The Eye

Beach, Village + Urban Living in Mexico
San Miguel de Allende · Issue 10
December 2026
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Editor's Letter

"The art of life lies in a constant readjustment to our surroundings."
Kakuzō Okakura, The Book of Tea

In the past couple of days, while procrastinating over writing my editorial, I have heard of the unexpected deaths of two wonderful women: one in Huatulco and one in San Miguel de Allende. It is a reminder of the ephemeral quality of life. This moment is fleeting, always rolling into another moment, with no promise of it being better or worse, only different, because change is the only guarantee.

Since my mother died, I find myself envying people who complain about their parents. It is an odd stage of life when those ahead of you are gone, like standing in a line that is advancing too quickly. I feel too young, at 52, to be an orphan.

As we enter the season of holiday shopping, air travel delays, vacation rentals that fail to meet expectations, slow restaurant service, and the noise of late-night carousing, let us take stock of our blessings and enjoy the pure joy of being alive in a time when indoor plumbing is the norm.

In his book *Psychology of the Mexican: Culture and Personality*, Mexican psychologist Rogelio Díaz-Guerrero explored how cultural values influence people's responses to difficulties. He described a tendency in traditional Mexican culture toward adapting oneself to circumstances, contrasting this with an Anglo-American emphasis on actively changing one's environment. In simple terms, one approach asks, "How can I adjust to this situation?" while the other asks, "How can I change this situation?" His work offers an interesting perspective on cultural differences in dealing with frustration, although these are broad patterns rather than rules about individuals.

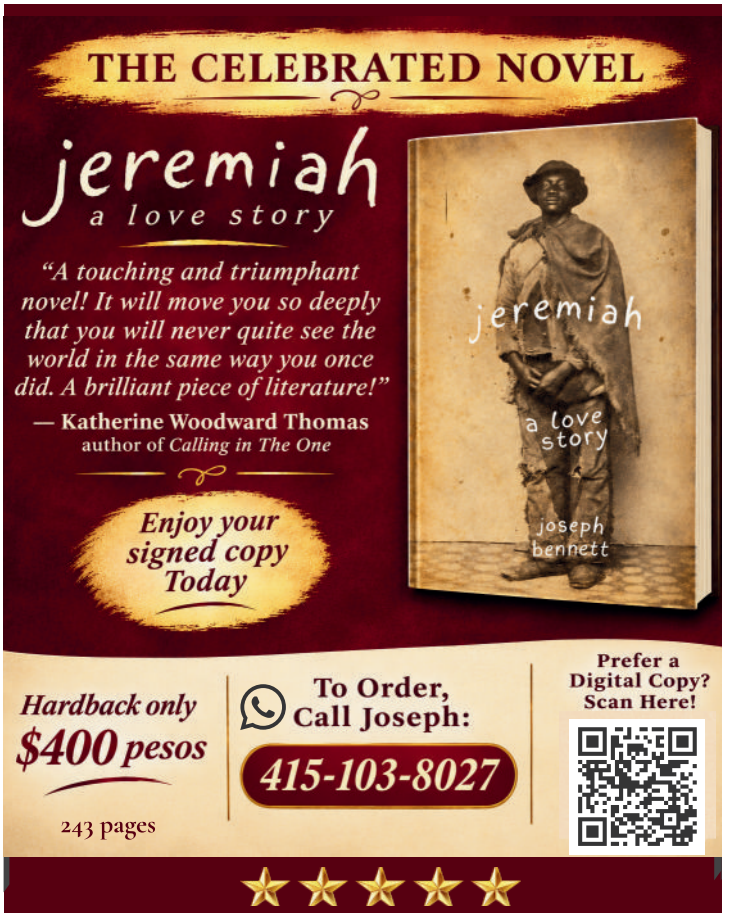
This holiday season, please be more adaptable. When something goes wrong, as it inevitably will, please do not share it with the world. With each complaint, you are reliving the moment and contaminating the person you are complaining to.

I cringe when I see social media posts from foreigners complaining about noise, a lack of hot water in their vacation rentals, or the suspicion that a waiter or taxi driver tried to rip them off. No one cares, and no one wants to know. Be adaptable. Be ready for the unexpected. Discomfort and challenging situations are how we learn and grow. Find ways to connect with others that don't involve enrolling them in your plight.

Life is short. Life is what you make it; let it be light. Tell people you love them. Give stuff away. Look strangers in the eye. Know that everyone is imperfect.

See you in January.

Jane



The Eye Team

Editor: Jane Bauer

Writers: Joseph Bennett, Jan Chaiken, Marcia Chaiken, Alicia Flores, Don Krim, Carole Reedy, Kat Sparks, Kary Vannice, Gina Weber, Charles Woollett

Cover Image: Orbon Alija
Photography/Art: Jane Bauer, Kat Sparks, Michael Solof, Various Artists

Advertising Associate: Charles Woollett

Distribution: Juan Antonio Arias
Layout: Jane Bauer

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We welcome submissions and input.
To get involved, send us an email.
TheEyeMexico@gmail.com

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The Long Way Home

An Immigrant's Journey and Three Stories of Return

By Gina Weber

A Volcano, an Airport Carousel, and the Meaning of Home

When I was about 12 years old, I made what I considered a very grown-up decision: I chose the movie to watch on television while my parents went out to dinner, leaving my three younger brothers and me with a babysitter. I selected *The Devil at 4 O'Clock* (1961), starring Spencer Tracy and Frank Sinatra. It was in English, with Spanish subtitles, which made it seem both sophisticated and educational. What could possibly go wrong?





Quite a lot, as it turned out.

The film follows a missionary and three convicts attempting to rescue children from a Pacific island threatened by a volcanic eruption. It was riveting cinema, but entirely too much for a 12-year-old with a vivid imagination.

For months afterward, I suffered recurring nightmares. In them, I was either Father Doonan, played by Tracy, or Harry, played by Sinatra, desperately gathering my brothers and trying to save them from rivers of lava. My mother was understandably upset that the babysitter had "allowed" me to watch a movie clearly not intended for a child my age.

Then came the real-life adventure that would change our family forever. My parents announced that we were moving to Chicago, Illinois. My father stayed behind in Mexico City to sell our home and belongings and wrap up business affairs. Several months later, he would join us in the United States.

In the early summer of 1977, my mother, my three younger brothers, and I, almost 15, arrived at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. We had a few suitcases and, like many immigrant families, cardboard boxes tied with twine, holding the possessions my parents had decided were important enough to bring into our new life.

We headed toward the baggage carousel. And then it happened. My brothers began running around the moving carousel, while the youngest apparently decided it would be fun to climb aboard. Suddenly, my mother and I were frantically trying to retrieve our luggage, boxes, and, more urgently, my brothers.

I experienced a powerful sense of déjà vu. There I was, once again, trying to save my brothers from impending disaster. Only this time, there was no lava. Instead, I was in a new country, surrounded by a language I barely understood, at a baggage carousel that, in my teenage mind, was every bit as threatening. For the first time in months, I slept peacefully that night. My nightmares had disappeared. Apparently, my subconscious had finally concluded that I had successfully rescued my brothers. Either that, or exhaustion had won.

Just like that, we were in a new country, with a new language, new schools, and the prospect of making new friends. My immigrant story had begun.

Growing Up Between Two Worlds

Leaving Mexico City at almost 15 meant leaving behind something especially precious: my friends and the social world that defines so much of adolescence.

Moving to another country where you cannot speak the language is like being dropped into the middle of a television series halfway through the season. Everyone else knows the characters and the plot, while you are still trying to figure out what everyone is saying.

I had to learn English, adjust to American public schools, and navigate a culture that was both exciting and unfamiliar.

Do you remember Mork & Mindy, the late-1970s sitcom starring Robin Williams as Mork, a clueless alien who lands in an egg-shaped spacecraft in Colorado? Imagine Mork, but in this case, imagine Gina as Mork.

Yes, my nickname in high school was "Mork." Kids would shout, "Na-Nu, Na-Nu!" at me in the hallways. Apparently, learning a new language and culture was not quite enough; I also had to be an extraterrestrial.

Mexican telenovelas on the only Spanish-language television channel became my saving grace. They helped me navigate the loneliness and kept me connected to the Mexico I had left behind.

The following year, my concerned parents gave me a “coupon” for a trip back to Mexico. I still don't know how they scraped together the money. My father had been without a job for nearly a year after arriving in the United States. I was depressed and slow to learn English, while my brothers adapted much more quickly.

Every summer and most winter vacations, I returned to Mexico City to spend time with my grandmother, family, and friends. Those visits reminded me of the people and places that had shaped me, allowing me to feel entirely at home without having to translate myself.

I completed my education in Illinois and gradually built a life in the United States. But I never stopped feeling Mexican. To this day, I dream in Spanish, and when it comes to math or spelling, my brain is often more comfortable thinking in Spanish.
Perhaps that is one of the great paradoxes of immigration: you can build a life somewhere new without surrendering the emotional geography of the place you left behind.

My Jewish ancestors fled persecution in Eastern Europe and found refuge in Mexico and the United States. Generations later, my parents moved our family to Chicago in search of opportunity. Having now returned to Mexico after most of my adult life in the United States, I see my journey as part of that same legacy of resilience and reinvention.

The Bigger Story: Millions of Journeys, Millions of Reasons
According to the Migration Policy Institute, approximately 11.1 million Mexican-born immigrants lived in the United States in 2024, representing about 22 percent of the country's foreign-born population.

Yet migration is not a one-way journey. Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) reports that nearly 23 percent of Mexicans who emigrated between August 2018 and October 2023 returned to the country. Among those who returned, nearly half cited family reunification, marriage, or moving in with a partner as their reason.

Not all returns are voluntary. In 2024, Mexican government statistics recorded 206,233 repatriation events involving Mexican nationals returned from the United States. While some return by choice, others are deported, leaving behind the lives they built.

Behind these numbers are deeply personal stories of difficult decisions, sacrifice, and belonging. Returning to Mexico after decades abroad is another form of migration. The country has changed, as have those who return.

I spoke with three people who, like me, spent much of their lives in the United States before choosing to make Mexico their home again.

Between Two Worlds: Artist Benito Rangel de María Finds His Way Home



For artist Benito Rangel de María, home has always existed between cultures. Born in rural Michoacán in 1970, he immigrated to Chicago with his family at two years old.

Growing up on Chicago's North Side among Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Polish families, he discovered the richness of cultural exchange.

“What I learned was that I didn't even know what a strong cultural heritage we brought until we started to share with the Puerto Ricans, and then they shared their culture, and then the Polish,” he recalls.

His path eventually took him into the international art world, including studies and professional experiences in Europe. It was there that his connection to his Mexican identity became especially meaningful.

“I always say, I'm Mexican first, but I never really felt that pride until I actually got to Europe.”

The political climate in the United States following the 2016 election also changed how he understood his place in the country.

“For the first time, I felt like an immigrant in the U.S. I had never felt that before.”

As an artist, he responded by creating work that explored identity, borders, and belonging.

Although he and his husband had considered returning to Mexico for years, the pandemic reinforced the importance of not postponing their dreams.

“You cannot wait until the perfect moment to fulfill a dream because we don't live forever.”

Now living in San Miguel de Allende, Rangel de María continues to explore the experience of living between cultures through his art. His return has not meant leaving his American life behind. He misses family and friends in the United States and recognizes that returning to a familiar place does not mean returning to the same life.

“You think you come back to a place only to realize that it's no longer the same place, that it has changed. It has not changed. You have changed. And therefore, you have changed it.”

Jaime Obregón: Rediscovering Mexico



Jaime Obregón's return followed a different path. He left Mexico at the age of five, when his family moved to Fort Worth, Texas. He grew up in the United States, attended Texas Christian University, and later lived in California.

Although his family had business connections in Mexico, he stayed away for many years, frustrated by what he saw as corruption and unwilling to work within a system that conflicted with his values. For much of his adult life, he considered himself “an international person” rather than identifying with one country.

His perspective began to change around 2017, when an opportunity to develop a resort on Mexico's Pacific coast brought him back. He was surprised by the changes he saw and by the people and businesses working to move the country forward.

“I kind of loved Mexico once again,” he recalled.
After years of considering the possibility, he decided to move to Mexico in 2026, settling in San Miguel de Allende.

What attracted him was the town's historic character, slower pace, and, above all, the warmth of its people. He appreciates the everyday greetings and spontaneous interactions that make him feel connected to those around him.

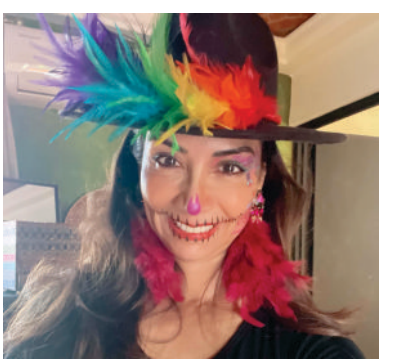
“When I look at it from a human perspective, it brought me back to being a human being. And appreciating it,” he said.
The food, architecture, and sound of church bells are part of the quality of life he has come to value.

“For me, that's what it's about. It's about relationship.”
Obregón also wants to contribute to Mexico's development, particularly in infrastructure and renewable energy, where he believes new technologies offer opportunities.
“I wanted to do something good for the country,” he explained. “I'm able to contribute in a good, positive, and hopefully meaningful way, and that's my purpose.”
For Obregón, returning was a gradual rediscovery that allowed him to see new possibilities for himself and for Mexico. After decades away, he has found a different quality of life and a renewed sense of purpose.

Bertha Salinas: A New Beginning in Mexico



Proud of her Mexican and Zapotec heritage, Bertha Salinas always imagined a life beyond Mexico. After studying advertising, she built a career in marketing, managing regional brands for Kimberly-Clark and Procter & Gamble.



At 28, she moved to Los Angeles on an H-1B work visa, beginning a professional journey that eventually took her to Texas and Virginia.

She married, raised two children, and co-founded a specialized training-technology company with her husband. The business grew into an international operation, giving her family opportunities she deeply appreciates.

“I am one of those Mexicans that love the U.S.,” she said. “I feel it's an amazing country. It is the country of opportunities. If you do it right, if you follow the rules and work hard, it does have great advantages.”

But after many years in the United States, the end of her marriage led her to reconsider where she wanted to live. She explored several destinations before visiting San Miguel de Allende, where she was drawn to its architecture, art, and cultural life. She eventually bought a home and moved there.
What she values most is the opportunity to connect with people and enjoy the arts as part of everyday life. Without a car, she walks throughout town, meeting people and discovering musicians, painters, and performers.

"I feel I have both the best thing of both cultures here," she explained. Many of her friends are American, but she also feels at home in Mexico. "I can also feel Mexican if I want to."

Her return has not been without challenges. Renovating her home exposed her to some of the frustrations of managing contractors and navigating business relationships in Mexico. She also misses aspects of the efficiency and professional work culture she experienced in the United States.

Yet she is finding a balance between the two worlds rather than choosing one over the other.

"My brain has a lot of American; my heart is Mexican."
For Bertha, returning has meant more than relocating. It has been an opportunity to begin again, reconnect with her roots, and create a life that brings together the independence and opportunities she found in the United States with the relationships and sense of belonging she has rediscovered in Mexico.

The Many Roads Home
These stories do not offer one definition of returning, nor do they suggest that coming home is always easy. For Benito, returning meant reconnecting with an identity he had carried across continents. For Jaime, it was a rediscovery of a country he had long kept at a distance. For Bertha, it offered the possibility of a new beginning.

My own journey began with a teenage girl trying to rescue her brothers from an airport baggage carousel. Nearly half a century later, I understand that immigration is not a single departure or arrival. It is a lifelong exchange between the places we leave and the places we learn to call home.

Perhaps the long way home is not really a journey backward. It is the discovery that home can hold all the places we have been, and all the people we have become.

Gina Weber, PhD, is an arts management consultant and former university professor whose work focuses on arts, culture, and community engagement. Born in Mexico City, she immigrated to the United States as a teenager and recently returned to Mexico after spending most of her adult life in the U.S.



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Jose Jorge Galvan Lassard

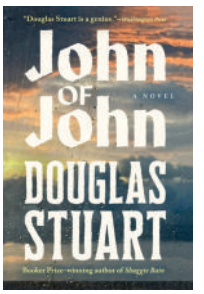
The Books That Defined 2026—And One That Transcended It

By Carole Reedy

What a grand year for readers. A handful of the best writers of our era published extraordinary novels, and more than once I became so absorbed that I devoured a book in two days, nearly nonstop.

In the November issue of *The Eye* I reviewed my seven top reads of the year…and saved the best for this last issue of 2026.

John of John by Douglas Stuart



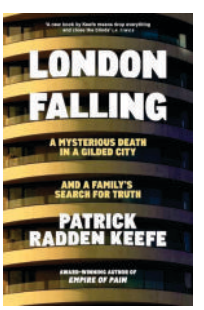
This novel is the masterpiece of the year. It would take more space than I have here to share the reasons why. All the essential elements of a *tour de force* are apparent on every page of the novel. This is a book that is profound and timeless.

The story begins in a phone booth in Glasgow, Scotland, the story materializes on a small island off the coast of Scotland where every element of the population is isolated, thus leading to suspicion, petty misunderstandings, deceptions, and erratic behaviors.

Cal, son of John, is returning from college in Glasgow to his home there. Cal is gay, thinking he is alone in that fact and believing it must remain hidden. The novel's events center around his father, estranged mother, sympathetic grandmother, and a variety of neighbors who are not always as they seem. Life is apparently as complicated on a small island as it is in a big city.

Every element in this story is treated as a character, and each one influences the others. Stuart knows how to pace the universal conflicts, emotions, and actions of his characters. Brilliance at its apex.

London Falling by Patrick Radden Keefe



Keefe is a highly respected investigative journalist who is also gifted in the fine art of storytelling. His blockbuster *Say Nothing* might be the finest synthesis put to paper of "The Troubles" in Ireland in the last century.

From the beginning of this book, we're engaged as we watch a young man fall from a high-rise building in the heart of London. Accidental or intentional? This sets us on a path to learn about the criminal elements that have seeped into British society and are destroying its traditional underpinnings.

Another significant element in the book, brought to my attention by several friends, is that of the role of the young man's relationship with his parents. Just 19 at the time of his death, a lack of parental guidance seems like a mystery since there was no physical distance between him and his parents.

The book's cast of characters may come from faraway places, but they share a singular motive: greed.

Partita by Barbara Kingsolver



Kingsolver has justifiably been praised and is famous for her page-turning novels that take us to a world outside our cultural comfort zone. We recall her blockbusters *The Poisonwood Bible* and *Demon Copperhead*, the latter a takeoff of the beloved Charles Dickens 19th century *David Copperfield,* a novel still read in schools and literary circles to this day.

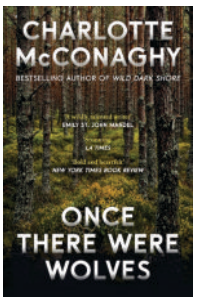
Music lovers will appreciate the care with which Kingsolver integrates the main character's love of classical music into the story. Her passion for the art, the interference of love, and the consequences of conflicting decisions set the stage in this tale of passion.

The deep satisfaction of her musical talent shifts with circumstances throughout the book, showing that there is more than one way to calm a person's interior genius.

Kingsolver is a pianist. She has played classical music since childhood, but knew early on she would not be one of the select few to become successful enough to make it a career. She had many interests and, fortunately for us, finally settled on literature and writing.

In this era of cuts in arts budgets, it's more important than ever to appreciate and keep alive that which touches our soul. *Partita* helps us prioritize our choices.

Once There Were Wolves by Charlotte McConaghy



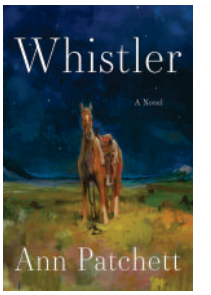
Elements of popular mystery, juxtaposed with the chilling recounting of the reintroduction of wolves to Scotland, contribute to the success of this brilliantly paced novel.

In it the reader is taken to Scotland, with flashbacks to Australia and Alaska, where we become engaged in the worldwide effort to return these majestic animals to their home in an effort to restore the flora and fauna of the region.

Family stories add color, life, and suspense to the book's serious themes. A cast of varied characters as well as a close twin relationship lie at the core of the novel. The main character is one of the strongest women in modern literature.

McConaghy's other two recent novels, *Wild Dark Shore* and *Migrations*, are equally compelling, with vivid characterizations. I highly recommend both of these riveting, revealing novels.

Whistler by Anne Patchett



When all is said and done, Anne Patchett simply delivers a fine story.

Novels such as *Bel Canto*, set in Peru and featuring an opera star, the Shining Path political group, and a Japanese diplomat demonstrate this author's versatility. People and book locations vary, ranging from missionaries in Africa to opioid addiction in Appalachia. Her ability to empathize never falters.

Patchett's latest has garnered praise from virtually all literary venues. Don't be fooled by the horse on the cover- it's not a book for equestrians. Instead it delivers a complex tale demonstrating family miscommunication and the consequences of decisions.

The story begins in a museum where a man tells his wife that she is being observed by someone nearby. This leads us to the woman's past, the misunderstandings and interpretations of events that influence the lives of all those involved with her.
A quick and satisfying read!

We literature lovers were fortunate this year to read grand novels from well established as well as new writers. Here's hoping 2027 can keep the pace.

Carole Reedy has been writing for The Eye since 2011. She is an avid reader who has made Mexico her home for many years.



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Getting Pesos in Your Pocket: A Practical Guide to Exchanging Money in Mexico

By Kary Vannice

Whether you're coming to Mexico for a week or escaping the cold north for the winter, you're going to want some pesos in your pocket. Much of Mexico still functions as a cash economy, and sooner or later you'll find yourself at a restaurant, shop, or taco stand where a credit card won't get you very far. Oftentimes, only a good old-fashioned bill will pay the bill.



If you're arriving at an international airport, this will likely be your first opportunity to exchange dollars, euros, or other foreign currency into Mexican pesos before you even leave the terminal. But before you step up to the counter, it helps to understand the exchange rates, the documentation you'll need, and your other options for getting pesos.

Money exchange counters typically display two rates: compra and venta, meaning "buy" and "sell." These terms describe the business's side of the transaction. When you hand over dollars and receive pesos, the business is buying your dollars, so the compra rate is the one you'll want to look for.

Exchanging money is a business, and providers cover their expenses and make a profit by buying currency for less than they sell it for. That's why you'll see two different rates.

If the buying rate is 18 pesos per U.S. dollar, your US$100 gets you 1,800 pesos before any separate fees. But if you decide to buy those same US$100 back at a selling rate of 19, you'll need 1,900 pesos. That difference is why "no commission" doesn't mean the exchange costs you nothing: the cost is built into the rate.

Airport counters offer convenience, but it might make more sense to just exchange enough to cover your immediate expenses if it means getting more pesos once you reach your destination.

In larger cities, you'll find currency exchange offices called casas de cambio and centros cambiarios. They may offer better rates, but you always want to look for their official authorization or registration posted inside. This way, you know you're dealing with a legitimate business. They function the same way as those in the airports, but there's no "set" exchange rate. It's worth comparing rates—you may get more pesos for your money just down the street.

Exchanging money at a bank is also an option, especially in smaller communities where exchange offices may not exist. However, it's important to know that not every bank exchanges foreign cash for visitors without accounts. Banco Azteca offers currency exchange to noncustomers and handles U.S. dollars, Canadian dollars, and euros, although availability can vary by branch.

When exchanging money at a local bank, you'll need to bring your original, valid passport. For cash exchanges, banks will record your information and may make a copy of your passport. Don't assume that a photograph on your phone, a foreign driver's license, or a passport card will be accepted. Many banks have daily or monthly limits, too, so you can't always exchange large amounts at once. Check the bank's current limits for noncustomers before you go.

Of course, most places in Mexico also have ATMs available for using your debit card. This means you can travel without carrying large amounts of cash, although you may have to pay both local ATM fees and fees from your home bank. Daily withdrawal limits apply here, too.

One thing to watch for: an ATM may offer to convert your withdrawal into your home currency. You can generally decline this conversion without cancelling the withdrawal. Your card issuer or network will then handle the conversion, often at a more favorable rate. The local ATM fee may still apply. The same goes for paying by credit card: if you're offered a choice of currencies, paying in pesos generally avoids the merchant's conversion rate.

If you're only going to be in the country for a few days and you're staying in a resort destination, you may find that some grocery stores and restaurants accept foreign currency (usually U.S. dollars), which can save you a separate exchange trip. Most will display their exchange rate, and you can expect to get any change in pesos.

Another option worth exploring is a money-transfer service that will allow you to send money to yourself from your home account. You can use services like Xoom to send yourself money from your domestic account and collect it in pesos at places like Banco Azteca and even some convenience stores. Western Union and Remitly also support sending money to yourself and offer cash pickup in Mexico.

But this requires thinking ahead. You'll have to set up your account, link your payment method, and complete any verification while still at home. Before sending money, compare the transfer fee and the number of pesos you'll receive. List yourself as the recipient using your name exactly as it appears on your passport, then bring your passport and transaction number when you go to collect your cash.

Sending and receiving limits apply. Your sending limit may depend on your country and level of verification. Additional verification can raise that allowance, but the places where you receive the money may have lower daily or monthly limits, and that is the number you'll really want to pay attention to.

One last pro tip… If your foreign bills aren't in good condition, the bank or exchange house may refuse to accept them. Before leaving home, inspect all your bills. If you go to the bank to get money before you leave, request the newest bills they have. And, if possible, do the same when you receive pesos. Damaged bank notes may be difficult to spend or may be refused by businesses. Bills in good condition on both sides of the transaction will make your life a lot easier.

It's also likely that you will be given large-denomination bills when you receive your pesos. Again, if possible, request a variety of bills because small change can be hard to come by in Mexico. It's not uncommon to be told “No hay cambio” (We don't have change for that). If you try to pay a small tab with a large bill, you might be out of luck.

Whether you're here for a few days or a few months, knowing how to get pesos will make your time in Mexico a little easier. With a bit of preparation and some smaller bills in your pocket, you'll be ready when only a good old-fashioned bill will do.

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







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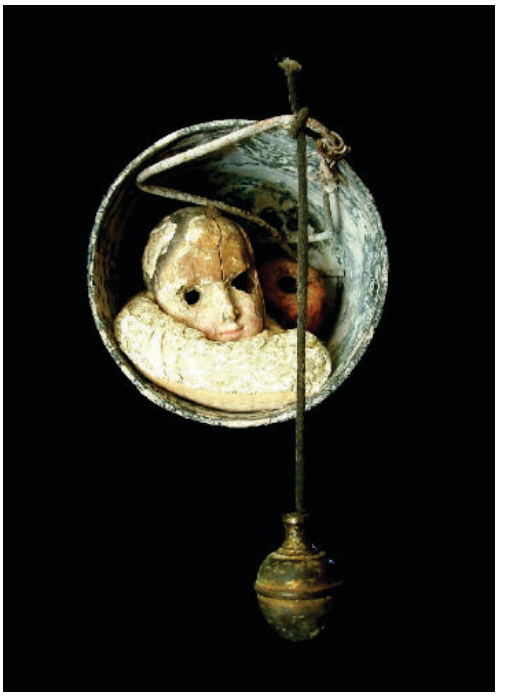

1. **on mexican time** / 17 x 22 x 11 inches

The title is borrowed from Tony Cohan's *On Mexican Time: A New Life in San Miguel*, a book about discovering a new home and, in the process, discovering a different way of living.

I'm fascinated by the exchanges that happen when objects leave their original lives and enter a new one. The santo carries its quiet spiritual presence; the pincushion speaks of domestic work and handmade things; the plastic apple offers a curious imitation of nature. Brought together, they begin a conversation none of them could have had alone.

Perhaps this assemblage is a little reminder to make room for the unexpected—and to see what new life can emerge when seemingly unrelated things find themselves together.

Materials: discarded paint/concrete bucket, hand-carved wooden santo, handcrafted pincushion, plastic apple, metal, and string.



2. **you will be killed if they find you with a pencil** / 14 x 11 x 4 in.

After visiting the Slave Haven Museum and the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, I learned more about the brutal consequences enslaved people faced for attempting to read or write. White enslavers feared that literacy could give enslaved people power—to communicate, challenge their captivity, or even forge their own emancipation papers. A pencil, something most of us take for granted, could become a dangerous object.

I spent weeks scavenging secondhand shops, looking for objects that might help me tell this story. I was drawn to a ragged wooden box, an old jar, worn cardboard containers, a vintage photograph, animal bone, and a pencil. I took these discarded things into my studio, where they began an unexpected exchange with one another—and with the story I was trying to tell.

As I brought them together, their meanings shifted. The pencil became more than a writing instrument. It became a symbol of freedom, knowledge, and the terrible lengths to which people will go to keep others from claiming either. The objects' new arrangement suggested a story beyond the historical facts: one about the denial of knowledge and the power that comes from being able to read and write.

Perhaps this is what draws me to assemblage. Objects pass from one life to another, accumulating meaning along the way. I may give them a new story, but they also give something back to me—and, I hope, to anyone who pauses to look.

Materials: vintage wood, glass bottles containing an unknown substance, marble, cardboard, image, light bulb, bone, and pencil.

3. **unless it moves the human heart** | 11 × 13 × 2.5 in.

This piece explores a question I return to often in my work: how do I bring disparate objects together to create something that moves us?

The materials in this assemblage have traveled very different paths. The worn leather once covered an old valise I bought at Los Bomberos' monthly pulga in San Miguel de Allende. The seed pod came from the woods near my childhood home in Wilmington, Delaware. The spool of assorted threads and the plaster picture frame turned up on the same day in Mexico City. A vintage safety pin, glass marble, small glass vial, and chalk are part of the juxtaposition.

Each object arrived with its own history, its own textures and associations. At my workbench, they enter into an exchange: leather meets plaster, thread meets glass, the organic meets the manufactured. I move things around, live with them, and wait. Sometimes months pass before the pieces seem to find their places.

There's an exchange here, too, that no one sees. I give these objects my time, oftentimes saying no to parties and gatherings so I can stay present to them. In return, they offer possibilities I couldn't have imagined when I first brought them home. I can't force that meeting. I can only keep looking, listening, and rearranging until something emerges that feels worthy of your attention—and, I hope, moves your heart.

Materials: wood, leather, seed pod, vintage safety pin, glass marble, plaster picture frame, glass vial, chalk, and spool of assorted threads.



Once Upon a Vine

By Charles Woollett



Once upon a time, in the golden hills outside San Miguel de Allende, two owls kept watch over a vineyard. They had seen the first vines planted and the first harvest come in, and they knew, the way owls know everything, that this was a place where love would grow as surely as the grapes.

We stumbled on Dos Búhos quite by accident. Well, actually, we were introduced by a dear friend, and our friendship with the owners, Diane Maycotte and her husband Higinio, has turned into a true love affair with all they do to make Dos Búhos what it is today. It all started many years ago, when Diane first met the tall, handsome Mexican who would become her husband. As in any good fairy tale, she married her prince, and her dream of owning a winery came true.

This organic vineyard sits at the base of the Los Picachos mountains on the Mexican Altiplano, 20 minutes from downtown San Miguel de Allende. On our first visit, we turned off the highway to Querétaro at a small sign, passed their Adobe Villa on the right, and began to see the vines as we approached a very unassuming old white hacienda. We walked in under the archway, and a sense of calm immediately enveloped us. Soft music drifts across the grounds as free-range chickens casually roam.

We were greeted and taken to a lovely table under a huge mesquite tree. Fernando, the head waiter, made some wine suggestions, and before we made up our minds, Diane wandered over to introduce herself. We quickly found common ground in our shared histories and our love of the grape in its liquid form. She recommended their DB Negroni, made with tequila, their own Campari, and sweet vermouth- why not? Then we settled on this year's Chenin Blanc, a Silver Medal winner, the perfect cold, crisp libation on a warm summer's day.

Perusing a menu of grilled salmon and/or duck tacos, we finally chose a tomato carpaccio, beet pasta, blistered green beans, their now-famous artichoke burger and, yes, the blanco pizza, which jumped out at us, smothered in gorgonzola, black Kalamata olives and fresh arugula. Most of the produce comes from their organic garden. Postres, or desserts, arrived as an eye-catching selection of crème brûlée, mini lemon tarts and a sinful chocolate brownie with homemade vanilla ice cream, all decorated with edible flowers. Chef Eduardo has been with them for years now and is constantly crafting a gastronomic menu that doesn't just accompany your wine; it makes every sip and bite sing.

What could be better, you ask? How about being lured into dipsomania by their own delicious, robust ruby port. We kept looking at one another and saying, "I feel like I'm on vacation." You could be in Italy, Spain, or Argentina; it's as though you've been magically transported to another place and time, and yet here you are, just minutes outside San Miguel. I was tempted by the row of bicycles to go for a spin but thought better of it this time. There would be many more chances, as we are seriously addicted and need our "vacation" fix at least once, if not twice, a month.

The history of this little boutique winery is fascinating. The family acquired the ranch in 1967 and established a massive fruit orchard, planting more than 55,000 peach, apricot, and pear trees. In the 1990s, the fruit trees reached the end of their life cycle. They committed to organic farming, and the ranch turned to vegetables. In 2006, recognizing the potential of their mineral-rich volcanic soil, at 2,000 meters above sea level, they planted their first 3.5 hectares of wine grapes. Today the organic estate has grown to 12 hectares and 15 grape varietals, producing about 48,000 bottles a year. Ninety percent is enjoyed locally in Mexico, and the remaining ten percent travels as far as Tokyo and London.

Dos Búhos means "*Two Owls*," and the name has several layers. In the main grape-processing room, where the harvest begins its transformation into wine, the family built a large wooden house for the resident owls. The owners are also avid artists and collectors, and a close artist friend gave them a trompe-l'œil painting depicting two owls as one, representing the coming together of their two distinct backgrounds. Today that blend of art, nature and agriculture defines the winery, where classical and baroque music plays in the barrel room as the wines serenely age.

Bodega Dos Búhos follows a philosophy of minimal intervention. Certified organic by Oregon Tilth, they pair the ancient heritage of the land with ancestral techniques and let the high-altitude terroir speak for itself. Diane, who studied at UC Davis and Texas Tech University, and her son Eric insist on zero chemical intervention, manual harvest, gravity flow, and, lastly, natural yeast fermentation. All a little technical, perhaps, but the result is impressive.

For a small winery, Dos Búhos has earned some impressive international recognition. At the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles, its Grenache Gran Reserva 2019 won a Grand Gold Medal, while the Tempranillo Gran Reserva 2020 took Gold. Its wines have also received medals at the Los Angeles International Wine Awards and the Bacchus International Wine Competition in Madrid. You get the idea: this is a small winery punching well above its weight.

After those lofty accolades, let me lead you gently back down to earth. Whether you're a connoisseur or simply enjoy the odd glass or two, what stays with you about Dos Búhos is the warmth of the place. To be in the company of the family and the people who work there is to experience their genuine desire to share Mexican culture, food and wine.

Wherever there is wine, I believe there is a little poetry in motion. It stimulates our senses and imaginations, but perhaps most importantly, it invites us to slow down, sit together and enjoy where we are.

So, whether you live in San Miguel or are just visiting, when you feel like you need a little vacation, Dos Búhos is only minutes away. Somehow, sitting beneath that mesquite tree with a glass of wine in hand, it feels much farther.

Charles has been writing about film, food and travel for over thirty years. www.cpbwinternational.base44.app





Cada barrica se inspecciona personalmente.

Every barrel is inspected personally.

En Dos Búhos el estándar es alto. El Grenache ganó Gran Medalla de Oro en Bruselas, el Aglianico obtuvo 97 puntos en la Guía Catadores del Vino Mexicano y nuestros vinos se sirven en Pujol, Quintonil y Californios. El resto del equipo trabaja más que este. Ven a conocerlos en el Km 6 de la carretera a Querétaro. Comida y catas, de miércoles a domingo.

Standards are high at Dos Búhos. The Grenache took Grand Gold in Brussels, the Aglianico scored 97 points in the Guía Catadores del Vino Mexicano, and the wines are poured at Pujol, Quintonil and Californios. The rest of the team works harder than this one. Come and meet them at Km 6 on the road to Querétaro. Lunch and tastings, Wednesday to Sunday.

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Exchanging Holidays

By Marcia Chaiken with Jan Chaiken

Exchanging holidays has been one of our greatest delights during the decades we've spent in Mexico. We've celebrated Jewish holidays with non-Jewish friends, and they've welcomed us into their own traditions. Over the years, these celebrations have brought our families together, crossing languages and generations.

At first, the youngest members were reluctant to speak each other's languages. But as their English and Spanish improved, they discovered another language all preteens share: giggles and eye-rolling at their elders' stories. Now they're grown, many living far away, and some of our oldest and dearest family members are no longer with us.

One of the most memorable ways that exchanges occurred was through sharing foods that are traditionally served on specific holidays. For Passover, which commemorates the Biblical exodus from Egypt, family members arriving from the United States brought boxes of matzoh that were difficult to find in Huatulco. As a result, customs officials at airports stopped them for long explanations of matzoh and why they were bringing it to Huatulco. Our non-Jewish Passover guests were less than delighted with matzoh (it is, after all, called "the bread of affliction"), but chicken soup with matzoh balls was a great hit at our Passover dinners. When we ultimately switched our Passover celebrations to the United States, we received protests from friends in Mexico about missing chicken soup and matzoh balls; so we provided them with some containers in advance that could be frozen until Passover. We later learned that rather than being frozen, they were immediately consumed.

For our part of the exchange, we always enjoyed the January 6 Three Kings Day and the delicious Rosca de Reyes that is served on that holiday. One year, our friend Edith attended several Kings Day parties and turned out to be the person who found the little baby figurine hidden in the Rosca at each party. This obligated her to prepare and serve tamales on Día de la Candelaria (February 2) to all the people who had attended the Three Kings Day events. That was the year I learned how to make tamales. Since I had a larger and more workable kitchen, Edith and I started tamale-making in the morning of February 1 and by late afternoon had steamed enough tamales to fulfill Edith's obligations and also to stuff ourselves and fill a shelf in our freezer. As it happened, I was a natural tamale maker since the proper consistency of the masa filling is the same as for the batter for matzoh balls.



For many years, on one of the eight days of Chanukah (the Jewish Festival of Light in December), we had a large number of Huatulco friends and neighbors over to our home to light the Chanukah candles with the blessings and then to have supper including traditional latkes (potato pancakes). Preparation of latkes requires frying in a lot of oil. So I set my alarm for 4:30 a.m. and after peeling many pounds of potatoes, grating them with onions and shaping them into pancakes, I fried more than 100 latkes and flash-froze them before the sun rose. A dozen were always set aside for our dear friend Carminia who, having grown up with Jewish friends in Mexico City, really appreciated the labor and love latkes take. After an hour or so of cleaning oil off the stove, wall and floor, I was ready for Chanukah.

Christmas Eve was often spent with Carminia and her family, some of whom had just returned to Mexico from The Hague. Carminia's Christmas dishes often varied and were always delicious, but one appetizer never changed: bacalao (cod). Just as I set aside latkes for Carminia, she always set aside bacalao for us. We've tried other preparations of bacalao in restaurants and they ranged from rather horrid to okay. From this we realized that Carminia's bacalao was always to be remembered but never to be repeated.

The final Jewish holiday we enjoyed sharing in Mexico – especially with the other *The Eye* writers and staff --is *Tu B'Shevat*, the New Year of the Trees. We Eye folks each brought a dish containing fruits or nuts and spent a lovely afternoon talking about trees that had particular meaning in our lives. The dishes were creative, as were the stories about trees. As usual, we wound up talking about books we've read and enjoyed – often on e-books to preserve trees.

Drs. Marcia and Jan Chaiken published many research reports on criminal justice policy issues and have been married for over 63 years.

Jóvenes Adelante's Unique Graduate Program

By Don Krim

Jóvenes Adelante (JA) has developed one of Mexico's most comprehensive higher education assistance programs. Our proven model of funding, combined with multiple levels of additional support, is why our success rate is 83%, more than twice the national average.

Today, Jóvenes Adelante's Graduate Studies Program offers our own graduates the chance to specialize, advance their career options, and set an even greater example of the success of Mexican youth when given the opportunity to achieve more than the circumstances they were born into. Now under the leadership of JA graduate Carlos Cadena (2022), the Graduate Network has three distinct components available to our more than 380 graduates.

Postgraduate Scholarships

JA offers its graduates financial support for master's programs, medical specializations, PhDs, and accredited diploma and certificate programs.

Our Graduate Studies Program is only a couple of years old, but we already have 13 advanced-degree graduates and 11 current postgraduate students, including our first PhD student.

Their fields include pedagogy, immunology, international business and project management, neuroscience, structural and civil engineering, pediatrics, and political criminology. These are young people who have already overcome considerable obstacles to complete their university studies. Now they are continuing their education, expanding their professional opportunities, and becoming role models for others in their communities.

Graduate Support and Network

The level of support we offer graduates mirrors our undergraduate program, although in a simplified form. We organize workshops and events for professional development, covering everything from practical workplace skills to leadership. Graduates also have access to English as a Foreign Language tutoring, helping them strengthen their language skills and improve their opportunities in an increasingly global professional environment.

Through the Jóvenes Adelante Job Bank, we connect graduates with employment opportunities that match their interests and skills. This network continues to grow through our own graduates and agreements with local companies.

JA Peers: Graduates Giving Back

JA boasts several graduates who have returned as mentors for newer students, and three graduates have served on JA's staff. Our graduates want to give back.

JA Peers offers a new way to do that, connecting current students with graduates who have already experienced university life and the transition into the professional world.

More than most mentors, recent graduates have fresh memories of the challenges of university. They understand the academic pressures, personal doubts, and uncertainty about what comes next. This allows them to share practical and relevant advice.

JA Peers doesn't replace mentoring. It is a flexible, close, human support system designed to adapt to the real schedules of students and graduates. And who better to encourage a student than someone who has recently walked the same path?



Cynthia Marlet Sanchez Castillo, a 2019 psychology graduate from the Universidad de Guanajuato, explains why she wanted to participate: “Being a scholar at Jóvenes Adelante transformed my life. JA didn't just support my education — they believed in me. When someone believes in your potential, the possibilities become endless. Giving back is my way of expressing gratitude and continuing that chain of trust, because I truly believe that one person or one action can change a life.”

Now a psychologist, Cynthia understands the importance of support from both perspectives.

"Having been a scholar and now being a psychologist allows me to see both perspectives and understand the challenges of academic life. I know how valuable it is to have a support system that reminds you your dreams are possible and that there are people who believe in you."

For Cynthia, JA Peers means planting hope and strengthening a community that has already had a profound impact on her life.



Eduardo Aldair García Juárez, a 2025 civil engineering graduate from the Instituto Politécnico Nacional, sees another advantage in the program. The idea is simple: our commitment to these young people doesn't end when they receive their university degrees.

"I have always enjoyed encouraging and supporting others. Being part of a program with a smaller age gap between graduates and students creates a different kind of trust and offers a more realistic perspective on the challenges faced at each stage of a career."

As the youngest in his family, Eduardo remembers how valuable it was to receive advice from people who had already faced similar challenges.

His advice to current students is straightforward:
"When the journey becomes difficult, move forward with patience and faith, one step at a time, without losing sight of the goal of completing your university studies."



The same spirit of giving back can be seen in graduates such as Rolando Jiménez Bonilla, who completed his gastronomy degree in 2019 and continued his education in Food and Beverage Business Management.

Today, Rolando runs Café Bonilla, his culinary venture in San Miguel de Allende, while also participating in JA Peers.

"Jóvenes Adelante believed in me at a very important moment in my life and gave me the opportunity to complete my university studies. Today, one of the ways I can give back for that support is by sharing my experience with those who are just beginning that same journey."

The Next Generation

What makes these programs so important is that our graduates are not simply moving on with their own lives. Many are returning to help others succeed.

We now have hundreds of young professionals whose accomplishments demonstrate what is possible when talent, determination, and opportunity come together.

As members of the San Miguel community, we owe it to these remarkable role models and future leaders of their communities and Mexico to support as many as we can, both undergraduates and those pursuing advanced degrees.

Support can take many forms: sponsorships, mentoring, English-language tutoring, and donations that help JA direct resources where they are most needed.

Our graduates have already demonstrated what they can achieve. Now many are helping the next generation do the same.

For more information, contact donkrim@jovenesadelante.org or visit www.jovenesadelante.org.

Don Krim is President and Development Director of Jóvenes Adelante.

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Las Posadas in San Miguel de Allende

By Alicia Flores



Every December, the streets of San Miguel de Allende become the setting for a tradition that has been celebrated in Mexico for more than four centuries. From December 16 to 24, Las Posadas reenact the journey of Mary and Joseph as they searched for shelter before the birth of Jesus.

The tradition dates to the late sixteenth century, when Augustinian missionaries introduced religious celebrations in Acolman, near Mexico City. Over time, these observances moved beyond churches and monasteries into homes and neighborhoods, becoming an important part of Mexican Christmas celebrations.

The word *posada* means lodging or shelter. During the nine evenings preceding Christmas, participants gather with candles, lanterns, and sometimes figures representing Mary and Joseph. They walk in procession, singing verses that alternate between those requesting shelter and those inside refusing entry. Finally, the doors open, and everyone is welcomed.

In San Miguel de Allende, where religious traditions remain closely connected to community life, posadas bring together families, neighbors, and parish groups. The celebrations combine prayer and song with food, laughter, and the breaking of a traditional star-shaped piñata.

The seven points of the piñata traditionally represent the seven deadly sins, while breaking it symbolizes overcoming temptation. Children eagerly await the shower of fruit and sweets, often including tejocotes, peanuts, and sugarcane.

Although the religious meaning remains central, Las Posadas have also become a celebration of hospitality. Doors are opened, food is shared, and neighbors gather in a tradition passed from one generation to the next.

Perhaps that is what makes Las Posadas particularly meaningful. Beyond the candles, music, and festivities lies a simple message that has endured for centuries: the importance of offering shelter and making room for others.

The Mexican Holiday Calendar

From Guadalupe to Día de la Candelaria

December and January in Mexico are a time of faith, community, and celebration. These are the key dates, traditions, and festivities to know and enjoy in San Miguel de Allende and across the country.



December 12
Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe
A major religious celebration honoring Mexico's patron saint, with masses, music, and festivities throughout the city.

December 16–24
Las Posadas
Nine evenings that reenact Mary and Joseph's search for lodging, with processions, songs, piñatas, and shared food.

December 24
Nochebuena
Christmas Eve, a time for family gatherings, traditional dinners, and midnight mass, with celebrations often continuing late into the night.

December 25
Navidad
Christmas Day, a festive and more relaxed day, often spent with family and friends.

December 28
Día de los Inocentes
Mexico's version of April Fools' Day, when good-natured pranks are part of the fun.

January 6
Día de los Reyes Magos
The Day of the Three Kings, when children receive gifts and families share the traditional Rosca de Reyes, a ring-shaped sweet bread.

February 2
Día de la Candelaria
The Presentation of the Lord, which closes the holiday season. Those who found the baby in the Rosca host a gathering with tamales and atole.





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What Catches Us

By Kat Sparks

The first time I evacuated, I was about five years old, and the evacuation route was a ditch. It was Texas, right around dusk. The sky had turned a strange green, and the air went perfectly still, like the whole world had drawn in a breath and was waiting. I remember my mother grabbing my arm and the two of us running, and then the cool dirt against my cheek as she pushed me down and covered me with her whole body. My little sister wasn't born yet, so it was just the two of us, a mother and her girl, flat in a ditch while the wind did whatever it wanted with the world above us.

I don't remember the tornado as clearly as I remember her. She didn't freeze. She didn't run back for her purse. She knew where to go, and she went. That was my first lesson about emergencies, and it has held up for more than half a century. The person who has already thought it through is the one who keeps everyone else calm.

Life kept handing me refresher courses. I rode out Hurricane Ike. When Katrina hit, I helped families who came out of Louisiana with whatever they could carry, and some with less than that. My brother Mark, brother of my heart, if not of blood, stayed in New Orleans after the levees broke. What he learned there, he taught me, and none of it is on the official checklists. Keep a big, fat marker in your bag, he said, because if you ever have to leave, you write on your door that you are out and where you went, so nobody wastes a minute searching for you. And if you live where floods come, put a sharp hatchet in the attic before you need it, because water rises faster than anyone believes, and the attic becomes a trap without a way through the roof.

That is the difference between a list and a lesson. A list tells you what to buy. A lesson comes from someone who was there. So when Jane told me I could pick any topic this month, I picked emergency preparedness. Of course I did.

Our emergency is quieter

We don't get hurricanes in San Miguel, but we do have floods. Anyone who has watched the rainy season turn our cobblestone streets into rivers knows it. Our houses have azoteas instead of attics, so Mark's hatchet may stay in the toolbox, but his point holds. Know where you would go before the water comes. Still, the emergency most of us will actually face is the lights going out and staying out, whether from a solar flare, a technical failure, or something nobody saw coming. When the power goes, it takes more with it than most newcomers realize. The pump that fills your tinaco stops. The card terminal at the tienda stops. The cell tower down the road runs on backup batteries that don't last forever. Most of us won't be going anywhere. We will be sheltering right where we are, in the dark, waiting.

And sometimes the whole world blinks. The week I sat down to write this, a Microsoft outage scrambled email and business systems across dozens of countries. The very next day, the FAA grounded every departing flight in the United States because of a communications failure. That was two days and two reminders that the systems we lean on are not as sturdy as they look.

When the lights go out, con calma

Preparedness isn't about fear. It's about doing a few small things on a quiet Tuesday so that a dark Thursday is only an inconvenience. Here is what I have learned about staying put in a San Miguel house when the grid goes down.

- **Treat your tinaco like a bank account.** When the power goes, your pump stops, and whatever is in the tinaco is all you have until it comes back. Stop the long showers and the laundry right away. Keep sealed garrafones of drinking water on top of that—at least a gallon per person per day, and count the dog.
- **Know how to light your stove by hand.** Most gas stoves here have an electric spark, but the burners still work with a match or a long lighter. Practice once now, in daylight, so you aren't figuring it out by flashlight.
- **Line the toilet.** When the water runs out, a heavy bag lining the regular toilet bowl turns it back into a working bathroom. Keep a box of bags and a bucket of sawdust or kitty litter with your supplies. Nobody puts this in the glossy guides, and everyone is grateful for it on day two.

- **Keep the fridge shut.** A full freezer stays frozen for about two days if nobody opens it. If you take medication that needs refrigeration, plan ahead for a cooler and ice.
- **Headlamps, not candles.** Candles start fires, and the fire truck may be slow on a night like that. A headlamp keeps your hands on the railing and the leash.
- **Cash in small bills.** No power means no card terminals and no ATMs. Keep enough pesos at home for a week of tortillas, garrafones, and gas.
- **Charge everything, always.** Keep your phone topped up and a power bank charged, and know that your car can charge a phone too. Agree ahead of time on one WhatsApp group where your people will check in.
- **Numbers on the freezer.** Write emergency numbers on one side of a page, including the CFE line to report the outage, and your own information on the other, like your medications, allergies, doctor, and who to call. Put it on the freezer, where anyone who comes to help can find it.
- **Keep Mark's marker anyway.** If you have to leave to stay with a friend who has solar or a generator, write it on your door.

The part no checklist covers

For two years now, I have hosted Expat Emergency Preparedness meetings, and these days we often gather on the rooftop at Silveyra's. I thought we would talk about flashlights. We do. But what actually happens up there is better. Neighbors who have lived three doors apart for years finally trade phone numbers. Someone who has been through it explains which hospital to name when you call for help. Someone else knows exactly how to buy gas without getting shortchanged. People leave with a checklist, and more importantly, with names.

The real emergency plan isn't the bag. It's the people. Mexico understood this long before most of us arrived. Here, the *vecina* holds your spare key. The señora at the corner *tienda* notices when you haven't come by. Some of us arrive thinking independence means needing no one. The ones who thrive learn the opposite. The strongest thing you can be is connected.

So here is my ask. Do the basics. Then do the warmer, harder thing and knock on one door. Learn the name of the neighbor who would check on you, and be the neighbor who checks on someone else. Start a WhatsApp group for your street or your building. Find out who lives alone, who has a generator, who speaks Spanish, and who used to be a nurse.

Where to start

I have put complimentary checklists for building a Bug Out Bag, for yourself, your pets, your children, and the elders in your life, at **www.UniversityofExpats.com/emergency-preparedness**. Print them, share them, and stick them on the fridge next to your freezer sheet.

If you want to go deeper, my new course on sheltering in place when the grid goes down walks you through water, equipment, food, medical needs, cash, communication, and staying safe and calm. You'll find it at:
www.UniversityofExpats.com/grid-down.
And come up to the rooftop. Bring a neighbor.

Back to the ditch

I still think about that evening in Texas. My mother couldn't stop the tornado. Nobody could. What she could do was be ready, and hold on to me.

In the end, that is what catches us. It isn't luck or the government or the cloud. It's each other.

Kat Sparks is a bestselling author, performer, and the founder of ExperienceSMA.com and University of Expats. She has called San Miguel de Allende home for more than twenty years.



Tlalpujahua: Christmas Town

By Alicia Flores

The name Tlalpujahua comes from Nahuatl and is commonly translated as “spongy earth,” a reference to the area's soil. The town's history, however, is anything but soft. For centuries, gold and silver mining shaped its economy, attracting workers and creating considerable wealth. When mining declined during the twentieth century, families faced unemployment and the difficult decision of leaving in search of work.

Then came an unexpected opportunity: Christmas ornaments.

From Gold to Glass

In the 1960s, Joaquín Muñoz Orta and his wife, María Elena Ruiz Villagrán, returned to Mexico after spending time in the United States, where they had learned about the Christmas decoration business. They eventually established a workshop producing blown-glass ornaments in Tlalpujahua.

Their enterprise, Adornos Navideños, founded in 1965, introduced skills that would spread throughout the community. Workers learned the techniques, and many eventually established workshops of their own. What began as a family business became an important source of employment and a new identity for the town.

The process is fascinating. Artisans heat glass tubes over a flame until the material softens, then blow carefully to create delicate spheres. Once cooled, the ornaments receive a reflective coating before being painted and decorated by hand. Some are simple, traditional Christmas balls. Others feature flowers, landscapes, religious images, or intricate patterns. The range of colours and designs seems endless.

Unlike factory-produced plastic decorations, each handmade ornament carries small differences. Those imperfections are part of its character, evidence of the hands that created it.

Today, the craft is passed between generations. For many families, Christmas is not a few weeks of celebration but a year-round occupation involving glassblowing, painting, packaging, and selling.

A Town Dressed for Christmas

Tlalpujahua was designated a *Pueblo Mágico* in 2005, recognizing its historical character, cultural traditions, and appeal to visitors.

The town itself is worth exploring beyond the ornaments. Narrow streets climb between colourful houses, while the imposing Santuario de Nuestra Señora del Carmen overlooks the historic centre. Its elaborate interior is a reminder of the prosperity that mining once brought to the region.







Visitors can also explore the former Dos Estrellas mine, which offers another perspective on the town's past. The contrast between its mining history and today's delicate glass ornaments is striking.

And, of course, there is the annual *Feria de la Esfera*, the Christmas ornament fair, held during the autumn months leading up to December.

The fair brings together artisans selling thousands of ornaments in every imaginable shape, size, and colour. It is an opportunity to purchase directly from producers, meet the people behind the decorations, and appreciate the skill involved.

For anyone accustomed to buying Christmas decorations in a department store, watching an artisan transform a glass tube into a shimmering ornament offers an entirely different experience.

More Than Christmas Decorations

There is something particularly Mexican about the story of Tlalpujahua. The town took a craft learned elsewhere, adapted it, and made it part of its own cultural and economic identity.

The ornaments now travel far beyond Michoacán, finding their way onto Christmas trees in homes throughout Mexico and abroad.

Yet the town's appeal extends beyond the holiday season. Its mountain setting, architecture, traditional foods, and other crafts make it a destination throughout the year. Visitors can enjoy regional dishes such as corundas and uchepos, browse pottery and stonework, or simply wander through the historic centre.

For those travelling from San Miguel de Allende, Tlalpujahua makes an appealing excursion, particularly during the months when the ornament fair is underway.

Christmas decorations are often sentimental objects. Families bring them out year after year, remembering where they were purchased, who gave them as gifts, or the people who once hung them on the tree.

In Tlalpujahua, those memories begin long before December, in workshops where artisans patiently shape glass over a flame.

The town's greatest achievement may not be that it celebrates Christmas all year, but that it transformed a tradition into a livelihood, exchanging the gold and silver of its past for something equally treasured: a craft that connects generations.

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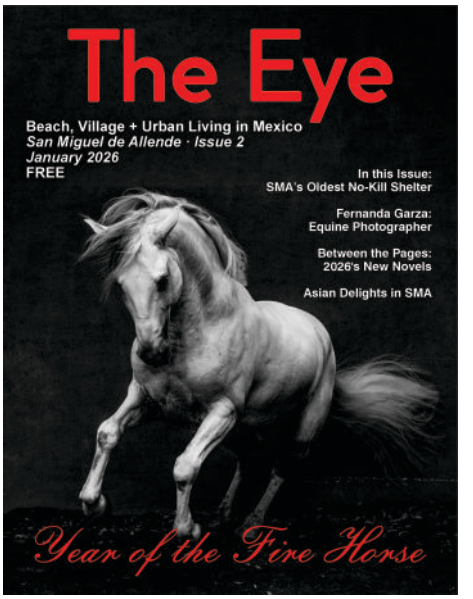









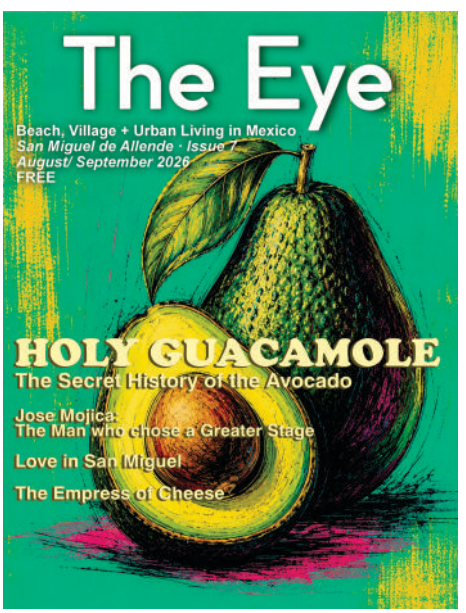



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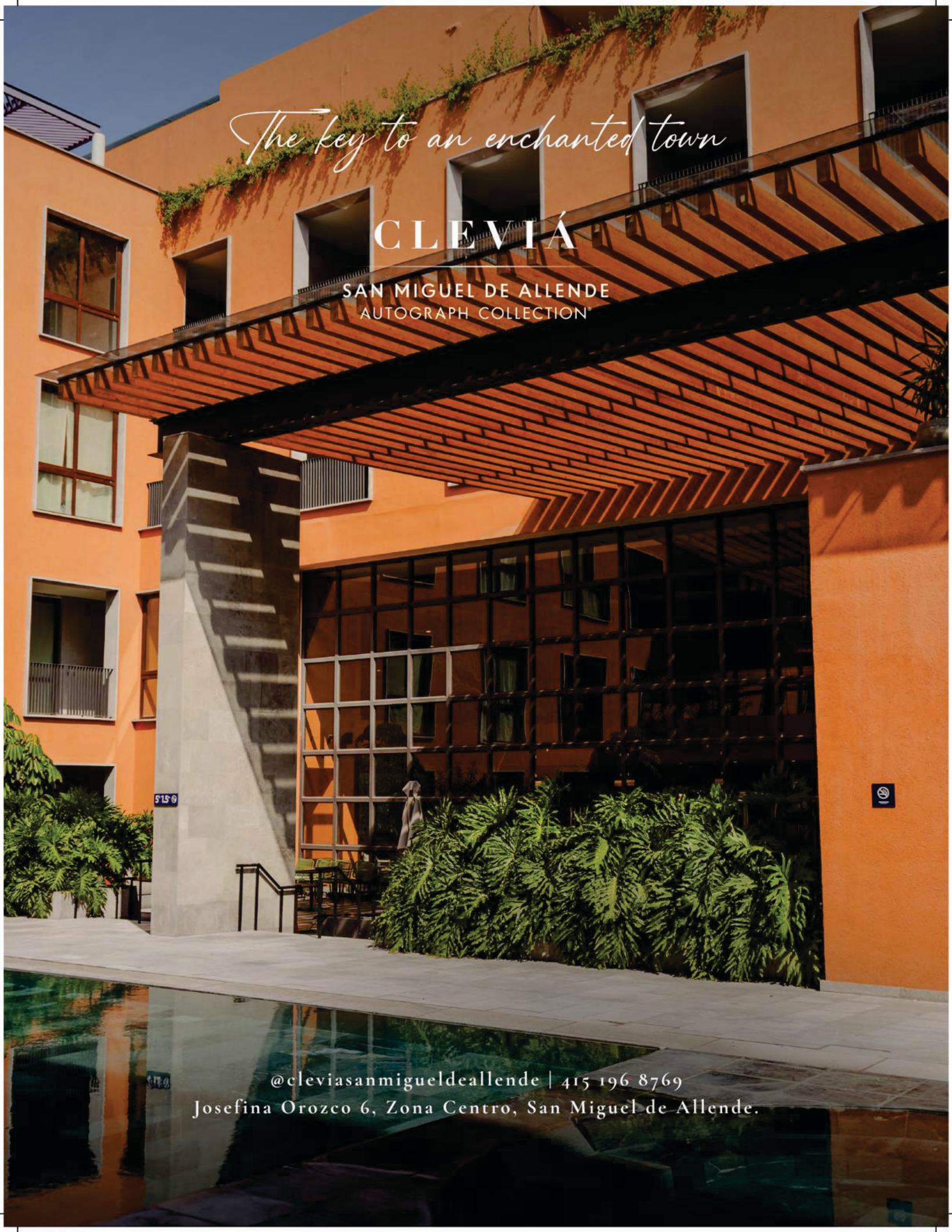
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