an enormous state-run museum/crafts store housing and selling products native to Jalisco, as well as some other things from around the country – a magnificent, intricately displayed collection with matching price tags.

In order to find folk art (and the artists) in the area, one needs to travel about half an hour outside of the city proper to the villages of Tonalá and Tlaquepaque, and if you have time for just one, my recommendation would be Tlaquepaque. A prosperous suburb of Guadalajara, this quaint town is peppered with stately mansions built by wealthy tapatíos as well as a pedestrian-only thoroughfare housing a memorable regional museum and many high-end shops selling all kinds of crafts. I have to stop and gush, and say that I very much enjoyed everything about Tlaquepaque, in spite of the fact that it is an ingeniously-planned tourist-oriented burgh.

I had heard that the area of Guadalajara was known for its fine leather products, so I dragged along with me a hand-tooled camera bag given to me by my father for my fifteenth birthday, hoping that I would be able to find others like it for my

husband and children. Upon my arrival in Tlaquepaque, I started asking around for leather shops and almost immediately met a young man who informed me that bags like mine were no longer made in Mexico, at least not in this area. For some reason, this enthusiastic, charming man made it his mission to find a shop that might make some duplicate bags for me, and he set off at warp speed on his quest. Eventually after several stops, we happened into the shop Leo e Hijos de Jimenez Piel, where we encountered the very polished Efrain Jimenez. He initially shook his head as I handed him my bag, but when he opened it and saw the maker's label inside it, exclaimed that his father had been the original designer and maker of my bag. He escorted me to an antique photo on the wall of his shop showing his father in front of shelves in a much less elegant store and pointed to an upper shelf in the photo lined with bags much like mine, all the while giving me his family history – the original store in Nogales in the 50's, moved to Guadalajara in the late 60's, seven sons – each with his own establishment, his being the finest of them all as he is the eldest. Long story short, Efrain agreed to reproduce my bag if I would leave the original with him, as patterns no longer existed. As an inducement, he offered to make some repairs on my aged bag in addition to making the new ones. With major reservations, I agreed to part temporarily with my bag and we proceeded about an order. Out came the laptop, where I was instructed to type in my design requirements, initials to be stamped, and shipping address information. Efrain gave me a specific date for completion of the bags, and advised me to have them shipped to my final destination in Oaxaca, as it would be far less costly than shipping them to the US. I paid the rather hefty tab with a credit card so as to have some



**A children's folkloric dance recital held on the roof of the Hotel de Mendoza**



**The finale at the weekly Sunday morning performance of Ballet Folklórico, performed to Guadalajara's moving theme song of the same name written by Pepe Guizar**

recourse should the bags never arrive, but suffered severe separation anxiety as I walked away from my father's gift of so many years ago. (I'm delighted to report that the new bags were waiting for me when I arrived at my friend's home in Oaxaca and they are superb – all in all, an extremely efficient transaction – definitely a first for me in all of my attempts at commerce within Mexico.)

In contrast to Tlaquepaque, Tonalá is a rather nasty little town whose only recommendations are the extraordinary Sermel papel mache factory and the workshops of Great Master ceramists Jose Bernabe Campechano, Jorge Wilmot Mason, Angel Santos Juarez, and Florentino Jimon Barba. Through sheer luck, in a taxi line in front of our hotel, I managed to latch onto Jose Gabriel Gomez, proclaimed by Frommer's to be the best taxi driver in Guadalajara, who agreed to help me find these people. (Gabriel turned out to be indeed a local treasure and I recommend him without qualification to anyone visiting Guadalajara. He can usually be found near the Hotel Mendoza, but also at any one of the numbers listed in Frommer's.)

Sermel is home to the artisans who for twenty years have been making the wonderful, very inexpensive "viejo" figures sold all over Mexico – the farm and village men and women complete with ceramic jugs, beans, hay and rice that are so popular with tourists. To my delight, they have started a new line of folkloric dance figures – more costly but totally enchanting.

Jose Bernabe is noted for his work in petitillo pottery, the fantasia-like designs with tiny, exact crossed lines in

*Continued on page 5*

# A Day in Santa Catarina Juquila

by Carol Alice and Geri Anderson

Carol Alice has lived for eight years in Oaxaca City from December to May.

Geri Anderson is a frequent contributor to **Mexico File** and lives in Oaxaca City.

If you aren't hell bent to get to the beach from Oaxaca city, you may want to explore a remote mountain village along the way. Originally called Xiuhquihilla, which means "place of beautiful vegetables," the small mountain village of Santa Catarina Juquila dates back to 1272. One of the most important pueblos in the Chatina region of northwest Oaxaca, the tiny town overflows with visitors every day of the year, the big draw being the legendary wooden statue of La Virgen de Juquila. Although she's not much more than a foot high, the stories of miracles attributed to her delicately carved features are so widespread and grandiose that believers trek over the mountainous terrain from all corners of Mexico.



**La Iglesia de Santa Catarina Juquila**

Chances are whether you go by bus or drive your own car, you'll pass hundreds of pilgrims on foot and bicycle, some camping out for days, even months. You'll wend among truckloads of the faithful packed under tarp-covered pickups, forming a kind of modern-day wagon train. While caravans converge on the town all year long, the roads become particularly jammed around December 8, the Virgin's special day of veneration.

Some days, such as weekends, are busier than others, but always the pilgrims come to make una promesa, a promise that they'll visit her time and again over the next few years if she will just cure a family member, repair a crippled limb, restore sight. Many requests are for gifts, the most

popular being homes and cars, but also farm animals and bountiful harvests.

The stories of the origins of the Virgin of Juquila are a bit convoluted, mysteriously clouded with the haze of time and myth. However, most accounts tell of a Dominican priest, Frey Juan Jordan, who brought the small figure with him from the Philippines. The exact date of their arrival is uncertain, but when he left in 1558 for another parish, he gave the figure to his young man servant who lived in the nearby town of Amialtepec. Word of her miracles spread and in 1630, a small shrine was built for her, affording all villagers a view. Three years later, the entire town of Amialtepec burned to the ground. From inside the inferno, they say, could be heard the wee voice of the tiny Virgin calling for help. While all around her fires blazed, destroying the entire town, the carved wooden figure survived, scorched a deep brown, the color of the Chatina people.

Perhaps this small brown statue reminded them of their prehispanic goddess, responsible for their beautiful vegetables. When the Spanish conquerors came, they brought their own idols with pale skin tones, blond hair and European features. The Virgin of Juquila, like the Virgin of Guadalupe, looks like one of their own. In 1776, seeing how the tiny figure was adored by the people, the Bishop ordered a temple built worthy of her in the larger town of Santa Catarina.

Even this move is surrounded by myth, some claiming that she "escaped" back to her original location several times. However, today you'll find her standing high above the altar in Santa Catarina de Juquila, only her little face and hands sticking out. She's securely protected behind glass lighted by a halo of blue neon. Topped with an ancient-looking crown, her mane of long black hair flows the length of her ornate gown. Standing on a pedestal cloistered in vegetable-like leaves, a perch befitting the goddess of

*Continued on page 6*



**A graveyard of offerings to the Virgin de Juquila**

## Quintana Roo *Continued*



slave trading, and territorial expansion sparked the economics of the globe, the nations of Europe – England, France, Holland and Spain – waged their wars on the high seas. With Spain's recent discovery of the New World and its riches, the only unity on the Atlantic was the common goal of sacking all Spanish galleons.

Adventurers by nature, highwaymen by design, "pirate" conjures familiar names from history such as Jean Lafitte, Sir Henry Morgan, and Sir Francis Drake. However, lesser known names such as Giovanni de Verrazano (The Frenchman) and Fermin Mundaca have equally compelling stories.

While Morgan and Lafitte are said to have walked the shores of Isla Mujeres (Quintana Roo) and buried treasure there, Isla's most notorious resident was Fermin Mundaca, a slave trader who transported African slaves to Antilles, preferring the more "respectable" title of pirate. In 1860 when the British campaigned against slavery, Mundaca took a powder on the white sand beaches of Isla Mujeres. There he rented out his boats to the Yucatan Government to capture rebel Mayans along this coast who were then sold into slavery to large Cuban sugar plantations, which hardly endeared him to the locals.

On Isla, Mundaca used his wealth to build a large hacienda named Vista Alegre which he filled with livestock, birds, and exotic gardens, still viewable today. The entrance arch, El Paso de La Triguena (The Brunette), was named for a beautiful girl from the village, Martiniana Gomez Pantoja, with whom the elderly pirate fell in love, after seeing her just once. He nicknamed her the brunette. But the dark-haired beauty, 37 years his junior, married her childhood sweetheart and Mundaca grew isolated, lonely, and mad. He died at age 55 in Merida still in love with the girl. To be near his lost love, he built a tomb which remains empty and can supposedly be found in Isla's colorful, crowded cemetery, one street before North Beach (although this writer could not find it). Etched on the headstone are the symbols of the pirate – skull and crossbones – with the words he carved as his epitaph,

**Dzilam de Bravo, the Yucatan fishing village where pirate John Lafitte is said to be buried**



“As you are, I was. As I am, you will be.”

Jean Lafitte, born in either Haiti or St. Malo, France, liberated New Orleans first of high tariffs by supplying stolen goods to customers without a middleman, and then liberated the city of the British in the U.S. Battle of 1812. Targeted at first by Andrew Jackson as a bandit and a rogue, he was later renamed a gentleman and a patriot, for without him, one of the war’s most decisive battles against Britain would have been lost. Soon after, he was named Territorial Governor of Galveston (still Mexican soil at that time), but with changing times, he was harassed by stricter U.S. policies which restricted his maritime activities. As his farewell and parting shot, he torched Galveston, then according to legend, sailed into the Caribbean. Rumor has it he stopped on Isla Mujeres, then moved onto the Gulf of Mexico. In the Yucatan, in the small pueblo Dzilam de Bravo not far from Progreso, a CEDAM (Club de Exploraciones y Deportes Acuaticos de Mexico) memorial plaque commemorates him. In the town’s cemetery, CEDAM workers found a weathered tombstone with the epitaph, “Jean Lafitte ReExhumed.” Could it really be the grave of Lafitte?

The Quintana Roo coast is rife with pirate stories. Xcalak was a known haven for pirates. Bacalar narrowly escaped their ruin, and Ascension Bay was one of the great pirate harbors of the 17th century. Wild and isolated, its treacherous mud flats must have sent countless vessels to their doom, while pirate ships waited in hiding for the passage of these Spanish galleons laden with gold, fighting against trade winds on their way to Santiago de Cuba.

In the Museo de la Cultura Maya, Chetumal, one display tells how pirates used Banco Chinchorro to their gain. Chinchorro is a deadly circular string of rocks on a low lying limestone shelf extending out from the sea, 30 miles long and 20 miles wide, just off the shores of Majahual. Pirates put lanterns along the reef, signaling ships this was clear passage. But actually, it lured them to their doom onto the treacherous rocks. It is rumored that thousands of ships had their downfall on Chinchorro Reef.

*Continued on page 8*

## Restaurante La Cabaña

by Bruce McGovern

Eating out pleases me only slightly more than visiting tourist places, and I’d rather have my teeth drilled than do that. Sometimes, I have little choice. This Sunday, in Cordoba, the family decided to eat out. They agreed on a place “in the country.” We climbed in the Beetles, and off we went, racing west down the *cuota* (tollway) which runs from Veracruz towards Mexico City.

At km. marker 292, we turned off at a dirt parking lot in front of a collection of ramshackle buildings. Nothing looked like a good restaurant to me.

But, right under the gigantic “Nissan Cordoba” billboard is a little cook shack with a large blue awning in front, and a hand lettered sign, “POLLO ASADO” (oven roasted chicken).

Behind this little shack is a large, grassy lawn with umbrellas separated by appropriate distances. The lawn is fenced with flowers, decorative plants, and trees. Except for the traffic roar a hundred feet away, we seemed to be in an elegant, country estate. There was playground equipment so the fighting cousins could burn off energy.

The menu said, Restaurante La Cabaña. We ordered a roast chicken, three large plates of barbacoa of lamb, two pitchers of orange juice, three cans of Coke Light, one plate of beef steak, and I had an order of french fries, Mexican style. The chicken, which cost 50 pesos, came with rice and salad.

It was a leisurely, happy meal. My *cuñado* (brother-in-law) sex-harassed the waitress – as usual. We made the customary jokes that Mexicans make when they are having fun in a family setting. My *cuñado* took his grand-daughters to the snack stand and bought them some candy and junk, thus ruining their appetites and giving them more fighting energy.

If eating out were always this stress-free, I might learn to like it.

The entire bill came to 241 pesos, about \$25.50US, for six adults and two kids.

A few hundred meters away are two really flashy restaurants. I asked why we did not eat there, and was told those restaurants charge a lot more, and prepared their food three days in advance.



## Afoot in Mexico *Continued*



**Jose Bernabe of Tonalá, great master of the ceramic art of Petatillo, holding an unfired vase**

the backgrounds, and he is a charming, expressive and generous man. He escorted me around his studio and his taller, showing me his kiln and design shop. However, as we got to the retail portion of his establishment, I nearly fell over with shock at the prices, shelving immediately my plan to purchase a small vase as a gift for the neighbor who takes care of my cats when I travel. Much to my astonishment, a 4” vase cost \$450 US. Many of the artists included in the Great Masters book and exhibit have increased their prices, but this was the largest jump I had seen yet.

Jorge Wilmot Mason was not at home when we called, but after Jose Bernabe, I wasn’t so sure a visit would have been all that productive as Jorge is the most famous of them all. I was also very disappointed not to find Angel Santos, as I felt it would have been an experience to meet this very young and accomplished ceramist who is working with traditional Tonalá materials and methods, but I felt adequately compensated to find Florentino Jimon Barba at home to me. Jimon (as he signs his work) also fashions some marvelous traditional Tonalá ceramics, but is perhaps best known for his work in Bandera, pottery



**The pool and waterfall at the Hotel de Mendoza**

*Continued on page 7*



**Villagers making clay offerings**

“beautiful vegetables,” she watches as pilgrims enter the church and make their way to the altar on their knees.

In a small room to the side of the altar a replica of the much-loved Juquila is almost buried beneath objects representing hopes and wishes of the pilgrims. At her feet are stacks of photographs, money, long braids of hair which have been cut off as offerings. Small piles of corn mingle with faded wedding bouquets and letters addressed to the Virgencita, asking for all manner of things and thanking her for the ones she has provided. This room is hot with the flames of dozens of candles. A young boy is on duty all day to scrape the wax from the floor and benches.

In nearby Amialtepec, you’ll find La Capilla del Pedimento, a shrine high on a hill near the original site. If you arrive by bus, you can hire a taxi for about \$5 to take you to El Pedimento. Our cab driver was a woman (not common in Mexico) and with her was her five year old son. He squeezed between his mother and the driver’s side door, hanging out the window singing Mexican love songs at the top of his lungs. With rhythmic rolling of his “R’s” he belted out the words “Mi corazon, you are my life. Te amo. My love. I live my life for you.” He sang many verses, which we suspect he made up, as we zipped along.

The ground around El Pedimento is dense clay, like much of this mountainous region. There are rustic wooden tables and spring water available for people to make clay objects to present to the large ceramic figure of the Virgin de Juquila posed inside the shrine. Most people build little houses and cars, or body parts in need of healing. They also rub their faces with the clay and sometimes eat it.

If you’re not skilled working with clay,

there are little stalls near El Pedimento which sell small replicas of houses, cars, babies, animals and play money. Just purchase the symbol of your desire to lay at the Virgin’s feet. So popular is this shrine that each day a caretaker hauls all of the offerings and gifts out back, forming an enormous dump, which extends as far as you can see into the trees and down the hill. Thousands of crosses, heaped on top of each other in this holy dump pile attest to the offerings. Many express thanks for miracles she has performed. Throughout Mexico, you’ll see trucks with “Regalo de Juquila” painted on them. In Oaxaca city, there’s at least one store named “Juquilita.”

In spite of its remote and hilly location, Santa Catarina Juquila is not the place to go if you want a quiet mountain getaway. As in many small towns, most people do not have telephones. That means that much news, including phone call messages, blare from a loud speaker in the town square, audible in every corner of the village. Important announcements, such as bus arrivals and departures, are punctuated by loud music, until well after midnight.

We stayed in Hotel Plaza Juquila with views from our balconies of the pale yellow church with brown trim. Streamers decorated the main plaza in front of the church, the only level ground in the entire town.

At 4 a.m., the roosters woke the burros and the burros woke the street dogs. At 5 a.m. a large group of pilgrims began singing in front of the locked church doors, announcing the conclusion of their no doubt long trip. We stole naps during the pauses between the seemingly endless early morning repertoire, not an unpleasant sound were it not for the early hour.

At 6 a.m., the church bells rang in the new day, sounding a precise patter, like the bell ringers do in England, a wonderful



**Crafting clay offerings at the clay modeling table**

sound. At 7 a.m. the construction workers continued their work on a huge three-level building that will house the government offices on the top floor, market stalls on the ground floor and a parking garage in the basement. This complex will no doubt lure even more pilgrims and already it’s interrupting the spacious courtyard in front of the church, the largest flat spot in this hilly town.

A warren of small stalls wind along the street at the side of the church, selling all manner of stuff featuring the image of not only the Virgin of Juquila, but also the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Virgin Mary and Jesus. They decorate clocks, key rings, toys, purses, hats, sunglasses, tee shirts, jewelry, beer can openers, posters, pens, candles and candies.

The fruits and vegetables in the nearby farmer’s market have that just-picked smell and the broccoli heads are beautiful enough to be bridal bouquets. The women who work in the stalls come out into the walkway and in sing-songy tones invite you into their booth and reciting their menus of tacos, tlacuyudas, rice and beans. The market people sell pottery, weavings and handmade clothing. Some of the designs are unique to the area and a bit different than Oaxaca city handicrafts. Baskets of all shapes and sizes abound.

The town’s several hotels have restaurants, most open to the street. None gourmet level, but featuring local items such as frijoles con patitas de puerco, tamales de mati, memelita de elote and flor de cauchepil con huevo. Much life is lived outdoors here, including the restaurants which are patio-style or with a wall or two open to the street.

Nearby jaunts include a 165-foot waterfall, Cascada Chorro Conejos. Taxis will take you there. The area has hiking paths and there was a group of European hikers going by foot from Oaxaca to Puerto Escondido. If you ask around, you’ll no doubt find a hiking guide.

Getting there: On a map, if you trace the path of the Rio Atoyac as it meanders from the city of Oaxaca to the Pacific coast, you’ll come upon this little village. By car or bus, take Highway 131 south of the City of Oaxaca for about 100 miles then following the signs west for 20 miles.

*Continued on page 7*

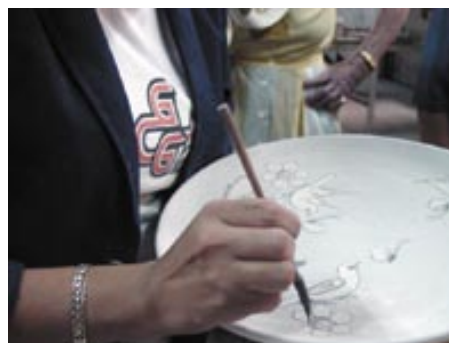


An example of the finished product from El Palomar

so named for its use of the colors of the Mexican flag. Terra cotta represents the red in the flag, with details added in white and green. Also rewarding was finding that Jimon's prices are still very manageable in spite of his recent celebrity. As I began searching for pieces to purchase, I was dumfounded to find a plethora of Bandara, but all of it missing any green detail. Noting my reaction, Jimon explained to me that his customers seemed to prefer only the red and white combination. I thought about this and then asked how the pottery was still called Bandera, since the colors were no longer accurate. We went around and around about this for a while, when finally, in frustration, Jimon – guessing my Spanish skills to be even less than they are – turned to Gabriel and asked "Who IS this woman and why is she asking all these questions?" Gabriel and I burst out laughing, and Jimon blushed with embarrassment at realizing that I had understood his question. Gabriel and I then entered into a discussion of the antique Bandera I have for which Tonalá is also noted, and Jimon became jovial once again. All in all, it was a fun visit and Jimon gave me several ceramic Christmas ornaments to cover for his gaff.

One of the highlights of my visit to

Guadalajara was an opportunity to talk with a young woman named Griselda Godoy Medina, a university graduate employed as a stock broker on the fledgling Mexican stock exchange. She is twenty-eight years old, has been married for three years, and is expecting her first child at the same time that my first grandchild is due to arrive this spring. Unlike most Mexicans I have met in the past, she knew exactly where my state is located, even adding that Maine is part of that area of the northeast United States known as New England. Also unlike most Mexicans I have had discussions with in the past, she was very interested in the financial aspects of our lives as compared to hers, with particular emphasis on real estate values. We had a lively conversation that was very illuminating to me. I asked Gris if she planned to continue working after the birth of her child and she replied that she would have to if she wanted to continue to finance her house, as well as that she had not spent all those years breaking into an essentially male-dominated field only to leave and stay home. This conversation led to an invitation to Gris' home for dinner, which was also a revelation. At least in the area in which Gris and her husband live, gone are the high street-side walls and sultry courtyards of the Mexico I know and love, replaced by two and three-story stucco homes surrounded by cultivated stamp-sized lawns. In the interior of her home,



A painting demonstration at the El Palomar factory

I found the first wall-to-wall carpet I've ever seen in Mexico, as well as sparkling appliances much like our own. In fact, the only vestiges of Mexico I saw in her home were a small pewter Virgen of Guadalupe on the wall, and several Mexican pewter photo frames holding family photographs. Otherwise, definitely Kansas.....



A perfect specimen palm at the Botanical Garden of the Universidad de Guadalajara

All in all, Guadalajara was an expose to me. We were shown with pride the first Burger King established in all of Mexico, for which a French colonial mansion was essentially destroyed to make room for its construction. On the upside, we saw very few of the skinny, scabrous dogs found everywhere in Mexico, and lots of well-fed, expensive, pedigreed dogs confined behind gates and fences. Perhaps most astounding to me was the fact that the sidewalks of Guadalajara were totally rolled up almost every evening by seventhirty. I was told that September is a slow tourist time in the region, but for the home of the Mariachi, I saw only one band, and that for about two minutes at the very end of the Sunday morning Folkloric Ballet at the Delgallado. With the exception of one Friday night, when there was a huge, excessively noisy fashion show worthy of MTV staged behind Teatro Delgallado, Guadalajara's nightlife seemed non-existent. When we asked where we could go to see mariachis, we were told the Plaza of the Mariachi, but were also advised to stay out of the area, as it is somewhat seedy and not considered safe for tourists. On weekend afternoons, the plazas were full of Mexican children and their parents eating candy cotton and waving balloons, but the evenings were stark in their silence.

Definitely the most stunning aspect of our visit to Guadalajara took place on the day we drove out of the city. As we passed the plaza across from the Cathedral, I saw out of the corner of my eye a sixteen-

*Continued on page 8*



The Newsletter for Mexicophiles

### THE MEXICO FILE

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# About Mexico

## Miguel de la Madrid Comes Clean

President Miguel de la Madrid, who governed Mexico from 1982 to 1988, has just published his memoirs where he has confessed what many believed to be true – the presidential election of 1988 that enshrined Carlos Salinas de Gortari was rigged. Basically, the PRI was losing badly to then Mexico City mayor Cuauhtémoc Cardenas of the PRD when the government declared that the computers counting the votes had crashed. They then announced that the long dominant PRI had once again won. Three years later an alliance was formed between the PRI and the conservative PAN party that agreed to burn the ballots, thereby destroying the only evidence of the stolen election. In an unrelated story, the U.S. is gearing up for computer balloting in the next presidential election, with no paper trail to be available on how each of us voted.

## Protected Marshlands Designated

The Environmental Department of Mexico has designated 34 areas as protected under the international Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. That makes 51 areas in 17 Mexican states that are now protected, making it the third-highest number of convention-protected areas worldwide. The requirements are that Mexico will have to increase spending to protect the newly designated areas

## Free Books, Fight Crime

Basing the concept on the idea that when people read, they become better people, Mexico City has started to hand out free books to subway riders in the hopes that they will return the books after finishing them. Some 250,000 books are being handed out during each morning's rush hour. The plan is to distribute some 7 million books in the next two years. Tokyo has had a similar plan for several years which seems to be a success.



## Virgin de Juquila *Continued*

The junction is well-marked. We took the Estrella Roja bus from the second class bus station near Abastos market in Oaxaca. It was designated a “first class” bus and only one or two a day make the trip to Juquila. The first class bus schedules apparently are driven by demand, so you cannot buy your ticket more than a day ahead and you may end up taking a second class bus for your return trip. From Juquila you can continue on by bus to Puerto Escondido.

Where to stay: We found it difficult to make reservations from Oaxaca city, but finally discovered a home where we paid for one night's lodging in the Hotel Juquila Plaza (Tel. 951-524-0066), because Hotel del Carmen had no vacancy. Another choice is Posada del Angel, at the plaza's southeast corner. Most visitors drive their “rooms” with them or camp out. December is the most popular month for pilgrimages to Juquila, definitely not a good month to go without a tent or room reservations.



## Quintana Roo *Continued*

If you yearn for more pirate tales, stop by the excellent Subacuatico-CEDAM Museum in Puerto Aventuras north of Tulum. Check out Museo de la Cultura Maya in Chetumal, and Posada del Capitan Lafitte, four kilometers north of Playa del Carmen, to see the white sand beaches that may have attracted one pirate extraordinaire. Locate a copy of CEDAM founder Pablo Bush Romero's Under the Waters of Mexico. Venture over to Isla Mujeres' newly renovated Hacienda Munadaca and see the pirate's gardens now made into a small zoo. Walk through the cemetery there, or drive to Dzilam de Bravo, Yucatan, to view Lafitte's commemorative plaque and find the gravestone with his name on it.

Ahoy, matie! There's treasure to be found.



**CEDAM  
commemo-  
rative  
plaque  
to John  
Lafitte**

## Afoot in Mexico *Continued*



**A view of the bandstand in the main plaza at Tlaquepaque**

foot vertical flesh-colored balloon with a smiling face painted on it cavorting around the fountain. Unsure of what I had seen, we circled the block to look again, and found to our utter amazement a large gathering of young people moving among several tents with five or six of the balloons mixing with the crowd. It turned out to be an all-day exhibition and lecture series, passing out literature and having speakers pertaining to safe sex and AIDS prevention – definitely not a sight I ever expected to see anywhere in Mexico, especially not fifteen feet from the doors of the celebrated Cathedral of Guadalajara.

*Watch for the second part of Lynne's article in the April 2004 issue of Mexico File.*



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