

The Eye



Beach, Village + Urban Living in Mexico

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FREE

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The Pueblo Mágico
of Mexican Silver**

Mexican Opals

**The Thrill of the Hunt:
Gem Hunting Adventures in Mexico**



Layne Ulmer Karla Mendez Mike Leon Lindsay Harder Erin May Brent May Leah Guzmán Hector Cisneros Bryan Paschke Mario Devcic

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Editor's Letter

"What we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument."

C.S.Lewis

Dominion or Delusion?

Imagine the center of the Earth—a churning core of fire, hotter than the surface of the sun. Around it, layers of rock, compressed over millennia, hold the planet together. Some of these rocks are laced with gold, silver, and lithium, elements we've deemed valuable. Others, we grind into dust beneath our feet without a second thought. Wrapped around all of this is water—vast, deep, and ancient—carving its way through rock, evaporating into clouds, raining back down in an endless cycle.

And then, there's us.

We exist only on the thinnest layer, a mere film on the surface of this massive, breathing planet. And yet, we draw lines across it, dividing land into nations, waters into territories, air into controlled space. We claim mountains, rivers, even the empty sky, labeling them with deeds and mineral rights. We build economies, establish laws, and enforce rules over something that will never truly belong to us. We convince ourselves we have dominion over the Earth.

But then, the Earth shrugs. An earthquake swallows a city. A hurricane flattens a coastline. A volcano erupts, spilling molten rock as if to remind us where the true power lies. We scramble to rebuild, to reinforce, to regain control, as if control was ever ours to begin with.

Why do we do this? Why is dominion our highest ambition?

What if we saw this endless striving for control not as strength, but as a kind of weakness? What if the leaders who seek to control land, resources, and people weren't admired for their power, but pitied for their delusion? What if, instead of fighting for dominance, we embraced the simple fact that we are just another part of this planet—not above it, not rulers of it, but made from the same dust as everything else?

Because, in the end, we are not conquerors of rock and water and fire. We are rock and water and fire. And the sooner we recognize that, the sooner we might learn to exist in harmony with the world, rather than constantly trying to claim it.

This month, our writers look at mining in Mexico, one of our earliest efforts to dominate the earth, but one that largely created the modern Mexican economy while filling affluent jewelry boxes. We need to ask at what cost?

See you next month,

Jane

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Editor: Jane Bauer

Copy Editor: Deborah Van Hoewyk

**Writers: Jane Bauer, Julie Etra, Alicia Flores,
Randy Jackson, Carole Reedy, Deborah Van
Hoewyk, Kary Vannice**

**Cover Image: dusk babe at 123rf
Photography/Art: Various Artists**

**Distribution: Renee Biernacki, Maggie Winter
Layout: Jane Bauer**

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TheEyeHuatulco@gmail.com**

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The Thrill of the Hunt: Gem Hunting Adventures in Mexico

By Kary Vannice

Mexico is home to a rich mining history, with an abundance of precious stones and minerals waiting to be discovered. From opals and quartz to silver and other rare gems, the country offers tourists an exciting opportunity to explore mines, dig for their own gemstones, and learn about deep-rooted mining traditions. Whether you're an amateur rockhound or a seasoned collector, gem-hunting destinations throughout Mexico provide a unique blend of adventure, history, and hands-on experience.

Mining has been at the heart of Mexico's story for centuries. Long before the Spanish arrived, the Aztecs and Mayans were using obsidian, jade, and turquoise for tools, jewelry, and ceremonial purposes. When the Spanish set their sights on Mexico's land, they found an abundance of silver, gold, and other precious minerals, turning places like Guanajuato and Zacatecas into some of the richest mining hubs in the world. Today, that legacy is still alive—not just in the country's continued mineral production, but in the hands-on experiences available to those who want to dig a little deeper into history (literally).

The Opals of Querétaro

One of the best places to experience this first hand is in the opal mines of Querétaro, near the charming town of Tequisquiapan. The journey begins with a rugged ride up into the hills, where miners have been extracting these fiery gems for generations. Once you arrive on-site, a professional guide explains the area's geology and teaches participants how to recognize raw opals hidden within the rocks. Visitors are then handed tools and set free to start digging. For some, the rush of excitement when discovering a glimmering stone is well worth the effort, and even for those who don't find a gem to take home, the stunning views of the Querétaro countryside make the experience equally rewarding.

There's Silver in Zacatecas

For a completely different kind of mining adventure, head to Zacatecas and step into the depths of Mina El Edén. Once one of the richest silver mines in the world, this underground labyrinth now serves as a fascinating tourist attraction. A small train takes visitors through dimly lit tunnels, past displays of rare minerals and ancient mining tools. The stories of miners who once toiled in the depths add an element of intrigue and bring the bygone days of silver mining to life. And for those seeking a truly unique experience, stick around after dark—this mine is also home to a nightclub, where you can dance the night away inside a mountain.



The Ghost Mines of Mineral de Pozos

Further south in Guanajuato, the ghost town of Mineral de Pozos tells a haunting story of a once-thriving mining community. Mineral de Pozos lay along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* (The Royal Road of the Interior), a major trade route that ran from what is now Mexico City north to what is now Santa Fe, New Mexico. On the Camino Real traveled minerals – most importantly, gold and silver – from the mines in San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, and Guanajuato – Mineral de Pozos was one stop along the way.



The Santa Brigida Mine, with its distinctive stone structures, stands as a monument to Mexico's mining past. Here, you can wander through the ruins of old mines, their crumbling stone structures still standing as a reminder of a once-booming industry. Trained guides lead visitors through abandoned shafts and tailing piles, where you can sift through rubble in search of small mineral specimens. This connects visitors to the miners who once labored here, and the haunting, picturesque scenery provides great photo opportunities too.

The Mining History Hidden under Guanajuato

In the heart of Guanajuato City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, mining history comes alive in an even more immersive way. The labyrinthine tunnels winding through the city were originally mining passageways, and some of the region's most famous mines, like La Valenciana, once produced an astonishing percentage of the world's silver. Walking through these tunnels, visitors can see mineral veins up close, learn about the city's role in Mexico's economic history, and once you've explored the underground, you can take a ride on the city's gondola to enjoy breathtaking views from high above the city where mining once flourished.



Whether descending into the depths of a historic silver mine, chipping away at rock to reveal blazing fire opals, or simply admiring Mexico's rich geological diversity, these destinations offer unforgettable experiences for adventurers and gem enthusiasts alike. Each location tells a different chapter of Mexico's long mining history, and every visit brings the possibility of uncovering something truly special. If you're ready for an adventure that blends history, discovery, and natural beauty, these Mexican gem-hunting destinations are waiting to be explored.

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The Digital Minefield: Navigating the Complexities of Cryptocurrency

By Randy Jackson

Historical Context: The Price Revolution

After the Spanish conquest of the Americas in the sixteenth century, gold and silver from the mines of Mexico and Peru flooded Spain and spilled across Europe. As gold and silver were already the currencies of Europe, this dramatically increased the money supply, causing a sustained period of inflation throughout Europe. The economic historian Earl Hamilton named this period “The Price Revolution,” highlighting the ripple effects on prices and economic power structures due to this dramatic shift in currency supply.

From Tangible Value to Fiat: The Evolution of Money

For centuries, the value of money was rooted in tangible commodities like gold and silver. In fact, for much of human history, currency was the value of the actual coin exchanged, often gold, silver, copper, or bronze. Later, and for centuries longer, the value of paper currencies depended on a country's gold reserves. However, gold-reserve-based currencies limited the ability of governments to control the economy, such as the ability to increase money supply during economic downturns. By the 1970s, governments adopted “fiat” currency – fiat literally means “let it be done,” i.e., a decree, in this case allowing government economic actions and policies, rather than physical gold, establish the value of a country's currency.

The Rise of Cryptocurrency

Today, cryptocurrency represents a radical shift in understanding, using, and valuing currency. It is a currency that does not depend on minerals or government authority. Instead, its value depends on the trust in the underlying technology, called “blockchain,” and the community consensus of its users; in other words, the value of a cryptocurrency at any moment is the market “sentiment” for that cryptocurrency. Today, hundreds of billions of dollars (US) worth of cryptocurrencies are traded daily. There are many different cryptocurrencies; Bitcoin, Ethereum, and Tether make up the majority of daily trading volumes.

Advantages and Challenges of Decentralization

Cryptocurrency proponents tout decentralization from government and banking institutions as one of its main advantages. Without currency exchange or bank intermediaries, cryptocurrencies can facilitate easier, faster, and cheaper international transactions, making global commerce more accessible. They also present the paradox of user anonymity paired with transparency of transactions. Using blockchain technology, all cryptocurrency transactions are traceable and on a public ledger, but the person or entity behind the transaction is anonymous.



Practical Guide: How to Purchase Cryptocurrency

- **Create an account on a cryptocurrency exchange:** Start by investigating the most widely used cryptocurrency exchanges; the top three are Coinbase, Binance, and Kraken. To comply with financial regulations, you must register and verify your identity. This typically involves providing your name, address, and a copy of a government-issued ID.
- **Deposit Funds:** Once you have an account, you can transfer funds from your bank account or use a credit card. Your cryptocurrency exchange account will hold the funds you have transferred. You then have funds available to purchase the cryptocurrency of your choice.
- **Make a purchase of cryptocurrency:** Once you've decided on which cryptocurrency to purchase, you can place an order to buy it, or a fraction of it, depending on its price and the minimum purchase amount on the exchange. Transaction fees will apply. To this point, this process is similar to executing trades on a stock exchange.
- **Secure your cryptocurrency with a Wallet:** There are two types of cryptocurrency Wallets. Hot Wallets are connected to the Internet, allowing easy access to transactions. Cold Wallets are held separately and are not connected to the internet, often on a USB. This digital wallet does not hold the cryptocurrency but the information that proves ownership and the digital keys (information) needed to enable your interaction with the blockchain holding the cryptocurrency.

Understanding Cryptocurrency Transactions

A cryptocurrency transaction relies on that blockchain technology, which offers a highly secure, transparent, and tamper-proof method of recording transactions across a global network of decentralized computers. The steps detailed above explain how to purchase cryptocurrency. The following (VERY simplified version) describes what happens behind the scenes when blockchain technology performs the purchase transaction.

- **Transaction creation:** When you place an order to buy (or sell) a cryptocurrency, you are requesting to transfer ownership of a certain amount of cryptocurrency. This transaction includes the sender's details, the recipient's wallet address, and the amount to be sent.
- **Miner Verification:** Your new transaction is pooled with other as-yet unconfirmed transactions to form a block of transactions selected by “miners” for processing. A miner registers the transaction on the blockchain using specialized hardware – ASICs, or Application-Specific Integrated Circuits – designed to mine one and only one type of cryptocurrency. The miner uses the ASIC to solve a unique cryptographic puzzle created by a mathematical algorithm based, in part, on the unique transactions included in the block.

Because miners are rewarded for solving the puzzle with a certain amount of the underlying cryptocurrency, they compete to find a solution. When a miner solves the puzzle, the block of transactions is added to the blockchain as a permanent, unalterable verification of those transactions. The transfer of ownership from seller to buyer is now complete.

Cryptocurrency Mining and Environmental Impact

This description of cryptocurrency mining is extremely basic – the nuances and complexities of the actual mining would just boggle the mind of any cryptocurrency novice. However, you can think of the extensive data-processing centers necessary to run blockchain processes as a type of physical cryptocurrency mines.

Blockchain processes require large amounts of electricity for the computers to solve complex mathematical puzzles needed for blockchain functionality. Additional electricity is also necessary to keep the computers cool. As a result, these cryptocurrency mines are built in areas with low electricity rates and places where less air conditioning is required. However, just as most types of physical mining have a negative impact on the environment, the impact of such digital mining operations on the environment is also a concern.

Conclusion: The Future of Mining and Technology

Today, there are cryptocurrency “mines,” or data processing centers, across Mexico, even as Mexico continues the centuries-old tradition of mining metals from the earth – it's the world's top producer of silver, and mines significant quantities of gold, copper, and zinc (see articles on mining elsewhere in this issue). Creating wealth by extracting physical minerals seems fundamentally “normal” when it comes to mining, whereas the wealth created by solving advanced equations of cryptographic puzzles doesn't line up with our concept of mining at all.

And yet, technology is rapidly changing everything, including our concepts. New technologies like blockchain are innovative and capable of transforming entire industries beyond finance; they have already transformed healthcare, real estate, and how supply chains operate. The nature of blockchain technology ensures that once information is entered, it cannot be altered. This offers a technological platform for benefits far beyond the realm of currency exchange.

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Mexican Opals

By Julie Etra

Yes, Mexico mines and refines opals, primarily around Querétaro today and formerly in the state of Jalisco. Opal enthusiasts can even take tours near La Trinidad, less than 30 minutes from Tequisquiapan, to explore the region's rich opal deposits (see Kary Vannice's article elsewhere in this issue).

Global Distribution

Opals are found worldwide in specific geological formations, with each region producing distinct varieties. In addition to Mexico, opal mines exist in Germany, France, Spain, New Zealand, Australia, England, and Nevada, USA. Nevada opal, found in the Virgin Valley northeast of Las Vegas, is a type of fire opal, similar to the vibrant opals mined in Mexico.

The Origins of the Name

The word "opal" is derived from the Latin opalus, related to sight and light, while the Greek opallios means "to see a change of color." Opals have been admired since ancient times, with the Roman author and naturalist Pliny the Elder describing them around 55 A.D.

In the Aztec civilization, opals were known as Vitzitziltecpa in the Nahuatl language, meaning "hummingbird stone." The Aztecs believed opals had magical and healing properties, and these gemstones, mined in Querétaro, were often presented as tribute to the rulers of Tenochtitlán. Examples of these opals can be seen today at the Museo del Templo Mayor in Mexico City.

Legends and Myths

One of the most famous legends about opals comes from India. In Hindu mythology, the gods Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu quarreled over a beautiful maiden. The Eternal One, tired of their bickering, transformed her into a cloud and dyed it in multiple colors to distinguish it from others. As the cloud dissolved into rain and touched the earth, it created opal—known as the "stone of a thousand colors."

Types of Opals

Opals are classified into two main types: precious (also called noble) and common. The key difference is that precious opals exhibit a "play of color," shifting hues depending on the angle and light, while common opals are typically translucent and lack this effect.

Precious Opal Varieties:

Black Opal: A dark-bodied opal (black, dark blue, or gray) with striking play of color.



White Opal: Light-colored (white or pale cream) with a delicate color play.



Boulder Opal: Found attached to its ironstone or sandstone host rock.



Crystal Opal: Transparent to semi-translucent with vibrant play of color.



Matrix Opal: Displays color play throughout the entire stone, not just on the surface.



Fire Opal: Translucent to transparent with red, orange, or yellow hues, often found in Mexico.



Pink Opal: A common opal variety ranging in shades of pink.



Hyalite Opal: A clear, glass-like opal with no play of color.



Dark Opal: Has a darker body tone but is not as deep as black opal.



Common Opal (also known as Potch):

- Lacks the characteristic play-of-color found in precious opal.
- Can be found in various colors, including purple, pink, blue, and green.

Doublet and Triplet Opals:

These are assembled opals, where a thin layer of opal is bonded to a backing (doublet) or sandwiched between two pieces of resin or potch (triplet).

Opal Formation

Opals are formed through volcanic activity and are composed of a silica-based gel that can contain up to 10% water. Silica, a compound of silicon and oxygen, is also found in quartz crystals and beach sand.

Opal formation is associated with geothermal activity—hot springs and geysers bring silica-rich water to the surface, where it settles into cracks and fissures, gradually hardening into layers. Opals most commonly form in rocks such as:

Limonite: An iron ore.

Sandstone: A sedimentary rock.

Marl: A light-colored, carbonate-rich mud found in freshwater and marine environments.

Rhyolite & Basalt: Volcanic rocks associated with Mexico's opal deposits.

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Mexican Opals

Mexico is famous for its fire opals, which range from translucent to transparent red, orange, and yellow. Despite their name, not all fire opals exhibit play of color—the term refers to their body color rather than optical effects.

Opals were prized by the Aztecs, but large-scale mining did not resume until the early 1800s, when Querétaro became a major hub for opal extraction. In the 1950s, opals were discovered northwest of Guadalajara in Jalisco, near the town of Magdalena. By the 1960s, Magdalena was surrounded by hundreds of small-scale mines. Although much of the area was mined out by the 1970s, some open-pit mining continues today, using bulldozers and backhoes to extract opals from rhyolite formations.

If you're looking to purchase fire opals, La Crucecita offers various options—but quality varies. For expert guidance and high-quality stones, Cielito Lindo is a trusted local jeweler.



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Batopilas: A Silver Town in the Heart of the Sierra Madre

By Jane Bauer

Tucked deep within the rugged canyons of the Sierra Madre Occidental in Chihuahua, the town of Batopilas boasts a rich mining history that once made it one of the wealthiest silver-producing centers in Mexico. Though now a quiet and picturesque village, Batopilas was once a thriving boomtown that attracted miners, adventurers, and fortune-seekers from around the world.

The indigenous Tarahumara people were aware of the region's mineral wealth long before the arrival of the Spanish, but it was in 1632 that Spanish explorers officially discovered silver in Batopilas. By the 18th and 19th centuries, the town's mines were producing vast quantities of high-grade silver, some of it so pure that it could be molded by hand.

The most famous chapter in Batopilas' mining history began in 1880 when Alexander Shepherd, a former governor of Washington, D.C., acquired mining rights in the area. Shepherd, seeing the immense potential of Batopilas' silver deposits, invested heavily in modernizing the industry. He built an extensive network of tunnels, processing facilities, and even a hydroelectric plant—the first in Mexico—allowing for increased production and efficiency. This innovation made Batopilas one of the first places in Mexico to have electricity, long before many larger cities, further cementing its status as an important industrial center. Under Shepherd's management, the Batopilas Mining Company became one of the world's top silver producers, extracting millions of ounces of silver and employing thousands of workers.

Despite its prosperity, Batopilas' fortunes were not destined to last. The challenges of operating in such a remote and rugged region, combined with the volatility of silver prices and the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution, led to a decline in mining operations. By the mid-20th century, large-scale mining had ceased, and Batopilas slowly faded into obscurity.



I've only been to Batopilas once, almost 20 years ago, but it left a lasting impression on me. It felt like a ghost town, silent and almost surreal, yet I could sense that something extraordinary had happened there. Getting there was an adventure in itself—I took a public van from Creel, winding down these steep canyon roads, gripping my seat as we navigated hairpin turns with sheer drops on either side. It was hard to believe that this remote, sleepy village had once been a booming center of wealth and industry. Learning about its history later only deepened my fascination. I haven't been back, but Batopilas has stayed with me, lingering in my mind like an unfinished story, calling me to return one day.

How to Get There

Batopilas is deep in the Copper Canyon region of Chihuahua, and getting there is no small feat. The most common route is from Creel, a town that serves as a hub for exploring the region. From Creel, travelers can take a shared van or a public bus for the approximately 5-6 hour journey down the dramatic mountain roads into the canyon. The road is steep, narrow, and thrilling—equal parts breathtaking and nerve-wracking. For those looking for a more scenic approach, the Chepe train runs to Creel, where you can arrange transport onward to Batopilas. The journey isn't for the faint of heart, but if you love travel that feels like stepping into a different time, Batopilas is worth every twist and turn.

While large-scale mining is a thing of the past, Batopilas remains a testament to the power and impermanence of resource-driven economies. Its story is one of ambition, ingenuity, and resilience—a silver town that shone brightly and then faded, leaving behind a legacy etched in the canyons of the Sierra Madre.



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ECO LUXURY VILLA #69329
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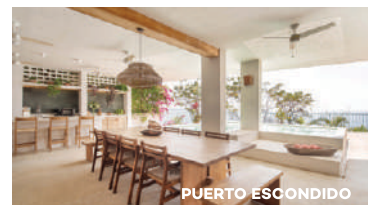
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CASA POLO #50649
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ARROCITO VILLA #73114
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5 Things: San Miguel de Allende

By Kary Vannice

San Miguel de Allende is a picturesque city famous for its Spanish colonial architecture, colorful facades, cobblestone streets, and thriving artistic scene. Just a few hours from Mexico City, this UNESCO World Heritage Site offers a perfect blend of culture, cuisine, and relaxation. With its mix of colonial charm and modern creativity, the town provides an enchanting escape where visitors can immerse themselves in history, adventure, and natural beauty. Whether you're an art lover, foodie, or simply seeking a memorable escape, here are five things to experience in San Miguel de Allende.

1. Stay at Casa de la Cuesta

For a truly authentic and immersive stay, book a room at Casa de la Cuesta, a charming bed and breakfast showcasing traditional Mexican architecture and décor. Located just a short walk from the town's central plaza, you'll be treated to photo-worthy views, comfortable accommodations, and a relaxing courtyard. Guests can enjoy traditional breakfasts featuring local ingredients and explore the in-house mask museum, a fascinating tribute to indigenous cultures.



2. Dine at Rústica

It's a must to have breakfast or lunch at Rústica, one of San Miguel's hidden gems. Known for its fresh, locally sourced ingredients and cozy outdoor garden ambiance, you'll want to stay for hours, chatting with friends and sipping coffee or chai. The unique, ultra-fresh menu features breakfast pizza (my personal favorite), a mouthwatering fig, arugula, and serrano pizza, and many vegetarian and vegan options, like the popular vegan Chilaquiles. The café's laid-back vibe and friendly service make it a local favorite.



3. Visit the Fabrica La Aurora

Art enthusiasts will love spending an afternoon at Fabrica La Aurora, a former textile factory transformed into a dynamic art and design center. The space houses galleries, studios, and shops featuring contemporary and traditional Mexican art. You'll find paintings, sculptures, textiles, and jewelry from talented local artists, as well as interior design shops, restaurants, and cafes. Many galleries also offer workshops and art classes, providing you with the opportunity to participate in the creative vibe.



4. Take a Hot Air Balloon Ride

For a breathtaking view of San Miguel de Allende's rolling hills and vibrant townscape, embark on a hot air balloon ride at sunrise. Floating high above the city, you'll start your morning bathed in golden light illuminating the iconic Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel and the surrounding countryside. Many tour operators offer packages that include breakfast and a celebratory toast after your flight, making it a magical and memorable experience you'll never forget!



5. Visit Cañada de la Virgen

Once you've had your fill of San Miguel's colonial architecture, step back in time by visiting Cañada de la Virgen, a nearby ancient archaeological site. A short drive outside of the city, this Mesoamerican pyramid complex offers guided tours that provide fascinating insights into the rituals and astronomical knowledge of the Otomi people. It's an experience that's both educational and awe-inspiring, with spectacular views of the rolling Mexican countryside.



San Miguel de Allende has been honored multiple times by Condé Nast Traveler in its Readers' Choice Awards. In 2024, it was named the "Best City in Mexico and the World," marking its fifth appearance at the top of the "Best Small Cities" list.

San Miguel's charm lies in its vibrant culture, artistic soul, and welcoming atmosphere. Whether you're wandering through its historic streets, popping into shops and art galleries, savoring the rich flavors of the local cuisine, or sipping cocktails as the sun sets from a charming rooftop bar, every moment here feels like an unforgettable adventure. This town offers a perfect balance of relaxation and discovery, allowing you to experience its magic at your own pace.

Do you have a favorite
place in Mexico?

What are the 5 things we can't miss?

Send us your list:
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While **feeling completely secluded**, enjoy a short **4-minute nature drive** to the conveniences of **Santa Cruz**, and an **8-minute drive to La Crucecita**.

Huatulco's first sector dedicated to **modern architecture integrated into nature** will **forever remain quiet and preserved** thanks to the presence of the **National Park**, as well as **low density** and **low height** regulations. Bike, walk, jog or drive into town easily via a scenic road in perfect condition, all while relishing the silence of a **one-of-a-kind neighbor: Huatulco's National Park**.

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Atmosphere Personified: Environment as Character

By Carole Reedy

Readers often take for granted the setting of a novel, expecting the author to create an atmosphere either directly through straightforward description or indirectly via more oblique prose.

For many stories, though, the sense of place offers the reader another dimension, essentially creating an additional character central to the development of the plot.

The stories in these books could not be told anywhere other than where their authors have set them.

Belfast: Adrian McKinty's Sean Duffy crime novels

When we think of Belfast we think: City of the Troubles. Although they can be traced back hundreds of years, the “troubles” as we know them began in the 1960s and lasted until the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

Unless you've been living in a bubble, you know the conflict takes place in a sorely divided Ireland. The island includes the southern portion (the Republic of Ireland), devoted to a sovereign Ireland, and the six counties in the north (Northern Ireland) that are still loyal to the British government, which held control of the entire island until the Republic was formed in 1949. Many people see a united Ireland as the ultimate goal.

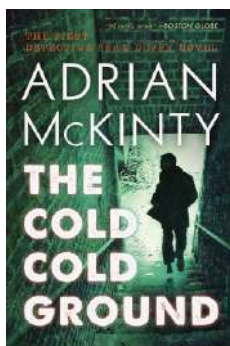
This is the setting for the life and career of Detective Inspector Sean Duffy, the only Catholic detective in a nearly 100 percent Protestant unit in Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland and the focal point of crime in the country. DI Duffy has a tough exterior, but plays Brahms on the police car radio; he knows how to manipulate, but is essentially honest.

Duffy takes us through the back streets and surrounding rural areas of the city in a country that is desperately looking for solutions to problems of a criminal nature, but also for resolutions in the struggle for a structure in which everyone can live in peace.

The author reinvents actual happenings and crimes of the past to suit his situations. This gives credibility to the sometimes unbelievable mayhem experienced in the region. As we know, truth can be stranger than fiction.

With Duffy the personality and Belfast the catalyst, McKinty has created a world that informs, entertains, and engages his readers. The writing is precise, at times staccato and occasionally lyric, like a Brahms symphony.

Start with book one, *The Cold Cold Ground* (2012). You need not read the novels in order of publication. To keep readers on their toes, McKinty ends each book with various surprises and tweaks. He never loosens the reins nor lets go of his reader.



Shetland Islands: Anne Cleeves series

Confession: I had to pull out my trusty map collection to locate Shetland. My Chicago Public School education didn't prepare me for this congregation of small islands 110 miles northeast of mainland Scotland – they are a very real character in the series Cleeves sets there, indeed a world unto itself, relying on weather conditions and human camaraderie in their frank isolation.



The books and characters provide compelling, page-turning entertainment. Detective Inspector Jimmy Perez, despite his recurring ennui, leads the investigations in the islands.

Winds, storms, and a raging sea are felt as characters that permeate the islanders' actions and states of mind. Readers might be in awe of this remote way of life. Contrary to what I originally thought when the books were recommended to me, I, a big-city girl, devoured the series during the pandemic, though I initially wondered why a remote place surrounded by water held any interest for me.

There is also a TV series based on the books, but buyer beware. The plots and even characters don't always duplicate the books. Some are uniquely drawn for the television series.

Addendum: a friend just called, lamenting that she needed something substantive to read that would engage her for a period of time, something to “bite her teeth into” that would endure and captivate. Right off I recommended this Shetland series.

Naples, Italy: Elena Ferrante in the Neapolitan novels

Classical music lovers swarm to Naples to inhale the sea air of the city where opera was born. Its Teatro San Carlos is the oldest active venue for opera in the world, having opened in 1737.

But this cultural-historical aspect is not the Naples of pseudonymous Italian author Ferrante's stories in the brilliantly penned novels that make up this tetralogy.



Naples is awakening after the horror of World War II, when the port city was destroyed by the Nazis. It is reestablishing itself in a world that is healing. People are struggling in a place where obvious violence prevails in a city of unrest and poverty. The plot and characters are fiction, but the city is all too real.

The Ferrante books became international bestsellers to the point that there are tours for fans of the series that snake through the dark corners of the city frequented by Lenu and Lila, the main characters, both born in 1944 and raised in the Rione Luzzatti area of Naples (bordered by the prison to the north and central train station to the east).

Naples is not a grand city, like Rome, and no distances seem far from others. The Rione Luzzatti neighborhood, full of littered sidewalks, unmaintained grass, laundry instead of curtains hanging in windows, and the presence of a general malaise, is known for its poverty, violence, and a Mafia presence. While not physically far from the sea and tourist areas, it is miles away mentally and emotionally.

The four novels take us through the childhood and adolescence of the girls, and into early adulthood. Inseparable in early childhood, their paths wander, cross, and often merge later as they go their separate ways in their teen years.

If you hope to encounter the famous author on the streets of Naples, you will be wasting your time as she has successfully chosen to remain anonymous. Despite numerous searches, her identity remains a mystery, somewhat like her city.

Norfolk England: Elly Griffiths' Dr. Ruth Galloway series

A quiet salt marsh is the home of choice for archeologist Dr. Ruth Galloway. She thrives there but also finds peace of mind...and some surprising archeological secrets.



The remoteness, the eerie vibes, and the lure and eccentricity of the salt marsh set the stage for a diverse cast of characters you'll think about when you drift off to sleep and again when you awaken.

The bones of bodies found in the marsh and the surrounding area come out of the distant past and the all-to-familiar present. It is up to Ruth and her team to determine the ages of buried objects. Was the death natural or imposed?

Each book, as is each case, is unique.

An eavesdropper listening in on a conversation about this series would think the characters belong to your inner circle of friends. You'll be frustrated by their actions and occasionally angry with them, and then you'll forgive them, just as we do in daily lives and relationships.

You will savor every minute at the salt marsh.

It's important to read this series in order, as the author pays close attention to the development of each character and the relationships they establish with other characters. No doubt you will fall in love with Cathbad, as most of us have.

There are 15 books in this captivating series about a woman obsessed by bones! Begin your archeological adventures now with the first book, *The Crossing Places* (2009).

Sicily: Andrea Camilleri and his Montalbano series

Andrea Camilleri's 28 books paint a portrait of the island he loves and inhabited (he died in 2019, at the age of 93). They will leave you enchanted with this largest island in the Mediterranean. In addition, the customs and manners of the locals and their idiosyncrasies – especially those of the renowned detective, Commissario Salvo Montalbano – bring spice to the entire landscape.



A TV series based on the series, *Il Commissario Montalbano* (1999-2021, still available on Amazon Prime), has proved almost as successful as the books. As usual with books and movies, the books delve more deeply into the history and social issues of the island.

The TV series is broadcast in Italian with subtitles. If you're tempted to ignore the subtitles in an effort to improve your Italian, you may be challenged, as the Italian is Sicilian Italian and is peppered with dialect. Take it from one who has tried.

The fictionalized city of Vigàta is based on Camilleri's home town, Puerto Empdocle. In the books, the town is located in the famous historical area of Agrigento, on the southern coast of Sicily. The harsh landscape, teetering on the edge of the coast, parallels the often rough daily life of its habitants.

Sicily's diverse population, thanks to the variety of cultures that have invaded this desirable island, brings a Neapolitan flavor of ways and manners. Fortunately for us, Inspector Montalbano savors the cuisine of his roots. Camilleri shares this table with us throughout: after all, one has to eat!

The series requires a commitment from the reader, but the result is a deep satisfaction with the consistent characterization, brilliant plotting, and extra credit for ambiance.

I envy the adventure you have ahead of you with each of these remarkable place-based books series!



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Taxco de Alarcón: The Pueblo Mágico of Mexican Silver

By Deborah Van Hoewyk

Maybe you don't spend a lot of time thinking about Mexico's GDP, or even what industries have made it the world's 15th largest economy (13th largest GDP), and Latin America's 2nd largest economy (Brazil is the largest). Maybe you do think about the products that visitors appreciate – and buy. When I lived in Huatulco, I bought traditional craft items for me, my family, and my house. And every year, I bought a pair of silver earrings.

Silver has written the economic signature of Mexico since well before the resource-extraction-obsessed conquistadors, priests, and administrators from Spain set foot on dry land; while the Spaniards might have preferred gold, it was silver that supported their colonial ambitions (Mexico is still the world's largest producer of silver, and the industry employed 350,000 people in 2020). While there are silver mines throughout the northern half of Mexico, the one place most famous for both producing silver and turning it into exquisite jewelry, not to mention plates, cups, figurines, picture frames, etc., is Taxco de Alarcón.

The Aztecs, the Spanish, and Taxco as a Silver-Mining Town

Located 170 km (106 miles) south of Mexico City in the state of Guerrero, Taxco was most probably named Tlachco in Nahuatl, meaning “place of the ballgame.” The city's seal shows a ballcourt complete with players, equipment, and skulls (Aztec ballgames were not without consequences). According to legend, hunters pursuing a huge deer chased it up Atachi Hill, also called Huizteco Mountain, located where Taxco now stands. When the hunters killed the deer, they built a fire ring of stones and roasted a haunch. They noticed that the stones of the fire ring sparkled and melted – the next morning, silver had formed a circle where the fire ring had been. After that primitive smelting, they hunted silver in Tlachco.



A more pedestrian account of the start of Taxco's identity as a silver-mining and -working center comes from the history of the Aztec empire. In general, we refer to all Nahuatl-speaking indigenous peoples as Aztecs; Tlachco was in territory inhabited by Chontals, Tlapanecos, Mixtecs/Mazatecas, and maybe a couple more; by 1414, the Aztec Mexico from Mexico City had started incorporating this area into their empire. Under Moctezuma I (1440-69), the Aztec Empire expanded significantly; Moctezuma I placed Tlachco under a military governor and demanded tribute in the form of gold and silver, thus giving rise to the pre-Hispanic mining industry.

After Moctezuma II was defeated by the Spanish in 1521, the conquistadors Juan de Cabra and Juan de Salcedo were sent out from the capital in 1524 to find sources of precious and useful minerals (among other things, they were looking for tin for making cannons). They arrived in Tlachco, although at that point, it didn't look too promising as a source of untold riches. It was already a built-up population center, but the Spanish thought it looked like “the poorest and most despised of places, as were its people, and there was nothing there but some hills and henequen plants of little worth,” as described in a later letter (1552) to Charles V, King of Spain, by an official named Pedro de Meneses. In particular, it lacked a market. (That was actually a plus, as markets, with their indigenously determined values and individual control of sales, annoyed the Spanish, who wanted to control everything of any value.) Meneses continued on to say that “it came about that silver and gold mines were discovered there” (the two Juans apparently continued looking under the henequen plants).

The Spanish started impressing the native populations, already accustomed to working for tribute, to do the mining; this included “renting” workers from friendly *encomenderos* (Spanish to whom the Crown awarded the right to receive tribute from a geographic area, see Julie Etra's article in the March 2025 issue of *The Eye*). By 1539, however, regulations prevented Spanish mine owners from exploiting the indigenous people as mine workers – they would have to be paid for their work.

The mine owners promptly started importing black slaves as the cheapest workers; by 1579, two thirds of the Taxco mine workers were slaves. The black slaves rebelled, and by 1600, they had completely fled the mining region. By that point, however, the Spanish had established large-scale, machine-assisted mining; by 1600, gold and silver bullion comprised 80% of Mexico's exports.

There has been a lot of historical research on the mine workers in colonial Mexico – suffice it to say it was horrible work, people were gravely injured, died in cave-ins, and were poisoned by minerals from the earth and minerals, mostly mercury, used in refining the precious metals.

The Mines and the City of Taxco

Skipping ahead to the 18th century, a newly-arrived French-Spanish teenager – he was 16 or 17 in 1716 – was going walkabout in the hills of Taxco when he saw a vein of silver running across the surface rocks. José de la Borda, born in France in 1599, would grow rich in Taxco.



What he did with his mining income made Taxco what you see today. Committed to the Catholic church and its principles of charity, he built much of what the city needed – roads, schools, houses. Other rich miners followed his example, building the McMansions of the day throughout the small city.

Don Borda's greatest contribution to Taxco is the Templo de Santa Prisca. When he was nearly 50 years old, with somewhat more than three decades of increasing his fortune derived from mining, he asked the religious establishment of Taxco for permission to build a new church; he specified that he would be in charge of building it, and that no one else could interfere with the design and construction of the church. The authorities gave their permission, and the church was built between 1751 and 1759. (The first priest of the church was Don Borda's son.)

Saint Prisca, a Roman noblewoman martyred for her support of the early Christian church, is the patron saint of prisoners. The church of Santa Prisca is thought to protect Taxco from lightning and storms common in this mountainous area. The building itself is considered one of the finest examples of the “churrigueresque” style in New Spain (churrigueresque is also called “ultra Baroque” – the style is highly ornamented, with decorative detail working its way up the building starting from the main façade).

José de la Borda also built homes in Mexico City and Cuernavaca; his Cuernavaca home was surrounded by gardens designed and installed by his son – the gardens are now a public park. Don Borda also generously gave to social charities and was lauded by the church for his charity, humility, and liberal views – nonetheless, he is also known for his harsh exploitation of native labor in his silver mines.

The War of Independence – the End of Colonial Silver

José de la Borda died in 1788 in his home in Cuernavaca. In 1810, Mexico declared its independence from Spain; the war would last until 1821. During the war, the Spanish mining barons destroyed their mines to prevent the revolutionaries from taking them. The war, and post-war political complications, left little time and few resources to try to revive the silver industry.

In the latter part of the 19th century, as Mexico stabilized its political and administrative structures and foreign capital freed up after the Civil War in the United States, there was a resurgence in silver production. Military engineer Manuel Robles Pezuela (1817-62), who graduated from the College of Mining in Guanajuato, was instrumental in writing the Mining Ordinance of 1854; the ordinance played a critical part in modernizing Mexican mining by updating mining laws, simplifying regulations, and creating tax incentives for mining development.

Foreign investment brought new technologies – steam-powered pumps and advanced metallurgical methods – to Mexican mining. Not the least of these imported innovations was soccer, brought to Mexico by British miners who accompanied British money and technology.

The Mexican Revolution – A Rerun with Artistry

The 20th century started with another war of similar length. The Mexican Revolution (1910-21) also slowed down mining – along with most other economic activity. Again, mines were destroyed, and foreign investment withdrew from the country.

The new Constitution (1917) nationalized the country's subsoil resources, which changed the regulatory landscape for mining. The government nationalized mining to bring in more income and to ensure that mining revenues benefited both the people and the economy of Mexico.

In 1942, during the Second World War, Mexico passed a new Mining Law that was designed to promote investment from home and abroad by simplifying the concession process. New post-war transportation infrastructure (roads and railways) linked mining regions more closely with trade routes and thus the national economy. New mining technologies revitalized old mines and opened new ones. The mining industry continued with legal and technological changes that made it a vital part of the Mexican economy; progress has also been made on ameliorating the environmental and social impacts of mining. Under President Claudia Sheinbaum, this attention to the negative impacts of mining is expected to continue.

William Spratling

But the most interesting thing that happened to silver mining in Mexico was an American artist and architect. William Spratling (1900-67) had often visited Mexico, moving there in 1929. He quickly became involved in the artistic circles of Mexico and was influential in getting Diego Rivera's work into the galleries of New York City. This led to his involvement in the first major exhibition of Mexican art in the U.S., held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. When Dwight Morrow (1873-1931), perhaps America's most successful ambassador to Mexico and Anne Morrow Lindbergh's dad, met Spratling, he suggested that Taxco was a center for silver but had no silver artistry.

Spratling hired a goldsmith from Iguala, a center for goldsmithing not far from Taxco, and decamped to Taxco. He set up his first studio, *Taller de las Delicias* (Workshop of the Delights) and began creating jewelry with the pre-Hispanic motifs he had studied as part of his architecture program at Tulane University in New Orleans. He also trained local artisans in silversmithing. In less than ten years, he had several hundred silversmiths to carry out his designs. They proved very popular, and were available north of the border at Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, and even the Montgomery Ward catalogue.



Spratling also attracted other artisans, who carried out his designs for tin and copper ware, textiles, and furniture. Once trained by Spratling, a good number of the silversmiths and other artisans went on to set up their own shops, encouraged by Spratling. Spratling's work became so popular he built a ranch and new studio in Iguala, hoping for some privacy to protect his designs from being pirated by visiting artisans.

Taxco became known as a center for fine crafts, attracting other artists – Diego Rivera, Juan O'Gorman, Frida Kahlo, and celebrities – U.S. President John F. Kennedy, novelist Patricia Highsmith, actresses Bette Davis and Marilyn Monroe. Indeed, Spratling made some chairs for Marilyn Monroe that were never delivered because of her death – they are still in his ranch house in Iguala.

In the early summer of 1985, there was a show at the Muriel Karasik Gallery in Manhattan that goes a long way to portray what Spratling did for Taxco's silver industry. "Mexican Silver Jewelry: The American School 1930-1960" included the work of ten jewelry designers. Spratling's work drew from the designs uncovered at Monte Alban, excavated in 1932. Margo Carr Banburgs, a San Francisco painter, married silversmith Antonio Castillo and moved to Mexico. Castillo, who with his four brothers was trained in Spratling's studio, encouraged Margo's work in modern Mexican jewelry design. Antonio Pineda and Hector Aguilar were also trained by Spratling; Pineda quickly opened his own studio; when he was included in a major 1944 exhibition in San Francisco, Gump's department store – noted for its jewelry department – began carrying his work. Hector Aguilar also opened his own workshop, *Taller de Borda*, after studying with Spratling; like Spratling, Aguilar trained other Taxco silversmiths.

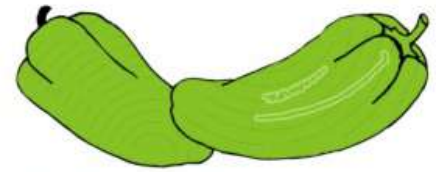
When William Spratling died, an old friend, Alberto Ulrich, bought the ranch and studio with the intent to keep Spratling's work alive. You can visit that ranch, now run by Ulrich's daughters, to see where and how he worked, not to mention the chairs he made for Marilyn Monroe, and even take a silversmithing class yourself (<https://violanteulrich.com.wordpress.com/rancho-spratling/>). There are, of course, many other things to do in Taxco – just Google!

Spratling and Ulrich used to race their cars down the winding local roads between Taxco and Acapulco. Spratling died on August 7, 1967, in a car crash on the road into Taxco. He was 66.

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- Guacamole
- Jicama, Cucumber, and Orange Salad
- Ancho Reyes Margarita

PIGS AND RUM- Thursdays

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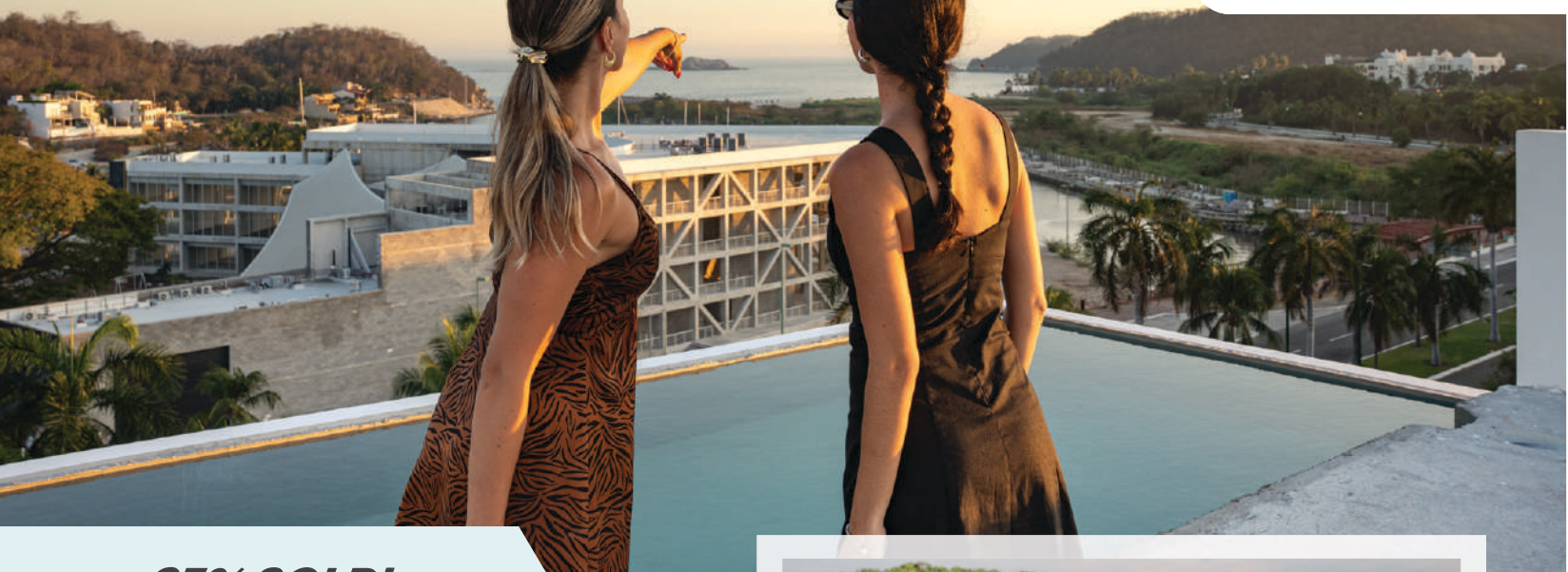
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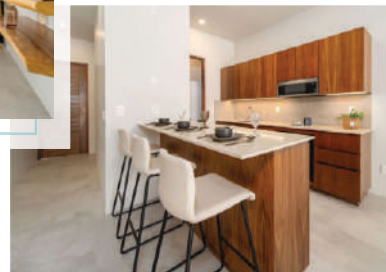
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From Cornwall to Mexico: The Story of Pastes and Mining Migration

By Alicia Flores

The humble paste, a traditional food from Cornwall, crossed the Atlantic in the 19th century, bringing with it a history of migration, industry, and cultural fusion. Today, in the state of Hidalgo, Mexico, this once-foreign dish has become a beloved local specialty known as paste, a symbol of the legacy left by the Cornish miners who came in search of new opportunities in Mexico's silver mines.

The Cornish Migration to Mexico

In the early 19th century, Cornwall was facing economic hardship. The collapse of the tin and copper mining industries left many miners without work, forcing them to seek opportunities elsewhere. Skilled in deep mining techniques, Cornish workers were highly sought after across the world, from Australia to South America. When British investors began developing silver mines in Mexico, they recruited these experienced miners, offering them the promise of steady wages and a better life. For many, migrating to Mexico was not just a necessity but also a chance to build a new future for their families. At the beginning of the 19th century, Mexico's mining industry was struggling due to outdated methods. After gaining independence in 1821, the new government looked for international experts to help modernize the mines, especially in the state of Hidalgo. British investors saw an opportunity and brought highly skilled miners from Cornwall, who settled in Real del Monte (Mineral del Monte) and Pachuca.

Between the 1820s and 1840s, hundreds of Cornish miners arrived in Mexico, bringing with them advanced mining techniques and a strong work ethic. Their impact on Mexico's silver industry was immense, as they modernized extraction methods and significantly increased production. While some miners eventually returned home, many stayed, started families, and left a cultural mark that is still visible today.



The Birth of the Paste

With migration comes the exchange of traditions, and the Cornish paste was no exception. Originally designed as a practical, filling meal for miners, the paste had a thick, crimped crust that served as a handle, allowing miners to eat without contaminating their food with the toxic minerals on their hands. In Mexico, the paste evolved to suit local ingredients and flavors, becoming what is now known as the paste. While the original fillings included beef, potatoes, and onions, over time, Mexican flavors such as black beans, tinga (spiced shredded chicken), and even mole were incorporated. The idea remained the same—a nourishing, portable meal—but with a local twist.

Pastes Today: A Mexican Culinary Tradition

Over the years, pastes have become a true symbol of Hidalgo's gastronomy. Every year, the town of Real del Monte celebrates the Festival del Paste, where visitors can try both traditional recipes and creative new flavors. Today, bakeries throughout the region have perfected the art of making pastes, offering a wide variety of options, from the classic meat and potato to sweet and savory combinations with Mexican ingredients like pineapple, rajas con queso (chili strips with cheese), and chorizo.

A Legacy of Cultural Exchange

The migration of Cornish miners to Mexico brought more than just technological advances to the mining industry—it also sparked an exchange of traditions and flavors. While the mining sector evolved over time, pastes remained as a culinary bridge between two cultures. Today, the story of pastes reminds us how migration shapes our food and how a simple meal created for hardworking miners became an essential part of Mexican cuisine. Whether enjoyed in Cornwall or Hidalgo, pastes continue to tell the story of those who brought them across the ocean.



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Caldo de Piedra: A Tradition Born from Fire and Water

A well-known fable tells of a hungry traveler who arrives in a village with nothing but a stone. He places it in a pot of boiling water, claiming to make a delicious soup. As curious villagers offer small ingredients—vegetables, herbs, and meat—the simple stone transforms the meal into a rich, nourishing broth. The communal spirit of caldo de piedra create something greater than the sum of its parts. Caldo de piedra ("stone soup") is a pre-Hispanic dish from Oaxaca, created by the Chinantec people. Traditionally prepared by men as a tribute to women, this dish reflects indigenous ingenuity and respect for nature.

The soup is made by placing fresh fish or shrimp, tomatoes, onions, chilies, and herbs in a gourd or clay bowl. Heated river stones are then dropped in, instantly boiling the broth and cooking the ingredients. This method infuses the dish with mineral-rich flavors and retains the essence of its fresh ingredients.

Caldo de piedra is still prepared in Chinantla, where families gather by the river to cook it as their ancestors did. While it has gained recognition in specialty restaurants, its essence remains tied to communal gatherings and cultural heritage.

As interest in indigenous cuisine grows, caldo de piedra stands as a testament to Mexico's deep-rooted culinary traditions, connecting past and present through the simple yet profound act of cooking with fire and water.



* Article adapted from information from tuxtepecturismo.com/.



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