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Mexico (161 detailed maps, including Mexico City), 8th Edition

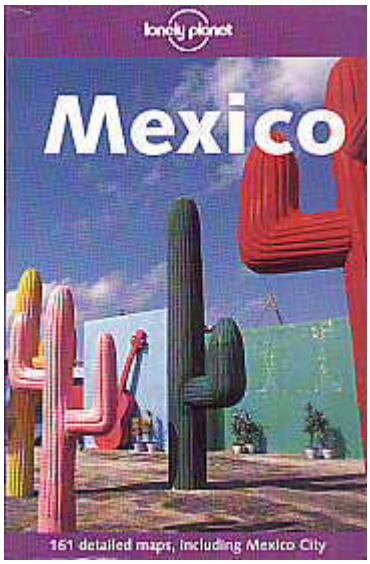
THE BOOK

Author	John Noble
Publisher	Lonely Planet
Published	2002
Format	Paperback, 5" x 7.75"
ISBN-10	1740590287
Price	$24.99

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MEXICO

Mexico (161 detailed maps, including Mexico City), 8thEdition, *by* John Noble, Paperback, 5" x 7.75" Lonely Planet,, 90 Maribrynong Street, Footscray, Victoria 3011, AUSTRALIA. Email: annab@lonelyplanet.com.au, Publication Date - September 2002. 1040 pp / 24 pp colour / 161 maps, ISBN 1740590287. Price US $24.99, AUS $39.6, UK £14.99

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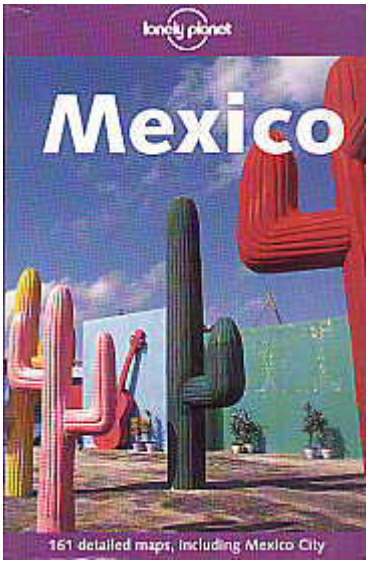


When Hernán Cortés, its Spanish conqueror was asked to describe Mexico, he simply crumpled a piece of paper and set it on a table! By doing this, he tried to stress upon the diverse topography of

Mexico. The country's endless mountain ranges have always allowed its many peoples to pursue independent destinies. The country's diversity, also makes it a very favorite spot for tourists.

If you have decided to visit Mexico for your next holidays, how are you going to make your preparations? Which places should you visit, if you had with you, say 1 week? Which places if you had 1 month? Where would you stay? Which mode of local travel should you use? What are the best places to eat?

Excerpts



The book makes clever use of boxes to give additional (travel related) information. When you are idly shuffling through the book, these boxes tend to catch your attention. Reading them is sheer pleasure. Sample some excerpts from the box which appears at page 110-111.

Dia de Muertos

Toy skeletons in honor of Dia de Muertos, San Miguel de Allende



The Day of the Dead has its origins in the pre-Hispanic Tarasco people's belief that the dead could return to their homes on one day each year to visit their loved ones...The day when the dead could return was set in the ancient calender, a month after the autumn equinox.

The book under review tells you not just about these things, but a host of other travel related questions. When I leafed through the book, I got an impression that one would fall in love with it, whether or not he was going to Mexico. The book is so full of interesting information (and photographs), that one would love to read it just for the sake of information that it provides.

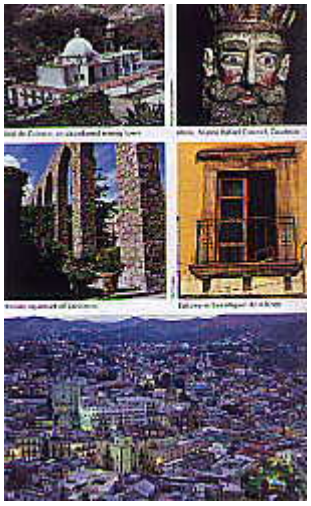
But of course, if you have decided to visit Mexico, this book is indispensable for you.

The publishers commissioned as many as ten different experts to visit various parts of Mexico. Each of them returned back with a wealth of information, and this information was then stitched in one place by the coordinating author John Noble.

To me, Mexico on a map has always appeared like a large swordfish, with its large fractured jaw hanging down from its North-western end (what we know as Baja California, and which incidentally happens to be the world's longest peninsula) and its tail rising proudly at its south-eastern end (the Yucatan Peninsula).

The book divides Mexico in twelve regions of roughly equal size. These are (i) Mexico City (ii) Baja California (iii) Northwest Mexico (iv) Central North Mexico (v) Northeast Mexico (vi) Central Pacific Coast (vii) Western Central Highlands (viii) Northern Central Highlands (ix) Central Gulf Coast (x) Oaxaca State (xi) Tabasco & Chiapas and finally (xii) The Yucatan Peninsula

The book gives a number of color plates such as this. This one facing page 353 depicts various tourist spots

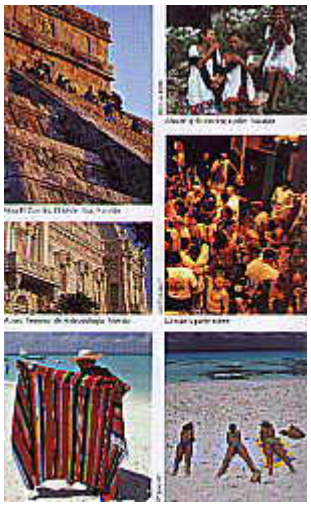


A complete chapter is devoted to each region, which actually forms a mini guide to that region. Each of these chapters is self-contained, with a detailed map of that region in the beginning and a detailed box giving highlights. Then we get to read detailed information specific to that region: things like the history, vital information, important telephone numbers, special events, organized tours, places to stay, places to eat, entertainment avenues, shopping, how to get there etc.

Places to stay are given for all categories. We get to read about budget accommodations ranging from US $1 per night to US $ 20. Then there are mid-range accommodations from US $20 till about US $45. And finally there are top end hotels which usually have a daily charge running in three figures. Phone and fax numbers, and in many cases Emails and websites are provided, so readers can contact the hotels easily.

When in Mexico, what should you buy as souvenirs? What should you bring back for your friends and relatives back home? A full chapter entitled "Artesanías" (pages 59-69) gives advice on this. Artesanías is Mexican for Handicrafts. We are told about various handicrafts, textiles, ceramics, masks and headdresses, Lacquerware & woodwork, bark paintings, leather, jewelry & metalwork, baskets, hats, hammocks, festival crafts and a host of other artifacts, which you can bring back home. Advice is given on how to select the best material and the best places from where to buy these materials.

This plate facing page 865 depicts - among other things - El Castillo, Chichén Itzá, Yucatán (top left)



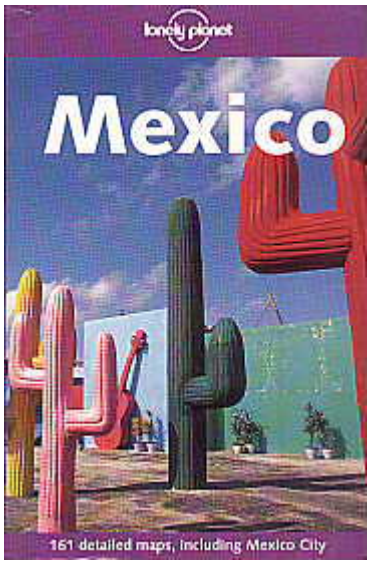
An interesting artifact that you can buy from Mexico is Retablos (page 68). It is a small painting typically done on small sheets of tin, but is sometimes also done on glass, wood, cardboard or other material. The paintings are a tribute to saints, and often depict miracles in touchingly literal images painted by their beneficiaries. Some typical images that you may see on them are a cyclist's hair's-breadth escape from a hurtling bus, a sailor's survival of a shipwreck or an invalid rising from a sickbed, beside a representation of the saint and a brief message along the lines of 'Thanks to San Milagro for curing my rheumatism - Maria Suárez González, 6 June 1999'.

Very few people know that Mexican personalities are widely known across the globe. We in New Delhi, for instance have a road named after Benito Juárez (1806-1872), a Zapotec lawyer from Oaxaca. The road is called Benito Juárez Marg ("Marg" is Hindustani for "road"), which joins the mighty Mahatma Gandhi Marg (another road named after the great Indian leader) with Rao Tularam Marg. The serene Delhi University South Campus lies along this road. While leafing through this book, I came across a very informative box describing Mexico's great personalities. It was interesting to read about Benito Juárez from this box (page 23). Further information on him appears on page 755.

A very interesting feature of this book is the number of informative boxes which appear all over. So lavishly are they spread across the book, that if you open the book at random you are most likely to see one. And each is full of interesting and off beat information. Although this information is related to the accompanying main text, the boxes can be read all by themselves, without referring to the main text at all. The information is invariably interesting. Sample this box appearing at page 121. Entitled "The Fiesta Brava" (Wild Festival), it gives information on *corrida de toros* (bullfight). We are told that Mexicans arrive in time only for two events - funerals and bullfights! We then get to read a graphic description of the bullfight, which usually ends with the killing and butchering of the bulls. The meat is then offered for sale. Bulls are expected to fight bravely till end. Animals lacking heart for the fight bring shame on the ranch that bred them. The bullfight season runs from March till September every year.

QUICK NOTES

Some major highlights of *Mexico* at a glance:



& A comprehensive look at regional geology, human history, flora and fauna, and all the top attractions
& The best spots for wildlife-watching, volcano-climbing, language-studying or beach-bumming
& Hot tacos and hot showers - eats and sleeps for all budgets
& Up-to-date details on getting around - by car, bus, train, plain or boat
& Food glossary and Spanish Language Section with Mexican Slang
& Handicrafts special section
& 161 detailed, easy-to-use maps

Several of these boxes tell us about the Mexican codes, mores, beliefs and practices, many of which may border on the uncanny and bizarre. Sample this box appearing on page 110. Entitled "*Dia de Muertos*" (The day of the dead), it tells us about people's belief that the dead return to their house at least once every year. On this day - which incidentally falls a month after the autumn equinox - preparations are made to welcome the spirits. An arch made of bright yellow marigold flowers is put up in each house as a symbolic door or gateway to and from the underworld. Tamales, fruits, corn and salt are placed in front of the arch. And water is always kept, because the spirits are always thirsty after making such a long journey! Spirits of the departed children visit first, followed by adults the next night. On the day the spirits of children are supposed to visit, toys and sweets are placed at the altar too.

The book is full of practical tips, which you would not find in other travel books. There is off-beat information such as information for women travelers! We get to read on page 103, for instance, that women must avoid eye contact with the locals! If possible they must ignore attention. Other things that women travelers must not do are challenge a man's masculinity, drink in a cantina, hitchhike, or going alone in isolated places. And most interestingly, women are advised to wear a wedding ring and talk about their husbands! Quite understandable!!

If you are going to Mexico, this book is as necessary for you as the air ticket. If you are not going to Mexico, quite probably you will want to go there after reading this book. And finally if you are bent upon not going to Mexico, this book will still interest you for the sheer wealth of knowledge about that country that it provides.

Order this Book by clicking here

-Editor-in-Chief

of Volume 1, No. 2 (July - December 2002)