



Campeche's cathedral, with its restrained baroque façade

Campeche: The Real Deal

Story and photos by Jane Onstott

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We assumed the young man and woman were pirates. The pirate crew, that is. The crew of the fantasy pirate ship that was to cruise us around the Bay of Campeche, singing "Avast Me Hearty!" songs, swinging from the rigging, landing punches. One of them might have to walk the plank.

It turns out that like us, they were also clients hoping to see the ship owner or tour operator, whoever was responsible for the cancellation of our three-hour bay cruise, do some plank walking.

On another visit I drove all by my lonesome in my rental car to see the famous Xtacumbilxunaan Caves. But there was no caretaker to admit me, no guide: The place was deserted. It was late in the day and I'd seen a few fine, out-of-the-way Maya ruins, so I didn't mind so much. But if that had been my one-and-only destination of the day, or something I was planning to write about, I might have been downright pissed.

As a tourist destination, Campeche compares to Cancun like a *cenote* to Sea World. The latter is man-made, engineered, expensive – lots of fun is all but guaranteed. A *cenote* (the English word "sinkhole" somehow doesn't conjure the magic) is an above- or below-ground limestone pond; each of the thousands found throughout the Yucatan peninsula is unique. To continue my metaphor, your *cenote* experience is fluid, more spontaneous, and less predictable.

Who Goes There?

Unlike Playa del Carmen, dominated by Europeans, and Cabo San Lucas, where Americans are firmly in control, Campeche attracts – more than any other nationality – Mexicans interested in their own culture and heritage. The state's seafood recipes are admired throughout the country, and *defeños* (people from Mexico City) and *veracruzanos* come to attend business conferences or with their families for holiday. Despite a long-standing rivalry between Yucatan and Campeche states, people from Merida regularly make the three-hour trip. And why not? Campeche's snug, 9x5-block historical center is far more beautiful than

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Hispanic Apodos (Nicknames): Profession, Affection, and Physical Characteristics

by John G. Gladstein

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One dictionary defines nickname as: "A descriptive name used instead or along with the real name of a person, place, or thing ("Nickname"). In the Hispanic culture, the nickname is usually given because of a person's profession, a term of affection or because of some physical characteristic.

Nicknames are used much more in Hispanic culture than Anglo culture. Hispanic culture also puts more importance on the profession of an individual than does Anglo culture. Hispanics are proud of their profession(s), and it is more common for a son to follow in his father's footsteps and do in adult life what the father has done. Hence, the professions of the father and mother are admired and imitated by children.

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I was doing some computer research recently when I landed on a page of statistics about all things in Mexico. It gave the usual stats concerning population, climate, natural resources, birth rates, religion, etc. I wanted to find something that I had never read before, a fact that would surprise me. Then, there it was. At the end of the several paged document were two references that forced a smile and may have told me more about the country than anything I have read in the past year. The subject was Airports. Total: 1,848. Airports with paved runways: 238. Airports with unpaved runways: 1,610. The next category was Highways. Total: 316,382 km. Paved highways: 96,221 km, Unpaved highways: 227,756 km. With all of the changes and progress Mexico has experienced over the past few decades in manufacturing, infrastructure, education and tourism, we sometimes forget that it is still, in many ways, a struggling, emerging country. And now, in 18 months they will be having one of their most important presidential elections in history.

The polls indicate right now the front-runner is populist Mexico City mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador representing the left-of-center PRD. Tied for second are Roberto Madrazo, president of the PRI and current president Vicente Fox's Interior Minister, Santiago Creel, of the conservative PAN. There is already a smear campaign in place to eliminate Obrador from the race. It's a complicated issue, but he may well be jailed before the election with trumped up charges of corruption and a minor land use issue where he had a road built to a hospital over "private property." The young, educated people of Mexico are fighting back by forming alliances and creating web sites to unify against what they see as a "politics as usual" corruption that has plagued the country throughout its history. Throw into the mix that the U.S. does not want Obrador to succeed. There will be a ramping up in the corporate press about the "war on drugs" and how we need to protect "U.S. interests," rationalizing our involvement in Mexico's affairs. This would not be unique in our history.

There was one other stat that put me at ease. Miles of Coastline: 5,784.

Campeche *Continued*

Merida's. And since no buses are allowed, it's both quieter and nearly pollution-free. In fact, Campeche's historic district is hands down the most walking- and breathing-friendly of any capital city in Mexico. Like a Peter Max poster of Disneyland's Pirates of the Caribbean, its one- and two-story buildings are painted vivacious yet dignified colors (ochre yellow, Venetian red, celestial blue) trimmed in white. Wrought iron lamps light the street scene at night.

In human relationships, opposite personalities initially attract but ultimately exasperate. And so it is with Campeche – what attracts me can also annoy me. Spontaneity and naiveté, a lack of sophistication and commercialization is what Campeche's about. But choosing a minor destination rather than a major resort means embracing, or at least accepting, a certain lack of polish and efficiency. I suppose Campeche is no more disorganized than elsewhere in Mexico, but the fact that there are relatively few tourists seems to make it difficult for *campechanos* to deliver tours and other services at definitive schedules.

Last month's pirate cruise never happened, nor did a Saturday night theatrical performance at **Casa Seis**, a cultural center facing Campeche's main plaza. The restored colonial-era house (whose rooms of authentic period furnishings would look more convincing without the bar-code inventory stickers) is open to visitors and supposedly has weekend performances depicting what life was like when this city was routinely sacked and ransacked by pirates.

The show never happened. We don't know why. Luckily my friend Terry and I are stoic and seasoned travelers, so we hitched up our pants and headed out into the salt-tinged night air, straight to the nearest bar. The night air was chilly when we arrived at a bar favored by ocean-loving types and travelers who've docked at the point's small



These beautiful doors have been around for centuries.



Downtown Campeche is all glamour, no glitz.

marina. We ended the evening serenaded by the sea and by a halfway inebriated man at the next table, who in lyrical colloquialisms told us he was going to pee in his pants if he didn't find the bathroom soon. So we did get a sort of a show, but without the pirates.

But Campeche is not all chaos and disappointments, far from it. Its recently updated *mercado municipal* has a new exhaust system to suck out the butcher-shop smells, and all stalls have new stainless steel counters. There's a parking structure on the roof and an elevator down to the ground floor. In the clothing area, we found some exquisite dresses and blouses at very reasonable prices. Pedro Sainz de Baranda Municipal Market is orderly and clean; vendors are friendly. It's a wonderful market. Hopefully this municipal treasure will continue to compete in the 21st century with the city's pride and joy, the new Sam's Club.

Bully for Bulwarks

Most of the 10-foot-thick defensive wall that once surrounded the city center has fallen or been dismantled, but seven of eight original *baluartes* (bastions) that connected the octagonal wall remain. Near the market on the northwest side of downtown, **Baluarte de San Pedro** has all the accouterments necessary for good old-fashioned warfare, including rooftop gunnery slits and watchtowers. A 17th-century toilet is a hole in a stuccoed bench, falling straight to the ground below, hidden within a tiny private cell. The roof also had an escape-proof space where prisoners could be broiled in the sun, presumably prior to confessing the location of buried

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Outside the historical center, store owners are free to express themselves artistically.

treasure. Downstairs, a small gift shop sells fine hats from Becal (home to the misnamed Panama hat). Unusual, natural-colored women's shawls of loosely woven cotton look like hammocks for cold shoulders. There are pictures made from gigantic, mica-like fish scales and other regional crafts, including hammocks.

Heading counter-clockwise from St. Pete's bulwark, **Baluarto de Santiago** now defends only the X'much Haltún Botanical Garden. It's a small collection of plants, but it's free and worth a look. Near the city's main plaza, **Baluarto de la Soledad** houses a collection of Maya stelae. The 1,000-year-old, 10-foot stelae are impressive, although the presentation is unsophisticated, and few details about the stone monoliths are given. Next door, the **puerta de mar** was in days of yore opened only to admit skiffs from ships anchored offshore. Today it's the main entrance to the old district from the malecón.

The malecón is both the city's main thoroughfare and a miles-long cement seawalk punctuated with fountains, statues, and exercise equipment. Most of the year, it's busy in the early morning with joggers and walkers, in the evening lovers snuggle on the built-in benches, and families and friends enjoy a stroll and each others' company after the heat of the day has abated. In January, however, the wind off the bay whipped our hair and chilled our faces even during the day. Terry had begun to use the



The main municipal market is great for browsing and people-watching.

fleece-lined corduroy coat she'd brought from Washington state. (I went for the layered approach.) Those who dislike the non-stop sweat-a-thons that visits to coastal Mexico tend to provoke may want to plan their visit between December and February, when the weather is coolest. The water (swimming pools, cenotes, and the ocean), however, is almost too cool for bathing.

Continuing counter-clockwise from the sea gate, el **Baluarto de San Carlos** has a small museum of historical memorabilia. Between **Baluarto San Juan** and the **puerta de tierra**,

The privy at Baluarte San Pedro



or land gate, is the only intact section of the old wall. You can walk along the top of the wall between one and the other and imagine what the inner and outer cities must have looked like long ago. Because of ongoing maintenance and strict civil codes, the historic downtown – a UNESCO patrimony of mankind site – looks quite a bit as it did 400 years ago.

The bastions and walls surrounding the city for the most part kept out remorseless pirates who so enjoyed sacking and burning the city before the barrier was completed. But they were of no help to the ships that anchored offshore laden with goods en route to the Old World, primarily dyewood, mahogany, salt, chicle, henequen, and other natural products. In return for these products, Campeche merchants would receive the luxuries that helped make their "outpost existence" a bit more civilized, like European furniture and Chinese silks. Campeche's cargo ships remained vulnerable until two forts were finally constructed, at either end of the city, in the mid-19th century.

Today, both forts are museums. **Fuerte San Miguel** has the **Museum of Maya Culture**, with ancient stelae, pottery, and jewelry as well as the contents of several royal tombs discovered at the ancient city of Calakmul. At the other end of town, at **Fuerte San Jose el Alto**, the **Museum of Boats and Arms** has items of interest to admirers of war and nautical themes.

Get Out and About

As welcoming and walkable as is historic Campeche, what lurks outside these walls is equally compelling, if not as tidy. Campeche state has more Maya ruins than either Quintana Roo or Yucatan state. Its two-lane highways are decently signed and maintained; even the long road penetrating enormous, once-remote Calakmul Biosphere Reserve has been paved.

One of the state's most impressive archaeological sites, **Edzná** is less than an hour outside the capital. Between 2,500 and 4,000 people visit Chichén Itzá, in Yucatan state, on a typical day. Edzná, on the other hand, might get one to two dozen sightseers. Without the distraction of hordes of people, it is possible to enjoy the natural beauty and the colossal architecture of the thousand-year-old buildings on a whole new level.

On our most recent visit, Erik Mendicuti, our extremely knowledgeable and friendly guide, led Terry and me along a nature trail before entering the site itself. We saw one of many *chultunes*, man-made holes that formed part of an extensive storage system to capture the area's scant rainfall. Entering the main plaza, we admired a ball court and many graceful, Late Classic buildings. A light wind blessed the site, and flowers fluttered to the ground from a towering ceiba tree. My friend Terry, a *curandera* and *bruja*, scooped up some of



Casa Seis has been restored to some of its 17th-century splendor.



Hacienda de San Diego, Chihuahua

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Somewhere under the relentless sun of the Chihuahua Desert, between the city of Casas Grandes and the village of Mata Ortiz, in the north central part of the state of Chihuahua lie the ruins of the Hacienda de San Diego, once the property of one Luis Terrazaz.

In the 1860's, during the French occupation of Mexico by Maximillian, Luis Terrazaz was the governor of the state of Chihuahua. When Benito Juarez was ousted as president, Terrazaz supported him during the two-year period that he hid out in the state's capital city. Once Juarez regained the presidency, he rewarded Terrazaz by giving him thousands of acres of "dead land" confiscated from the Catholic church. This land had always had cattle on it, but most were wild without any brand, so along with the land, Terrazaz received the cattle as well, at one count numbering in excess of 750,000 head.

Before the Revolution, the haciendas of northern Mexico were constantly attacked by Apaches, some from the United States, who wantonly stole the cattle. Laws were established and a special force was born (commonly believed in Mexico to be the origin of the Texas Rangers) for the sole purpose of hunting and killing Apaches. Military settlements were built near the

Hanging in solitary splendor just inside the main entrance arch is this very large wrought iron cross. The present residents of the hacienda report that this cross remains from the time of Luis Terrazaz, which seems possible in its somewhat protected location.



The front facade of the crumbling Hacienda de San Diego. The center arches frame the primary entrance; to the right is what was once a grand salon; to the left are the living quarters of the family presently in residence.

largest haciendas and owners shared the land in exchange for protection. By 1903, due to the ferocity of these forces, the Apache problem was pretty much resolved and hacienda owners, among them Luis Terrazaz, having no further need of their protection, tried to oust the soldiers still living on their lands. These soldiers eventually became Pancho Villa's revolutionaries and began their service in the Revolution with a built-in grievance and seeking revenge against the hacendados of Chihuahua.

In 1910, at the beginning of the Revolution, Luis Terrazaz owned twenty-nine haciendas throughout the state of Chihuahua, fully half of the state's territory, and was considered the wealthiest man in Mexico. At one point, he declared to the American press that "Chihuahua is mine!!" Within the year, he had been exiled to the United States by Pancho Villa, who confiscated all of his land and used his cattle as food for his troops and also to barter with the US for weapons. In 1923, at the age of 101, Terrazaz returned to the City of Chihuahua from El Paso, but he had lost 80% of his wealth, and he was never able to return to his lands or his magnificent haciendas, which along with most of the property of the wealthy classes of Mexico, became *ejido* land to be distributed to the country's peasants.

Today, this most elaborate of Terrazaz's properties is a crumbling ruin inhabited by the descendants of the campesinos who were living on it at the end of the Revolution. Unable to maintain the ornate main building, the current residents reside in one corner of it and earn their living raising cattle and horses,



farming and charging tourists to roam throughout the property, imagining the luxury and romance of times past.

Perhaps because I lived in a restored urban hacienda of sorts as a child in Cuernavaca (although it was nothing like the size of San Diego), or maybe because I have seen and been enchanted by the huge henequen plantations of the Yucatan that have been restored and turned into luxury homes and B&B's by brave and enterprising Americans, I was instantly sucked bigtime into the nostalgia that permeates these wrecks of structures at San Diego. Built in the grandiose style of architecture known as Porfirismo, these buildings loom huge and silent in the center of waving fields of desert grass with the foothills of the Sierra Madres blue and purple in the distance, and an occasional child passing by riding bareback on a magnificent Arabian horse. It is beyond simple to lean against a massive stone arch, close your eyes and hear the swishing skirts, gentle laughter and soft music that once was so integral to these shaded porticoes.



In a rear cupola corner, it is especially sad to see how the portico roof has rotted through, leaving the stucco and tile floor below open to the elements.

As we wandered from one destroyed room to another, we could see

clearly through the dust and cobwebs the vestiges of that long-ago life style. In one space, most likely a dining room, we could see the remains of an immense crystal chandelier; in another – possibly a kitchen – we found a vast stone hearth and an intricately tiled floor bordered by a mosaic in the Greek key pattern. In a far corner room, there was an arced opening in the wall that suggested to us the space might once have contained a chapel or prayer room, so integral to remote country living in the Mexico of yesteryear. In the center courtyard are the vestiges of a large stone fountain as well as a few

untended flowering trees and plants. Most of the original hand-carved doors are gone, burned for fuel during an excessively cold winter, the daughter of the house told us, but some thick



At the very top of the ornate entrance to the hacienda is a sandstone crest with the name of the house and the initials of Luis Terrazaz, still in almost pristine condition – a telling symbol of a bygone era in Mexico.



In this view of the courtyard of the building, the vestiges of the central fountain is over-run with weeds and wildflowers. While the arch leading to the rear portion of the house remains in fairly good condition, the areas of the building where the stucco has fallen from the original adobe blocks is very apparent. Also, one of the few original handmade wooden doors remains, although most of the handcarved decoration is long gone.

intricately-carved window shutters remain, and in the entranceway, hung proudly on the wall over a new log bench, is an enormous wrought iron cross said to be original to the structure.

I cannot fully explain the appeal of this remote and desiccated place, a decaying symbol of a lifestyle with which I generally have no sympathy, but there is no way to deny that appeal there is. I'd love to say it lies in the remains of the once-splendid architecture, or even in the beauty of the horses wandering over the grounds, or possibly in the grace of the high stone arches, but I truly cannot pin it down to any of these things. I can only say that it was an unforgettable experience to stand in the center of this living monument to a way of life that actually did exist in Mexico, instead of just reading about it, and – letting my imagination completely gallop away from me – to feel the ghosts of that long-ago time whispering around me. Hopeless romantic? Sure, I would never deny that, especially where Mexico is concerned. But even so, for the price of a buck or two, if you happen to be in the area, this mysterious and lovely place is

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This view of one of the corner cupolas fronting the main building illustrates some of the worst of the building's decay. While most of the sandstone trim and corner blocks have held up reasonably well, some of the huge wooden beams have rotted away. The surface mars in the stucco are said to have been caused by bullets during the Revolution.



Campeche *Continued*

Each level of Edzná's Five-Story Building was built in a different era.



the blossoms to save for conjuring purposes.

Traditional Maya believe that this beautiful tree connects heaven, earth, and the netherworld. Interested not only in the esoteric and intuitive, the Maya were awesome astronomers long before Copernicus trained his naked eye on the skies. So precise were first-millennium Maya priests in their calculations, that they routinely predicted the appearance of comets, the annual solstices, and other celestial events.

At Edzná, two well-preserved masks on the **Temple of the Stone Masks** provide a physical representation of the sun god, Kinich Ahau. The giant molded stucco figure on the far east side of the building represents the rising sun. On the west side, the setting sun is depicted with crossed eyes, an attribute prized by the Maya elite. Both have the filed teeth and ear plugs also favored by the gentry of the time. A hint of the original red and blue pigment gives only a small clue as to what these buildings might have looked like when painted in full color.

The Maya custom of constructing new buildings over old – instead of ripping them down and remodeling – is responsible for the preservation of incredible art, like these sun god masks. Today, a palm-thatch roof shields the figures from further destruction by the elements.



Cross-eyed Kinich Ahau represents the setting sun.

On my most recent visit, I climbed the site's tallest and most impressive building, the **Five-Level Building**. Bats in crevices squeaked and purred. A large iguana scurried about in plain view amid the ruined temples and ritualistic steam bath on the uppermost platform. I used to be afraid of heights, and was fearful of climbing the narrow, sometimes slippery stone steps of Mexico's pyramids. Coming down was even worse. I would crawl down at an agonizingly slow pace, crab-like, crouching – afraid to look down and afraid to stop. After decades of practice I can now walk upright on the diagonal course I've learned makes the trip up or down less dizzying.

Who was there to applaud my most recent descent to Edzná's broad main acropolis, dotted with magical ceibas, slender chicle trees, and round altars? Just Erik and Terry, and a jade-blue motmot or two, winging among the silent trees.

IF YOU GO

Accommodations

High end

Open since 2004, the **Hacienda Puerta Campeche** (Calle 59 #71, centro, tel. 981/816-7508 or in the U.S., Canada 888/625-5144, starwoodhotels.com) is the first and only luxury hotel in the state. A city block of colonial houses was converted to sumptuous rooms and public spaces. Prices start at \$159. It's located just across from la Puerta de Tierra, or land gate. A lovely place for a special retreat... and so far, prices are far below those of Mexico's other Starwood properties.

Budget Hotel

Hotel Colonial (Calle 14 #122 between Calles 55 and 57, centro, tel. 981/816-2222 or 816-2630) is alluringly old-fashioned and downright cheap, at less than \$30 per night for a double.

Ultra Economy

For rock-bottom prices and a younger crowd of international travelers, check into **Hostal del Pirata** (Calle 59 #47 between Calles 14 and 16, centro, tel. 981/811-1757). A bed in the clean, spare, dorm rooms goes for \$8 a night including Continental breakfast at the cheerful patio café. The few private rooms go for \$18 apiece – quite a deal.

Food

At "restaurant row," near Col. San Román on the malecón, are several restaurants recommended by locals, including **Roma**

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Generally speaking, Hispanics tend to stick more to a profession and change careers less often than Anglos. A person who takes up a profession as a young adult may carry the nickname until death, even though a career change takes place. Some common nicknames that deal with professions are *maestro* (teacher or any profession where a great deal of skill is needed, such as carpenter, craftsman, musician, bricklayer, or even laborer). Of further interest is that in Mexico and other Latin American countries where bullfighting is practiced, members of the bullfighting team will have the nickname *maestro* due to their particular area of expertise in *la Corrida de Toros*. A butcher might carry the nickname of *carnicero* and a salesman *vendedor*. In the education field *profesor* is a common nickname and is sometimes shortened to *el profe*. Medical doctors almost always have the nickname *doctor* or *médico*. A lawyer will usually have the nickname *licenciado* (the name of his degree which is equal to a bachelor of arts or science), and dentists and veterinarians will usually be called *doctor*. A milkman will have *lechero* and a tailor *sastre*. The definite article *el* or *la* (the) sometimes will accompany the nickname and other times not. Nicknames with reference to a profession in Anglo culture are rarely used with the exception of some legal and medical nicknames.

Hispanics use the shortened form of the name or diminutive just as is done in the Anglo system to show affection. In the Anglo system, Johnny becomes John in later life and Tommy becomes Tom. Susie usually later converts her name to Sue or Susan and Patty to Pat. It is common that later in life the individual will lose the shortened name form in the Anglo system. This is seldom the case with the Hispanic system. Many times the shortened form will stay with the person until death. A colleague relates that in Mérida, Yucatán, a friend and a group of merchants would play dominos usually in a back nook of a bar from around 11:00 a.m. until time to go home for *comida*. All these men had been friends since childhood and they still called each other by the nicknames they had received when they were little boys (Trimble). Some common diminutives are Toño for Antonio, Concha for Concepción, Quique for Enrique, Pepe for José, Pili for Pilar, Pancho for Francisco, Teté for Teresa, Chabela for Isabel, Chico for Francisco, Chuy for Jesús, Lola for Dolores, Lupe for Guadalupe and Memo for Guillermo.

The third form of placing nicknames relates to a special physical characteristic, racial group, or in some cases a deformity. To the Anglo, this practice may seem cruel. However, in Hispanic culture it is seen more as a sign of

affection or *cariño* than trying to highlight the physical characteristic. “The Anglo sees it as difficult to get used to in the Spanish speaking culture the way that seemingly insulting nicknames are bandied about, without causing any offense whatsoever. For example, Tito calls his father “*Viejo*” (old) rather than “*Papa*” [sic]. Everyone has a nickname, and it is usually based on personal appearance or racial background – just the things we seem to most avoid talking about in modern English” (Vanesita). How would most English speakers feel about being called by names which bring attention to some of their most unattractive physical features (like “fatty” or “chrome-dome”)? The Mexicans think nothing of calling someone *Gorda*, or *Gordita* if the person is a young girl or *Flaco* (skinny) or *Chato* (pug-nose). Most Mexicans [and Hispanics] with these designated names wear them proudly and wouldn’t think of protesting them, much less changing them” (“Surnames”).

At times, a person will be given a nickname pertaining to a physical characteristic when the characteristic does not exist. For example, as a child Juan was called *flaco* because he was skinny. As he grew older he put on weight and is no longer skinny. However, the nickname *flaco* will probably stay with him for life. Another example would be to give the nickname *zanahoria* (carrot) to a red headed male, although the male has no physical characteristic linking him to a carrot (Santa Cruz).

Sometimes in Hispanic culture, a nickname is given to a person with a double meaning attached. In one instance, a tailor was given the nickname *El Tigre* (the tiger). The tailor felt very proud and honored thinking that this nickname was given for his speed and skill in making fine clothing and his ability for repairing. He later was disheartened when he found out that he was given this nickname because his customers said he ripped and tore up all the clothing that he touched (“Santa Cruz”).

On occasion, a play on words is used when giving a nickname. A man was given the nickname *Príncipe Charro* (prince of the skilled horsemen). His pride and esteem were very high because people had given him such an elegant nickname. He later felt very deceived and somewhat embarrassed when he found out that his nickname contained a play on words and was really *Pinche Chaparro* (damned little short one) referring to his short physical stature (Santa Cruz).

We can surmise that the giving of nicknames will continue in Hispanic culture and will probably only be limited by the imagination

of the inventor. Anglo culture sees nicknames that address physical and racial characteristics as derogatory. The Hispanics, however, see the use of these nicknames as a way of placing affection on a person regardless of the circumstances. “This simple cultural observation may lead one to conclude that in fact, the Mexicans [and Hispanics in general] tend to be much more accepting of the uniqueness of the individual that we are likely to see north of the Rio Grande” (“Surnames”).

The following is a list of some of the more amusing *apodos*, the translation and the reason for the nickname.

Apodos

El Abrelatas. (Canopener): As a young man he had buck teeth. Brothers and sisters said he could open cans with his mouth. *El Abrelatas* lives and works in Austin, Texas.

El Baboso. (The slobberer, drooler): As a child he slobbered a lot. *El Baboso* lives in Big Spring, Texas.

La Bicicleta. (Bicycle): This man had bad body odor. His friends used to say *apestaba a rayos* (he stank to high heaven). *Rayos* (rays, beam of light) resemble spokes of a bicycle, therefore the nickname. *La Bicicleta* resided in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico.

La Buffy. (No translation): Used because as a young girl she had a large rear end, reminding persons of the rear end of a buffalo. *La Buffy* resides in Midland, Texas.

Chac Chi. (Maya for red mouth): This is a type of fish found off the Northern coast of Yucatán. The fish is of little commercial value and is not considered very palatable. This fisherman was given this nickname by other fishermen in jest because it seems this was the only type of fish he could catch. *Chac Chi* fishes today in Chichalub, Yucatán, Mexico.

La Chita. (Ankle bone but not used in this context): When the four year old brother asked his mother why he and his sister were not alike sexually, the mother replied that little boys were called *chito* and little girls *chita*. The nickname stuck for life. *La Chita* lives in Big Spring, Texas.

El Chango. (Monkey): As a child this person was very active swinging on household furniture. His parents gave him the nickname. *El Chango* still resides in Big Spring, Texas.

El Chueco. (Twisted or crooked): One side of his face appears crooked or twisted due to paralysis of the facial nerve (“Rutledge”). *El Chueco* now is serving a long sentence in *el*

Apodos *Continued*

Reclusario del Norte federal prison in Mexico, D. F., Mexico.

Coa. (A tool used in the Yucatán to cut grass and weeds): A skilled gardener, Francisco was given this nickname by clients and colleagues for his ability to handle the tool and his excellent ability to cut grass and weeds. *Coa* lives close to Dzibilchaltún, Yucatán, Mexico.

Las Cucaras. Taken from the noun *cucaracha* (Cockroach): Used to describe travel habits of a part of a family. Their behavior sometimes reminds other family members of actions of cockroaches as they always travel together and in caravans when going places. *Las Cucaras* live in Midland, Texas.

Curro. (No translation): Usually given to a very handsome, well dressed man who is popular with women. Sometimes this nickname is given to the chief bullfighter or *matador*.

Ex: *El matador* Curro Durán from Spain and *el matador* Curro Rivera of Mexico. *Curro* currently resides in Midland, Texas.

Gafas de Coca. (Coke bottle lens): His glasses were so thick, they reminded other students of the bottom of the old fashion coke bottle. *Gafas* lives and works outside of Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico.

La Huera. (The blond, fair or North American woman): Used to dye her hair blond and powder her skin in order to appear more fair. *La Huera* lives in Creel, Chihuahua, Mexico.

Matador. (The killer): Nickname given to the bullfighter who actually kills the bull. There are many *matadores* in countries that have bullfighting. Pictured is the *El Matador* Jorge Gutierrez of San Luis Potosí, Mexico.

La Mayonesa. (Mayonnaise legs): Given because when she wore a bathing suit, her legs were so white they reminded people of mayonnaise. *La Mayonesa* lives and works in Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico.

El Mocho. (Blunt, mutilated, chopped): When he was young he lost two fingers. Friends gave him the nickname. *El Mocho* resides in Big Spring, Texas.

El Palomo. (The cock, pigeon): As a young man he was pigeon breasted with an extended rib cage and sternum. *El Palomo* hangs his hat in Big Spring, Texas.

Pechos. (Breasts): As a young boy he had large breasts that would shake when he walked. His schoolmates gave him the name. *Pechos* lives in Progreso, Yucatán, Mexico.

El Pecoso. (The freckled one): Given this nickname because he had a lot of freckles. *El Pecoso* at last word was a resident of the Texas State Penitentiary in Huntsville, Texas.

El Pollero. (Poulterer): This man is 78 years old and married to a woman more than forty years younger. His friends gave him this nickname out of respect. *El Pollero* resides and works in Creel, Chihuahua, Mexico.

El Rastreador. (The tracker): Given to a border patrol agent for his ability to hunt down and follow tracks of illegal immigrants in the sandy soil of South Texas. *El Rastreador* used to be stationed in Brownsville, Texas.

Ratón. (Mouse or rat): This individual was given this nickname because his friends thought he had the face of a rat. *Ratón* lived

Campeche *Continued*

(Resurgimiento 83, tel. 981/811-2129) for Italian food and **El Cactus** (Av. Justo Sierra y Malecón, 981/811-1453) for steaks. Justifiably famous with Campeche families, and a must-do for visitors, is **Cenaduría Los Portales** (Portales de San Francisco, Calle 10 #86, near San Francisco church, off Av. Miguel Alemán northwest of the historical center). Open for dinner only, 6 to midnight, Los Portales serves delicious clove-and-honey-spiked ham sandwiches, tacos, tostadas, and a bunch of less familiar but equally yummy local treats. Within the historical district, try **Restaurant Campeche** (Calle 57 between Calles 8 and 10, tel. 981/816-2128). It sits directly across from the main plaza, serves a variety of international and regional dishes, and is open daily between 6:30 a.m. and midnight.

Taking a Break

Campeche is a pretty quiet city; entertainment is limited. Have a drink in the pretty central kiosk on the **plaza principal**,



This bright red trolley is a comfortable way to tour the city.

or overlook it from the balcony of **Casa Vieja** (Calle 10 between Calles 57 and 55, tel. 981/811--8016) a Cuban-Campeche-fusion restaurant bar. For a blue-tinted evening in an intimate restaurant bar, go to **Iguana Azul** (Calle 55 between Calles 10 and 12, tel. 981/816-3978). The friendly folks at **Las Puertas** (Calle 10 #415, between Calles Bravos and Allende, San Román, tel. 981/811-4694) café serve breakfast, coffees, cake and pastries. It's an arty ambience and a nice place to hang.

Guide

Erik Mendicuti can be contacted at (981) 815-8785 or cell (044-981) 101-5957. ❁ ❁ ❁



The swimming pool at Starwood's Hacienda Puerta Campeche



THE MEXICO FILE

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About Mexico

Ambassador and the Heiress

Texan-born U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Tony Garza, has become engaged to Maria Asuncion Aramburuzabala, heiress to a family fortune worth \$1.5 billion. Included in her portfolio are Grupo Modelo, which makes Corona beer amongst others, as well as Grupo Televisa. Garza has never been married and she is once divorced.

Mexican Composer Dies

The composer of the romantic hit song, "Besame Mucho," Consuelo Velazquez, died recently in Mexico City from heart problems. Having started playing the piano at age four, Velazquez penned her famous ballad in 1941 and it soon became a world-wide hit as it was recorded by various artists. More recent renditions have been covered by Placido Domingo, Luis Miguel, and even the Beatles.

Ancient Find in Chapultepec

Scientists have discovered the remains of ten people in Mexico City's large Chapultepec Park, one dating back to 1,300 B.C. The discoveries are part of a major project sponsored by the National Museum of History in an ongoing study of preHispanic culture in Mexico City.

Private Investment In Oil

Mexico's government oil company Pemex is drawing up contracts that for the first time will provide for private, foreign and domestic investment in drilling for crude. It is expected that the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico contain some 54 billion barrels of crude oil, more than the country's current total reserves. The Chicontepec field in the state of Veracruz has potential reserves of 139 million barrels. These totals would put Mexico in the class of Iraq and Kuwait as major world oil producers. There will be significant opposition within the country to allowing foreign investment in oil of any kind, as oil produces 60% of the country's gross revenues.



Apodos *Continued*

in Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico.

El Resorte. (The bedspring): His manner of walking and the up and down motion resembled the motions of a bedspring going up and down. *El Resorte* lives and works in Rio Grande, Texas.

El Sabelotodo. (To know it all, to know everything): Given to a person who either knows all or thinks they know all. In Spain it is written and pronounced *El sabelotó*—Andalusian Spanish omits the last intervocalic d when spoken. ("Trimble") *El Sabelotodo* or *El Sabelotó* resided in Montilla, Córdoba, Spain.

Tuerto. (Blind or blind in one eye): This man was cross eyed and his friends gave him the nickname. *Tuerto* lived in Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico.

El Urraca. (Magpie, loud talking bird related to the crow): This person talked a lot and loudly but very seldom has anything interesting to say. *El Urraca* lives in Midland, Texas.

Vibora. (Snake, serpent): Was tall and skinny and licked his lips with his tongue constantly when talking resembling the tongue of a snake. *Vibora* resides in Houston, Texas.

El Wixón. (Pronounced weee-shón) (The big pisser, one who urinates frequently): A combination of the Maya word for urine *wix* combined with the Spanish superlative *ón*. As a baby he used to urinate frequently. *El Wixón* now an adult, works and lives in the Maya village of Timucuy, Yucatán, Mexico.

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Hacienda *Continued*

not just something to see, but rather is to be experienced. No kidding.



These graceful portico arches outside what was once a dining room frame a breathtaking view of the foothills surrounding the several thousand acre property, one of twenty-nine such ranches owned by Luis Terrazas at the turn of the century.



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