

The Eye

Beach, Village + Urban Living in Mexico

December 2024

Issue 143

FREE





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Editor's Letter

We are created in water—amniotic fluid is about 98% water. Throughout our lives, water will continue to pull us, not just through thirst, but through longing. Most of us harbor a desire to be near the ocean, a lake, or a river. A swim in a body of water is curative.

Water holds deep spiritual significance across religions, symbolizing purity, life, and renewal. Yet, despite its sacredness, we often fail to honor it. In Christianity, water is central to baptism, representing cleansing and rebirth. In Hinduism, sacred rivers like the Ganges purify the soul and aid in achieving moksha (liberation). Islam incorporates water in wudu (ritual washing) before prayers, signifying spiritual and physical cleanliness. In Judaism, water plays a key role in mikveh rituals, symbolizing purification and transformation. Indigenous traditions often view water as a sacred element, honoring its life-giving properties through ceremonies. Across faiths, water connects humanity to the divine, symbolizing rebirth, healing, and spiritual connection.

Water is the lifeblood of our planet, yet we often fail to treat it with the respect it deserves. The world's water supply faces critical threats from pollution caused by human activities. Industrial waste, such as dyes and chemicals from fast fashion production, contaminates waterways. Agricultural runoff from large-scale farming operations, particularly those supporting beef production, introduces chemicals into water systems. Single-use plastics, like bottles and packaging, clog waterways and create garbage patches spanning over 1.6 million square kilometers—an area more than twice the size of Texas—disrupting marine ecosystems and harming wildlife. In 2023 alone, approximately 70 operational oil spills and 10 significant tanker spills released thousands of tonnes of oil into the environment, compounding the degradation of vital water sources. These issues underscore the urgent need for collective action to protect and preserve this essential resource.

We are contaminating ourselves with the clothes we buy, the plastic we throw away, and the cars we drive. The pollution we cause through everyday actions harms our own well-being. Water, the essence of our existence, is being poisoned by our neglect.

We are told we are living in the age of self-love, but often this is interpreted as indulging in the material—buying that trinket or satisfying our fleeting desires. "You deserve it" has become the anthem of our time. But does indulging our egos really lead to fulfillment? Does this kind of self-love align with our deepest needs?

As we approach one of the most wasteful seasons of the year, I urge you to pause and reflect. Does indulgence serve as true self-love? Nature owes us nothing. Instead, we are deeply in debt—to the water, the wildlife, and the air we breathe.

We are water—our bodies, our lives, depend on it. When we protect water, we protect ourselves. Real self-love begins with responsibility. Repairing the harm we've caused to the Earth, especially its water, is the greatest gift we can offer ourselves and future generations.

As we move into the new year, let's commit to being better stewards of the water that sustains us. Happy Holidays, and see you in 2025!

Jane



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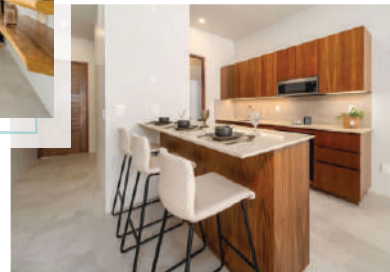
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Ice Crystals of Emotion

By Kary Vannice

Water is more than just a vital substance to sustain life. For centuries, humans seem to have known it holds mysteries that bridge science and spirituality. From ancient creation stories to modern scientific studies, water is valued not only for its life-sustaining properties but also for its deeper, hidden potential. In the early 90s, Dr. Masaru Emoto, a Japanese researcher, set out to prove water's ability to interact with human consciousness and answer the question: Does water respond to thoughts, energies, and emotions?

Our daily life is intimately intertwined with water. Not one living thing on planet Earth can survive without it. Humans are composed of 60-70% water, and the human brain is nearly 85% water. This physical connection hints at a deeper relationship – one where water reflects our internal state and acts as a conduit of energy and information.

In his book, *Hidden Messages in Water* (2005), Dr. Emoto demonstrated water's potential to reflect and retain emotional and energetic imprints. His studies involved imprinting water with various words, intentions, and music before freezing it and photographing the resulting ice crystals. Water samples exposed to positive expressions formed intricate, symmetrical patterns, resembling snowflakes. Water exposed to negative words or feelings, on the other hand, produced chaotic patterns and irregular shapes. These results represented visual proof of water's sensitivity to external stimuli, suggesting that it might be more than just a passive resource. It might actually be interacting with the energies around it, and be impacted by feelings, thoughts, words, and intentions.

This sensitivity is not a new idea, however. In Native American traditions, rivers are revered as sacred beings that sustain life and connect the spiritual and physical worlds. Aztec mythology celebrates *Chalchiuhtlicue*, the goddess of water, fertility, and childbirth, who is seen as the provider of life-giving rain. These ancient perspectives align with the notion that water is more than a substance, it's an energetic force woven into the fabric of life itself.



The unique molecular structure that allows water to interact with its surroundings seems to also allow it to retain information from its environment, creating what is known as "water memory." It is believed that water carries imprints that influence its behavior. Knowing this is true, it could be said that water acts almost like the subconscious mind, which stores impressions from our experiences and interactions.

Many spiritual traditions teach that everything is "mind" and speak of the "primordial waters" as the background energy of all creation. It seems science now also links water to mind and substance to unseen energy.

In the Christian Bible, the "water of life" flows from the throne of God, symbolizing eternal life and spiritual renewal. The Quran also emphasizes

water's foundational role: "We made from water every living thing." And in the Hindu tradition, the cosmic churning of the ocean symbolizes the origins of life, the universe, and the nectar of immortality. In almost every spiritual tradition, water is seen as both the origin of life and a medium for spiritual connection and renewal.

Since both ancient wisdom and modern science support the idea that we are always in a two-way conversation with the water in us and around us, choosing more positive emotions, thoughts, and intentions can have a profound effect on both our internal and external worlds.

This unique quality of water is a testament to the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things, a reminder that we are not separate from the world around us. It demonstrates that even the smallest ripple of emotion can grow into a wave, reaching places we may never see. Knowing water carries information gives us the opportunity to contribute to a positive flow of energy that uplifts not only ourselves but also the environment we live in.

The mystery of water's intelligence may never be fully understood, but the lessons from Dr. Emoto's work are profound, and offer us the opportunity to interact with water in a more intentional and empowered way. So, the question is, how will you interact with water today?

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The Blues Maestro with a Mission: David Rotundo's Quest to Empower Young Dreamers

By Avril Dell and Jennifer Desor

In a world where dreams often get lost in the chaos of everyday life, David Rotundo stands out as a shining exception. This talented musician and passionate advocate for youth empowerment has dedicated his life to inspiring schoolchildren to turn their dreams into reality. Via The Caravan Blues School Tour, David aims to unlock the full potential of young minds, just as he did for himself.

Rotundo is originally from Toronto but has now been living here locally for almost two decades. His journey to becoming a musician and motivational speaker is a testament to the power of following one's dreams. At 28, he left his job as a plumber to pursue his passion for music, traveling to the birthplaces of the Blues – Chicago, Memphis, St. Louis, Dallas, Austin, and New Orleans – to immerse himself in the genre. Years of practice, songwriting, and recording led to the creation of six original albums and a touring career that has spanned across the globe.

The Caravan Blues School Tour is designed to help children overcome obstacles and achieve their aspirations. Through motivational sessions, David shares his own story of perseverance and passion, igniting students to chase their dreams. By visiting schools and sharing his message, he hopes to empower the next generation to believe in themselves and their abilities.

The Caravan Blues Tour is the vehicle Rotundo created to take the school program on the road. This unique tour combines concerts with school sessions, spreading the message of hope and inspiration to local communities.

Here in Huatulco, The Caravan Blues Tour's partnership with the Bacaanda Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving education in rural Mexico, has enabled the program to reach even more young minds.

On a recent sunny day in September, Rotundo visited a school in San Miguel del Puerto. As he stepped off the van, he was greeted by excited moms and kids, eager to meet the blues maestro. With his harmonica in hand, Rotundo captivated the students, sharing his story and inspiring them to chase their dreams.

As the Caravan Blues Tour prepares to launch in January 2025, Rotundo's message of hope and inspiration is poised to sweep across communities, leaving a lasting impact on the lives of young dreamers everywhere. With his soulful music, infectious energy, and genuine passion for empowering the next generation, David Rotundo is proof that dreams can become reality.



Rotundo's story serves as a reminder that our dreams have the power to transform not only our own lives but also the lives of those around us. Through The Caravan Blues Tour, David is paying it forward, inspiring a new generation to rock their world.

As David Rotundo takes the stage, his harmonica at the ready, the crowd is transported to a world of soulful blues and unbridled passion. But it's not just about the music – it's about the message. His legacy will be one of empowerment, inspiring countless young minds to chase their dreams and never look back.

For more information on The Caravan School Blues Tour, such as including your school on the agenda or participating as a guest speaker, please write info@caravanbluestour.com or visit www.caravanbluestour.com.

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Huatulco's Water Supply Revisited: Is There Relief in Sight?

By Randy Jackson

In January 2023, I published an article in *The Eye* titled “Huatulco's Water System: In Survival Mode?” It had become evident that Huatulco's water supply and delivery infrastructure was already stretched to its limits, with frequent interruptions in service leaving residents without water for days. Since then, Huatulco's population has continued to grow, alongside ongoing hotel, condo, and resort developments. With these changes, I set out to re-evaluate Huatulco's current water situation. My goal has been to answer the following three questions: What is Huatulco's water supply situation today? Has FONATUR stepped away from its role in managing Huatulco's water supply? And are there any plans in place to expand Huatulco's potable water availability?

What Is Huatulco's Water Supply Situation Today?

Two years ago, the eight FONATUR wells near the Copalita River supplied up to 15 million liters of potable water daily. At the time, available data indicated that 78% of this water went to residents, hotels, and commercial use, while 22% was lost through leaks or allocated to irrigation. Since then, no updated water supply or demand reports have been published. However, two notable indications of what the water supply issue might be for Huatulco are in the public domain.

The first is a study by the *Comisión Nacional del Agua* (National Commission on Water, CONAGUA) titled *Programa Hidrico, Regional 2021-2024, Región Hidrológico-Administrativa, Pacífico Sur*. In this 80-page report covering the coastal region of Oaxaca, Huatulco's water and sewage system was classified as having a “type 2 deficit.” This classification refers to situations in which, despite having sufficient natural water availability, the infrastructure or management practices are inadequate to meet the demand effectively.

Under the heading “Problems detected in the consultation evaluation process for the PHR 2021-2024,” the report identifies “issues such as misuse of domestic and business water resources and leaks in Huatulco's already obsolete distribution network.” While no additional explanation is provided, numerous sources addressing Mexico's water supply overall identify leakage as a critical problem, with rates averaging around 40% and ranging from 30% to 70%.

The second indication emerged in March 2023, with media reports covering a federal inspection of Huatulco's water system conducted by the Federal Secretariat of Infrastructure, Communications, and Transportation (SICT). This inspection pointed to the need for substantial upgrades to the system. However, no specific plans for these upgrades have been published since, apart from the construction of a 108,000-liter storage tank, which is currently underway.



How Are Huatulco's Wells Doing?

Since there are no published statistics on Huatulco's current water supply, I revisited the well sites to speak with a well-site operator. The operator assured me that all eight wells were running normally. Operators record the flow rates of each well daily. This is a manual process; the data are recorded in a spiral-bound notebook. A random glance through the operator's notebook suggested that production rates were close to 15 million liters per day—the same number I observed two

years previously. However, this production rate is significantly higher than the reported water delivered to customers.

The information on water deliveries, obtained by a request filed under the transparency laws of the state of Oaxaca, shows that water deliveries to all types of users for the first nine months of 2024 came to 2,598,310 cubic meters, or 9,482,882 liters. (The last column has been added to show the breakdown of consumption by user.)

Water Deliveries	Cubic Meters	Liters per Day	% of Total
Commercial	459,716	1,677,795	18%
Hotels	1,018,695	3,717,865	39%
Public Services	57,676	210,496	2%
Residences	673,083	2,456,507	26%
Tourism	389,140	1,420,219	15%
Total Jan - Sep 2024	2,598,310	9,482,882	100%

The last reported water sales data I could locate was for 2017, which showed a volume of 11,238,861 liters per day; this year's sales are 84% of those in 2017, despite seven years of increasing population.

The well operator I spoke to suggested that many supply problems in the last two years were due to breaks in the pipes supplying water to Huatulco. Water supply varies considerably from day to day and seems to depend on the residential area. In Santa Cruz this past year, the supply was far more intermittent than in previous years. Anecdotal responses from a few residents in other sectors suggest a supply not much worse than previous years, but consistent days of good water pressure are rare.

During my visit to the well site, five water trucks were awaiting their turn to fill up. One truck driver told me that 50 potable water trucks served the greater Huatulco area. These private companies buy water from the system operator and resell it to areas and residences not connected to the Huatulco water system, or they are connected but have no supply from the pipes.

From the above, I conclude that although the well system seems to have maintained its production levels, Huatulco's outdated infrastructure severely constrains water delivery to residents. Without substantial infrastructure upgrades to address leaks and increase storage, the water system will continue to fall short, especially during peak tourist seasons.

Has FONATUR Stepped Away from Managing Huatulco's Water?

The short answer is yes. The entire water and sewage system is now under the responsibility of FIDELO – *Fideicomiso para el Desarrollo Logístico del Estado de Oaxaca* (Trust for the Logistics Development of the State of Oaxaca). FIDELO is like a public corporation. It was created on February 15, 1997. Its stated main objective is to position Oaxaca as a competitive region for developing various productive sectors through the promotion and execution of logistics, social, commercial, and tourism projects.

Emilio Rivera Moreno is the current Director General of FIDELO. He oversees the Huatulco operations as well as other responsibilities within the organization.

Are There Plans in Place to Expand the Availability of Potable Water in Huatulco?

The short answer is – not that I could find. Given the critical water shortages in Oaxaca City, Mexico City, and across Mexico, combined with limited funding for water infrastructure, it seems unlikely that Huatulco's water needs will be seen as a priority. The CONAGUA report referenced above lists 119 municipalities in Oaxaca as having a Type 1 deficit, meaning water availability is below current demand, leading to overexploitation. Fortunately, this is not Huatulco's current situation.

However, there is a glimmer of hope. Mexico's new president, Claudia Sheinbaum, has pledged as part of her 100 campaign proposals to guarantee access to clean water through a National Water Plan. This includes revising the existing Water Law and allocating \$110 million MXN (\$5.4 million USD) from the Social Infrastructure Contribution Fund (FAIS) to support water projects in Mexico's poorest municipalities.

The photo accompanying this article shows a mural painted on the outside wall of the sports complex in La Crucecita: *Cuidemos el Agua* – "Let's take care of the water."

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Drinking Water in Mexico

By Marcia Chaiken and Jan Chaiken

“Can I drink the water?” is a common question asked by tourists and travelers in Mexico. Decades ago, in the early 1970's, in Mexico, as in many other places in the world, the answer was generally, “Stick to soda or beer right from the bottle.” At that time during our early visits to Mexico. “And what about ice?” we would ask, as many tourists still do. “Never drink liquor or soft drinks with ice,” we were advised.



The penalty for not heeding this advice often occurred a few hours later. The dreaded travelers' diarrhea variously called Montezuma's revenge (or other names such as Delhi Belly according to location), and accompanied with cramps and necessitating frequent trips to the bathroom, felled many visitors. Sometimes the cause was bacterial or viral contamination in the water or ice, but frequently the cause was simply that the concentration of minerals in the water was different from what was customary to the travelers' gastrointestinal tracts. You may have noticed this if you have welcomed visitors from Mexico to the United States or Canada, and they experienced similar symptoms.

The Garrafon – Bottled Water, Better Water

Over time, the questions about drinking water stayed the same in Mexico, but the answers changed. Perhaps the largest shift in the question and answer for drinking water occurred in the late 1980's and throughout the 1990's, when bottled water became available and popular throughout Mexico and the larger world. The sight of *garrafones* – large water jugs – filled with purified water and outfitted with a hand pump became ubiquitous in the kitchens and common areas of hotels and rental units. Ice was frozen from *garrafon* water in small inns, and hotels purchased large bags of ice made from purified water. A covered pitcher of water from a *garrafon* with a couple of glasses were often left on tourists' bedside tables.

But then the plastic-bottle craze swept the world. From small bottles of purified water that barely quenched an ordinary thirst to large bottles that required herculean strength to transport, drinking water gradually filled many shelves in tiny bodegas in rural villages and in huge city supermarkets.

Drink Enough to Avoid Dehydration

Today, advice about drinking water in Mexico is generally “Drink water with every meal and whenever you're thirsty – but leave the single-use plastic bottles on the shelf.” This advice is based primarily on two factors: the health of the humans drinking the water and the health of the planet. Over 60% of our bodies are composed of water. Water is needed by virtually every organ in our bodies. We are constantly eliminating water from our bodies in trips to the bathroom and between (by perspiring and breathing). We need to replenish our water levels frequently in warm climates. Even a minor lack of water or dehydration can result in very unpleasant symptoms – headaches, cramps, and even high fevers.

Travelers to Mexico who arrive by plane should be aware that they are likely to arrive dehydrated unless they take full advantage of the free purified water served on the plane. The very low humidity onboard and the difference in air pressure act to deplete the water in bodies. Drinking alcohol has a diuretic effect (more frequent trips to the bathroom) and further dehydration. So seriously consider asking the cabin attendants for *agua* rather than *cerveza* or *vino*. And when they come through the aisles with cups of water, grab one. You'll feel much better when you land fully

hydrated.

Upon reaching your Mexico vacation destination, keep drinking water. Although a common assumption is that adults need eight glasses each day, there's actually a range of individual needs determined by gender, body weight, health status and notably environment. Obviously high temperatures result in more perspiration – so if you're vacationing in Mexico's wonderful beach towns and resorts or exploring architectural ruins in the jungle, you'll need to drink more water (unless you ordinarily live in a tropical climate). High altitudes also lead to fast water elimination, so if you're in Mexico City or another mountainous area, your drinking water needs will also increase. Exactly how much you should drink is not easily answered, but drinking enough water can be simply gauged by paying attention to how frequently you're thirsty. If you find you're often thirsty, start drinking more and more frequently until you find you're rarely experiencing a dry mouth and throat.

Don't worry about drinking too much water; cases of water toxicity (hyponatremia) are extremely rare in healthy people and have been mainly attributable to athletes who have decided to dramatically increase their water intake to as much as 6 liters in three hours before a race. You can monitor whether you're under- or overdoing the drinking water by the color of your pee: if it's a deep yellow, drink more; if it's almost clear, drink less. On the other hand, excessive perspiration and more frequent urination can result in an imbalance of salt and other minerals essential for life – easy to remedy by taking a daily vitamin/mineral pill and if needed downing a bottle of electrolyte water available in most Mexican supermarkets – but given the sugar or other sweeteners added, it's best not to make a habit of electrolyte water.

You're Good, But All Those Plastic Bottles???

Okay, you're convinced to drink more water in Mexico. But where can you get a safe supply? For the sake of the health of the world, please don't get your needed daily intake of drinking water from the little plastic bottles supplied by many hotels in Mexico, sold in restaurants and stocked in an obvious place in many Mexican groceries. One good environmental way of handling your water needs is to bring your own empty water bottle; after you've passed through security, head to the nearest water fountain and fill your bottle for drinking after you've landed and before you reach your lodging. At top-tier hotels and restaurants you can almost always be sure the water served is safe to drink and ice is made from purified water --and you can ask your server to refill your water bottle for when you're off to the beach or a day trip.

Staying Good with the Water

If you're not sure about the water in your less expensive hotel – use their *garrafon* or head to the nearest market and buy the biggest bottle of water you can carry back to your room. The larger the bottle, the less expensive the water per milliliter and the greater chance the bottle can be recycled. There are many reputable brands such as Bonafont, Ciel and Epura, owned by Coca-Cola.

If you're staying in a condo – ask the owner about the quality of water. If it can't be guaranteed as safe, the owner will likely provide a *garrafon* of water – sometimes at an extra cost but a worthwhile expense. If you're staying in an area that was developed by FONATUR (the federal agency in charge of increasing tourism), chances are a water purification system was set up for the whole area. Where we stay in Huatulco, not only is there municipal water purification but the condo association has its own secondary purification system, and the refrigerator water dispenser has a filter – so we're largely independent of store-purchased water.

If you're planning on traveling to rural undeveloped areas in Mexico – places where water comes from a river where clothes are washed, people bathe, and sewage seeps in, bring packs of your favorite teas and just drink water that has been boiled. No need to ask for ice because there's probably none to be found. But if you're vacationing in the many beautiful places in Mexico where foreigners usually hang out, enjoy your margaritas and *cervezas* but remember – in addition to the good-time drinks, be sure to drink water.



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A Project with Vision

By Jane Bauer

It was an honor to spend Sunday, October 28th in the communities of Xadani and Zimatán with Melanie Petelle, providing vision tests and distributing over 100 pairs of reading glasses.

The experience was not only rewarding but also eye-opening in more ways than one. Witnessing the gratitude of people receiving their first pair of glasses was a powerful reminder of how something as simple as a pair of reading glasses can significantly impact a person's quality of life.

I can relate to this experience personally—when I first started needing reading glasses a few years ago, I was surprised by how much they improved my daily life. Today, I carry them with me everywhere.

For so many, clear vision can be a luxury they cannot afford, and the act of giving back, even in small ways, can make a world of difference. According to the World Health Organization, over 2.7 billion people globally suffer from uncorrected poor vision.

For many individuals, basic tasks like reading, driving, or even recognizing loved ones can be a struggle. The good news is that the solution is often simple and inexpensive—just like the vision tests and glasses distributed in Xadani and Zimatán.

By offering such services, we can help reduce the strain caused by poor vision, improving not just the ability to see clearly but also the overall well-being of these communities. This initiative is a beautiful example of how we all have gifts, whether they be professional skills or the ability to contribute our time and resources, that can be shared to help others. It reminds us that small acts of kindness and service can have a profound, lasting impact.



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December Menus

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Shrimp with Garlic, Chile, and Parsley

Sweet Potato

Vanilla Cake

Tuesday, December 10

Turmeric Tepache Mezcal

Green Papaya Salad

Peanut Chicken with Rice

Mango Parfait



Tuesday, December 17

Rum Horchata

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Cochinita Pibil Tacos

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Mexico City's Water Crisis

By Julie Etra

Mexico City is facing a severe water crisis, a situation rooted in centuries of mismanagement dating back to the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan, now modern-day Mexico City. After the conquest, Tenochtitlan expanded into the five lakes that formed the closed basin of Mexico. These lakes, which had no natural outlet, varied in elevation and water quality. The Mexica (also known as the Aztecs) had successfully engineered the lakes by building a series of dikes and causeways starting in the 1420s, separating the brackish from fresh water.



Under the regime of dictator Porfirio Díaz, the “Great Canal” was constructed at the end of the 19th century, abandoning Garay’s multi-purpose plan in favor of a more direct, single-minded effort to “conquer nature.” Between 1886 and 1900, the canal, 47 km long, with a 10 km tunnel, dams, and bridges, was built. Despite the scale of the project, the government could not overcome the topography, and flooding returned in the 1920s and again in 1945. By then, the canal’s flow had become nearly flat, and it filled with fine sediment. This required the construction of 11 pumping stations, a costly and inefficient solution.

Before 1466, fresh water was sourced from the springs at Chapultepec, accessed via canoes or trajineras (shallow-bottomed boats). During this time, the poet-engineer Nezahualcōyotl built the first aqueduct. However, the Spanish, inheriting a system they didn’t fully understand, began a series of drainage projects to dry what they considered a swamp. These efforts, combined with land-use changes such as grazing, cultivation, and deforestation, led to erosion and siltation. These projects, along with seasonal rains, couldn’t prevent periodic floods, which struck in 1555, 1580, 1607, 1615, and 1623. Despite persistent flooding, the Spanish refused to relocate to the mainland, convinced that the lake system could eventually be drained.

The first major engineering project came in 1607-1608, under the direction of Enrique Martínez. A tunnel was excavated to a low point in Nochistongo, called the Desagüe, but the plan failed. In the great flood of 1629, the only dry spot left was around the Zócalo (then known as the ‘island of the dogs’) where people sought refuge. The Catholic Church leaders, undeterred, even held mass on the rooftops. The floods lasted for five years, and the death toll reached over 30,000, largely due to disease in the unsanitary, muddy conditions. Despite these horrors, the Church and the government (which were essentially one and the same) justified staying on the island, minimizing the destruction in their reports to the King of Spain, instead of moving to the mainland.

The paradox continued into the 20th century with ever-larger engineering projects. In 1857, Francisco Garay was awarded a contract by the federal government to design a new system. His project included a 50 km tunnel from San Lázaro, east of the city, which channeled rivers and incorporated over 200 minor canals. The goal was not just to drain the basin, but also to provide irrigation for fields and create a waterway transportation system—a lofty vision that was never fully realized.

Another attempt came in 1975, when an elaborate system of underground tunnels and pumps was installed at depths ranging from 88.5 ft. to 712 ft. (22 to 217 meters). The most recent infrastructure, built in 2019, included a massive 38-mile tunnel system meant to drain water away from the city.

Ironically, the water crisis in Mexico City today is one of scarcity rather than excess. The city, historically plagued by floods, now struggles with dwindling water supplies. About 30% of the city’s water needs are met by the Cutzamala system, an archaic network of dams, reservoirs, canals, and pumps. This system, one of the largest of its kind in the world, includes seven reservoirs, six pumping plants, 322 km of canals and tunnels, and a large water treatment plant. The main reservoirs—Villa Victoria, Valle de Bravo, and El Bosque—are located in the states of México and Michoacán, some 85 miles from the city, requiring an extensive network of pipes to deliver water to the capital. Currently, these reservoirs are at a historical low of just 30%. El Bosque, suffering from deforestation and urbanization, no longer contributes as it once did.

The rest of the city’s water comes from groundwater within the Mexico City Basin, which is being pumped out at twice the rate it is replenished. This groundwater is often contaminated and has caused ground subsidence in certain areas. Some buildings around the Zócalo, in particular, have started leaning due to this subsidence, according to a recent New York Times article. The pump system operates 24/7, posing a significant maintenance challenge. None of the water from the taps is potable, and the city relies on bottled water for drinking.

The situation has been worsened by prolonged droughts and the effects of climate change, although last summer’s rains provided some relief. Claudia Sheinbaum’s federal government has promised to address the issue with a national water initiative. As former mayor of Mexico City, Sheinbaum is familiar with the city’s aging infrastructure and its pressing water needs. She has stated that solving the water crisis is near the top of her agenda.

¡Muy complicado! ¡Suerte! (Very complicated, good luck!)

For more reading, check out this link: [‘Grist article on Claudia Sheinbaum and Mexico City’s water crisis’](#)

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5

things: San Agustín

By Jane Bauer

Huatulco has over 36 beaches but each offers a different experience. San Agustín is a perfect getaway from your getaway. Its coral reef and clear waters are ideal for snorkeling and kayaking, while the calm beach invites relaxation. Enjoy fresh seafood and the simplicity of this quiet bay, a refreshing escape within Oaxaca's stunning Pacific coast.

Stay in a Cabana

Aldea Natalia, near San Agustín, offers a retreat surrounded by nature. With beach access perfect for stargazing, it provides a unique setting for relaxation. Guests can enjoy a vegetarian diet with fresh, local ingredients, while the community between guests and staff creates a welcoming atmosphere. The property's eco-friendly accommodations allow visitors to connect with nature and each other. Ideal for those seeking tranquility, Aldea Natalia fosters a sense of belonging, making it a special place to unwind.

www.aldeanatalia.com



Go under water

Snorkeling in San Agustín is an opportunity to explore underwater ecosystems teeming with marine life. The clear waters are home to various species, including parrotfish, angelfish, and pufferfish. The calm, shallow waters of the area make it an ideal spot for both beginners and experienced snorkelers to enjoy coral reefs and encounter sea life like sea turtles and rays. With its protected coves and pristine environment, San Agustín provides a memorable and peaceful snorkeling experience, whether you're exploring underwater or relaxing on the shore. Remember to avoid sunscreen or use a brand that won't damage the coral.



Visit the Green Farm

Visiting the Green Farm in Bajos del Arenal, led by Gil Cardenas, offers a unique experience in sustainable farming. This farm specializes in organic produce, showcasing eco-friendly farming methods. Gil and his team guide visitors through the fields, explaining their practices that avoid chemicals, promote local agriculture and environmental conservation. The farm is an opportunity to learn about growing fresh, healthy crops while connecting with nature. A visit to the Green Farm is a peaceful, educational experience for those interested in sustainability and supporting local farming efforts. Contact: Gil Cardenas, (958) 585 0222



Seafood Lunch

San Agustín is a haven for seafood lovers. Beachfront restaurants serve fresh, locally caught seafood prepared with traditional Oaxacan flavors. Enjoy dishes like grilled red snapper, garlic shrimp, or octopus ceviche while taking in the breathtaking views of turquoise waters and golden sands. The casual, laid-back atmosphere makes dining here an authentic experience, where the day's catch is cooked to perfection, often with a hint of lime and chile. Pair your meal with a cold beer or agua fresca, and savor the essence of coastal living.



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Get there by bike

The bike tour from La Crucecita to San Agustín starts bright and early at 6 a.m., covering 58 km round trip. It's a medium-to-expert level ride with all equipment provided and a trained, bilingual guide to lead the way. The route offers stunning views of the coast and jungle, making the effort totally worth it. Oscar at Bike Tours Huatulco (958) 124 4158 organizes it all—just show up ready for adventure!



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Capturing the Art and Importance of Storytelling: My Ten Favorite Reads of 2024

By Carole Reedy

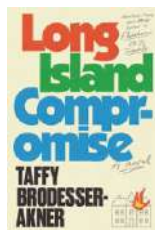
The best moments in reading are when you come across something – a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things – which you had thought special and particular to you. Now here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, someone even who is long dead. And it is as if a hand has come out and taken yours.

— Alan Bennett, *The History Boys* (2004)

The long hours I spend reading and thinking about reading are certainly disproportionate to my other daily activities. What I remember most about a book is not so much the plot or even the characters, but rather the way I felt while reading it: the compulsion to keep reading, the heightened emotions evoked by a character's glance or the fevered pace of a city or a raging river.

I'm convinced that treasured book memories are made from good stories. As Brian Doyle, author of one of the books listed below, so eloquently put it, "The best way to celebrate a people is to share their stories. Stories are who we are, what we are made of" (*Chicago: A Novel*, 2016).

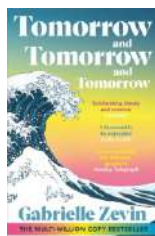
Long Island Compromise, by Taffy Brodesser-Akner (2024). This chronicle of a New York family is disturbing, realistic, and so vividly frightening at times that the reader may actually share the physical pain of the characters.



The ability of the author to describe the suffering of a drug addict, the lack of self-confidence from uncertainty, or a young sibling's disgust at the actions of her wealthy family are all brought fully to life in this wide-ranging story.

Brodesser-Akner was the author of the popular novel *Fleishman Is in Trouble* (2019) which was made into a TV mini-series with Jesse Eisenberg (2022-23). From my point of view, both novels can be categorized as unputdownable and emotionally draining.

Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, by Gabrielle Zevin (2023). This emotionally packed novel has been lauded by young and old alike. And even though I'm in the latter cohort, I can attest to the brilliant rendering of the book's three young gamers over the decades this novel spans.



Perhaps you, as was I, are not current on the lives of gamers or of gaming in general. How can I read, let alone praise, a book whose subject is alien to my experience of life (though isn't this part of what drives us to read)? That was my initial response to a friend who recommended this book. She encouraged me to try it and I'm grateful I trusted her judgment and followed her advice.

In this book, deeply engrossing characters and their friendships grow over time. Their astute thought processes so enchanted me that I immediately read more novels by this young author.

Zevin's *The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry* (2014) should be added to this list of favorite books. I challenge a lover of reading to find fault with this little treasure about a small bookstore on a small island.

Tomás Nevinston, by Javier Marías (2023).

This is, sadly, Marías' final novel. His illustrious writing career was cut short at the age of 70 after a case of pneumonia. Marías' lengthy sentences and attention to detail consistently delight serious readers and grammarians alike. There is no other writer like him.



One wisely will read the penultimate novel, *Berta Isla: A Novel* (2019), first, as it sets the stage and plot for this thriller. The duality of two terror organizations, Ireland's IRA and Spain's ETA, provides all the color necessary for a tense plot. The characters, as always in a Marías novel, are finely honed.

Praise also goes to Marías' loyal and constant English translator Margaret Jull Costa, in whom he had the greatest belief. Marías himself spoke excellent English and yet he entrusted this brilliant translator with his creations.

Palimpsest: A Memoir, by Gore Vidal (1995).

For many of us, Vidal holds a special place on the bookshelf as a prominent writer of novels, journalist, magazine contributor, political observer, and *bon vivant* of society in the last half of the 20th century. His wit has consistently transported him to the front of any event or issue.



Vidal, famous for his strict care with words and phrasing, most definitely describes this book not as an autobiography, but as a memoir – a book of memories. Throughout, as one memory sparks others, he precisely recounts the adventure of his talented and privileged life and the famous and prestigious people with whom he rubbed elbows.

There is no greater pleasure than a sentence or phrase penned by Vidal.

Erasure: A Novel, by Percival Everett (2001) looks at societal judgements from a different perspective.

Everett's main character feels misunderstood not by the white majority but by those in his own community who accuse him of "not being black enough." Indeed, the subject matter and style of the literature he creates are thought by his fellow people of color not to be typical of them, and thus a betrayal.



What follows depicts the sad state of the publishing industry and a conundrum for our protagonist. How to change his image within his community and what price fame? His daring attempt to address the issue in a freshly written book – complete with twists, turns, humorous surprises, and the public's response – will stun you.

Everett's most recent work, *James: A Novel* (2024) has just won the National Book Award for this year. James was also shortlisted for this year's Booker Prize.

Snap, by Belinda Bauer (2018) was a surprise choice for the long list by The Booker Prize committee the year it was published.



"It's the sort of commercial fiction that tends to outsell the rest of the longlist put together but which the Man Booker judges are supposedly too snotty and set in their literary ways to consider," writes Johanna Thomas Corr in *The New Statesman* (August 29, 2018). Nonetheless, the committee proved her wrong and nominated *Snap* for the long list.

This compelling story is based on a true incident: the kidnapping and murder of Marie Wilks, 22, seven months' pregnant with her fourth child, on the M50 motorway in England. The pace of the text, the heart-stopping emotion, and the rendering of the story of the children left behind places Bauer among the finest of crime writers.

The character depictions are spot on, the writing concise and colorful, and the plot suspenseful. A delightful surprise "find" for this reader.

Knife: Meditations after an Attempted Murder, by Salman Rushdie (2024). Special recognition must be accorded Rushdie, a prolific writer of fascinating stories, for his consistent courage in the wake of attempts to restrain his literary pursuits.



The world watched and lived with the years-long *fatwa* imposed on the author by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini after publication of Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

More recently, Rushdie narrowly survived a knife attack in Connecticut. *Knife* is the elegantly rendered story of that attack and Rushdie's unexpected recovery in the midst of his family and dear friends, many of whom are prominent writers and to whom he pours out his sincere emotion and thanks. This most personal and desperate of stories is deservedly on many best-book lists this year.

Chicago: A Novel, by Brian Doyle (2016). I brimmed with pride while reading this highly personal story of a young man who spends just five seasons in the Second City.



Chicago is the city that owns me. It is my identity, and this book allows the Windy City to shine, if sometimes through the smog, rush-hour traffic, and the usual disruptions of big city living.

Here's a personal story of a young man who begins his working life at a Catholic magazine in Chicago's Loop. The days and years follow him through the city's neighborhoods and more intimately through life at his apartment building, which is filled with eccentric tenants.

The writing is personal, witty, and bursting with the conflicting emotions and excitement of a newcomer to a grand city.

For me, this book was the most satisfying surprise of my year's reading.

Anita Monte Laughs Last, by Xóchitl González (2024). Here is a story that satisfies on many levels: artistically, politically, and socially.



It tells the tale of two women artists a generation apart, their similarities and differences within the art world and their relationships with men and society. I'm not a fan of magical realism, but González' use of it in the second half of the book is cerebral, biting humor, and pitch perfect.

If you haven't read González's first book, you're in for a double treat. *Olga Dies Dreaming* (2021) is the story of a Puerto Rican family in New York that includes anarchist parents, a politically ambitious son, and Olga, who struggles with her own identity as a Latina professional woman.

Both books are richly entertaining while teaching us about our southern neighbors, Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Death at the Sign of the Rook: A Jackson Brodie Book, by Kate Atkinson (2024). A reader's first reaction to this book might be one of merriment. Many have told me that they laughed out loud while reading it.



Art theft, suspicious caregivers, and an old, privileged family are the entertaining elements that make this a rich and enjoyable read. A troupe of actors adds another humorous element. One friend, however, did share that although engaging and humorous, it was "a little too Agatha Christie" for her. That may intrigue you.

Repeat readers of Atkinson's novels know to expect the unexpected from her. Subject matter and tone vary from book to book, making each a delightful surprise.

Now we enter 2025, which we hope will deliver a bookbag filled with new novels to while away our hours. On that note, I leave 2024 thinking of Elif Shafak, the Turkish writer and essayist, who reminds us that "We are living in a world in which there is way too much information, but little knowledge and even less wisdom."

Perhaps our world's storytellers will rectify the balance in the future.

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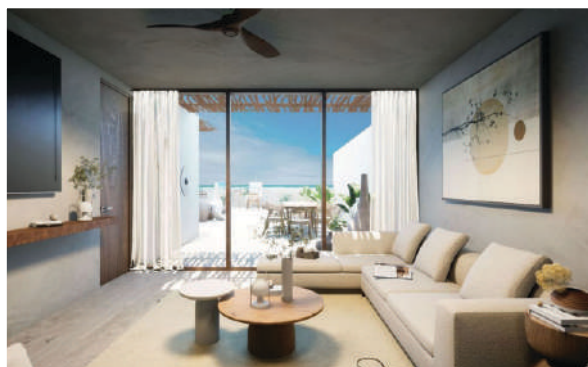
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Pirate's Story and the Not-So-Hidden Blemish on the Oaxacan Coast

By Arlene Prunkl

There is a blemish on the Oaxacan coast, a dark side that often goes unnoticed. While articles highlight the state's gorgeous beaches, sunshine, and vibrant culture, they rarely mention the region's massive dog overpopulation problem and the human cruelty toward these animals. Of an estimated 62.7 million dogs in Mexico, nearly one-third—18.8 million—are strays, wandering the streets, abandoned, abused, and often starving. Tragically, some of these dogs are poisoned or shot, and others face even more unimaginable cruelty, such as being buried alive.

Pirate's Story

We first wrote about Claudia Mamet in *The Eye* in November 2023, where we highlighted her dedication to rescuing abused, abandoned, and injured dogs in the Puerto Angel area. In addition to her role teaching at UMAR, Claudia operates the nonprofit *Dogs of Puerto Angel*, where she works tirelessly to save some of the most severe cases of animal cruelty. In early September, Claudia received a call from a local citizen who had filmed a dog that had been buried alive, a video so graphic it was difficult for many to watch.



When Claudia arrived at the site near San Pedro Pochutla, she found the dog—whom she named Pirate—barely alive, buried under heavy rocks and dirt with his paws and muzzle bound. He was emaciated, his body covered in ticks, with shredded paw pads and a large cancerous tumor on his penis. Pirate was too weak to stand on his own, but Claudia was determined to help. She rushed him to the vet, where he was put on IV and treated for the hundreds of ticks that had infested his body. A foster home was needed, and Marlene Beattie, known for her rescue work in Huatulco, generously offered her home.

Pirate spent six weeks in recovery, during which he gained the strength for surgery to remove the tumor, performed on October 30. Unfortunately, despite his progress, Pirate succumbed to renal failure just one week after his surgery. Claudia poignantly shared on social media: “Pirate could've left this world on September 10 never knowing love or compassion. But by some miracle, someone heard his whimpers and freed him, giving him a chance to feel love for the first time in his life.”

A Widespread Issue

Pirate's case is just one of many. Journalist Patricia Pacheco covered Pirate's story, reporting that animal cruelty is alarmingly common on the coast. She interviewed Claudia, who said, “Animals are beaten, deprived of food and water, tied up without shade, and poisoned. All these acts are crimes punishable in Oaxaca. We urge citizens to report them and authorities to enforce existing laws.”

The Eye 26

The Path to Change

Tackling this crisis requires a three-pronged approach: education and awareness, law enforcement, and sterilization.

1. Education and Awareness

Raising awareness is crucial to fostering a cultural shift in how domestic animals are treated. Education programs targeting locals, long-term residents, children, and tourists can help promote respect for animals. Communities must recognize that abandoning or mistreating animals has broader consequences. Through awareness, citizens can demand stronger enforcement of animal welfare laws and become active in rescue efforts.

2. Law Enforcement

While laws exist against animal cruelty in Oaxaca, enforcement is severely lacking. Harsher penalties and stricter oversight are essential. Current laws are often ignored, allowing abuse to continue unchecked. Activists, rescue organizations, and concerned citizens must pressure officials to prioritize animal welfare enforcement.

3. Sterilization

Sterilization is one of the most effective ways to address overpopulation. Nonprofits like Snipsisters and Palmas Unidas organize regular sterilization campaigns, often operating with limited resources. Since 2019, Snipsisters has sterilized over 8,000 dogs and cats in Puerto Escondido and surrounding communities. Palmas Unidas has sterilized 7,242 animals over nine years, while Dogs of Puerto Angel sterilizes approximately 1,000 animals annually.

Fundraising is critical to these efforts, as donations cover veterinary costs, medications, and supplies. Yet the demand for sterilizations far exceeds the resources available.

The Bigger Picture

Mexico ranks third globally—and first in Latin America—in animal abuse, according to INEGI (Mexico's Institute of National Statistics and Geography). The issue is as severe on the Oaxacan coast as it is elsewhere in the country. Hiding the problem from tourists will only worsen it; addressing it requires systemic change.

Fortunately, long-term residents, locals, and organizations are stepping up. Many tirelessly work to rescue animals, educate communities, and advocate for stronger laws. These efforts offer hope, but more support is needed.



How You Can Help

This human-created crisis requires human solutions. You can help by donating, volunteering, fostering, or adopting a rescue dog. Here are some organizations making a difference:

- **Dogs of Puerto Angel:** dogsofpuertoangel.org
- **Huellitas de Acero A.C. Puerto Escondido:** huellitasdeacero.com
- **ARCA Dog Shelter (Puerto Escondido):** Instagram: @ArcaShelter
- **Perros en Puerto (Puerto Escondido):** perrosenpuerto.org
- **Palmas Unidas (Huatulco):** Facebook: @palmasunidasac
- **Snipsisters:** snipsisters.com/donate



Pirate's tragic story is a stark reminder of the urgent need for action. By supporting these organizations and advocating for change, we can work toward a future where animals on the Oaxacan coast are treated with the care and compassion they deserve.

An advertisement for Las Palmas Oceanfront Villas & Casitas. The top half features a large swimming pool at night with a thatched roof structure in the background. The text "LAS PALMAS" is prominently displayed in white, with "oceanfront villas & casitas" and "Exclusive Boutique Resort" in smaller text below it. The phrase "Enjoy Relax Escape" is written in a cursive font. The bottom half of the ad is a dark grey box containing contact information: "Oceanfront Weddings" and "Retreats in Paradise" with a palm tree icon, phone numbers for Mexico and the US, the website "www.LasPalmasHuatulco.com", the email "courtney@laspalmshuatulco.com", and the location "Playa Violín, El Faro, Camino a Playa La Entrega".

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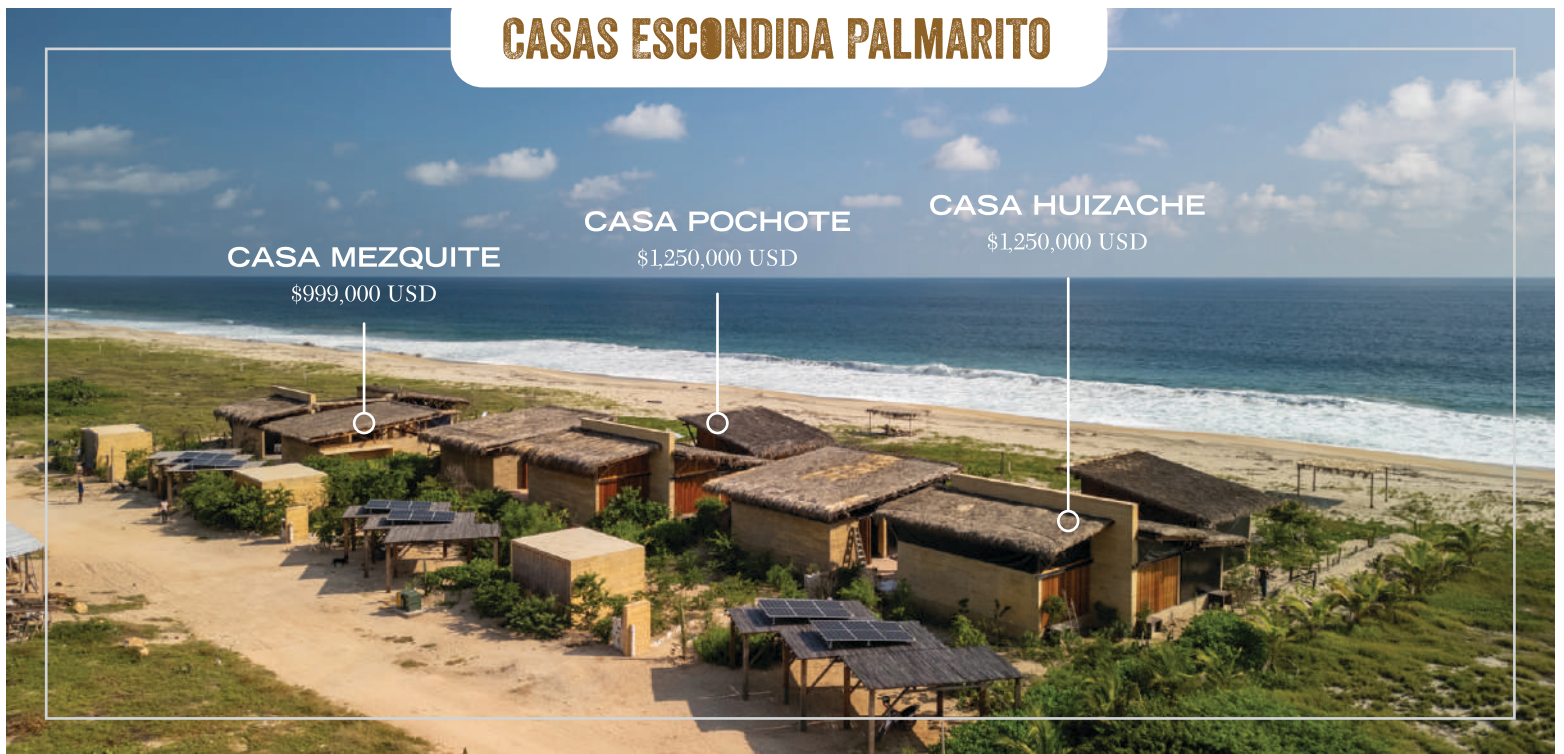
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Un Nuevo Amanecer

By Pamela Welgan

Several years ago, my husband and I decided to make Huatulco our annual winter retreat. During one of our stays, I sought ways to connect meaningfully with the local community and discovered various charitable organizations. Serendipitously, I crossed paths with one of the founding members of *Un Nuevo Amanecer* (UNA), a professional care center in Huatulco dedicated to supporting children and adolescents with developmental challenges.



Today, UNA serves approximately 150 children annually, ranging from infants as young as three months to teenagers up to 17 years old. After an initial assessment by UNA therapists, each child receives personalized interventions. Specialized medical follow-ups are often arranged in Huatulco, Oaxaca City, or Mexico City. Diagnoses include physical disabilities, hearing loss, blindness, learning disorders, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, autism, and neurological disorders.

How It Started

An old proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child." Nearly 30 years ago, Flor Angélica Castillo de la Cruz, María Estela Venegas Aguirre, Dominga Sanchez Aguirre, Luz María Blanquet, and Leonardo Alcántara García took this to heart when they founded UNA. They recognized a pressing need for resources and services to support children with disabilities in Huatulco.

In those early days, these remarkable individuals, some with young children of their own, conducted village-by-village needs assessments across the Santa María Huatulco municipality. Imagine them driving a VW Beetle to remote communities to better understand and educate families about the importance of providing care for children with disabilities.

UNA's initial funding came from the Ba'asolay Foundation. Piña Palmera, another local organization working with children with disabilities, provided medical assistance, wheelchairs, and hearing aids in collaboration with the Huatulco Rotary Club.

Over the years, UNA has partnered with government institutions and international organizations, including Indesol, Unión Europea, COPLADE, Oaxaca Public Charity, TELETON, the Harp Foundation, and Amistad Canada. Local support has come through efforts such as *Blues on the Beach*, spearheaded by Daniel and Sonia Thompson, and community-driven initiatives led by Vamos Huatulco and Lobos Blancos. These partnerships, along with countless dedicated volunteers, have been instrumental in UNA's journey.

UNA Today

UNA is a registered *asociación civil* (a nonprofit organization permitted to receive private donations). Its full name, *Un Nuevo Amanecer en Pro del Discapacitado, A.C.* ("A New Dawn for the Disabled"), reflects its mission to offer hope and a brighter future to children and adolescents with developmental challenges.

In 2023, UNA reached a significant milestone: the opening of a purpose-built Child Care Center in Huatulco. This modern facility provides a safe environment for children and their families and improves working conditions for staff. Its prominent street-level location has also increased awareness of UNA's services. (See Dan Thompson's article, "A New Dawn for Un Nuevo Amanecer," in the February 2022 issue of *The Eye*.)

Therapeutic interventions at UNA include speech therapy, occupational

therapy, Mexican Sign Language instruction, and pedagogical support. For adolescents unable to pursue further education, workshops in independent living and cooking skills prepare them for future employment. Success stories abound—many young people have gone on to work in local resorts, restaurants, or their own communities

Supporting UNA

UNA relies on the generosity of donors, volunteers, and community support. Here's how you can help:

Blues on the Beach

- **Date:** February 5, 2025
- **Location:** Hotel Casa Bocana, Bocana Beach
- **Details:** Enjoy food, drinks, and live entertainment in a stunning open-air venue. Admission by donation—\$5,000 MXN per person.
- Donations can be made via PayPal: www.paypal.me/unnuevoamanecerhux. For Canadian tax receipts, donate through UNA's partner, Amistad Canada: www.amistadcanada.org/donate.

Vamos Huatulco

- **Date:** January 12, 2025
- **Details:** Join a 5km run or 3km walk to support UNA. Register and learn more at: vamoshuatulco.org.

Apadrinar a un Niño (Sponsor a Child)

Through this program, donors commit to financially supporting a child's therapeutic treatments with an annual donation of \$15,000 MXN. This initiative targets children from the region's neediest families who require multiple interventions. For more information, please contact UNA directly.

Get Involved

Whether you're interested in donating, volunteering, or simply learning more, UNA welcomes your support. Visit: www.unnuevoamanecerhux.com.

Pamela Welgan serves as Project Liaison for UNA with Amistad Canada.



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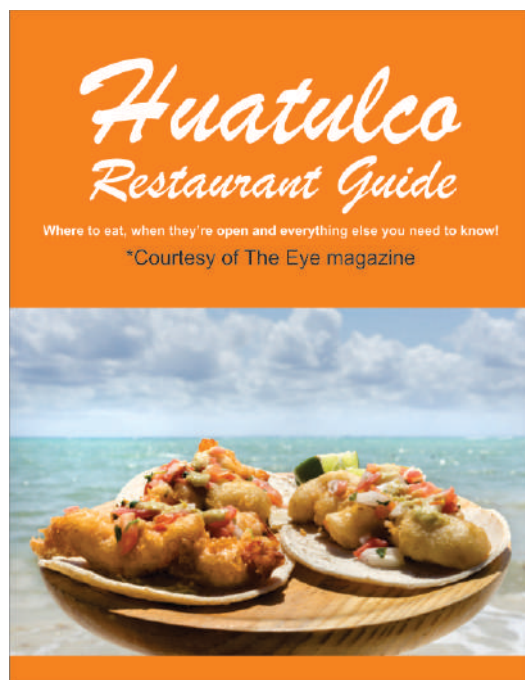
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You – Yes, You!

The Impact of Tourism on Mexico's Water Shortage

By Deborah Van Hoewyk

We've probably all heard about the water crisis in Mexico City (see Julie Etra's article elsewhere in this issue), but Mexico City's problems are just the worst example of a country-wide shortage of water.

- Historically, 30 of Mexico's 32 states have suffered from water scarcity; currently, drought conditions affect all of Mexico except Oaxaca and parts of Veracruz and Puebla. January to May of this year was the driest spring ever recorded.
- Having water is not the same as getting water – in places with plumbing, up to 40% of the water is lost through leaks in poorly maintained piping. Huatulco homeowners often experience water cutoffs (rumor has it that the water is diverted to the fancier hotels).
- Reservoirs have receded, leaving mudflats littered with trash, surrounding brownish ponds where once there were sparkling lakes; some have been closed. Perhaps worst off are the three reservoirs that comprise the Cutzamala system, which supplies Mexico City. Authorities started reducing the water distribution in October 2023; in June, they shut it down for 6 hours to make repairs. Fortunately, the rainy season has restored the Cutzamala system to 67% of capacity, from a low of 28% in June (the system is completely closed when the level drops to 20%).

Tourism and Water

Despite the water crisis, Mexico is a wildly popular tourism destination. In 2022, tourism employed 2.8 million people, over 7% of the Mexican workforce, who served over 38 million visitors. In 2023, Mexico as a tourist destination was 4th in the world, 2nd in North America; over 42 million tourists visited Mexico. In 2022, tourism spending constituted 8.5% of Mexico's GDP; in 2024, estimates say it will make up 14.2% of GDP – tourism brought in \$2.3 billion in June of 2024 alone.

All those tourists, including non-resident snowbirds, presumably come from places that are not experiencing a water crisis. And they bring their water consumption habits with them, along with a pretty accurate perception that drinking tap water is not a good idea in much of Mexico (see the Chaikens' article elsewhere in this issue). A 2012 article on "Tourism and Water Use" in the journal *Tourism Management* indicates that each tourist visiting Mexico used 300 liters – just shy of 80 gallons – of water per day; in Randy Jackson's article elsewhere in this issue, tourism consumed 15% of Huatulco's water supply.



Current data on just how many tourists are using that water are hard to come by, outdated, and generally only count people who arrive by plane; we do know that nearly 500,000 people arrived at the Huatulco airport in 2018, and that arrivals this year are almost back to pre-pandemic levels. As tourism increases, so does tourist water usage. Rest assured, however, it's not just that those folks are splish-splashing, taking a bath. Direct consumption of water is far from the only impact tourism has on Mexico's water supply.

The Price of "Big Tourism"

There are those who argue that Mexico's government privileges the interests of tourists and the tourist industry over those of local people, especially through large-scale tourism projects that bring more tourists. Referred to in 2023 as "anchor products" by then Secretary of Tourism Miguel Torruco Marqués, they include new and remodeled airports, the highway from Oaxaca to the coast, the largest aquarium in Latin America (in Mazatlán), the *Callejón de Liverpool* honoring the Beatles (also in Mazatlán), museums, arenas, and a Chinatown in Baja. More tourists, more swimming pools, more 5.3-gallon *garrafrones de agua*.

The biggest "anchor product" of them all is the *Tren Maya* (Mayan train), pet project of Mexico's last president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Intended to promote – Torruco Marqués said "detonate" – tourism in the Yucatán, the train will transport visitors from Mayan ruin to Mayan ruin throughout the Yucatán Peninsula, with side stops for other attractions. The track runs for 1,554 km (about 966 miles); the seven sections run from Palenque in Chiapas up to Mérida in Yucatán, over to Cancún and down to Chetumal in Quintana Roo, and back over to Escárcega in Campeche. In addition to tourist passengers, the train will carry freight; notably, the primary freight client is Pemex (*Petróleos Mexicanos*), which will be hauling fuel.

Various efforts to make the Mayan Train sustainable have taken place. The train itself provides low-impact public transportation, reducing traffic emissions. Portions are electrified or hybrid ultra-low-sulfur diesel and electric, there's an extensive tree-planting program to replace the clear-cutting for the track, there are safe passages for wildlife, and large portions of track have been elevated to avoid disrupting the landscape beneath the tracks.



The Mayan Train and the Great Maya Aquifer

Missing, however, seems to be any concern for the Great Maya Aquifer (*Gran Acuífero Maya*, or *GAM*) one of the world's largest aquifers, extending through the states of Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, and Chiapas. It provides drinking water for 5 million people – if you've ever gone swimming in a Yucatán *cenote*, a water-filled sinkhole, you've been in the GAM.

The Yucatán peninsula was once a huge underwater coral reef, but has risen out of the sea to form a plain composed of porous coralline and limestone, and the latter is water soluble. When rain, which is slightly acid, falls on the peninsula, it percolates through to the underground cave system, wearing away the limestone. When the limestone is weakened by serving as a water filter, it collapses into the underground system, creating the open-air cenotes.

The GAM is a network of underground caves and rivers. The Great Maya Aquifer Project, part of the National Institute of Archeology and History (INAH), is mapping the aquifer and investigating “cave archeology and paleontology” – basically, what fell, or what the Maya threw, in the water, along with artifacts and wall paintings done before the caves filled up.

The Mayan train speeds over the aquifer, sometimes on crumbling limestone only three feet thick. Track builders drove 15,000 long pilings down through the limestone and into the aquifer to support the train; the impact of construction on the aquifer has yet to be measured. The process coats once pristine caves with a shards of concrete and broken stalactites. According to Guillermo D. Christy, a civil engineer with the group *Cenotes Urbanos*, a voluntary collective focused on preserving the cenotes of the Yucatan, “Pouring concrete into a cavern, directly into the aquifer, without any concern or care – That's total ecocide.”

Tourism's Indirect Effects

Less direct are the impacts of increased tourism brought by the Mayan Train. As the Yucatán population has increased (Playa del Carmen had 46,000 people in 2000, and 304,000 in 2020 – a 661% increase), the cenotes have been filling with the trash and human waste generated by too-rapid urbanization. Nearly 50% of individual wells have registered contamination. The cenotes and the wells connect to the aquifer.

The Eye 34



Contaminating the water supply destroys more than clean drinking water. One of Tulum's more popular tourist attractions is a *cenote* park called Dos Ojos (“Two Eyes”). Dos Ojos is a community-managed attraction in the nearby *ejido* of Jacinto Pat (*ejidos* are community-owned lands). Recent explorations have revealed that Dos Ojos is connected with the aquifer. The path of the train was routed around the two main cenotes, but passes directly over several others.

Some Jacinto Pat residents are not happy. An article in *Time* magazine (by Soraya Kishwari, January 2023) focused on the Maya Train's impact on indigenous lifeways. One villager spoke anonymously about not wanting the Maya Train: “It will destroy the jungle, our home, and contaminate the cenotes, our life source.” Gabriel Mazón, a resident who refused to move to make way for the train, says, “As a people, we have allowed ourselves to be bought ... there is no support from indigenous people [for the Maya Train]. If our ancestors could see what is being done in their name, they would die of sadness, knowing how they have been profaned, prostituted, and their culture and traditions used.” Mazón continued, “We are little more than a brand or marketing slogan for the government. The people have already been paid off. There will be no more benefits. All we have left to wait for now is the invasion.”

Changing a culture by changing its environment is a very complicated issue. As culture and local heritage are redefined to meet tourist expectations – as they are made into commodities that are more “salable” to outsiders – culture and heritage change to reflect the value placed on them by those outsiders. You can live without water for three days; living without your history is a long, slow death.



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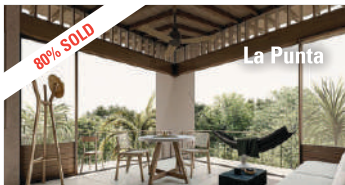
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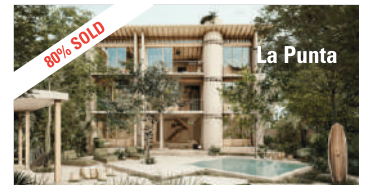
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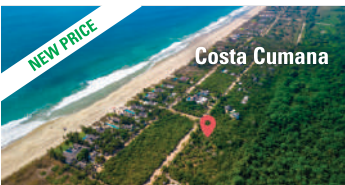
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