

(Explore) MEXICO



## WHERE THE PAST IS PRESENT

With its more than five thousand Spanish Colonial buildings, few places have evoked the past as clearly as Puebla. Mexico's fifth-largest metropolis is dotted with idiosyncratic, sixteenth-century edifices, often adorned with hand-painted tiles. Among the shops and grand buildings of Puebla's *zócalo*, the tree-lined square that serves as the city's social center, is Puebla Cathedral. Consecrated in 1649, Mexico's second-largest church has two bell towers. One tower is open to the public for a commanding view of Puebla. In the distance, visitors can see two distant volcanoes, one snow-capped, the other still active.

Throughout the city and at the traditional markets such as the **Mercado de Artesanías** and **El Parián**, shop for local handicrafts such as *el árbol de la vida* figurines.

The tree-shaped objects have leaves, fruit, animals, and human figures wired to their branches. Exquisite, hand-painted Talavera tiles, dinnerware, and ceramics can be purchased at local workshops. The manufacture of pottery in Puebla dates back to before the

arrival of the Spanish conquerors. Moctezuma, it's said, would eat only from ceramics made in the region.

In a place with so much history, it's hardly surprising to find a variety of museums. At the **Museo Regional de Antropología e Historia de Puebla**, historic sculpture,

photographs, and armory allow visitors a broad overview of the area's cultural development, from the pre-Hispanic era on to the Mexican Revolution. The fifteen exhibition rooms at the **Museo de Arte José Luis Bello y González** house Talavera ceramics, local marquetry, majolica pottery, and oil paintings. At the **Museo de Arte Popular Poblano**, six exhibition rooms represent the regions of the state of Puebla through displays of crafts and cooking utensils.

No discussion of Puebla is complete without a mention of its cuisine. Puebla is the home of *mole poblano*. Consisting of a spicy chocolate sauce served over chicken or turkey, the dish was allegedly created by a local nun. Another well-known dish is *chiles en nogada*. Its colors are those of the national flag: large green chilies are stuffed with meat and dried fruit, covered in creamy white walnut sauce, and sprinkled with red pomegranate seeds. Other local delicacies include *cemita*, a sesame roll filled with *chiles rellenos*, ham or white cheese, and seasoned with herbs.

Those hoping to work off a filling meal should visit the two nearby national parks. **Izta-Popo National Park** has about sixty-four thousand acres with spectacular views of the Popocatepetl and Iztacihuatl volcanoes. At **La Malintzi National Park**, guides can help visitors climb a dormant volcano. Trails run past vegetation and narrow mountain ridges. After spending the night in a cabin, visitors can head to the summit, and leave the world below.

