The Eye

Beach, Village + Urban Living in Mexico
Huatulco · Issue 155
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FREE

In this Issue

The Convention Centre -
Huatulco's Unfinished Promise

Ants in the Selva Seca

Pilgrimage South:
A Journey of Calling, Community, and Return

Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals in Mexico

Pilgrimage

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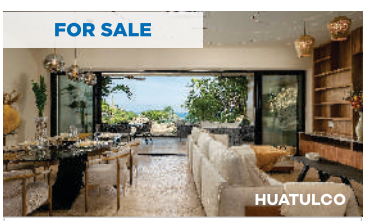

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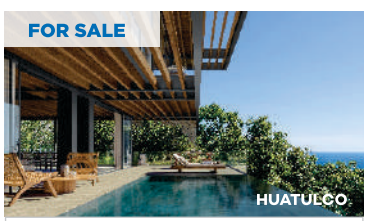

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Editor's Letter

"I'm going to Graceland, Graceland, Memphis, Tennessee
I'm going to Graceland
Poor boys and pilgrims with families
And we are going to Graceland
My traveling companion is nine years old
He is the child of my first marriage
But I've reason to believe we both will be received in Graceland"
Paul Simon, singer and songwriter

If you are reading this, you have probably already undertaken a lot of journeys to get here. A pilgrimage is often associated with religion, but there are many other roads than the one to God that lead to salvation. Maybe salvation is too powerful a word for some journeys- communion, perhaps.

It would make sense for this topic to tell of my own journey to my Mexican life almost 30 years ago, but when I think of pilgrimage, I think of a road trip I took with my daughter.

Even though I had already been living in Mexico for close to 15 years, I had several items in Canada that I didn't want to part with: art my father left me when he died, a few pieces of furniture. We all have things we don't want to part with just yet. I purchased an old Canada Post truck, filled it up, and my nine-year-old daughter and I took a road trip from Montreal to Huatulco.

It was hot, like driving in a sardine can. The radio didn't work, but we had an iPod that played music through a speaker. In college, I was briefly obsessed with a book called *Reflections on the Birth of the Elvis Faith*, which likened the Elvis following to a religious phenomenon. So when my daughter and I found ourselves rumbling along the highway near Memphis, Tennessee, the words to Paul Simon's Graceland came back to me: "My traveling companion is nine years old." Without hesitation, we veered towards Graceland.

What back in the 1970s what was considered a mansion now just looked like a large suburban house. I asked people on the shuttle if it was their first time, and for most, it wasn't. For many, it was an annual pilgrimage; for some, like us, a curiosity. Were we part of the pilgrimage or observers?

We toured the house, and when we reached the Jungle Room, my daughter said, "Like the song." She meant *Walking in Memphis* - we had listened to it on some stretch of highway through Ohio.

Saw the ghost of Elvis
On Union Avenue
Followed him up to the gates of Graceland
Then I watched him walk right through
Now security they did not see him
They just hovered 'round his tomb
But there's a pretty little thing
Waiting for the King
Down in the Jungle Room

As people, journeying, searching, and having faith in something other than our own immediate existence is perhaps the most unifying human experience. Does it really matter if we call this feeling and belief by different names?

See you next month,

Jane

Did you know *The Eye* is now in San Miguel de Allende? We've just launched our third issue in one of Mexico's coolest towns—a perfect counterpoint to the coast.
Scan the QR code to read the issue.

Scan me!

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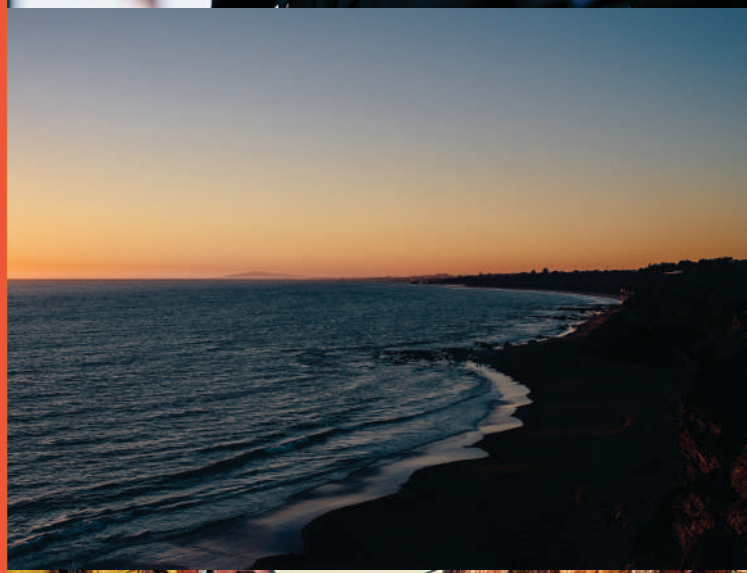
In This Issue



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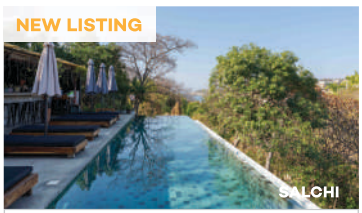

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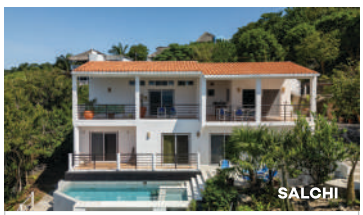

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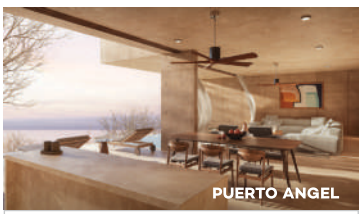

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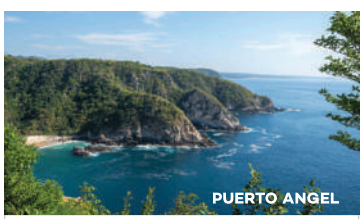

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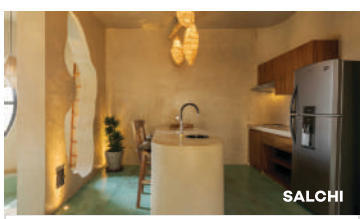

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A Pilgrimage Nobody Asked For

By Kary Vannice

When people talk about pilgrimage in Mexico, they usually envision a basilica or a shrine of spiritual significance, someplace established, sanctified, religious. A place where the route is well known, the motivation clear, and the rules are understood. The local community, for better or worse, is built around the incoming seekers.

But Huautla de Jiménez in the state of Oaxaca never had that luxury. What occurred there in the 1950s and 60s didn't align with the natural order of a pilgrimage destination. The people there didn't want to be a destination, and yet, without their consent, the world arrived anyway.

At the center of it all was a curandera (a healer) named María Sabina, of the Mazatec tradition, a local woman who performed ceremonies using psilocybin mushrooms to heal illness, resolve inner conflict, and restore energetic balance. Her ceremonies were based in ancient knowledge and were performed for local people and "hometown" problems.

But in 1955, a United States banker turned amateur ethnomycologist, R. Gordon Wasson, visited Huautla and participated in one of María Sabina's ceremonies. The experience affected him so deeply that he published an account of it in *Life* magazine.

And for Huautla, a town that had existed in near anonymity for centuries, this cast them directly into the limelight. *Life* was one of the most widely read magazines in the United States, and in a single article, Huautla was transformed from a place into an idea and, for many readers, into a destination.

Wasson's story presented the town not as a community, but as a doorway, a spiritual gateway that anyone who wanted could walk through. So, people came by the thousands to the small, remote village that was not prepared for global "fame," nor in any position to receive it.

Traditionally, pilgrimage sites develop over time. An infrastructure of support builds itself around the seekers who gravitate there. Communities have time to negotiate and navigate their relationship with the influx of outsiders. Huautla had no such opportunity. Visitors arrived faster than the town could accommodate them.

And unlike most pilgrims, they did not come at a specific time of year, or on a significant date that could be prepared for and, more importantly, recovered from. They came in a constant, unrelenting stream, consumers of an experience they knew little about. And many came without regard, reverence, or respect for the local people or their customs.

Sadly, their influence changed the local ceremonies forever, destroying the very thing they sought. The psilocybin mushrooms, once honored as "living wisdom," became objects of curiosity and experimentation.

María Sabina herself once said, "From the moment the foreigners arrived, the mushrooms lost their purity. They lost their force. The strangers spoiled them."

But the strangers didn't just spoil the mushrooms. They spoiled the sense of place, the sacredness of ancient customs, and they fractured the bonds of the community. The small village acquired a global reputation it did not choose and, ultimately, could not control.

The history books remember María Sabina as someone who "opened the door." A very convenient story for those who do not have to live with the consequences of its telling. Sabina was blamed by her community for the unexpected and unwelcome impact of the outsiders and lived much of her later years in isolation as an outcast, alone and disheartened.

This is the part of the story that rarely fits the pilgrims' romanticized narrative. Something they forget is that those who come can go home again, but the place cannot. Huautla will never again return to the humble, unassuming mountain town of its ancestors. It is forever changed and has been forced to adapt to the year-round seekers who still come in search of the mystical.

The story of Huautla shines a light on an uncomfortable question: who gets to decide when something sacred becomes a destination?

The people who came believed they were on a spiritual journey. But pilgrimage, in its traditional sense, implies responsibility, relationship, and a shared understanding between those who arrive and those who receive. In a modern world that makes access easy and distance irrelevant, there will be more places like Huautla, and more communities asked to adapt to stories they did not write.

Seen this way, the story is not really about María Sabina, or even about mushrooms. It is about what happens when the outside world decides something is meaningful and forgets that the people who live there are the ones who must live with what that meaning becomes.

Kary Vannice is a writer and energetic healer who explores the intersections of culture, consciousness, and daily life in Mexico.

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Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals in Mexico

By Marcia Chaiken and Jan Chaiken

Among the many pilgrimages that occur in Mexico, probably the ones with the oldest historical foundations are some Jewish observances. Known in Hebrew as the Shalosh Regalim, the "three pilgrimage festivals," the observance of these ancient practices was carried here by Jews who accompanied the Spanish conquistadors. They were practiced in secret, since the Spanish Inquisition imposed the death penalty on those who carried out Jewish observances.

Historically, the three Jewish pilgrimages occurred in the land of Israel during times when Temples existed in Jerusalem: Solomon's Temple, between the 10th and 6th centuries BCE, and the Second Temple, between 538 BCE and 70 CE.

Three times each year, marking the beginning of the spring barley harvest, the beginning of the summer wheat harvest, and the end of the annual fall harvests, Jewish law, as written in the Torah (Jewish scriptures), commanded that members of the twelve tribes of Israel travel from their home territories, largely by foot, up to the Temple in Jerusalem carrying specific offerings.

The three pilgrimages were known by names that are still used around the world, including in Mexico today. The spring harvest pilgrimage was also known as Passover (Pesaj); the beginning of the summer pilgrimage, Shavuot; and the fall pilgrimage, Sukkot, or the Feast of Booths (Cabañuelas).

In addition to offerings of the choicest of the harvest, each of the pilgrimages required sacrifices of animals brought by the pilgrims to the priests at the Temple. The Passover sacrifice was a one-year-old unblemished male lamb. The lamb was a reminder of the sacrifice of a lamb and shared meal that took place about 3,300 years ago on the night before the Israelite slaves were freed in Egypt and began their long journey toward the Promised Land.

Shavuot involved offerings of first fruits and loaves of bread baked from the choicest early wheat, along with a diverse selection of domesticated animals. Once again, the animals were chosen from the best of the herds and flocks and examined to ensure the absence of any blemish. These sacrifices reenacted the ceremonial offerings that, according to the Torah, took place at the foot of Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments were given to the Israelites.

The most noteworthy animal sacrifice for Sukkot entailed seventy bulls offered over the seven days of the pilgrimage festival. Temple rites for Sukkot also involved a far less bloody ceremony: the water ceremony. Pilgrims lined the path the priests followed from the Temple down to a pool of water at the bottom of the Temple Mount.

As the priests descended to fill their ceremonial bowls and climbed back up to the Temple, the pilgrims sang and danced in joy. They continued singing and dancing as the priests poured the water, together with wine, over the Temple altar, assuring all that there would be sufficient rain to produce abundant crops in the following year.

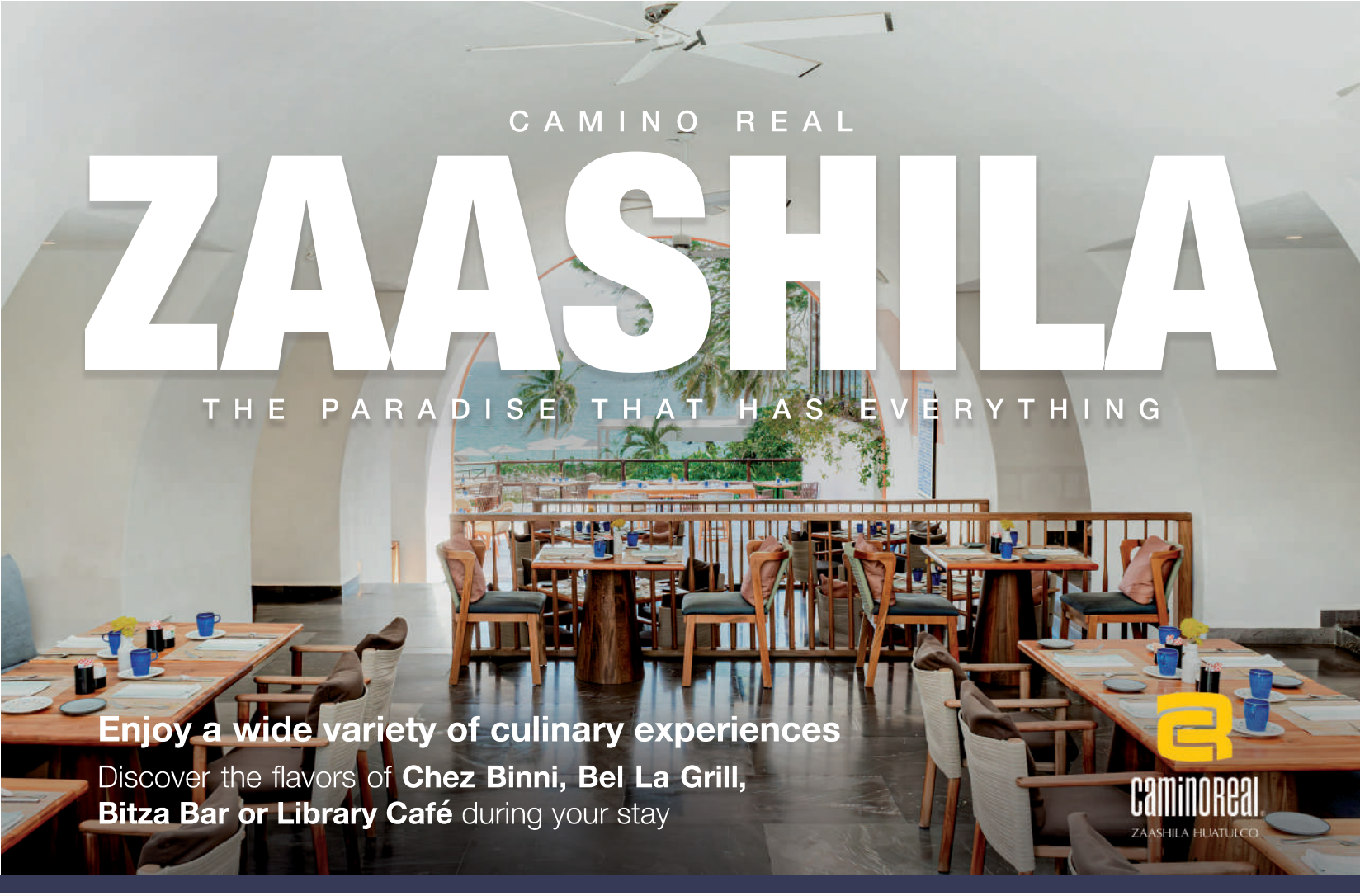
Pilgrimage to Jerusalem came to an end in 70 CE when the Roman army besieged the Temple Mount, almost completely destroyed the Temple, leaving only the Western Wall standing, killed a large portion of the Jewish population in the Holy Land, and sent thousands more into exile. With the destruction of the Temple and the end of priestly sacrifice, it fell to the rabbis to decide how Judaism could continue without pilgrimages to the Temple Mount or flesh-and-blood offerings. The discussions and debates that followed were recorded for posterity. Although physical pilgrimage ceased, the rabbis continued to refer to the festivals as the Shalosh Regalim, and each holiday remained a hag, the Hebrew word for pilgrimage, linguistically related to the Arabic hajj.

Since the end of the Inquisition in Mexico in 1820 and Mexico's independence from Spain shortly thereafter, the Shalosh Regalim have been openly practiced by observant (and not so observant) Jews. Passover seders, often large family and community gatherings, retell the story of the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. On the seder table, along with other symbolic foods, is a shank bone, a reminder of the original sacrificial lamb. On Shavuot, meals traditionally include grains and fruits reminiscent of those once harvested and brought to the Temple. On Sukkot, ceremonies involve four species of ancient plants. A bundle of willow, palm, and myrtle, called the lulav, when shaken produces a sound likened to falling rain. Although the water ceremony exists only in memory, Jews still sing and dance as they shake the lulav and pray for a year of sufficient rain to foster the coming crops.

As the hag of Passover ends, those gathered for seders often call out in Spanish, "Este año estamos aquí; el próximo año, en Jerusalén." ("This year we are here; next year, in Jerusalem.")

2026 Festival Dates
Passover begins on the evening of Wednesday, April 1, 2026, and concludes Thursday, April 9, 2026
.
Shavuot begins on the evening of Thursday, May 21, 2026, and concludes Saturday, May 23, 2026
.
Sukkot begins on the evening of Friday, September 25, 2026, and concludes Friday, October 2, 2026.

Drs. Marcia and Jan Chaiken have been married for 62 years and have published many justice system research reports together.



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The Convention Centre - Huatulco's Unfinished Promise

By Randy Jackson

From flagship project to forensic evidence: how ambition, engineering reality, and political paralysis collided at the Chahué Marina

In December 2025, formal notices of seizure were posted across the skeletal structure of the Huatulco Convention Center overlooking the Chahué Marina. Issued by the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office of Oaxaca, the notices designate the unfinished building as part of an ongoing criminal investigation, legally immobilizing the site. With that act, a project once promoted as a cornerstone of Huatulco's future tourism economy entered a new phase, no longer merely incomplete, but formally frozen.

Projects like this are often referred to in Mexico as *elefantes blancos*: costly public works that never fully deliver on their promise. They are not unique to Oaxaca, nor to Mexico. What makes the Huatulco Convention Center distinctive is how its fate now sits at the intersection of ambitious planning, technical complexity, and a political transition that has left the structure and the community caught in prolonged limbo.

A PROMISE OF DEVELOPMENT

On October 5, 2019, the Oaxacan legislature authorized 3.5 billion pesos in financing for a broad portfolio of infrastructure projects across the state, intended to stimulate employment and reduce poverty. Among them was a proposed convention center for Huatulco. At the time, then-governor Alejandro Murat pledged that a special committee would closely monitor the use of public funds, and that all projects would be completed before the end of his term in 2022.

According to early project documentation, the Huatulco Convention Center was initially budgeted at 70 million pesos (US $3.7 million). Even in retrospect, that figure now appears unrealistically low, reflecting a preliminary concept rather than a fully defined architectural or engineering plan.

Shortly thereafter, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted public works across Mexico. During that pause, however, the project was not merely postponed; it was substantially reimagined. State officials reframed it as a “strategic trigger” capable of elevating Huatulco into the international convention market alongside destinations such as Cancún or Los Cabos.

A VISION TAKES SHAPE

In December 2020, Governor Murat announced a dramatically upgraded project: an iconic waterfront convention center designed to attract international MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism. To realize that vision, he appointed architect Enrique Norten, founder of TEN Arquitectos, a Mexican firm internationally recognized for contemporary civic and cultural projects characterized by glass, steel, and bold structural expression.

The proposed design called for an approximately 11,000-square-meter facility integrated into the Chahué Marina, including a 1,285-seat auditorium with advanced acoustics capable of hosting concerts, theatrical productions, and academic conferences. Public plazas and green spaces were incorporated to ensure the building functioned as a community asset rather than a sealed, single-purpose venue.

WHEN REALITY COLLIDES WITH VISION

As the project moved from concept to engineered design, costs escalated rapidly. Building a large-scale performance venue on reclaimed waterfront land introduced significant technical challenges. According to statements from state infrastructure officials at the time, the site required extensive geotechnical reinforcement, including deep foundation work and large-scale soil stabilization, to create a stable foundation before vertical construction could even begin.

As planning advanced and architectural designs were finalized, cost estimates were revised upward. By the time construction formally began in 2022, official figures placed the project at over 320 million pesos. While that amount represented a dramatic increase over early estimates, it more closely reflected the market realities of constructing a specialized, architecturally complex facility in a marine environment. What had begun as a modest line item had evolved into a technically sophisticated public landmark.

A PROJECT IN POLITICAL LIMBO

On November 29, 2022, just forty-eight hours before his term ended, Governor Murat formally inaugurated the Huatulco Convention Center in its unfinished state. Without lighting, equipment, or connection to the electrical grid, the structure nonetheless stood complete enough for a ceremonial ribbon cutting.

For the incoming state administration, the building quickly became a focal point, symbolizing unfinished business and, potentially, deeper irregularities. Rather than advancing construction, authorities shifted their attention to investigation.

Transitions between political administrations in Mexico often involve heightened scrutiny of major public works, particularly those left incomplete. Supporters see this as accountability; critics argue that prolonged investigations can indefinitely freeze projects, regardless of their potential public benefit. In Huatulco, the result has been paralysis: a completed shell, neither advanced nor dismantled, sitting idle on one of the town's most prominent waterfront sites.

JUSTICE OR POLITICAL THEATER?

The seizure notices posted on the convention center walls are tied to a broader investigation into the 2019 infrastructure program. In late 2023, the Oaxacan Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office arrested Javier Lazcano Vargas, charging him with illicit enrichment and misuse of public funds related to those projects.

Meanwhile, former governor Alejandro Murat has followed a surprisingly different political trajectory. After leaving office, he joined the ruling MORENA party and secured a seat in the Senate, thereby obtaining *fuero*, the constitutional immunity afforded to high-ranking legislators. The contrast has not gone unnoticed locally. For many in Huatulco, the stalled convention center has become less a symbol of justice pursued than of accountability deferred.

None of this is to suggest that investigations should be abandoned or that financial irregularities, if proven, should go unpunished. But when a criminal process indefinitely halts a project with clear public value, questions arise about balance: between enforcing accountability and fulfilling the state's obligation to serve the community.

THE COST OF STANDSTILL

For local tourism operators, business owners, and residents, the convention center represents more than a political controversy. It was envisioned as an economic catalyst, one capable of extending the tourist season, supporting local employment, and anchoring complementary cultural and commercial activity around the marina. Its continued dormancy carries opportunity costs that compound with each passing year.

Justice and development need not be mutually exclusive. Yet as long as the Huatulco Convention Center remains sealed off as an immobilized site, it stands as a reminder that infrastructure can become collateral damage in political struggles. The unfinished structure on the Chahué waterfront is no longer just an unrealized building; it is a test of whether governance in Oaxaca can reconcile accountability with the practical needs of the communities it serves.

Randy Jackson blends local reporting from the perspective of a seasonal Huatulco resident with explorations of life and change in Huatulco, Oaxaca and Mexico. Email, box95jackson@gmail.com

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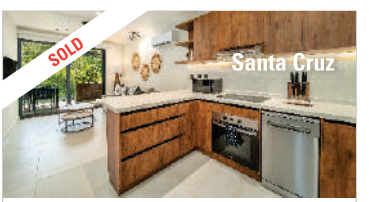

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On the Page:
Books That Shape Our View of Mexico

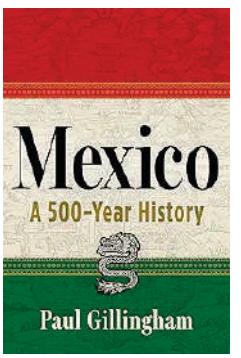
By Carole Reedy

Living in Mexico for 30 years hasn't only settled my understanding of the country; rather, it has expanded it. New research and reading continually reshape my previous viewpoints. Novels and nonfiction narratives are my guide, although numerous personal encounters have enhanced my knowledge.

An education is never complete.

Here are some contemporary histories and classic texts to guide your understanding of this great land.

***Mexico* by Paul Gillingham**



This new tome surprises with a topsy-turvy view of our nation. Sometimes it's hard to believe that now, 500 years later, Mexico survived the literary earthquake we call our history.

Milenio, the popular and prestigious Mexican daily newspaper, calls *Mexico* "unique and, from now on, indispensable for anyone who wants to explore Mexican history with sincerity."

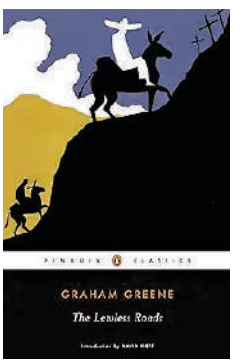
It is so easy to get things wrong when writing or relating stories orally. Peter Frankopan from The Telegraph tells us that this "fine account does well to remind that the best history is about fact, not fiction."

Gillingham begins with the misconceptions of the role of the Spaniards in the early 1500s: their original goals and intentions and their relationships with various communities across the country. Over the next 700 pages, *Mexico* recounts great human displacements and epic battles. Most important, Gillingham constantly stresses the global economic forces that shaped each period of the country's history.

Álvaro Enrigue, respected author of the brilliant novel *You Dreamed of Empires*, in his New York Times review says: "Gillingham's 700-page book is imposing, yet it is an absorbing read, from the amusing and skeptical cadence of the first line that describes the embellished estimates made by the Spanish of the indigenous armies they encountered."

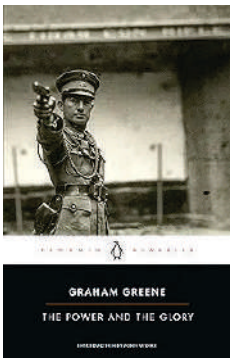
Buy a copy and slowly read the unimaginable 500-year history of Mexico. As has been suggested in my other book column recommendations, also pick up a copy of *You Dreamed of Empires* as an accompaniment.

***The Lawless Roads* and *The Power and the Glory* by Graham Greene**



Few people are familiar with the Cristeros War (1926-1929). Mexican history often stresses the importance and dominance of the Catholic Church, brought to Mexico from Spain in the 1500s.

The Cristeros War was a reaction to the Calles laws, introduced by the then-president (from 1924 to 1928) Plutarco Elías Calles, which reduced the power of the church. The short rebellion in rural Mexico was eventually settled with the help of Dwight Morrow, ambassador to Mexico from the US.



You might recall that President Benito Juárez in the previous century severely limited the power and extreme wealth of the Catholic church.

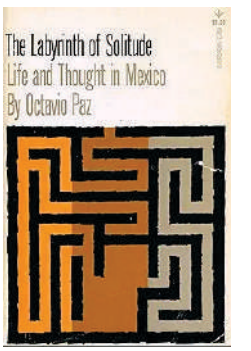
British citizen Graham Greene thought of himself as a Catholic Agnostic. These two controversial novels describe different aspects of this short but significant time in the complicated history of Greene's travels to Mexico to see what the effects of the conflict on Catholicism there had been.

*The Lawless Road*s is an account of Greene's Mexican journey that takes him from the northern border towns to San Luis Potosí and Mexico City. From there he goes to the nearby rural state of Puebla and then to Chiapas. But his primary interest was in Tabasco, home of the atheist activist and cacique of the state, Tomás Garrido Canabal.

In 2005, *The Power and the Glory* was chosen by *TIME magazine* as one of the 100 best English-language novels since 1923. John Updike calls *The Power and the Glory*, "Graham Greene's masterpiece…The energy and grandeur of his finest novel derive from the will toward compassion, an ideal communism even more Christian than Communist."

For Graham Greene fans, this novel of southern Mexico it is often cited as their favorite by the author.

***The Labyrinth of Solitude* by Octavio Paz**

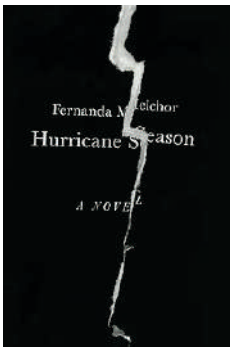


Octavio Paz is virtually a household name in Mexico, admired and respected by people from all walks of life. Through his remarkable literary skill, Paz brings Mexico's complex and fascinating history to life, offering richly crafted narratives that illuminate the essence of Mexican identity.

In 1998 he won the Nobel Prize for Literature for his "impassioned writing with wide horizons, characterized by sensuous intelligence and humanistic integrity."

His most famous work, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, is an indispensable and deeply illuminating read for anyone who lives in Mexico, visits, or seeks to truly understand the country. With a gentle yet compelling force, Paz draws readers into the deepest chord of the Mexican people, revealing the inner workings of their collective. Paz observes that solitude is responsible for the Mexican's perspective on death, *fiesta*, and identity. Published first in 1950, the book explores difficulties of integration and cultural belonging.

***Hurricane Season* by Fernanda Melchor**

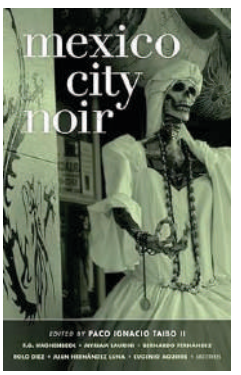


Regular readers of *The Eye* may notice that this title pops up from time to time in my recommendations. The novel touches on many different aspects of Mexican life, especially the spiritual.

The appearance of a dead witch is the impetus for a story that is full of rumors, mythology, suspicions, and traditions of violence. It is Melchor's style, however, that brings to life the mysterious workings of the people who live in the *pueblo.*

The Guardian review says it well. "A brutal portrait of small-town claustrophobia, in which machismo is a prison and corruption isn't just institutional but domestic, with families broken by incest and violence. Melchor's long, snaking sentences make the book almost literally unputdownable, shifting our grasp of key events by continually creeping up on them from new angles. A formidable debut."

***Mexico City Noir*, edited by Paco Ignacio Taibo II**



I recently ran across this anthology of short stories. These dark, acidic short stories reflect some unique-to-Mexico situations. Take note of the title of the book! This is a dark, somber series about police corruption, drug trafficking, the homeless, and the ultra-rich, to name just a few of the unforgettable characters.

All of the stories, told in different narrative styles, have one thing in common: they speak to, and about, a city the authors love.

The brilliant foreword by the much-loved editor of these stories, Paco Ignacio Taibo II, establishes the basis for these stories with a diverse cast of characters. Perhaps more important is the emphasis on the neighborhoods that drive the narrative.

Each chapter has a subtitle of a *colonia* (neighborhood): *Roma, Condesa, Centro Histórico, Colonia de Valle, Doctores.* Don't look for a list of cafes or clubs or a discussion about gentrification in these stories; a more brutal agenda is at stake here.

Despite the barbarous themes, editor Taibo relates that while "*Mexico City Noir* may not be sponsored by the city's department of tourism; but if anyone, from anywhere on earth, were to ask whether the writers recommend visiting Mexico City, the response would be both firm and passionate: 'Yes, of course.' Because this is the best city on the planet, in spite of itself."

Taibo also observes that the writers "take refuge in humor, a very dark humor, acidic, which allows us enough distance to laugh at Lucifer."

***Poems and Sonnets* of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz**

An article about Mexico, especially in an issue emphasizing the spiritual, cannot be written without a discussion about the monumental figure in our country, Sor Juana, philosopher, writer, and poet. We have written about her often over the past 15 years.

Considered the first feminist in the Americas as well as one of the most important writers in the Spanish language, in the 17th century she was defending the rights of women against the patriarchal norms of the time.

If you are a first-time reader of this significant figure in history, I would start with the poems and sonnets, especially the poem *Hombres Necios* that argues that men's taste and censorship are inconsistent and that they accuse women of what they themselves cause. It exposes the inequality and injustice that women suffer through sexism and discrimination against women.

Then, continue on to the 975-line monumental poem *Primero Sueño* (First Dream), an extensive philosophical allegory about the search for knowledge.

Learn from Sor Juana's most famous words: "I don't study to know more, but to ignore less."

Well said, sister!

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Sanjuaneros: Up to a Month Away from Home, with a Promise to See the Virgin

By Estefanía Camacho

Cihualpilli, also known as the Virgin Mary in her invocation of the Immaculate Conception, whose image is housed in the Cathedral-Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos in Jalisco, receives up to seven million pilgrims each year. In this representation, the Virgin "condenses the meaning that precedes motherhood," as Felipe Gaytán Alcalá explains in his book *Las semánticas de lo sagrado* (*The Semantics of the Sacred*).

To get there, the so-called *sanjuaneros* (believers who set out from the Bajío region toward San Juan de los Lagos) walk approximately 80 kilometers over a period of nine to twelve days. Some depart from the Parish of Saint Anthony of Padua in San Miguel de Allende, others from Querétaro or San Luis Potosí, and those coming from farther away leave from Aguascalientes, adding up to a total distance of 200 kilometers or more.

They set out in late January. In 2026, they departed on January 21 from the well-known "Y," an intersection formed by a famous roundabout in León, through which other pilgrims from nearby cities also pass. "I'm leaving from the Y," they notify one another in a Facebook group of nearly 84,000 members, where they share everything from announcements to form departure groups in their hometowns to photos from the journey, weather advice, and, above all, blessings for the road.

In 2026, the passage of approximately 350,000 travellers through the state of Guanajuato is expected, a place referred to as "pilgrim transit territory," according to Luis Antonio Güereca Pérez, the state coordinator of Civil Protection for the Secretariat of Security and Peace of the State of Guanajuato. These figures have been repeated over the past two winters, although the number, he says, has been declining.

"I should tell you that before 2020, before the pandemic, the number of pilgrims was much higher: around 450,000 to nearly 500,000 people passing through the state. However, when the pandemic hit and all this type of activity was suspended, something happened: the rhythm or the motivation was lost. We don't know exactly what occurred, but we haven't been able to recover the large numbers we used to have," he tells me in an interview.

Not everyone stopped during the pandemic. That is the case of Paty, a 44-year-old woman who lives in León. She has made this pilgrimage for 30 years. The first time she went, she was 14. She kept going and never interrupted her visits after one of her children fell ill frequently and she asked the Virgin for his health. "Since then, he hasn't gotten sick," she says. That was 17 years ago.

"I promised that if my son didn't get sick again, I would never stop going." So, during one of the pandemic years, when there were very few pilgrims, she went with her daughter, without many supplies, because there was no one selling food or lighting the way at night with flashlights. They got lost.

"My daughter's feet started bleeding halfway along the route. We stopped, and we got lost. Then the coyotes showed up. One of them was about to attack us. My daughter lit the way with her cellphone so I could throw a stone, but there wasn't just one. There were about ten."

They had to jump into a ditch. "The little Virgin is very miraculous," she recalls, describing how they were able to see a military barracks nearby. From there, some personnel fired at the coyotes to scare them off and helped Paty and her daughter out of the ditch.

“Sometimes people don't even have money for bus fare,” the matriarch of the Quiroz Aguilar family tells me. She has been a devotee for approximately 50 years, but now she offers food to pilgrims passing through on the night of January 23. She recalls that when she first began making the pilgrimage, people endured many hardships — cold, hunger, sleep deprivation, and exhaustion, and it was difficult to find water or food. That is why she wanted to offer some relief.

She offers her home —“*tu casa*,” as Mexicans say when we speak of our own home and offer it to a stranger— as a place of rest for approximately 40 people.

“They bathe here, we make hot chocolate at night so they can fall asleep, and for food, well, we give them carnitas, salsa, beans, rice, noodles, potatoes. I mean, everything we can, whatever we're able to help with.”

In addition to offering her home as a place to spend the night, they also go out onto the route in a pickup truck to transport food. So that pilgrims do not have to stop and lose time, they prepare bagged lunches and hand them out to those who pass by. “Sometimes more people come, sometimes fewer, but everything gets eaten,” she explains, referring to the roughly 50 kilograms of food she prepares, not counting the 40 liters of salsa she cooks with the help of her grown children and now her daughters-in-law.

Throughout the year, they save together to be able to give away this food, which amounts to an expense of approximately 15,000 pesos, she confides.

Her altruistic work has brought her public recognition, to the point that she has appeared in television interviews, although María Concepción Quiroz (her full name) does not like to boast about her efforts.

According to the state coordinator of Civil Protection for the Secretariat of Security, the issues they pay closest attention to include traffic accidents on the highway, food poisoning, people who become lost, occasional fights, and elderly pilgrims.

This time, Civil Protection officially launched the coordinated operation among authorities from Friday, January 9, through February 5, when travellers stop passing through Guanajuato. Personnel from the Guanajuato Ministry of Health, the Red Cross (through its local chapters), state firefighters, and the National Guard are also present.

On January 20, 2026, the eve of the departure of most believers, the forecast indicated that the lowest temperature would occur at seven in the morning on the 21st, dropping to 9 degrees Celsius.

This January, pilgrims walked illuminated by lamps that provided enough light along the path, they crossed train tracks, sometimes alongside a stationary train, detoured around fields of maguey that lengthened the route, and walked for long stretches next to high-speed roads, where freight trucks sped past, often in blind spots. Some travelers coming from the State of Mexico spent up to a month away from home, according to television reports.

Arrival in San Juan de los Lagos

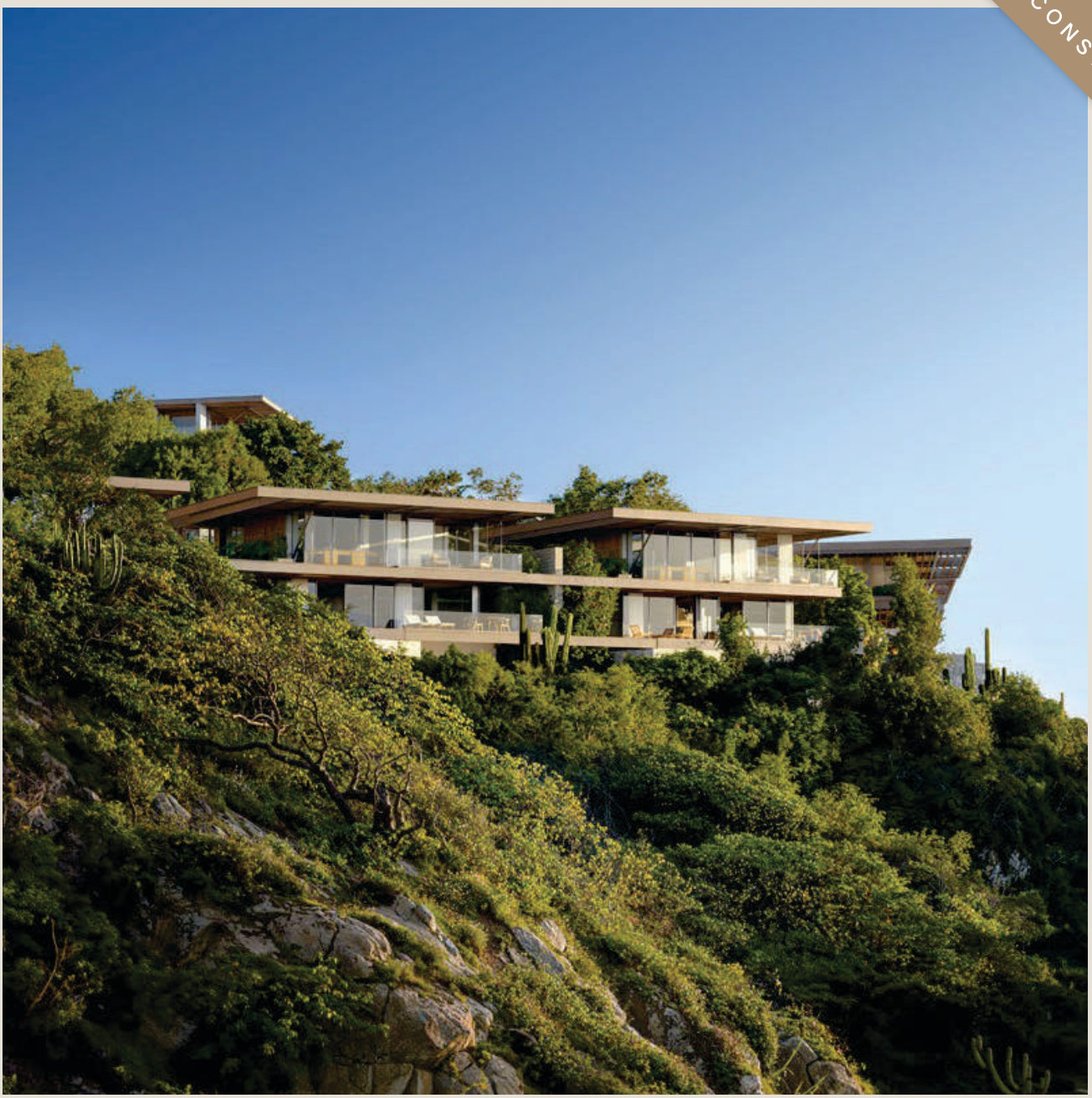
Ideally, pilgrims arrive on February 2, which coincides with the celebration of Candlemas. The Candelaria is a popular religious celebration that commemorates the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, the Virgin's purification after childbirth, and the Virgin of Candelaria, another Marian devotion. Tradition in Mexico also dictates that whoever ate *Rosca de Reyes* on January 6 and found the small figurine (representing Baby Jesus) must offer tamales and *atole* to the rest. However, the Immaculate Conception is also venerated in May, on August 15, and on December 8, although the longest pilgrimage takes place in mid-January.

While San Juan de los Lagos awaits the arrival of tens of thousands, the Cathedral-Basilica (the country's second-most visited Marian sanctuary, after the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City) is already hosting processions and dances. All of this is done to honor a figure measuring just 33 centimeters and weighing over 300 grams, adorned with eighteenth-century Baroque-style ornamentation –which is why Paty calls her with love “little virgin”. The Virgin, made from corn-pith paste, was crafted in workshops in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán.

According to testimonial records from 1623, the Virgin performed her first miracle by restoring the life of a young trapeze artist who had reportedly died after falling from a swing.

Estefanía Camacho is a freelance Mexican journalist working across media and digital magazines. She is a specialist in gender, SMEs, economics, and business.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION



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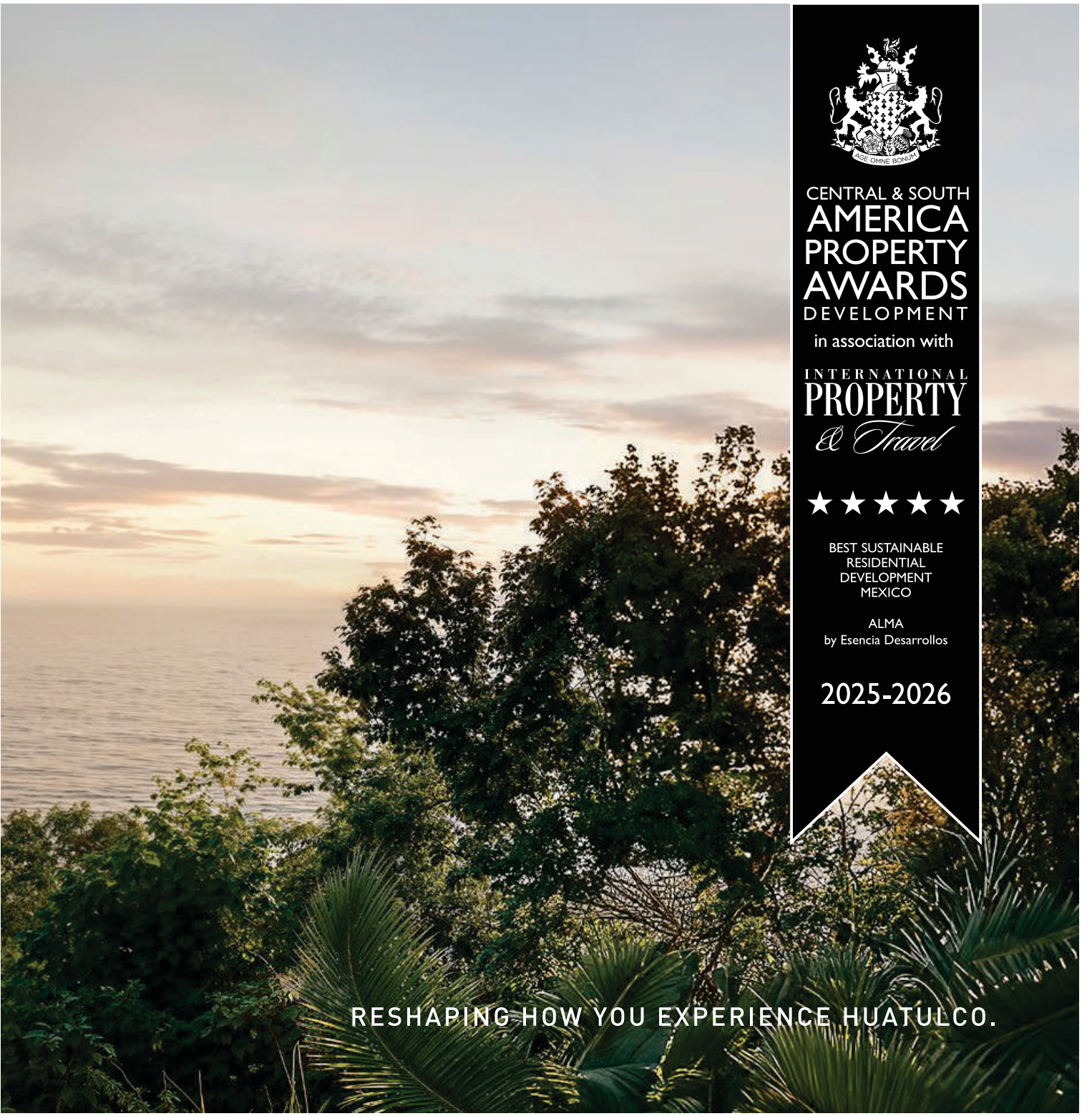

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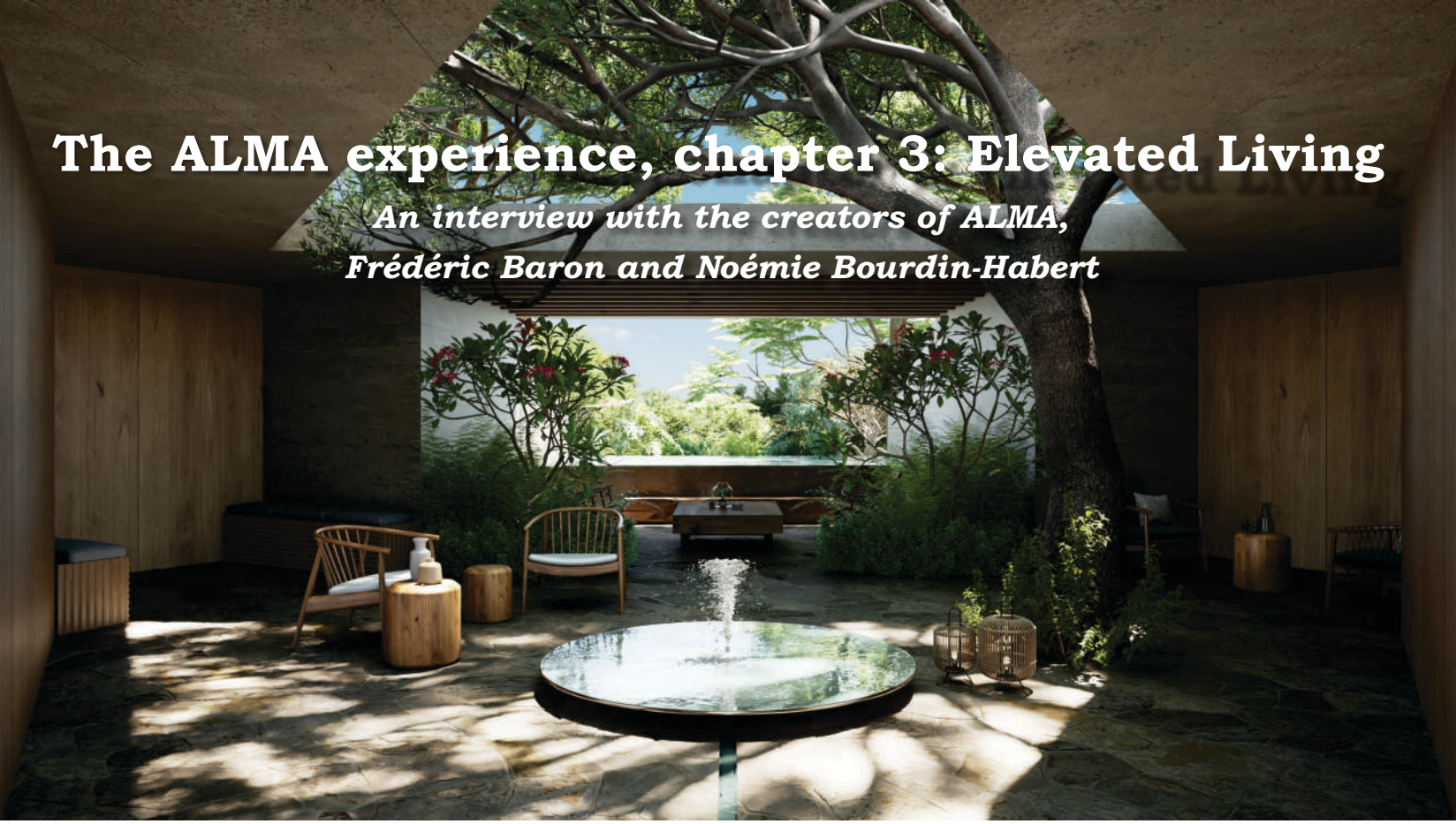

The ALMA experience, chapter 3: Elevated Living

An interview with the creators of ALMA, Frédéric Baron and Noémie Bourdin-Habert

We continue our sit-down with the founders of ALMA to talk about architecture, landscape, and the experience of living in a place designed with care and intention.

I'm curious, who are your clients ?

***Frédéric*:** You know, that's funny, but we don't really have "a type" of client at ALMA. We have **seven nationalities**, ages ranging **from 28 to 78**, and **all kinds of professions** from doctors or bankers to retirees. What they all share is the desire to own and enjoy a place of timeless elegance, hidden in nature, and yet close to everyday comforts. That's when you can tell a design is truly timeless: when it resonates with people of different ages, cultures, and backgrounds.

What is the motivation to purchase in ALMA ?

***Noémie*:** First and foremost, they purchase in ALMA because they genuinely **love the architecture.** We have even welcomed into the community people who had never heard of Huatulco before discovering ALMA. They seek comfort, privacy, a deep integration into the landscape and a place that is climate-resilient, yet adapted to the way we live in the 21st century.

Of course, they are also **buying an address.** In real estate, we often say the three most important factors are location, location, and location. So naturally, oceanfront properties remain a strong and reassuring investment, and something that owners, their families, and their guests will always enjoy. With pristine ocean views and an existing fisherman's trail leading to the beach, the setting speaks for itself.

There is also a great sense of **peace of mind** in investing in a safe city, in a neighborhood that cannot become over-densified, thanks to the 2023 extension of the National Park that completely surrounded the property, and the presence of unspoiled beaches. It reassures buyers who seek both emotional value and long-term appreciation.

It finally comes down to **rarity.** This type of architecture, this level of quality in this landscape, with this low density and at this price point, is extremely uncommon in Oaxaca and in all of Mexico.

What is it exactly that you call "the ALMA experience" ?

***Frédéric*:** The ALMA experience starts very early. We like to think it begins with the discovery of the project. For example during a site visit, we always introduce potential buyers to a number of new birds and tree species, show them the whales or observe the milky way when coming back at night. When new to Huatulco, we take the time to show them the town, its neighborhoods, and some of its hidden gems. We love taking them to your village-to-table dinner in Zimatán, for example, because it reflects the passion behind some of the most inspiring local initiatives.

Now of course, the most meaningful experience will begin once their property is delivered. Noemie and I are both deeply inspired by unique hotel experiences, and ALMA was designed as a private, residential interpretation of that spirit.

Our clients are never numbers; they are people we get to know personally. Our relationship often goes beyond an investment, and that is the beauty of building a small community. In short, the ALMA experience is **a journey we designed from discovery to delivery**, and the care we put into every detail to make it both simple and beautiful.

Alright, so tell me, what will it feel like, once you live in ALMA?

***Noémie*:** That's an excellent question, and not always easy to describe because it is mostly sensorial.

Entering ALMA feels like entering a refined, low-density resort. The access gate is spacious and surrounded by trees and gardens. You hear insects and birds, you are in the shade, and everything feels calm. Unhurried. And instantly, you feel welcomed, not controlled. From that point on, all that you see, hear, and smell has been carefully considered.

You reach your home with your own car, driving sometimes at trunk height, sometimes at foliage height. You park under or next to your property, always in the shade. No golf carts, no valet, no waiting, and no long walks necessary. You simply drive home, easily and privately.

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Pilgrimage South:
A Journey of Calling, Community, and Return

By Leon Chretien

When people think of pilgrimage in Mexico, they often imagine ancient ruins, colonial cathedrals, or barefoot devotion along dusty roads. While I love each of those images, my pilgrimage did not begin with a shrine or a vow. It began quietly, decades earlier, with a name given to me by others before I ever chose it for myself.

When I was twelve, pastors and preachers often called me "preacher boy" or "pastor boy." I spoke well. I cared about people. I tried to bring peace into tense situations and noticed those who were unseen or misunderstood. At the time, I didn't know whether those traits were gifts, expectations, or burdens—but they stayed with me.

As I grew older, another calling developed alongside the spiritual one: business. I learned how systems work, how to lead people, take risks, and carry responsibility. For much of my adult life, these two paths—ministry and business—ran side by side, sometimes complementing one another, sometimes pulling against each other.

At twenty-two, I left a corporate career to attend a small Bible school. I wasn't chasing a title or a platform; I went for formation and clarity. I thought I would emerge and move directly into full-time church work. Instead, I came out with a growing sense that calling and timing are not the same. I returned to work, eventually owning and operating my own business for thirteen years, which I sold in 2024. Only in hindsight did I see that this was not a detour—it was preparation.

Mexico had been part of my story for years. My wife is Mexican, from Sonora, but my own introduction came much farther south, in Huatulco, Oaxaca. From the first visit, Mexico felt less like a destination and more like a conversation—layered, complex, deeply spiritual, wounded in places, generous in others, and very much alive.

When we began discerning a move to Mexico, we were clear about one thing: we were not moving to escape life. We were moving to engage it. We didn't want to live on the perimeter of a place that had given us so much. We wanted community. We wanted to add value. We wanted to belong and to serve.

That question shaped everything that followed. Should we start something new? Join an English-speaking ministry? Or come alongside a Spanish-speaking church and serve where needed? We weren't looking to build something of our own—we were looking to join what was already alive.

The answer came quietly, through our daughter. After moving to Huatulco in early 2023, she began attending Iglesia Ágape, a twenty-year-old missional church serving the Oaxacan community. The leadership sensed a need for an English service but lacked a worship leader. When they learned we were moving—and that I led worship with guitar and vocals—the alignment became clear. What they needed, we were already carrying.

Ágape English Service didn't begin with strategy or ambition. It began with alignment. Eleven months in, my wife and I help lead worship, teach, preach, and share in leadership. But the heart of what we are doing has little to do with roles or titles. It has everything to do with pilgrimage—ours and that of the people who gather with us.

We serve a community spanning a wide range of spiritual experiences. Many arrive carrying pain or disappointment from past churches. Some were faithful for years in Canada or the United States but drifted after relocating and losing community. Others come with no church background at all, only a quiet sense that something essential is missing. Some live here full-time, some seasonally, and some are here only briefly—but seek Christ-centered fellowship while they are.

We believe every human being carries a God-shaped space—a longing that no success, relocation, or reinvention can fully satisfy. Our role is not to fill that space for people, but to walk with them as they rediscover the One who can.

That is where Mexico became a pilgrimage for me. Not a single dramatic moment, but a long movement. Not a holy site, but a steady surrender. My journey south was not about leaving one country for another; it was about returning to a calling spoken over me as a boy and refined through decades of work, faith, responsibility, and failure. Business taught me structure and stewardship. Ministry taught me listening and presence. Mexico became the place where those streams finally converged.

Pilgrimage, I've learned, isn't always marked by spectacle. Sometimes it looks like weekly gatherings, shared meals, worship, and sitting with people in their grief and questions. Sometimes it means choosing community over comfort, faithfulness over visibility, and long obedience over quick results.

I did not come to Mexico to find God. I came because God was already calling—and Mexico became the place where obedience finally felt whole.

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Sound and Breath: Journeys of Healing in Oaxaca

By Stephanie Whitford

Pilgrimage in Mexico has always been more than a physical act of walking from one place to another. It is a journey of devotion, transformation, and connection, an experience that bridges the outer world of landscapes and traditions with the inner world of spirit and healing. In Oaxaca, where Indigenous wisdom and Catholic traditions intertwine, pilgrimage takes on a unique resonance. Here, sound healing, spiritual music, breathwork, and energetic frequencies are not modern inventions but echoes of practices that have guided seekers for centuries.

The Outer Journey: Walking Sacred Paths

Across Mexico, pilgrimages are woven into the cultural fabric. Millions walk each year to the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City, while smaller communities in Oaxaca honor saints and ancestral spirits with local processions. For the Zapotecs, pilgrimage meant traveling to sacred mountains, caves, and temples—sites where the human spirit could align with cosmic order.

In Huatulco, the nine bays themselves invite pilgrimage. Walking along the shore at sunrise, climbing into the Sierra Madre foothills, or entering a temazcal sweat lodge are all acts of devotion. Each step outward becomes a prayer, each destination a reminder that the land itself is sacred.

The Inner Journey: Sound as Medicine

Sound has always accompanied pilgrimage. Indigenous healers used conch shells, drums, rattles, and chants to mark rhythm and call communities together. These vibrations were believed to restore harmony, dissolving dissonance in body and spirit.

Today, sound healing continues this tradition. Crystal singing bowls, gongs, and various other instruments create frequencies that bypass the analytical mind and open pathways to subconscious release. Spiritual music, whether ancient chants or contemporary compositions, becomes a companion on the journey. It reminds us that pilgrimage is not only about reaching a shrine but about listening deeply, allowing vibration itself to guide transformation.

Breathwork: The Pilgrimage Within

If sound is the external companion, breath is the internal guide. Breathwork, increasingly recognized in modern wellness, has deep roots in Mexico's traditions. In the temazcal, participants breathe through heat and steam, surrendering what needs to be let go of and emerging renewed. Breath becomes a pilgrimage inward, a journey through intensity toward clarity.

As a teacher of conscious breathing, I believe that breath is the bridge between spirit and matter. In Oaxaca, this truth is lived daily. Each inhale is an invitation to receive abundance; each exhale, a chance to release limitation. Walking pilgrimages mirror this rhythm—inhale with each step forward, exhale with each pause. Breath transforms movement into meditation. Breath is the first step on an inner pilgrimage—a foundational key to well-being that, when practiced with intention, has the power to transform your life on every level: physical, mental, and spiritual.

The Zapotecs believed the cosmos was structured by harmony. Rituals, music, and pilgrimage were ways of aligning with that order. Modern practitioners speak of energetic frequencies, vibrations that restore coherence to the body's energy field. Whether through a drumbeat, a tuning fork, or the resonance of a crystal sound bowl, these frequencies remind us that healing is not only physical but energetic. Each of us breathes a unique frequency that seeks harmony.

In Oaxaca, this wisdom is not abstract. It is lived in festivals, in community rituals, and in the daily rhythm of life. Pilgrimage becomes a way of tuning oneself to the frequencies of land, spirit, and community.

Pilgrimage does not need to be a distant concept. Living in or visiting Huatulco, one can experience pilgrimage in everyday acts: walking the bays, listening to the ocean's rhythm, breathing deeply into presence. These are small pilgrimages, journeys that connect us to Mexico's cultural legacy and to our own inner truth.

Sound healing, spiritual music, breathwork, and energetic frequencies invite us to expand this practice. They remind us that pilgrimage is not only about movement across land, it is about resonance, vibration, and breath. It is about aligning with frequencies that heal, whether inherited from Indigenous traditions or discovered in contemporary practice.

Pilgrimage in Mexico is alive, evolving, and deeply resonant. It is the journey outside—walking to sacred sites, listening to communal music—and the journey within—breathing, listening, and allowing sound to heal. In Oaxaca and Huatulco, the legacy of the Zapotecs meets modern practices of sound healing and breathwork. Together, they invite us to see pilgrimage not as a destination but as a vibration: a journey of resonance that transforms both body and spirit.

Stephanie Whitford is an inspired living coach who blends breathwork, sound-healing, yoga, fitness, and lifestyle practices to guide people on transformational wellness journeys back to their bodies and spirits. She teaches classes and workshops throughout Huatulco. Learn more at www.sunkissedfire.com

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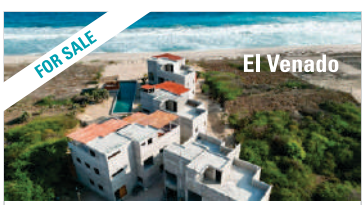

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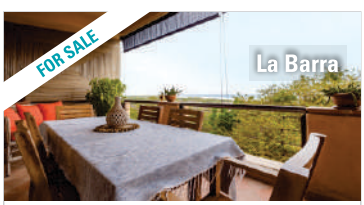

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Dry Law, Elections, and a First for Oaxaca

By Alicia Flores

From time to time, life in Oaxaca pauses in small but noticeable ways. One of the most familiar signs is the ley seca — the temporary suspension of alcohol sales — which often accompanies elections and official civic consultations across Mexico. For residents and visitors alike, it can raise a simple question: what exactly is being voted on?

Recently, Oaxaca held its first-ever revocación de mandato, a recall-style public consultation that asked voters whether the current governor, Salomón Jara Cruz, should continue in office. Unlike a general election, this process does not involve choosing new candidates or parties. Instead, it offers citizens an opportunity to express their approval or dissatisfaction with a sitting official midway through their term.

The consultation was organized across a state known for its political and cultural complexity. Oaxaca has more municipalities than any other state in Mexico — over 570 — many governed by distinct local systems and traditions. Coordinating any statewide vote here is no small task, and the results often reflect the diversity of voices rather than a single, unified opinion.

As is customary during electoral processes, a ley seca was put in place to help ensure public order. While the restriction can feel abrupt, it is a long-established part of Mexico's electoral framework and applies regardless of whether the vote involves local offices, national elections, or civic consultations like this one.

In the end, while a majority of participating voters supported the governor remaining in office, overall turnout did not reach the threshold required for the result to be legally binding. As a result, the consultation did not trigger any immediate change in government.

Even so, first-time processes matter. They set precedents, reveal political undercurrents, and invite broader participation in public life. In a state as varied and decentralized as Oaxaca, the significance of such moments often lies not in dramatic outcomes, but in the signals they send — and the conversations they begin.

Five Films About Pilgrimages & Journeys

By Alicia Flores

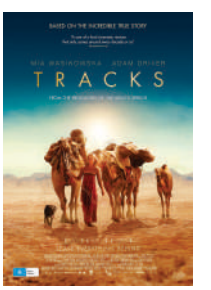
1. The Straight Story (1999)
Directed by David Lynch
Based on a true story, this quietly powerful film follows Alvin Straight, an elderly man who travels across the Midwest on a riding lawnmower to reconcile with his estranged brother. Slow, tender, and deeply human, it's a pilgrimage measured not in miles but in resolve, humility, and love.

2. The Way (2010)
Directed by Emilio Estevez
After the death of his son, an American father (Martin Sheen) walks the Camino de Santiago to honor him. Along the way, grief softens into connection as fellow pilgrims join the path. A modern classic about loss, healing, and the unexpected community that forms on the road.

3. Into the Wild (2007)
Directed by Sean Penn
Based on the true story of Christopher McCandless, this film follows a young man who abandons conventional life to travel across North America in search of meaning. His journey raises timeless questions about freedom, solitude, and what it means to truly belong.

4. Wild (2014)
Directed by Jean-Marc Vallée
Reese Witherspoon stars as a woman who hikes the Pacific Crest Trail alone after personal tragedy. Physical endurance mirrors emotional reckoning in this raw and honest portrayal of a journey undertaken not for adventure, but survival.

5. Tracks (2013)
Directed by John Curran
Inspired by Robyn Davidson's memoir, Tracks follows a solo trek across 1,700 miles of Australian desert with only camels and a dog for company. The film explores solitude, resilience, and the pull of landscapes that transform those who cross them.



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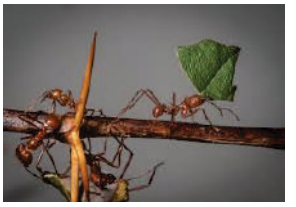
Ants in the Selva Seca

By Julie Etra

Ayayay. Ants are everywhere—in and outside our house here in the Bahías de Huatulco. That should come as no surprise given the climate. According to the literature, Mexico is home to more than 1,100 species of ants across 10 subfamilies.

Our house hosts the big, flesh-colored *mordullos*, or carpenter ants, who appear in the bathroom just before dawn. There are the tiny "sugar" ants—whom I call *crazy ants* because their movement seems randomly drunk—skittering across my desk. At least two species of small black ants are nearly always on my kitchen counters, despite my diligence (and generosity) with vinegar, bleach, and insecticides.



I've written before about the truly terrifying *barranderas* (sweeper ants) that invade in coordinated waves in pursuit of live prey (www.theeyehuatulco.com/2012/06/01/sweeper-ants-of-the-selva-seca). During the five-plus months we're here each year, we usually endure two or three of these incursions. And then there are the leafcutter ants—the subject of this article—capable of stripping my vigorous, 15-year-old bougainvillea in a single night. Here, I'm talking about Atta mexicana, the Mexican leafcutter ant.

Ants in Mexican Mythology and Culture

Ants appear in pre-Hispanic mythology, most notably in stories involving the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl. In one version of the myth, Quetzalcoatl transforms himself into an ant to retrieve the first kernel of corn from a mountain, bringing sustenance—and civilization—to humanity. Through this story, ants become linked to the origins of life and agriculture.

In the Mexico City neighborhood of Azcapotzalco—whose name means *"place where the ants live"*—ants appear repeatedly in sculptures, murals, and architectural details. Once a distinct community and now absorbed into the city's sprawl, Azcapotzalco is home to the Parroquia y Convento de los Santos Apóstoles Felipe y Santiago el Menor, built in 1565. A depiction of an ant still adorns its façade.

Legend holds that the Spanish enslaved the local population to construct the church, and that the maltreated locals responded by placing an ant at its base as a curse. One interpretation suggests the ant represents Quetzalcoatl returning from the underworld with corn for humanity—though how this constitutes a curse is unclear. Another version claims that when the ant reaches the base of the bell tower, it will announce the end of the world, for which we are all still waiting.

As explored in *The Eye* archives, ants remain part of Mexico's culinary culture in the form of escamoles (ant larvae) and chicatanas—the winged reproductive females that appear during the rainy season. These prized ants are captured, their wings removed, and prepared in a variety of traditional dishes.

Range and Habitat

Leafcutter ants (*Atta* spp.), known in Mexico as hormigas arrieras (muleteer ants), are aptly named for their ability to transport plant material weighing up to ten times their own body weight—the ants themselves serving as pack animals.

They range throughout the Neotropics, from southern Mexico through Central and South America and the Caribbean, and occur as far north as southern Texas and Florida. They inhabit elevations from sea level to nearly 9,800 feet (3,000 meters).

Leafcutters require warm, humid environments and well-drained soils to build their vast underground fungus gardens. Although the literature often claims they thrive mainly in managed landscapes such as farms and roadsides, my own observations suggest otherwise. I've watched them harvest flowers and leaves from native trees in the *selva seca*, and friends in Pluma report similar behavior. At least here, they seem just as at home in wild ecosystems.

Foraging and Food Preparation

Because leafcutter ants cannot digest cellulose, harvested leaves—and occasionally flower parts—are transported back to the nest, processed into pulp, and incorporated into existing fungus gardens.

There, the ants cultivate a specific symbiotic fungus using enzymes produced in their fecal fluids (yes—ick). The fungus produces nutrient-rich structures called gongylidia, which feed the entire colony, particularly the developing larvae. In return, the ants protect the fungus from pests, while symbiotic bacteria suppress unwanted molds.

Physiology
Leafcutter ants are astonishingly strong and agile. They can carry fragments weighing up to 50 times their own body weight, thanks to powerful mandibles, robust muscles, and flexible, multi-jointed legs equipped with grasping feet. They can even pivot on their hind legs to maneuver material into designated chambers.

This remarkable physiology allows them to travel 600 feet or more from the nest in search of suitable plants.

The Colony
A single leafcutter colony can contain up to eight million individuals, ruled by a single queen who may live more than 20 years. The nest itself is vast—sometimes covering more than 720 square feet (67 m^2) and extending 23 feet (seven meters) underground.

These subterranean cities contain thousands of chambers, including fungus gardens, brood chambers, a queen's chamber, food-processing areas, and separate garbage dumps to maintain sanitation. Sophisticated ventilation tunnels regulate airflow throughout the nest.

Caste System
Leafcutter ants operate under a highly structured system of task partitioning, with roles determined largely by size:

- Minims: Tiny workers that tend the fungus gardens, brood, and waste.
- Minors: Slightly larger workers that groom and cultivate fungus.
- Mediae: Foragers that harvest and transport plant material.
- Majors: Large soldiers that defend the nest and perform heavy labor; they bite.

Older ants often become trash workers, a hazardous role that exposes them to toxins and pathogens. These ants effectively self-quarantine, protecting the queen, brood, and primary fungus gardens.

Reproduction
Leafcutter ants reproduce through massive mating flights that occur after the first substantial rains of the season. Winged queens (chicatanas) and males take to the air, mate, and shed their wings.

Each fertilized queen carries a pellet of symbiotic fungus from her natal nest to seed a new colony. She lays eggs and initially feeds the larvae with infertile eggs, storing sperm for life.

The mating flights are said to be spectacular—and lucrative—for human predators who harvest chicatanas during this brief window.

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The Eye
Call for Submissions

Are you a storyteller, writer, or photographer?

We're always looking for creative voices and new perspectives that explore life in Mexico — its people, culture, cuisine, travel, and ideas.

Each issue follows a theme.
Upcoming topics include:

March – Healthcare
April – The French–Mexico Connection
May/June - Heat
July - Water
August/September - Food

If you have an idea, photo essay, or finished story that connects to one of these themes, we'd love to hear from you.

theeyemexico@gmail.com
Guidelines: theeyemex.com/faq

Tell your story. Share your Mexico.

Huatulco English-language AA meeting

Please join us every Monday at 6:30 pm and Thursday at 9 a.m. for a wonderful English speaking meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous at
Hotel Gran Juquila Huatulco.

FOUR ACES:
By carving shadows, stars are recovered.

By José Palacios y Román

Facing a blank sheet of paper, a canvas, metal, or stone to paint or sculpt is always a challenge. For millennia, humankind has expressed its experiences through diverse materials—some ephemeral, others that still endure in museums. It is about leaving traces and memories of the passage of time.

Before the Renaissance, various human groups chose to destroy their precious objects in order to renew them. This was the case prior to the European invasion of Mesoamerica, where every 52 years a new count of time began and life was renewed. With this in mind, Copalli Art Gallery, in its commitment to supporting and promoting new local talent, presents an exhibition featuring four promising artists. Three of them belong to the millennial generation and share the distinction of being natives of the Oaxacan coast. We are excited to present them and wish them a long and fruitful career in the arts.

They are:

Abisai GUMAG (Pochutla, 2002)

Life is a constant search that he unravels on the canvas. Every path Abisai has taken leads him back to painting: working as a sign painter, decorating mezcal bottles, photographing the sea, creating custom graphic design, and cooking—all to earn a living and be able to paint. He never begins with a preconceived idea. Instead, he observes the canvas, allowing stored emotions to emerge. From one stroke to the next, there is no turning back. He moves to the rhythm of life, absent from ordinary existence in order to create.

Javi VASHER (Bahías de Huatulco, 1999)

He has found his language in water, color, and emotion. Having grown up, lived, and loved Huatulco his entire life, he holds a degree in International Trade and Customs. Through art, he discovered form and expression by portraying both the delicacy and strength of the feminine. His work combines geometry and detail, balance and fluidity, reflecting a deep connection with nature. In each stroke, the flow of water on paper becomes a metaphor for life: unpredictable, luminous, and constantly transforming. He is devoted to watercolor.

Heriberto HERGON (Santa María, Huatulco, 1990)

His connection to nature gives meaning to his art. His life has unfolded entirely in the region. From early childhood, he became an artisan, creating unique and beautiful pieces from seeds, gourds, and wood. This practice bordered on painting and led him to develop skills through drawing and painting workshops. Detail-oriented and meticulous, with a steady hand and enormous patience, he has forged his own path without grand ambitions, simply reflecting his tranquil and transparent spirit through his canvases.

Alex TAPIA (Mexico City)

His art serves as a bridge between tradition and spiritual exploration. He settled in Pinotepa Nacional and has lived in Huatulco for thirty years. A master of martial arts, discipline flows through him as deeply as painting. Guided by mentors, he has developed his own visual language to express his worldview. His oil paintings capture serenity and beauty in the simple and the everyday.

Welcome.

This group exhibition reflects Copalli Art Gallery's commitment to offering this magnificent space to emerging artists from the coastal region of Oaxaca.

The opening will take place on **February 20, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.** in **Tangolunda, Huatulco**. Wine, snacks, and live music will be served. Admission is free.

Follow us on social media:

www.instagram.com/copalliartgallery

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— Tom D., Canada

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— John M., USA

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-Black Mole and Yellow Mole
-served with Rice and Chicken
-Handmade Tortillas
-Mezcal Margarita

THURSDAYS
Fiesta-
-Beef Picadillo Tamales
-Poblano & Nopal Empanadas
-Guacamole
-Jicama, Cucumber, and Orange Salad
-Ancho Reyes Margarita

FRIDAYS
Street Food-
-Red and Green Salsas
-Pico de Gallo
-Handmade Tortillas and Sopes
-2 types of Taco Fillings
-Tlayudas
-Jamaica Margaritas

SATURDAYS
Seafood-
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