

Ancient Mexico

With Denise Iwaniw

and

Mexican Tour Guide, Julie Fortino

September 18 – 25, 2010

Cost: \$1,800

Includes roundtrip airfare, first class ground transportation, first class hotel accommodations, tour guide, daily classes and celebration dinner!



First Deposit of \$900 due by May 1st

Second and Final Payment of \$900 due by August 1st

Payment may be made via PayPal or by check to:

Julie Fortino, 3510 West Wing Road, Mount Pleasant MI 48858



Day one

Travel from Grand Rapids to Mexico City – Immediately board a first class bus to Puebla and check into hotel. Dinner together in the zocalo (plaza).

The charming colonial city of Puebla is best known for the beautiful Talavera tiles that adorn its walls and interiors, for *mole poblano*, Mexico's national dish, and as the site of the Cinco de Mayo battle in 1862. The historic center of Puebla was named a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) in 1987. The streets of Puebla's compact city center are lined with churches, mansions, and other lovely old buildings, making it a delight to stroll around. Puebla also makes a good base for exploring isolated Cantona and the ancient murals at Cacaxtla.

Puebla is a very Catholic city, even for Mexico; there are so many churches and former convents that most Poblanos can't keep them all straight. The town's full name is actually Puebla de los Angeles, "People of the Angels."

Day two

Cholula for breakfast and exploration of the pyramids with a tour guide:

At first glance, the Great Pyramid just looks like a grassy hill crowned by a church (called Nuestra Señora de los Remedios). But if you climb the unreconstructed pyramid beside it, you can plainly see the geometric outline of the original structure, which rises from the ground in four levels.

From this viewpoint you also get a good look at El Popocatepetl, the majestic snow-capped volcano that separates this valley from the valley of Mexico.

The Great Pyramid of Cholula is the largest pyramid in the world, much larger in volume than the great pyramids of Egypt. With a base of 450x450m and a height of 66m, its total volume is estimated at 4.45 million m³.

Archaeologists have reconstructed one side of one of the lower segments of the pyramid and have dug some five miles of tunnels into the pyramid, which visitors are free to explore.

Among the artifacts uncovered by archaeologists at Cholula is a 165-foot (50-m) long multicolored mural featuring life-sized human figures. Thought to date from the Classic period, the mural has been given the title "The Drunkards" - the scene is one of drinking and inebriation. The liquid depicted in the mural may not be alcohol, but a hallucinogenic potion derived from mushrooms or even peyote.

Afternoon: lunch and siesta

Evening = AMAZING church outside of Puebla and dinner in an Italian village

Day Three

Drive to Oaxaca – check into hotel and explore the city

Santo Domingo Church and Convent

The most splendid Oaxaca's 27 churches, with gilded walls and ornate statues. When the sun shines through the yellow stained-glass window, it looks like a Baroque vision of heaven.

Basilica de la Soledad

The holiest site in Oaxaca, this 17th-century church was built to house the image of the Virgin of Solitude (Soledad), Oaxaca's patron saint. She wears 600 diamonds and a 4-lb gold crown.

Catedral de Oaxaca

An imposing structure with an attractive Baroque facade. Rebuilt after a fire in 1730, it features a bronze altar and a much-revered crucifix that was the sole survivor of the lightning-caused blaze.

Regional Museum

Housed in a beautifully-restored colonial convent, this excellent museum displays finds from ancient Mexico, including artifacts from Monte Alban's Tomb 7.

Day Four

Monte Alban

Situated on a mountain 400 m (1,315 ft) above the Oaxaca Valley, Monte Albán ("*mohn-teh ahl-bahn*") was once the holy city of more than 30,000 Zapotecs. It is the area's most interesting and extensively excavated ruin, yet it is estimated that only about 10% of the site has yet been uncovered.

People have lived in the Oaxaca Valley since about 2000 BC. Between 800 and 500 BC, there was an influx of new peoples, now called the Zapotecs. Around 500 BC, these peoples began the monumental exercise of leveling the top of a mountain, where they would build Monte Albán.



Sunset at Monte Alban.

A center of Zapotec culture, Monte Albán was also influenced by other contemporary cultures. Olmec influence is evident in the early sculptures; more recent masks and sculptures reflect contact with the Maya. At its zenith in 300 AD, Monte Albán borrowed architectural ideas from Teotihuacán and dominated the cultural, religious, and economic life of the region.

Monte Albán declined in later years and by 800 AD was largely abandoned. Around 13th century it was adopted by the Mixtecs, who added little to the existing architecture but left magnificent gold-laden tombs for their royalty. The most famous of these is Tomb 7, because of its fabulous treasure.

Day Five

El Tule



Located in the church grounds in the town center of Santa María del Tule. It has the stoutest trunk of any tree in the world. The age is unknown, with estimates ranging between 1,200 and 3,000 years, and even one claim of 6,000 years, the best scientific estimate based on growth rates is 1,433-1,600 years. Local Zapotec legend holds that it was planted about 1,400 years ago by Pechocha, a priest of Ehecatl, the Aztec storm-god, in broad agreement with the scientific estimate; its location on a sacred site (later taken over by the Roman Catholic Church) would also support this. The tree is occasionally nicknamed the "Tree of Life" from all the images of animals that are reputedly visible in the tree's gnarled trunk.

Afternoon – travel to a village outside Oaxaca where the wood carvings, alebrijes, are made and buy them directly from the artists.

Day Six

Travel back to Puebla spend the night

Day Seven

Bus back to airport in the morning

Fly out of Mexico City in the early afternoon