Mexico City

When people first arrive in the Distrito Federal, they find a civilized, likeable destination, with serene parks, delightful plazas and vibrant street life, brimming with history, architecture and culture. Like any great metropolis, Mexico City presents a mosaic of scenes. One easily shifts from lucha libre to experimental theater, street markets to sleek shopping malls, tamales to fusion cuisine. Compared with many North American cities, streets feel safe for strolling, and the residents are remarkably patient and accommodating.

Mexico City is the political, financial and cultural nerve center, and to understand Mexico one should spend some time here. People continue to move to Mexico City and it has become a more livable place. Strict emission controls have reduced pollution, and mass-transit solutions have addressed traffic problems. The Condesa and Roma neighborhoods have blossomed as nightlife zones, while the Centro Histórico is being made over as a vibrant cultural quarter.

Part modern metropolis, part monstrosity, Mexico City encapsulates the contemporary urban experience. Perhaps more than any city on earth, it is at the intersection of the first and third worlds, with all the ills and thrills that suggests. The modern heir to one of the ancient world’s most remarkable cities – Tenochtitlán – it remains a city of epic proportions.

TOP FIVE

- Surveying the incredible architectural catalogue of the Centro Histórico (p128)
- Ambling through Parque México (p136) in spring, when the are jacarandas in bloom
- Enjoying a dish of roasted peanuts and caballito of tequila at El Nivel (p166), the nation’s first registered cantina
- Cheering on the ‘good guys’ at the lucha libre bouts of Arena Coliseo (p175)
- Cruising Xochimilco’s back canals to the Isla de las Muñecas (Island of the Dolls; p150)

TELEPHONE CODE: 55
POPULATION: 18 MILLION
JANUARY DAILY HIGH: 21°C | 70.3°F
JULY DAILY HIGH: 23°C | 73.8°F
ELEVATION: 2240 M
HISTORY
As early as 10,000 BC, humans were attracted to the Lago de Texcoco, the lake that then covered much of the floor of the Valle de México. After 7500 BC the lake started shrinking, hunting became more difficult, and the inhabitants turned to agriculture. A loose federation of farming villages had evolved around Lago de Texcoco by 200 BC. The biggest, Cuicuilco, was destroyed by a volcanic eruption about AD 100.

Breakthroughs in irrigation techniques and the development of an economy based on the cultivation of maize contributed to the rise of a civilization at Teotihuacán, 40 km northeast of the lake. For centuries Teotihuacán was the capital of an empire whose influence was felt as far away as Guatemala. However, unable to sustain its burgeoning population, it fell in the 8th century. The Toltecs, possibly descended from the nomadic tribes who invaded Teotihuacán, arose as the next great civilization, building their capital at Tula, 65 km north of modern-day Mexico City. By the 12th century the Tula empire had collapsed as well, leaving a number of small statelets to compete for control of the Valle de México. It was the Aztecs who emerged supreme.

Aztec Mexico City
The Aztecs, or Mexica (meh-shee-kah), arrived a century after the decline of the Toltecs. A wandering tribe that claimed to have come from the mythical region of Aztlan in northwest Mexico or further north, they offered their skills as fighters to the dominant Tepaneca tribe who resided on the lake’s western shore. The Tepanecas allowed the Aztecs to settle upon the inhospitable terrain of Chapultepec, but other tribes objected to Aztec habits like wife-stealing and human sacrifice (to appease Huizilopochtli, the hummingbird god).

In the early 14th century, warriors of Culhuacán, on the southern shore, launched an attack on the Tepanecas, their chief rivals, enslaving the Aztec mercenarys. Eventually the Aztecs played the same role for their new masters, and Cocoxtlí, Culhuacán’s ruler, sent them into battle against nearby Xochimilco. The Aztecs delivered over 8000 human ears to Cocoxtlí as proof of their victory. When the Aztecs sought a marriage alliance with Culhuacán, Cocoxtlí rashly offered his own daughter’s hand to the Aztec chieftain. But when he arrived at the wedding banquet, his pride turned to horror: a dancer was garbed in the flayed skin of his daughter, who had been sacrificed to Huizilopochtli. Fleeing from the wrath of Culhuacán, the Aztecs wandered around the swampy fringes of the lake, finally reaching an island near the western shore around 1325. There, according to legend, they witnessed an eagle standing on a cactus and eating a snake, which they interpreted as a sign to stop and build a city, Tenochtitlán. (The eagle depicted on the Mexican flag refers to this event.)

Tenochtitlán rapidly became a sophisticated city-state whose empire would, by the early 16th century, span most of modern-day central Mexico from the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico and into far southern Mexico. The Aztecs built their city on a grid plan, with canals as thoroughfares and causeways to the lakeshore. At the city’s heart stood the main teocalli (sacred precinct), with its temple dedicated to Huizilopochtli and the water god, Tláloc. In the marshier parts of the island, they created raised gardens by piling up vegetation and mud, and planting willows. These chinampas (versions of which can still be seen at Xochimilco in southern Mexico City) gave three or four harvests yearly but were still not enough to feed the growing population.

To supplement their resources, the Aztecs extracted tribute from conquered tribes. In the mid-15th century they formed the Triple Alliance with the lakeshore states Texcoco and Tlacopan to conduct wars against Tlaxcala and Huejotzingo, which lay east of the valley. The purpose was to gain a steady supply of prisoners to sate Huizilopochtli’s vast hunger for sacrificial victims, so that the sun would rise each day.

When the Spanish arrived in 1519, Tenochtitlán’s population was an estimated 200,000 to 300,000, and that of the whole Valle de México was perhaps 1.5 million, already making it one of the world’s densest urban areas. For an account of the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlán, see p48.
Capital of Nueva España
So assiduously did the Spanish raze Tenochtitlán that only a handful of Aztec structures remain standing in Mexico City today. Having wrecked the Aztec capital, they chose to rebuild it as their own. The conquistador Hernán Cortés hoped to preserve the arrangement whereby Tenochtitlán siphoned off the bounty of its vassal states.

Ravaged by disease, the population of the Valle de México shrank drastically – by some estimates, from 1.5 million to fewer than 100,000 within a century of the conquest. But the city emerged by 1550 as the prosperous, elegant capital of Nueva España. Broad, straight streets were laid out, and buildings were constructed to Spanish designs with local materials such as tezontle, a red volcanic rock that the Aztecs had used for their temples. Hospitals, churches, palaces and a university were built. But, lacking natural drainage, the city suffered floods caused by the partial destruction in the 1520s of the Aztecs’ canals. Lago de Texcoco often overflowed, damaging buildings, bringing disease and forcing thousands of people to relocate.

Independence
On October 30, 1810, some 80,000 independence rebels, fresh from victory at Guanajuato, overpowered Spanish loyalist forces just west of the capital. But they were not sufficiently equipped to capitalize on this triumph, and their leader Miguel Hidalgo chose not to advance on the city – a decision that cost Mexico 11 more years of fighting before independence was achieved. By 1821 the city’s population had swelled to 160,000, making it the biggest in the Americas.

Mexico City entered the modern age under the despotic Porfirio Díaz, who ruled Mexico for most of the period from 1877 to 1911 and attracted much foreign investment. Díaz ushered in a construction boom, building Parisian-style mansions and theaters to serve the city’s elite. Some 150km of electric tramways threaded the streets, industry grew, and by 1910 the city had 471,000 inhabitants. A drainage canal and tunnel finally succeeded in drying up much of Lago de Texcoco, allowing further expansion.

Modern Megalopolis
After Díaz fell in 1911, the Mexican Revolution (see p52) brought war, hunger and disease to the streets of Mexico City. Following the Great Depression, a drive to industrialize attracted more money and people to the city. By 1940 the population had reached 1.7 million. In the 1940s and ’50s, factories and skyscrapers rose almost as quickly. The supply of housing, jobs and services could not keep pace with the influx of people; shantytowns appeared on the city’s fringes, and Mexico City began to grow uncontrollably.

Despite continued economic growth into the 1960s, political and social reform lagged behind, as was made painfully evident by the massacre of hundreds of students in the lead-up to the 1968 Olympic Games (see the boxed text, p106).

In the 1970s Mexico City continued to grow at an alarming rate, spreading beyond the Distrito Federal (DF) into the adjacent state of México and developing some of the world’s worst traffic and pollution, only partly alleviated by the metro system (opened in 1969) and by attempts in the 1990s to limit traffic. On September 19, 1985, an earthquake measuring over eight on the Richter scale hit Mexico City, killing at least 10,000, displacing thousands more and causing more than $4 billion in damage. But people continued to pour in.

Since 1940 Mexico City has multiplied in area over 10 times, yet it’s still one of the world’s most crowded metropolitan areas. Today the city counts 18 million inhabitants, around a sixth of the country’s population. Though growth has slowed in the last decade, there are still some 600 newcomers daily and the population is expected to top 20 million by 2010. It is the industrial, financial and communications center of the country; its industries generate more than one-third of Mexico’s wealth, and its people consume two-thirds of Mexico’s energy. Its cost of living is the highest in the nation.

Heavy subsidies are needed to keep the city from seizing up. Water extraction from the subsoil makes the city sink steadily – parts of the center sank 10m in the 20th century. Even so, one-third of the city’s water must be pumped in at great cost from outside the Valle de México; and because
there is no natural drainage, waste water must be pumped back out.

From 1928 to 1997 the federal government ruled DF directly, with federally appointed 'regents' heading notoriously corrupt administrations. Since 1997 the DF has had political autonomy and the chance to elect its own mayor. In 2000 Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a member of the left-leaning PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution), was elected. Capitalinos generally approved of the mayor's initiatives, which included an ambitious makeover of the Centro Histórico. In 2005, the Fox administration attempted to have 'AMLO' removed from his post – and from political life – by prosecuting him on tenuous contempt-of-court charges. But the plan backfired: when the mayor handed the reins over to Alejandro Encinas, his chief cabinet minister, to launch a presidential campaign, he found himself more popular than ever. Elections in 2006 were expected to determine Encinas’ successor.

ORIENTATION
Mexico City’s 350 colonias (neighborhoods) sprawl across the ancient bed of Lago de Texcoco and beyond. Though this vast urban expanse appears daunting, the main areas of interest to visitors are fairly well defined and easy to traverse.

Note that some major streets, such as Av Insurgentes, keep the same name for many kilometers, but the names (and numbering) of many lesser streets switch every few blocks.

Full addresses normally include the colonia. Often the easiest way to find an address is by asking for the nearest metro station.

Centro Histórico & Alameda Central
The historic heart of the city is the wide plaza known as the Zócalo, surrounded by the presidential palace, the metropolitan cathedral and the excavated site of the Templo Mayor, the main temple of Aztec Tenochtitlán. The Zócalo and its surround-

ECHOES OF TLATELOLCO
Nineteen sixty-eight marked a pivotal moment for Mexican democracy. Perhaps due to the subversive mood of the era, unrest was rife and students took to the streets to denounce political corruption and authoritarianism. Mexico had been chosen that year to host the Olympics, and President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz was anxious to present an image of stability to the world. Known for his authoritarian style, Díaz Ordaz employed heavy-handed tactics to stop the protests, in turn generating further unrest, with the mantle now being taken up by a broader coalition of middle-class capitalinos.

On the afternoon of October 2, a week before the Olympics were to begin, a demonstration was held on Tlatelolco’s Plaza de las Tres Culturas. Helicopters hovered overhead and a massive police contingent cordoned off the zone. Suddenly a flare dropped from one of the choppers and shots rang out, apparently from the balcony which the protestors had made into a speakers platform. Police then opened fire on the demonstrators and mayhem ensued. Later, government-authorized newspaper accounts blamed student snipers for igniting the incident and reported 20 protesters killed, although the real number is acknowledged to be closer to 400. News of the massacre was swept under the rug and the Olympic games went on without a hitch.

There are numerous theories as to what actually occurred that October day. But the generally accepted version is that the government staged the massacre, planting snipers on the balcony to make it seem as if the students had provoked the violence. Many Mexicans viewed the killings as a premeditated tactic by the government to suppress dissent, permanently discrediting the post-revolutionary regime.

More than 30 years later, the Tlatelolco massacre was still recalled bitterly by a generation of Mexicans when President Vicente Fox took office, pleading to bring human-rights abusers to justice, and it appeared some light would finally be shed on the matter. A special investigator was appointed and secret files were released for scrutiny. Luis Echeverría, who as minister of the interior under Díaz Ordaz controlled internal security, was questioned. But, whether because the authorities under investigation stonewalled or because the prosecutor mishandled matters, results were inconclusive and no convictions were made. Skeptical Mexicans have given up hope the case will be resolved – unless the next administration picks it up again.
ing neighborhoods are known as the Centro Histórico (Historic Center) and are full of notable old buildings and interesting museums. North, west and south of the Zócalo are many good, economical hotels and restaurants.

Av Madero and Av 5 de Mayo (or Cinco de Mayo) link the Zócalo with the Alameda Central park, eight blocks to the west. On the east side of the Alameda stands the magnificent Palacio de Bellas Artes. The landmark Torre Latinoamericana (Latin American Tower) pierces the sky a block south of Bellas Artes, beside one of the city’s main north–south arterial roads, the Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas.

**Plaza de la República**

Some 750m west of the Alameda, across Paseo de la Reforma, is the Plaza de la República, marked by the somber, domed Monumento a la Revolución. This is a fairly quiet, mostly residential area with many budget and midrange hotels. The districts called San Rafael and Juárez are respectively west and south of here.

**Paseo de la Reforma**

Mexico City’s grandest boulevard runs through the city’s heart, connecting the Alameda to the Bosque de Chapultepec. Along the way, the Monumento a la Independencia (aka ‘El Ángel’), the capital’s signature monument, marks the northern side of the Zona Rosa, while the sleek Torre Mayor, the city’s tallest building, stands at the eastern end of Chapultepec Park.

**Zona Rosa**

The Zona Rosa (Pink Zone) is a glitzy shopping, eating, hotel and nightlife district bound by Paseo de la Reforma to the north, Av Insurgentes to the east and Av Chapultepec to the south.

**Bosque de Chapultepec**

The woods of Chapultepec, known to gringos as Chapultepec Park, are to the west of the Zona Rosa. This large expanse of greenery and lakes is Mexico City’s ‘lungs,’ and holds many major museums, including the renowned Museo Nacional de Antropología. North of the park is the swanky Polanco district, filled with embassies and upscale shopping and dining establishments.

**North of the Centro**

Five kilometers north of the center is the Terminal Norte, the largest of the four bus terminals. Six kilometers north is the Basílica de Guadalupe, Mexico’s most revered shrine.

**South of the Centro**

Av Insurgentes Sur connects Paseo de la Reforma to most points of interest in the south. Just south of the Zona Rosa is Colonia Roma, a quaint area of Porfirian-era architecture, art galleries and plazas. West of Roma, 1km to 2km south of the Zona Rosa, is Colonia Condesa, a trendy neighborhood with pleasant parks, quiet streets, and plentiful restaurants and cafés. Five to 10km further south are the atmospheric former villages of San Ángel and Coyoacán and the vast campus of the national university. In the southeast of the city are the canals and gardens of Xochimilco.

**The Eje System**

Besides their regular names, many major streets are termed Eje (axis). The Eje system establishes a grid of priority roads across the city, supposedly speeding up transport. The key north–south Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas, running from Coyoacán in the south to Tenayuca in the north, passes just east of the Alameda Central. Major north–south roads west of the Eje Central are termed Eje 1 Poniente, Eje 2 Poniente etc, while roads to the east of Eje Central are labeled Eje 1 Oriente, Eje 2 Oriente and so on. The same goes for major east–west roads to the north and south of the Alameda Central and Zócalo – Rayón is Eje 1 Norte, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier is Eje 1 Sur.

**Maps**

Mexico City tourist modules hand out useful color maps with enlargements of the Centro Histórico, Coyoacán and San Ángel. Those needing more detail should pick up a Guía Roji fold-out map of Mexico City ($4), or a Guía Roji Ciudad de México street atlas ($18), updated annually, with a comprehensive index. Find them at Sanborns stores, Librería Sama (see p125) and at larger newsstands.

**Inegi** (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5512-1873; Balderas 71, Juárez; ☒ 9am-4:30pm Mon-Fri; M Juárez), Mexico’s
MEXICO CITY IN...

Two Days
Day one dawns and you’re overlooking the Zócalo from one of the rooftop restaurants on the plaza’s west side. For a different angle, climb the bell tower of the Catedral Metropolitana (p128), then admire Diego Rivera’s cinematic murals at the Palacio Nacional (p128). Take the Turibús (p151) for a survey of the city’s neighborhoods, getting off in Polanco (p140) or the Zona Rosa (p136) for lunch and shopping. Spend the evening relaxing at a café near your hotel, or if you’re up for it, tequila tasting with the mariachis at Plaza Garibaldi. Day two, delve into Mexico’s past at the Museo Nacional de Antropología (p138) and Castillo de Chapultepec (p137).

Four Days
With a couple more days, head out to the pyramids at Teotihuacán (p195). Spend a morning roaming around the Alameda Central (p134), making time to acquaint yourself with the Palacio de Bellas Artes (p134) and Museo Franz Mayer (p134). Have the quintessential Mexican comida (lunch) at Los Girasoles (p158), then do some artesanías (crafts) shopping at La Ciudadela (p133). In the evening plug into the lively Condesa (p170) scene.

One Week
Get to know the southern districts: Visit Frida Kahlo’s Blue House (p144) in Coyoacán; hire a trajinera (gondola) for a cruise along the ancient canals of Xochimilco (p141); shop for quality crafts at San Ángel’s Bazar Sábado market (p177). Reserve Wednesday or Sunday evening for the Ballet Folclórico (p171) at the Palacio de Bellas Artes.

national geographical institute, publishes topographical maps covering the whole country (subject to availability). There is also an outlet at the airport (5786-0212; Sala C; 8:30am-8pm) and their headquarters are in Colonia Mixcoac (Map pp110-11; 5278-1000, ext 1207; Patriotismo 711; 9am-9pm Mon-Fri; Mixcoac).

INFORMATION

BOOKSTORES

Books in English and other languages can be found in top-end hotels and major museums, as well as most of the following bookstores.

CENTRO HISTÓRICO

American Bookstore (Map pp114-15; 5512-0306; Bolivar 23; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat; Allende) Has novels and books on Mexico in English, and Lonely Planet guides.

Gandhi (Map pp114-15; 5512-4360; Juárez 4; 10am-9pm Mon-Fri, 11am-8pm Sat & Sun; Bellas Artes) Good source of books about Mexico and Mexico City, and novels in English, plus a worthwhile music section.

Librería Madero (Map pp114-15; 5510-2068; Madero 12; 10am-6:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat; Allende) Great selection of Mexican history, art and architecture, including many secondhand books.

OTHER AREAS

Rare-book aficionados can dig up some gems in the used bookstores along Av Álvaro Obregón in Colonia Roma.

Cenca (Map pp120–1; 5399-5821; Temístocles 73B, Polanco; 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-9pm Sat & Sun; Polanco) Wide variety of foreign magazines, plus best-sellers in English.

Gandhi (Map p122; 5661-0911; Miguel Ángel de Quevedo 121; 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun; Miguel Ángel de Quevedo) The large San Ángel branch has outlets on both sides of Quevedo.

La Bouquinerie Zona Rosa (Map pp118-19; 5514-0838; Casa de Francia, Havre 15; 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, until 6pm Sat; Miguel Ángel de Quevedo) French bookstore with Le Figaro and Libération.

Librería Alemana (Map pp118-19; 5533-1002; Orizaba 6, Colonia Roma; 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sun; Insurgentes) German pop fiction and literature.

Librería Pegaso (Map pp118-19; 5208-0174; Álvaro Obregón 99; 11am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun; Insurgentes) Inside the Casa Lamm; carries mostly Spanish-language titles with a small English literature section, plus a few Lonely Planet guides.
Emergency
The Policía Turística, recognizable by the heart-shaped patch on their sleeve, patrol Paseo de la Reforma and the Centro Histórico. Their function is to help tourists. They supposedly speak English.

Report crimes and get legal assistance through the Unidad Ministerial Especializada para Atención al Turista (Map pp114-15; 5592-2665, ext 1114; Paseo de la Reforma 42; 9am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri; M Hidalgo). You fill out a form, possibly available at hotels and embassies, in English, Spanish and French, describing the incident and submit it to the office, which will address it to the proper authorities. Mobile units of the PGJDF (Federal District Attorney General’s Office) can assist crime victims on the spot; call 061.

Other useful numbers:
Ambulance, Fire (080)
Cruz Roja (Red Cross; 5395-1111)
Hospital ABC (emergency 5230-8161; Sur 136 No 16, Colonia Las Américas; M Observatorio)
Hospital Ángeles Clínica Londres (emergency 5229-8445; Durango 64, Colonia Roma; M Cuauhtémoc)
Missing persons & vehicles (5658-1111)

Internet Access
Public Internet services are easily found throughout town. Rates range from $1 to $2 per hour, unless otherwise noted. In addition, many cafés offer wireless Internet (though oddly, not Starbucks).

CENTRO HISTÓRICO
C&X (Map pp114-15; Humboldt 62; 8am-10:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sun; M Juárez) Adjacent to the YWCA.
Esperanto (Map pp114-15; 5512-4123; Independencia 66; 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun; M Juárez)
Keep in Touch (Map pp114-15; 5512-4186; Gante 6, Pasaje Iturbide; 9am-8:30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun; M Allende) Wireless access and X-Box available, plus frappuccinos and sandwiches.

COYOACÁN
Papelería Dabo (Map p123; 5659-5547; Allende 45, cnr Cuauhtémoc, Coyoacán; 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun; M Viveros)

ZONA ROSA
Plenty of cybercafés occupy the big Insurgentes roundabout.
C@lling Home (Map pp118-19; 5207-2586; Jalapa 51, Colonia Roma; 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun; M Insurgentes)

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Cafenauta (Map pp118-19; 5533-1517; Ensenada 6, Colonia Condesa; 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-8pm Sun; M Patriotismo)
Conecte Café (Map pp118-19; Génova 71, cnr Londres; 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, 10am-9pm Sun; M Insurgentes)
Mac Coffee (Map pp118-19; 5525-4391; 1st fl, Londres 152; 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun; M Insurgentes) Haven for Macheps.

Internet Resources
The following sites compile oodles of information on the capital. Some offer their pages in English, but the English pages are often not as thorough or are barely comprehensible.
Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes (www.cnca.gob.mx in Spanish) Up-to-date guide to DF museums, theaters and other cultural institutions.
Dfiesta en el DF (www.defiestaeneldf.com) Tourism department’s exhaustive listings with plenty of practical information.
Sistema de Transporte Colectivo (www.metro.df.gob.mx in Spanish) All about the Mexico City metro.
Vive el Centro (www.viveelcentro.com in Spanish) Excellent overview of Centro Histórico places and happenings, maintained by the downtown restoration foundation.

Laundry
Self-service laundromats have yet to catch on here. The following lavanderías charge $4 to $6 to wash and dry a 3kg load for you, and only slightly less if you do it yourself.
Acualav (Map pp118-19; 5514-7348; Orizaba 42, Colonia Roma; 8:30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 9am-3pm Sun; M Insurgentes)
Lavajet (Map pp118-19; 5207-3032; Río Danubio 119B; 8:15am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 8:15am-4pm Sat; M Insurgentes)
Lavandería Automática Édison (Map pp114-15; Édison 91; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat; M Revolución) Near Plaza de la República.

Libraries & Cultural Centers
Biblioteca Benjamín Franklin (Map pp118-19; 5080-2733; Liverpool 31; 11am-7pm Mon-Fri; M Cuahtémoc) Housed in the US Trade Center, the library subscribes to a wide range of periodicals, from Foreign Affairs to Mad. Leave your ID at the gate.

(Continued on page 125)
(Continued from page 109)

Canadian Embassy Library (Map pp120–1; ☏ 5724-7960; Schiller 529, Polanco; 9am-12:30pm Mon-Fri; M Auditorio)

Casa de Francia (Map pp118–19; ☏ 5511-3151; Havre 15, Zona Rosa; 10am-8pm Mon-Sat; M Insurgentes) The complex includes an art gallery, French bookstore and restaurant, plus a mediateca for watching videos or browsing the Internet.

Centro Cultural de España (Spanish Cultural Center; Map pp114-15; ☏ 5521-1925; www.ccemx.org; Republica de Guatemala 18; admission free; 10am-8pm Tue & Wed, 10am-11pm Thu-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun; M Zócalo) Dedicated to promoting Spanish culture in Mexico. See p130 for more details.

Instituto Francés de América Latina (IFAL; Map pp118–19; ☏ 5566-0777; www.francia.org.mx/ifal; Rio Nazas 43, Colonia Cuauhtémoc) Films, concerts and other events take place here.

Instituto Goethe (Map pp118–19; ☏ 5207-0487; www.goethe.de/hn/mex in German; Tonalá 43, Colonia Cuauhtémoc) Less expensive and often with a doctor on-call who speaks English.

Hospital ABC (American British Cowdray Hospital; Map pp110–11; ☏ 5230-8000, emergency 5230-8161; Sur 136 No 16, Colonia Las Américas; M Observatorio) One of the best (and most expensive) hospitals in Mexico. There’s an outpatient section and English-speaking staff.

Hospital Ángeles Clínica Londres (Map pp118–19; ☏ 5229-8400, emergency 5229-8445; Durango 64, Colonia Roma; M Cuauhtémoc)

The pharmacies that are found inside Sanborns stores are among the most reliable, as are the following.

Farmacia de Ahorros (Map pp118–19; ☏ 5264-3128; Yucatán 40; M Insurgentes) Take metrobus ‘Álvaro Obregón.’

Farmacia París (Map pp114–15; ☏ 5709-5349; República de El Salvador 97, Centro; 8am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-9pm Sun; M Isabel La Católica)

Médicor (Map pp114–15; ☏ 5512-0431; Independencia 66; 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6:30pm Sat; M Juárez) Specializing in homeopathic medicines.

Media

Tiempo Libre, the city’s Spanish-language what’s-on weekly, comes out on Thursday and is sold at newsstands everywhere.

Recommended Spanish-language daily newspapers include La Jornada, with excellent cultural coverage, and Reforma, the latter available at convenience stores and some metro stations.

English-language newspapers and magazines can be found at these locations:

La Torre de Papel (Map pp114–15; ☏ 5512-9703; Filomena Mata 6A; 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-2:30pm Sat; M Allende) Also stocks newspapers from around Mexico.

Librería Sama (Map pp118–19; ☏ 5525-0647; Florencía 57; 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat & Sun; M Insurgentes)

Medical Services

For recommendation of a doctor, dentist or hospital, call your embassy or Sector ( ☏ 5212-0260), the tourism ministry. An extended list of Mexico City hospitals and English-speaking physicians (with their credentials), in PDF format, is on the website of the US embassy (www.usembassy-mexico.gov/medical_lists.html). A private doctor’s consultation generally costs between $35 and $50.

Dalinde Centro Médico (Map pp118–19; ☏ 5265-2805, emergency dial 9; Tuxtán 25, Colonia Roma Sur; M Chilpancingo) Less expensive and often with a doctor on-call who speaks English.

Habitat for Humanity Mexico (Map pp118–19; ☏ 5230-8000, emergency 5230-8161; Sur 136 No 16, Colonia Las Américas; M Observatorio) One of the best (and most expensive) hospitals in Mexico. There’s an outpatient section and English-speaking staff.

Habempré (Map pp118–19; ☏ 5229-8400, emergency 5229-8445; Durango 64, Colonia Roma; M Cuauhtémoc)

The pharmacies that are found inside Sanborns stores are among the most reliable, as are the following.

Farmacia de Ahorros (Map pp118–19; ☏ 5264-3128; Yucatán 40; M Insurgentes) Take metrobus ‘Álvaro Obregón.’

Farmacia París (Map pp114–15; ☏ 5709-5349; República de El Salvador 97, Centro; 8am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-9pm Sun; M Isabel La Católica)

Médicor (Map pp114–15; ☏ 5512-0431; Independencia 66; 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6:30pm Sat; M Juárez) Specializing in homeopathic medicines.

Money

Most banks and casas de cambio (exchange offices) will change both cash and traveler’s checks – but some will change only Euros and US or Canadian dollars. Exchange rates vary, so check one or two beforehand.

The greatest concentration of ATMs, banks and casas de cambio is on Paseo de la Reforma between the Monumento a Cristóbal Colón and the Monumento a la Independencia, but there are others all over town, including 24-hour branches at the airport.

AMERICAN EXPRESS

American Express (Map pp118–19; ☏ 5207-7282; Paseo de la Reforma 350; 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat; M Insurgentes)

CASAS DE CAMBIO

Casa de Cambio Puebla (Map pp118–19; ☏ 5207-9485; Paseo de la Reforma 308A; 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat; M Insurgentes)

Centro de Cambios y Divisas (Map pp114–15; ☏ 5705-5656; Paseo de la Reforma 87-F; 8:30am-7:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 9am-2:30pm Sun; M Hidalgo)

Mexcambios (Map pp114–15; ☏ 5510-9690; Madero 13; 9:30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun; M Bellas Artes)
WIRE TRANSFERS
Western Union’s ‘Dinero en Minutos’ wiring service is available at several locations, including Banamex branches.
Elektra (9am-9pm) Alameda Central (Map pp114-15; 5510-2185; Balderas 62; M Juárez); Zócalo (Map pp114-15; 5522-5567; República de El Salvador 225 at Pino Suárez; M Pino Suárez)
Telecomm (Map pp118-19; 5511-7495; Guadalquivir 109, Colonia Cuauhtémoc; 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun; M Sevilla)

The US Postal Service’s ‘Dinero Seguro’ service (in the US 888-368-4669; www.usps.com) sends cash within 15 minutes to any branch of Bancomer Alameda Central (Map pp114-15; 5512-9511; Balderas 92; M Juárez); Zona Rosa (Map pp118-19; 5208-4243; Liverpool 109; M Insurgentes); Centro Histórico (Map pp114-15; 5226-8495; Bolívar 38; M Allende).

Post
The Palacio Postal (Map pp114-15; 5523-1408; Tacuba 1; M Bellas Artes), across from the Palacio de Bellas Artes, is not just Mexico City’s central post office, but an architectural masterpiece. The early-20th-century building was designed in Italian Renaissance style by Adamo Boari, the original author of Bellas Artes. Note in particular the marble stairway with bronze banisters.

The stamp windows, marked ‘estampillas,’ stay open beyond normal post office hours (until 7:30pm Monday to Friday, and on Sunday). The lista de correos window (similar to poste restante) is on the right side.

Other post-office branches, scattered around town, open 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday, 9am to 1pm Saturday, unless noted otherwise.
Cuauhtémoc (Map pp118-19; 5207-7666; Río Tiber 87; M Insurgentes)
Plaza de la República (Map pp114-15; 5592-1783; Arriaga 11; M Revolución)
Zócalo (Map pp114-15; 5512-3661; Plaza de la Constitución 7; M Zócalo) On the west side of the Zócalo.
Zona Rosa (Map pp118-19; 5514-3029; Londres 208; 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm; M Sevilla)

Telephone & Fax
There are thousands of Telmex card phones scattered around town. Pick up cards at shops or newsstands bearing the blue-and-yellow ‘Ladatel’ sign.

Some Internet cafés let you make reduced-rate international calls via an Internet server line. Typical rates are $0.20 per minute to the US or Europe.

Some stationery stores, copy shops and Internet cafés offer fax service; look for ‘fax público’ signs. Sending one page to the US or Canada costs about $1; receiving a fax costs $0.50.

Toilets
Use of the bathroom is free at Sanborns stores. Public toilets are also found inside most market buildings and at some other locations in the Centro Histórico area; look for the ‘WC’ signs. Standards of hygiene may vary at these latter facilities, and a fee of two or three pesos is usually charged. Toilet paper is dispensed by an attendant on request, or may be taken from a common roll outside the stalls.

Tourist Information
The Mexico City Ministry of Tourism has modules in key areas, as well as at the airport and four bus stations. They can answer your queries on Mexico City and distribute a decent map and practical guide, free of charge. At least one staff member should speak English.

The following offices are all open from 9am to 6pm daily, unless otherwise noted.
Antropología (Map pp120-1; 5286-3850; Paseo de la Reforma; M Auditorio) At the entry to the Museo Nacional de Antropología.
Basílica de Guadalupe (Map pp110-11; 5748-2085; Plaza de las Américas 1; M La Villa-Basílica)
Bellas Artes (Map pp114-15; 5518-2799; cnr Juárez & Peralta; M Bellas Artes)
Catedral (Map pp114-15; 5518-1003; Monte de Piedad; M Zócalo) West of the Catedral Metropolitana.
Del Ángel (Map pp118-19; 5208-1030; Paseo de la Reforma & Florence; M Insurgentes) On the Zona Rosa side of Monumento a la Independencia.
San Ángel (Map p122; Revolución at Madero; 10am-6pm Sat & Sun; M Miguel Angel de Quevedo) In front of Centro Cultural.
Templo Mayor (Map pp114-15; 5512-8977; Seminario; M Zócalo) On the east side of Catedral Metropolitana.
Xochimilco (Map p124; 5653-5209; Mercado) At the Nativitas boat landing. There are additional tourism modules at other landings, open Saturday and Sunday only.
Additionally, these city delegaciones (urban governmental subdivisions) operate information offices:

**Coyocán** (Map p123; ☏ 5658-0221; Jardín Hidalgo 1; 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun; M Viveros) Inside the Casa de Cortés.

**Xochimilco** (Map p124; ☏ 5676-0810; Pino 36; 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun) Just off the Jardín Juárez.

The office of **Corazón de México** (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5518-1869; www.elcorazondemexico.com.mx; Gante 15; 10am-6pm; M San Juan de Letrán) provides information on these Mexican states: Hidalgo, Morelos, Michoacán, Guerrero and Estado de México.

The national tourism ministry, **Sectur** (Map pp120-1; ☏ 3002-6300; Presidente Masaryk 172; 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat; M Polanco), hands out stacks of brochures on the entire country, though you’re better off at the above modules for up-to-date information about the capital.

**Travel Agencies**

A number of midrange and top-end hotels have an agencia de viajes on-site or can recommend one nearby.

**Mundo Joven** (www.mundojoven.com in Spanish; 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) airport (Map pp110-11; ☏ 2599-0155; Sala E2, international arrivals; 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat, 10am-7pm Sun; M Polanco); **Zócalo** (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5518-1755; República de Guatemala 4; M Zócalo) Specializes in cheap travel for students and teachers, with reasonable airfares from Mexico City. Issues ISIC, ITIC and IYTC and HI cards.

**Turismo Zócalo** (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5518-3606; www.agenciazocalo.com; Venustiano Carranza 67, Local 3, Centro; 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat; M Zócalo) Also functions as a Ticketbus outlet.

**DANGERS & ANNOYANCES**

Mexico City is often portrayed as an extremely crime-ridden city, so first-time visitors can be astonished to find how safe and human it feels. While the incidence of street crime remains too significant to deny the risks – four express kidnappings, 84 car thefts and 55 muggings a day in 2004 – there is no need to walk in fear whenever you step outside. A few precautions greatly reduce any dangers. See p972 for some general hints.

Robberies happen most often in areas frequented by foreigners, including the Bosque de Chapultepec, around the Museo Nacional de Antropología and the Zona Rosa. Be on your guard at the airport and bus stations, and remember to keep your bag between your feet when checking in. Avoid pedestrian underpasses that are empty or nearly so. Crowded metro cars and buses are favorite haunts of pickpockets. Stay alert and keep your hand on your wallet and you’ll be fine.

Unless absolutely necessary, avoid carrying ATM cards, credit cards or large amounts of cash. Most importantly, if you become a robbery victim, don’t resist. Give the perpetrator your valuables rather than risking injury or death.

A far more immediate danger than muggings is traffic, which statistically takes more lives in the capital than street crime. Obvious as it sounds, always look both ways when crossing streets. Some one-way streets have bus lanes running counter to the traffic flow, and traffic on some divided streets runs in just one direction. Never assume that a green light means it’s safe to cross, as cars may turn left into your path. It is useful to take the ‘safety in numbers’ approach, crossing with other pedestrians.

**Ambulantes** (mobile street vendors) clog many downtown streets, impeding movement along the sidewalk and forcing you to walk in the street. Attempting to move through the throngs makes you more susceptible to pickpockets.

**Taxi Crime**

Although not as prevalent a danger as in the 1990s, taxi assaults still do occur and visitors are strongly advised to take precautions. Many victims have hailed a cab on the street and been robbed by armed accomplices of the driver. In particular, taxis parked in front of nightclubs or restaurants should be avoided, unless specifically authorized by the management. Rather than taking the risk of hailing cruising cabs, phone a radio sitio (taxi service). See p186 for a list of recommended companies.

**SIGHTS**

One could spend months exploring all the museums, monuments, plazas, colonial buildings, monasteries, murals, galleries,
archaeological finds, statuary, shrines and religious relics this encyclopedia of a city has to offer.

**Centro Histórico**

A good place to start your exploration of Mexico City is where it all began. Declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 1987, the 34-block area defined as the Historic Center presents an array of sites from the Aztec, colonial and prerevolutionary eras, and the legacy of the incomparable wealth and importance the city has enjoyed, and is home to numerous absorbing museums. It also bustles with modern-day street life. The focus of this historic core, and indeed of all Mexico, is the Zócalo, the vast main plaza.

Under the administration of Mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador, investments were poured into upgrading the image and infrastructure of the Centro. Streets were repaved, buildings refurbished, lighting and traffic flow improved and security bolstered.

**ZÓCALO**

The heart of Mexico City is the Plaza de la Constitución, though city residents began calling it the Zócalo (Map pp114–15), meaning ‘base,’ in the 19th century when plans for a major monument to independence went unrealized, leaving only the pedestal.

The ceremonial center of Aztec Tenochtitlán, known as the Teocalli, lay immediately northeast of the Zócalo. Today *conchero* dancers in feathered headdresses and *concha* (shell) anklets and bracelets remind everyone of this heritage with daily gatherings in the Zócalo for a sort of pre-Hispanic aerobics, carried out to the rhythm of booming drums.

In the 1520s Cortés paved the plaza with stones from the ruined Teocalli and other Aztec buildings. Until the early 20th century, the Zócalo was more a maze of market stalls than an open plaza. Measuring more than 220m from north to south, 240m from east to west, it’s one of the world’s largest city squares.

The Zócalo is home to the powers-that-be in Mexico City. On its east side is the Palacio Nacional (the presidential palace), on the north the Catedral Metropolitana, and on the south the offices of the Distrito Federal government. The plaza is also a place for political protesters to make their point, and it’s often occupied by makeshift camps of strikers. Lately it’s also been a venue for free concerts and other popular entertainment.

**PALACIO NACIONAL**

Home to the offices of the president of Mexico, the Federal Treasury and dramatic murals by Diego Rivera, the National Palace (Map pp114-15; 📞 9158-1259; Plaza de la Constitución; admission free, ID required; ⏰ 10am-5pm; 🚉 Zócalo) fills the entire east side of the Zócalo.

The first palace on this spot was built by Aztec emperor Moctezuma II in the early 16th century. Cortés destroyed the palace in 1521, rebuilding it as a fortress with three interior courtyards. In 1562 the crown bought the palace from Cortés’ family to house the viceroys of Nueva España. Destroyed during riots in 1692, it was rebuilt and remained the vice-regal residence until Mexican independence.

As you face the palace you will see three portals. On the right (south) is the guarded entrance for the president and other officials. High above the center door hangs the *Campana de Dolores*, the bell rung in the town of Dolores Hidalgo by Padre Miguel Hidalgo in 1810 at the start of the Mexican War of Independence. From the balcony underneath it, the president delivers the *grito* (shout) – *Viva México!* – on September 15 to commemorate independence.

Enter the palace through the center door. The *Diego Rivera murals* along the main staircase, painted between 1929 and 1935, depict Mexican civilization from the arrival of Quetzalcóatl (the Aztec plumed serpent god) up to the post-revolutionary period. The nine murals covering the north and east walls of the first level above the patio deal with indigenous life before the Spanish Conquest; Rivera’s vision of Tenochtitlán is incredibly detailed.

Beyond the main patio is a botanical garden containing plants from around Mexico.

**CATEDRAL METROPOLITANA**

Construction of the Metropolitan Cathedral (Map pp114-15; 📞 5510-0440, ext 123; admission free; ⏰ 8am-7pm; 🚉 Zócalo) began in 1573 under
the direction of the architect Claudio de Arciniega and remained a work in progress during the entire colonial period. Because of its placement atop the ruins of the Aztec temple complex, the massive building has been sinking unevenly since its construction, resulting in fissures and cracks in the structure.

Visitors may wander freely, though they are asked not to do so during Mass. A $1 donation is requested to enter the sacristy or choir, where docents provide commentary. You can climb the bell tower (admission $1.25; ☑ 10:30am-6pm). Sunday evenings at 7pm, Mass is accompanied by mariachis.

With a five-nave basilica design of vaults on semicircular arches, the cathedral was built to resemble that of Seville. The baroque portals facing the Zócalo, built in the 17th century, have two levels of columns and marble panels with bas-reliefs. The central panel shows the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, to whom the cathedral is dedicated.

The upper levels of the towers, with unique bell-shaped tops, were added in the late 18th century. The exterior was completed in 1813, when architect Manuel Tolsá added the clock tower – topped by statues of Faith, Hope and Charity – and a great central dome.

The first thing you notice upon entering from the Zócalo is the elaborately carved and gilded Altar de Perdón (Altar of Pardon). Invariably there is a line of worshipers at the foot of the Señor del Veneno (Lord of the Poison), the dusky Christ figure on the right. Legend has it that the figure attained its color when it miraculously absorbed a dose of poison through its feet from the lips of a clergyman, to whom an enemy had administered the lethal substance.

Also worthy of admiration are the intricately carved late-17th-century wooden choir stalls by Juan de Rojas in the central nave, and the sacristy, the first component of the cathedral to be built, with a pair of enormous painted panels. La Asunción de la Virgen, by Correa, depicts the ascension of Mary, while La Mujer del Apocalipsis, by Cristóbal de Villalpando, portrays the apocalyptic vision of St John the Apostle.

Adjoining the east side of the cathedral is the 18th-century Sagrario Metropolitano (Map pp114-15; ☑ 7:30am-7:30pm). Originally built to house the archives and vestments of the archbishop, it is now the city’s main parish church. Its front entrance and mirror-image eastern portal are superb examples of the ultra-decorative Churrigueresque style.

**TEMPLO MAYOR**

The Teocalli of Tenochtitlán, demolished by the Spaniards in the 1520s, stood on the site of the cathedral and the blocks to its north and east. It wasn’t until 1978, after electricity workers happened on an eight-ton stone-disc carving of the Aztec goddess Coyolxauhqui, that the decision was taken to demolish colonial buildings and excavate the Templo Mayor (Map pp114-15; ☑ 5542-4943; Seminario 8; admission $3.50; ☑ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun; ☏ Zócalo). The temple is thought to be on the exact spot where the Aztecs saw their symbolic eagle, perching on a cactus with a snake in its beak – the symbol of Mexico today. In Aztec belief this was, literally, the center of the universe.

The entrance to the temple site and museum is east of the cathedral, across the hectic Plaza Templo Mayor, with a model of Tenochtitlán. Authorized tour guides (with Sectur ID) offer their services by the entrance. Alternatively, rent a recorded audio-guide inside the museum, available in English ($5.50).

Like other sacred buildings in Tenochtitlán, the temple, begun in 1325, was enlarged several times, with each rebuilding accompanied by the sacrifice of captured warriors. In 1487 these rituals were performed at a frenzied pace to rededicate the temple after one major reconstruction. By some estimates, as many as 20,000 sacrificial victims went under the blade in one ghastly four-day ceremony.

What we see today are sections of the temple’s different phases. (Little is left
of the seventh and last version seen by the Spanish conquistadors, built around 1500.) At the center is a platform dating from about 1400; on its southern half, a sacrificial stone stands in front of a shrine to Huizilopochtli, the Aztec war god. On the northern half is a chac-mool (a Maya reclining figure that served as a messenger to the gods) before a shrine to the water god, Tláloc. By the time the Spanish arrived, a 40m-high double pyramid towered above this spot, with steep twin stairways climbing to shrines of the two gods.

As you approach the museum, notice the large-scale quotes chiseled on its west walls. These are awe-struck descriptions of Tenochtitlán from three of its earliest European visitors – Hernán Cortés, Bernál Díaz del Castillo and Motolinía.

The Museo del Templo Mayor houses artifacts from the site and gives a good overview of Aztec civilization, including chinampa agriculture, systems of government and trade, and beliefs, wars and sacrifices. Pride of place is given to the great wheel-like stone of Coyolxauhqui (She of Bells on her Cheek), best viewed from the top floor vantage point. She is shown decapitated – the result of her murder by Huizilopochtli, her brother, who also killed his 400 brothers en route to becoming top god. Other outstanding exhibits include full-size terracotta eagle warriors.

CALLE MONEDA
Just to the north of the Palacio Nacional, Moneda is a pedestrian thoroughfare lined with tezontle buildings and often clogged with ambulantes. The Museo de la Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público (Museum of the Finance Secretariat; Map pp114-15;  9158-1245; Moneda 4; admission 50.80, free Sun; ☎ 10am-5:30pm Tue-Sun; Zócalo) shows off its vast collection of Mexican art, with an emphasis on 20th-century painters. The former colonial archbishop’s palace also hosts a full program of cultural events (many free), from puppet shows to chamber music recitals.

Constructed in 1567 as the colonial mint, the Museo Nacional de las Culturas (National Museum of Cultures; National Museum of Cultures; Map pp114-15;  5542-0165; Moneda 13; admission free; 9:30am-6pm Tue-Sun; Zócalo) exhibits art, dress and handicrafts of the world’s cultures. A block further east, then a few steps north, is a former convent housing the Museo José Luis Cuevas (Map pp114-15;  5522-0156; Academia 13; admission 51, Sun free; ☎ 10am-5:30pm Tue-Sun; Zócalo). A haven for Mexico’s fringe art scene, the museum showcases the works of Cuevas, a leading modern Mexican artist, and his contemporaries. Cuevas’ La Giganta, a 9m-high bronze figure with male and female features, dominates the central patio, while the Sala de Arte Erótico is an intriguing gallery of the artist’s sexual themes.

CENTRO CULTURAL DE ESPAÑA
The Spanish Cultural Center (Map pp114-15;  5521-1925; www.ccemx.org; República de Guatemala 18; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue & Wed, 10am-11pm Thu-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun; Zócalo), dedicated to promoting Spanish culture in Mexico, is one of the more happening spaces in the Centro, with various cutting-edge exhibitions going on at once, plus frequent concerts by Spanish bands. The splendidly restored building, which conquistador Hernán Cortés once awarded to his butler, has a rooftop terrace for tapas-munching and, on weekends, late-night DJ sessions.

MUSEO DE LA CIUDAD DE MÉXICO
For a good overview of the megalopolis, visit the Museum of Mexico City (Map pp114-15;  5542-0083; Pino Suárez 30; admission 52, Wed free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun; Pino Suárez). The innovative permanent exhibit, 'It All Fits in a Basin,' conveys a sense of the capital’s epic sweep while providing all kinds of fascinating details along the way. There’s a concise history of the city with models and maps, a photo gallery of nocturnal life and a sort of hall of fame of DF entertainers. One room is devoted exclusively to the Zócalo and its role as a stage for social movements. The 18th-century Palace of the Counts of Santiago de Calimaya that houses the museum is a piece of history itself: check out the serpent’s head embedded into the outside corner at Calle República de El Salvador, probably a leftover from the wall that once surrounded Tenochtitlán’s sacred precinct.

PLAZA SANTO DOMINGO
Two blocks north of the Zócalo is this smaller, less formal plaza. Printers, with ancient machines, work beneath the Portal
de Evangelistas, along its west side. They are the descendants of the scribes who once did paperwork for the merchants who came to register their wares at the customs building (now the Education Ministry) across the square. The maroon stone Iglesia de Santo Domingo (Map pp114–15), dating from 1736, is a beautiful baroque church. The three-tiered facade deserves a close look: statues of St Francis and St Augustine stand in the niches alongside the doorway. The middle panel shows Saint Dominic de Guzmán receiving a staff and the Epistles from St Peter and St Paul, respectively; the dove above them represents the Holy Spirit. At the top is a bas-relief of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

Opposite the big church, the 18th-century Palacio de la Inquisición was headquarters of the Holy Inquisition in Mexico until 1820.

MURALS
In the 1920s the post-revolution Minister of Education, José Vasconcelos, commissioned talented young artists – among them Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco – to decorate numerous public buildings with dramatic, large-scale murals conveying a new sense of Mexico’s past and future. One was the former convent that housed the newly established Secretaría de Educación Pública (Secretary of Education; Map pp114-15; 5328-1097; República de Brasil 31; admission free; 9am-5pm Mon-Fri; M Zócalo). The entrance is on the east side of Plaza Santo Domingo.

The two front courtyards (on the opposite side of the building from the entrance) are lined with 120 fresco panels painted by Diego Rivera in the 1920s. Together they form a tableau of ‘the very life of the people,’ in the artist’s words. Each courtyard is thematically distinct: the one nearest the República de Argentina entrance deals with labor, industry and agriculture, and the top floor holds portraits of Mexican heroes. The second courtyard depicts traditions and festivals. On its top level is a series on capitalist decadence and proletarian and agrarian revolution, underneath a continuous red banner emblazoned with a Mexican corrido (folk song). The likeness of Frida Kahlo appears in the first panel, as an arsenal worker.

A block back toward the Zócalo, then east, is the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso (Map pp114-15; 5789-6845; www.sanildefonso.org.mx in Spanish; Justo Sierra 16; admission $3.25, free Tue; 10am-5:30pm Tue-Sun; M Zócalo). Built in the 16th century as a Jesuit college, it later became a prestigious teacher training institute. In the 1920s, Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros and others were brought in to adorn it with murals. Most of the work on the main patio and staircase is by Orozco, whose caustic interpretation of prerevolutionary Mexico suggests a grotesque pageant of exploitation and brutality. The amphitheater, off the lobby, holds Rivera’s first mural, La Creación, commissioned by Vasconcelos upon Rivera’s return from Europe in 1923. Mural tours (in Spanish) are given at 1pm and 4pm. Nowadays, the San Ildefonso hosts outstanding temporary exhibitions, as well as the Filmoteca of the national university.

PLAZA TOLSÁ
Several blocks west of the Zócalo is this handsome square, named after the illustrious late-18th-century sculptor and architect who completed the Catedral Metropolitana. Manuel Tolsá also created the bronze equestrian statue of the Spanish king Carlos IV (who reigned from 1788 to 1808) that is the plaza’s centerpiece. It originally stood in the Zócalo, then on Paseo de la Reforma, before being moved here in 1979 (‘as a work of art,’ a chiseled plaque emphasizes).

King Carlos rides in front of the Museo Nacional de Arte (National Art Museum; Map pp114-15; 5130-3400; www.munal.com.mx in Spanish; Tacuba 8; admission $2.75, free Tue; 10:30am-5:30pm Tue-Sun; M Bellas Artes). Built around 1900 in the style of an Italian renaissance palace, it holds collections representing every school of Mexican art until the early 20th century. A highlight is the work of José María Velasco, depicting the Valle de México in the late 19th century – with Guadalupe and Chapultepec far outside the city.

Opposite the art museum is the Palacio de Minería (Palace of Mining; Map pp114-15; 5623-2981; Tacuba 5; admission $2.50; tours 11am & 1pm Sat & Sun; M Bellas Artes), where mining engineers were trained in the 19th century. Today it houses a branch of the national university’s engineering department. A neoclassical masterpiece, the palace was designed by Tolsá and built between 1797
and 1813. Visits are by guided tour only. The palace contains a small museum (admission $1; 10am-6pm Wed-Sun) on Tolsá’s life and work.

**AVENIDA MADERO**

A landmark for disoriented visitors since 1952, the Torre Latinoamericana (Latin American Tower; Map pp114-15; 5518-7423; Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas 2; adult/child $3.75/2.75; 9am-10pm; M Bellas Artes) was Latin America’s tallest building when constructed. (Today it’s Mexico City’s fifth tallest.) Views from the 44th-floor observation deck are spectacular, smog permitting. Also worth checking out is the 37th-floor museum (admission $1) with exhibits on the history of the building, plus vintage photos of the Centro.

A block east toward the Zócalo stands one of the city’s gems, the Casa de Azulejos (House of Tiles; Map pp114-15; 5518-6676; Madero 4; 7am-1am; M Bellas Artes). Dating from 1596, it was built for the Condes (Counts) del Valle de Orizaba. Although the superb tile work that has adorned the outside walls since the 18th century is Spanish and Moorish in style, most of the tiles were actually produced in China and shipped to Mexico on the Manila naos (Spanish galleons used up to the early 19th century). The building now houses a Sanborns restaurant in a covered courtyard around a Moorish fountain. The staircase has a 1925 mural by Orozco.

Continuing eastward you’ll encounter the baroque facade of the late-18th-century Palacio de Iturbide (Map pp114-15; 1226-0011; Madero 17; admission free; 10am-7pm Wed-Mon; M Allende). Built for colonial nobility, in 1821 it became the residence of General

**HIDDEN MURALS**

So broad was the muralist movement’s canvas that it sometimes seems not a wall has gone uncovered. With murals showing up in markets, libraries, metro stations and restaurants, Chilangos naturally grow indifferent to the presence of these grandiose artistic statements in their midst. Sure, you’ve seen the tableaux at the Palacio Nacional and Bellas Artes, but some lesser-known murals are just as worthy of viewing, and tracking them down is half the fun.

- **El Agua, El Origen de la Vida** (*Water, Origin of Life*; Map pp120-1; Cárcamo del Río Lerma, 2a Sección Bosque de Chapultepec; M Constituyentes) Diego Rivera painted these murals inside the Chapultepec water works, built in the 1940s to channel the waters of the Río Lerma, 62km west, into giant cisterns to supply the city. Experimenting with waterproof paints, the artist covered the collection tank, sluice gates and part of the pipeline with images of amphibious beings and the workers involved in the project. The murals are housed in a pavilion behind the Tlaloc fountain, another Rivera work. Though not technically open, the guard can be persuaded to let you in for a tip.

- **Velocidad** (*Speed*; Map pp114-15; Plaza Juárez, Av Juárez; M Bellas Artes) Originally designed for a Chrysler factory, this 1953 work by David Siqueiros represents the notion of speed through the kinetic figure of a female runner. The mosaic canvas was transplanted to the entrance of the new Plaza Juárez shopping mall as part of the Alameda development project.

- **Historia de México** (*History of Mexico*; Map pp114-15; Mercado Abelardo Rodríguez, República de Venezuela, cnr Rodríguez Puebla; M Zócalo) The large Abelardo Rodríguez public market, east of the Zócalo, became a canvas for a group of young international artists in the 1930s. Sadly many of these paintings are decaying from neglect. One of the most intriguing (and best preserved) works, created by the Japanese artist Isama Noguchi, is a dynamic three-dimensional mural sculpted of cement and plaster that symbolizes the struggle against fascism. It’s located in the community center, upstairs from the southeast corner of the market.

- **El Perfil del Tiempo** (*The Profile of Time*; Map pp110-11; Metro Copilco, línea 3 platform; M Copilco) As any metro rider is aware, the walls of many stations were illustrated by major artists during the 1980s. The Copilco station, at the eastern entrance to UNAM, features this work by Durango artist Guillermo Cenicero. Covering 1000 sq meters – the largest of any metro murals – it surveys the history of world painting, from Spain’s Altamira cave paintings to Mexico’s modern masters, and also includes scenes from the conquest of Mexico.
THROW A PESO IN THE HAT

Dressed in khaki uniforms, they stand on street corners, in front of theaters, at busy traffic intersections – anywhere that people congregate. They work in pairs: the organ grinder and the tip collector, who extends an upturned cap at any pedestrian or driver in sight. The music-maker cranks the handle of a varnished wooden box, manufactured in Berlin in the late 19th century, to produce a carnivalesque string of tunes that echo Mexico’s distant past. The jukeboxes of their era, these ‘organs’ generally play eight tunes of a minute each. Though some passersby consider them a mere annoyance, the 100 or so organ grinders who work the city are actually heirs to a tradition dating back to before the Revolution. Brought over by Italian immigrants who earned their living as itinerant carnival performers, the instrument became fashionable during the Porfirio Díaz regime. Later the old European ditties were replaced by Mexican tunes. If you’d like to see the tradition continue, drop a few pesos in the hat.

Agustín Iturbide, a hero of the Mexican struggle for independence. To the cheers of a rent-a-crowd, Iturbide was proclaimed Emperor Agustín I here in 1822. (He abdicated less than a year later, after General Santa Anna announced the birth of a republic.) Acquired and restored by Banamex bank in 1965, the palace now functions as the Palacio de Cultura Banamex, with exhibits drawn from the bank’s vast Mexican art collection, as well as contemporary Mexican handicrafts. Some of the palace’s original salons are displayed on the upper level, along with exhibits on its eventful history. Guided tours are offered (in Spanish) at noon, 2pm and 4pm.

UNIVERSIDAD DEL CLAUSTRO DE SOR JUANA

Considered the greatest Spanish-language poet of the 17th century, Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz composed many of her sonnets in the former convent of San Jerónimo, today the University of the Cloister of Sor Juana (Map pp114-15; 5130-3336; www.ucsj.edu.mx; Izazaga 92; admission free; 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-3pm Sat; Isabel la Católica). Its magnificent two-level cloister, dating from 1585, now buzzes with students of gastronomy, literature and philosophy. To the east is the painstakingly restored Iglesia de San Jerónimo containing Sor Juana’s tomb and a 1750 portrait of the poetess. The series of tiled niches on its south wall is what remains on the confessional. The adjacent Museo de la Indumentaria Mexicana (Map pp114-15; admission free; 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) displays regional outfits from around Mexico.

The university also hosts a dynamic range of cultural activities, including films, plays, book presentations and conferences.

LA CIUDADELA

The formidable compound now known as ‘The Citadel’ started off as a tobacco factory in the late 18th century. Later it was converted to an armory and political prison, but is best known as the scene of the Decena Trágica (Tragic Ten Days), the coup that brought down the Madero government in 1913. Today it is home to the Biblioteca Nacional José Vasconcelos (National Library; Map pp114-15; 5510-2591; Plaza de la Ciudadela 4; 7:30am-7:30pm; Balderas), with holdings of over 260,000 volumes and a good periodicals collection. The central halls are given over to art exhibits.

At the Calle Balderas entrance is the Centro de la Imagen (Map pp114-15; 9172-4724; www.conaculta.gob.mx/cimagen; admission free; 11am-6pm Tue-Sun; Balderas), the city’s photography museum. This innovatively curated museum stages compelling exhibitions, often focusing on documentary views of Mexican life by some of the country’s sharpest observers. Pick up a copy of Luna Córnea, the photography journal published by the center, at the excellent bookstore.

Alameda Central & Around

The only sizable downtown park, the Alameda Central is surrounded by some of the city’s most interesting buildings and museums. Less than 1km from the Zócalo, it is near two metro stations, Bellas Artes on its east, and Hidalgo on its northwest corner.

Under the administration of Mayor López Obrador, the Alameda and adjacent Áv Juárez have undergone ambitious redevelopment. The Foreign Relations Secretariat towers, designed by leading architect Ricardo Legorreta, and Sheraton Centro Histórico have transformed the look of the
corridor, much of which was destroyed in the 1985 earthquake. Opened in 2006 to occupy the art-deco structure at the corner of Independencia and Revillagigedo, the Museo de Arte Popular should have a galvanizing effect on the moribund zone south of Juárez. The museum will be a major showcase for Mexico’s folk arts and traditions.

ALAMEDA CENTRAL
Created in the late 1500s by mandate of then-Viceroy Luis de Velasco, the Alameda (Map pp114–15) took its name from the álamos (poplars) planted over its rectangular expanse. By the late 19th century, the park was graced with European-style statuary and a bandstand and lit by gas lamps. It became the place to be seen for the city’s elite. Today the Alameda is a popular refuge, particularly on Sunday when families stroll its broad pathways and gather for open-air concerts.

PALACIO DE BELLAS ARTES
Dominating the east end of the Alameda is the splendid white-marble Palace of Fine Arts (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5512-2593; Hidalgo 1; admission $3.25, free Sun; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun; M Bellas Artes), a concert hall and arts center commissioned by President Porfirio Díaz. Construction began in 1905 under Italian architect Adamo Boari, who favored neo-classical and art-nouveau styles. The project became more complicated than anticipated as the heavy marble shell sank into the spongy subsoil, and then the Revolution intervened. Work was halted and Boari returned to Italy. Architect Federico Mariscal eventually finished the interior in the 1930s, utilizing the more modern art-deco style.

Immense murals dominate the upper floors. On the 2nd floor are two early-1950s works by Rufino Tamayo: México de Hoy (Mexico Today) and Nacimiento de la Nacionalidad (Birth of Nationality), a symbolic depiction of the mestizo (person of mixed indigenous and Spanish ancestry) identity.

At the west end of the 3rd floor is Diego Rivera’s famous El Hombre En El Crucie de Caminos (Man at the Crossroads), originally commissioned for New York’s Rockefeller Center. The Rockefellers had the original destroyed because of its anti-capitalist themes, but Rivera re-created it here in 1934. Capitalism, accompanied by war, is shown on the left; socialism, with health and peace, on the right.

On the north side are David Alfaro Siqueiros’ three-part La Nueva Democracia (New Democracy) and Rivera’s four-part Carnaval de la Vida Mexicana (Carnival of Mexican Life); to the east is José Clemente Orozco’s eye-catching La Katharsis (Catharsis), depicting the conflict between humankind’s ‘social’ and ‘natural’ aspects.

The 4th-floor Museo Nacional de Arquitectura (admission $2.75, free Sun; ☎ 10:30am-5pm Tue-Sun) features changing exhibits on contemporary architecture.

The Bellas Artes theater (only available for viewing at performances) is itself an architectural gem, with a stained-glass curtain depicting the Valle de México. Based on a design by Mexican painter Gerardo Murillo (aka Dr Atl), it was assembled by New York jeweler Tiffany & Co from almost a million pieces of colored glass.

In addition, the palace stages outstanding temporary art exhibitions and the Ballet Folclórico de México (see p171). A worthwhile bookstore and elegant café are on the premises too.

MUSEO FRANZ MAYER
An oasis of calm and beauty north of the Alameda, the Franz Mayer Museum (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5518-2266; Hidalgo 45; admission $2.75, Tue free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue & Thu-Sun, until 7pm Wed; M Bellas Artes) is the fruit of the efforts of Franz Mayer, born in Mannheim, Germany, in 1882. Prospering as a financier in his adopted Mexico, Mayer amassed the collection of Mexican silver, textiles, ceramics and furniture masterpieces that is now on display at the museum.

Taking up the west side of the compact Plaza de Santa Veracruz, the museum is housed in the old hospice of the San Juan de Dios order. Under the brief reign of Maximilian it became a halfway house for prostitutes.

The exhibit halls open off a superb colonial patio; along its west side is a suite of rooms decorated in antique furnishings, on the north side the Cloister Café.

MUSEO MURAL DIEGO RIVERA
Among Diego Rivera’s most famous works is Sueño de una Tarde Dominical en la
Alameda (Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda), painted in 1947. In the 15m-long by 4m-high mural, the artist imagined many of the figures who walked in the city from colonial times onward, among them Cortés, Juárez, Emperor Maximilian, Porfirio Díaz, and Francisco Madero and his nemesis, General Victoriano Huerta. All are grouped around a Catrina (skeleton in prerevolutionary women’s garb). Rivera himself, as a pug-faced child, and Frida Kahlo stand beside the skeleton. Charts identify all the characters.

Just west of the Alameda, the Diego Rivera Mural Museum (Map pp114-15; 5512-0754; cnr Balderas & Colón; admission $1.50, free Sun; 10am-6pm Tue-Sun; M Hidalgo) was built in 1986 to house the mural, after its original location, the Hotel del Prado, was wrecked by the 1985 earthquake.

LABORATORIO DE ARTE ALAMEDA
As is often the case with museums in the Centro Histórico, the building that contains the Alameda Art Laboratory (Map pp114-15; 5510-2793; www.artealameda.inba.gob.mx; Dr Mora 7; admission $1.50, free Sun; 9am-5pm Tue-Sun; M Hidalgo) is as interesting as its contents. The former church is just a fragment of the 17th-century Convento de San Diego that was dismantled under the post-independence reform laws. As the museum’s name suggests, it hosts installations by leading experimental artists from Mexico and abroad, with an emphasis on current electronic, virtual and interactive media. They could not have asked for a grander exhibition space.

Plaza de la República & Around
This plaza, west of the Alameda Central, is dominated by the imposing, domed Monumento a la Revolución. The grand art-deco building northeast of the plaza is the Frontón de México, a now-defunct jai-alai arena.

MONUMENTO A LA REVOLUCIÓN
Begun in the 1900s under Porfirio Díaz, the Monumento a la Revolución (Map pp114–15) was originally meant to be a meeting chamber for legislators. But construction (not to mention Díaz’ presidency) was interrupted by the Revolution. The structure was modified and given a new role in the 1930s: the tombs of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary heroes Pancho Villa, Francisco Madero, Venustiano Carranza, Plutarco Elías Calles and Lázaro Cárdenas are inside its wide pillars.

Underlying the monument, the Museo Nacional de la Revolución (National Museum of the Revolution; Map pp114–15; 5546-2115; Plaza de la República; admission $1.25, free Sun; 9am-5pm Tue-Sun; M Revolución) covers an 80-year period, from the implementation of the constitution guaranteeing human rights in 1857 to the nationalization of Mexico’s oil reserves by President Lázaro Cárdenas in 1938. Enter from the northeast quarter of the plaza.

MUSEO NACIONAL DE SAN CARLOS
The Museum of San Carlos (Map pp114–15; 5566-8342; Puente de Alvarado 50; admission $2.50, Mon free; 10am-6pm Wed-Mon; M Revolución) exhibits a formidable collection of European art from the 16th to the early 20th century, including works by Rubens, Van Dyck and Goya. Occupying the former mansion of the Conde de Buenavista, the unusual rotunda structure was designed by Manuel Tolsá in the late 18th century. It later became home to Alamo-victor Santa Anna, and subsequently served as a cigar factory, lottery headquarters and school before being reborn as a museum in 1968.

Paseo de la Reforma
Mexico City’s main boulevard runs southwest past the Alameda Central and through the Bosque de Chapultepec. Emperor Maximilian of Hapsburg laid out the boulevard to connect his castle on Chapultepec Hill with the old city center. You’ll almost certainly pass along Reforma at some point during your stay, to call at one of the nearby banks, shops, hotels, restaurants or embassies.

The López Obrador administration undertook a thorough restoration of Paseo de la Reforma, paving the broad esplanades with mosaic cobblestones and planting attractive gardens along its length. Paseo de la Reforma links a series of monumental glorietas (traffic circles) and is studded with impressive architecture. A couple of blocks west of the Alameda Central is El Caballito (Map pp114–15), a bright yellow representation of a horse’s head by
the sculptor Sebastián. It commemorates another equestrian sculpture that stood here for 127 years and today fronts the Museo Nacional de Arte (p131). A few blocks southwest on Reforma is the Monumento a Cristóbal Colón (Map pp114–15), an 1877 statue by French sculptor Enrique Cordier of Columbus gesturing toward the horizon.

Reforma’s busy intersection with Av Insurgentes is marked by the Monumento a Cuauhtémoc (Map pp118–19), memorializing the last Aztec emperor. Two blocks northwest is the Jardín del Arte, site of a lovely Sunday art market (p176).

The Centro Bursátil (Map pp118–19), a glass arrow housing the nation’s stock exchange (Bolsa), marks the northeast corner of the Zona Rosa. Continuing west past the US embassy, you reach the symbol of Mexico City, the Monumento a la Independencia (Map pp118–19; admission free; ☛10am-6pm; M Insurgentes). Known as ‘El Ángel’ (The Angel), this gilded statue of Victory on a 45m pillar was sculpted for the independence centennial of 1910. The female figures around the base portray Law, Justice, War and Peace; the male ones are Mexican independence heroes. Inside the monument are the remains of Miguel Hidalgo, Ignacio Allende, Juan Aldama and nine other notables.

At Reforma’s intersection with Sevilla is the monument commonly known as La Diana Cazadora (Diana the Huntress; Map pp118–19), a 1942 bronze sculpture actually meant to represent the Archer of the North Star. The League of Decency under the Ávila Camacho administration had the sculptor add a loincloth to the female figure, which wasn’t removed until 1966.

Southwest from here stands the newest addition to the Mexico City skyline, the Torre Mayor (Map pp118–19). Designed by Canadian architect Heberhard Zeidler, the green-glass tower rises 225m above the capital, making it Latin America’s tallest building. Inaugurated in 2003, the 59-storey structure contains 43 floors of offices, 13 parking levels and a shopping mall. A 52nd-floor Skydeck (☎ 5283-9000; adult/child 3-12 $6.50/3.25; ☛7-10pm Tue-Fri, 11am-9pm Sat & Sun) affords mesmerizing views of the Reforma corridor, Bosque de Chapultepec and beyond. Sharing this level is a museum with changing exhibits, so plan on spending a few hours.

GETTING THERE & AWAY
Metro Hidalgo is on Reforma at the Alameda Central; Insurgentes station marks the southern edge of the Zona Rosa, 500m south of Reforma. Any ‘Metro Auditorio’ bus heading southwest on Reforma continues through the Bosque de Chapultepec, while ‘Metro Chapultepec’ buses terminate just south of Reforma at the east end of the Bosque de Chapultepec. In the opposite direction, ‘Metro Hidalgo’ and ‘La Villa’ buses head northeast up Reforma to the Alameda Central and beyond.

A metrobus, similar to the one along Av Insurgentes, is planned to run the length of Reforma.

Zona Rosa
Both glossy and sleazy, the Pink Zone is an integral piece of the Mexico City jigsaw. People-watching from its sidewalk cafés reveals a higher degree of diversity than elsewhere: it’s the city’s principal gay and lesbian district and an expat haven, with a significant Korean population.

Condesa & Roma
Colonia Condesa’s architecture, palm-lined esplanades and idyllic parks echo its early-20th-century origins as a haven for a newly emerging elite. La Condesa is now a trendy neighborhood of informal restaurants and sidewalk cafés. Amsterdams, Tamaulipas and Mazatlán, with pedestrian paths, are worth strolling to admire the art-deco and California colonial–style buildings. A focus is the peaceful Parque México (Map pp118–19), with an oval shape that reflects its earlier use as a horse-racing track. It makes for a delightful ramble, especially in spring when lavender jacaranda blossoms carpet the paths. Two blocks northwest is Parque España (Map pp118–19), with a children’s fun fair.

Parque México is a 200m walk west from the Av Insurgentes Metrobus Campeche station. The main cluster of bistro-type eateries in Condesa is about 500m west of Parque México, near the intersection of Michoacán and Tamaulipas. Patriotismo and Chapultepec metro stations are also within walking distance.

Colonia Roma, home to numerous artists and writers, was established in the late 19th century on the hacienda lands
surrounding the center. Northeast of Condesa, its Parisian-style buildings (many damaged in the 1985 earthquake) are a reminder of the Porfiriatro era’s admiration for all things French. Two lovely plazas – Rio de Janeiro, with a giant statue of David, and Luis Cabrera with dancing fountains – reinforce the old-world character. When in Roma, browse the secondhand-book stores, linger in the cafés and check out a few art galleries. On weekends inspect the antique market along Av Alvaro Obregón, the main thoroughfare. The neighborhood holds literary notoriety as the site of William S Burroughs’ William Tell incident, in which the beatnik novelist fatally shot his wife Joan while aiming for a martini glass on her head.

GALLERIES
The Roma neighborhood is dotted with art galleries – see www.arte-mexico.com (in Spanish) for a map.

Centro de Cultura Casa Lamm (Map pp118-19; 5511-0899; www.casalamm.com.mx in Spanish; Álvaro Obregón 99; admission free; 10am-6pm Tue-Sun; Insurgentes) houses a contemporary-art gallery, plus the Manuel Álvarez Bravo photo collection, with more than 2000 original images by masters like Henri Cartier-Bresson, Edward Weston and Tina Modotti.

Other galleries of note:
Galería Nina Menocal (Map pp118-19; 5564-7209; www.ninamenocal.com; Zacatecas 93; 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat; Insurgentes) Highlights emerging Latin American artists.

MUCA Roma (Map pp118-19; 5511-0925; Tabasco 73; 10am-6pm; Cuauhtémoc) Roma branch of the university museum (p143).

OMR (Map pp118-19; 5511-1179; www.galeriaomr.com; Plaza Rio de Janeiro 54; 10am-3pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat; Insurgentes) Showcases cutting-edge painting, photography and sculpture by international artists. It hosts six to eight exhibitions per year.

Bosque de Chapultepec
Chapultepec – ‘Hill of Grasshoppers’ in Náhuatl – served as a refuge for the wandering Aztecs before becoming a summer residence for their noble class. It was the nearest freshwater supply for Tenochtitlán and an aqueduct was built to channel its waters over Lago de Texcoco to the pre-Hispanic capital. In the 15th century, Nezahualcóyotl, ruler of nearby Texcoco, designated the area a forest reserve.

The Bosque de Chapultepec, Mexico City’s largest park, now covers more than 4 sq km and has lakes, a zoo and several excellent museums. It also remains an abode of Mexico’s high and mighty, containing the current presidential residence, Los Pinos (Map pp120–1), and a former imperial and presidential palace, the Castillo de Chapultepec.

The park is busiest on Sunday, when vendors line its main paths and throngs of families come to picnic and crowd into the museums. It is divided into two main sections by two major north–south roads, Calz Chivatito and the Anillo Periférico. Most of the major attractions are in or near the eastern 1a Sección (First Section; Map pp120-1; 5am-5pm Tue-Sun), while a large amusement park and children’s museum dominate the 2a Sección.

Photo exhibitions are staged at the Galería Abierta de las Rejas de Chapultepec, an outdoor gallery that lines the park’s northern fence along Reforma, from the zoo entrance to the Rufino Tamayo museum. These giant photo enlargements, which often cover some fascinating aspects of DF history, can be viewed during the day, or by night when they’re amply illuminated.

MONUMENTO A LOS NIÑOS HÉROES
The six asparagus-shaped columns marking the eastern entrance to the park (Map pp120–1), near Chapultepec metro, commemorate the ‘boy heroes,’ six brave cadets who perished in battle. On September 13, 1847, more than 8000 American troops stormed Chapultepec Castle, which then housed the national military academy. Mexican General Santa Anna retreated before the onslaught, excusing the cadets from fighting, but the youths, aged 13 to 20, chose to defend the castle. Legend has it that one of them, Juan Escutia, wrapped himself in a Mexican flag and leapt to his death rather than surrender.

CASTILLO DE CHAPULTEPEC
The castle atop Chapultepec Hill was built in 1785 as a residence for the viceroy of Nueva España. After independence it became the national military academy. When Emperor Maximilian and Empress Carlota arrived
in 1864, they refurbished it as their residence. The castle became home to Mexico’s presidents until 1939 when President Lázaro Cárdenas converted it into the **Museo Nacional de Historia** (National History Museum; Map pp120-1;  
5241-3100; admission $3.50;  
9am-4:30pm Tue-Sun;  
Chapultepec). Historical exhibits, chronicling the period from the rise of colonial Nueva España to the Mexican Revolution, occupy the museum. The east end of the castle preserves the palace occupied by Maximilian and Carlota, flanked by a patio with expansive views. On the upper floor are Porfirio Díaz’ sumptuous rooms, opening onto a patio where a tower marks the top of Chapultepec Hill, 45m above street level. The lower southwest room covers the battle of Chapultepec, with portraits of the six heroic boys (see p137).

In addition to displaying such iconic objects as Santa Anna’s wooden leg and the Virgin of Guadalupe banner borne by Miguel Hidalgo in his march for independence, the academy features a number of dramatic interpretations of Mexican history by leading muralists including Juan O’Gorman’s *Retablo de la Independencia* (Panel of Independence) in room 5, and David Alfaro Siqueiros’ *Del Porfiriato a la Revolución* (From Porfirism to the Revolution) in room 13.

To reach the castle, follow the road that curves up the hill behind the Monumento a los Niños Héroes. Alternatively, a little road-train ($1 round-trip) runs up every 10 minutes while the castle is open.

At the base of the castle is one of the park’s perennial attractions, the **Casa de los Espejos** (Map pp120-1; admission $0.30;  
Chapultepec), housing 16 fun-house mirrors imported from Spain in 1932.

**MUSEO DEL CARACOL**

From the Castillo de Chapultepec, the **Museo del Caracol** (Map pp120-1; 5241-3145; admission $3;  
10am-4:15pm Tue-Sun;  
Chapultepec) is a short distance back down the road. Shaped somewhat like a snail shell, this ‘gallery of history’ traces the origins of Mexico’s present-day institutions, identity and values through a series of audio-enhanced dioramas re-enacting key moments in the country’s struggle for liberty. The 12 exhibit halls spiral downward, along the way depicting the cry for independence at Dolores Hidalgo, the May 5 battle of Puebla, the execution of Maximilian, and the triumphant entrance of Madero into Mexico City. The tour ends at a circular hall that contains only one item – a replica of the 1917 Constitution of Mexico.

**MUSEO DE ARTE MODERNO**

The **Museum of Modern Art** (Map pp120-1; 5211-8331; cnr Paseo de la Reforma & Gandhi; admission $2, Sun free;  
9am-4:30pm Tue-Sun;  
Chapultepec) exhibits work by noteworthy 20th-century Mexican artists. The main building consists of four skylit rotundas, housing canvasses by Dr Atl, Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco, Kahlo, Tamayo and O’Gorman, among others. *Las Dos Fridas*, possibly Frida Kahlo’s most well-known painting, is in the Sala Xavier Villarrutia. Temporary exhibitions feature prominent Mexican and foreign artists. Just northwest of the Monumento a los Niños Héroes (access is via Paseo de la Reforma), the museum has a pleasant café beside a sculpture garden.

**ZOOLÓGICO DE CHAPULTEPEC**

The **Chapultepec Zoo** (Map pp120-1; 5553-6263; admission free;  
9am-4:30pm Tue-Sun;  
Chapultepec) houses a wide range of the world’s creatures in large open-air enclosures. The first place outside China where pandas were born in captivity, the zoo has three of these rare bears, descendants of the original pair donated by the People’s Republic in 1975. Endangered Mexican species include the Mexican grey wolf and the hairless xoloitzcuintle, the only surviving dog species from pre-Hispanic times.

Part of Chapultepec forest was given over to a bird sanctuary back during Moctezuma’s reign; today, parrots, macaws, toucans, flamingos and other Mexican species swoop around the Aviario Moctezuma (only 20 visitors allowed in at a time).

There are various fast-food franchises on the premises.

**MUSEO NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGÍA**

The **National Museum of Anthropology** (Map pp120-1; 5553-6381; www.mna.inah.gob.mx; cnr Paseo de la Reforma & Gandhi; admission $3.50;  
9am-7pm Tue-Sun;  
Auditorio), among the finest of its kind, stands in an extension of the Bosque de Chapultepec.
The vast museum offers more than most people can absorb in a single visit. Concentrate on the regions you plan to visit or have visited, with a quick look at some of the other eye-catching exhibits. Everything is superbly displayed, with much explanatory text translated into English. Audio-guide devices, in English, are available at the entrance ($6).

The spacious complex, constructed in the 1960s, is the work of Mexican architect Pedro Ramírez Vázquez. Its long, rectangular courtyard is surrounded on three sides by two-storey display halls. An immense umbrella-like stone fountain rises up from the center of the courtyard.

The 12 ground-floor salas (halls) are dedicated to pre-Hispanic Mexico. The upper level shows how Mexico’s indigenous descendants live today. Here’s a brief guide to the ground-floor halls, proceeding counterclockwise around the courtyard:

**Cultur de la Costa del Golfo** Spotlights the important civilizations along the Gulf of Mexico including the Olmec, Classic Veracruz, Totonac and Huastec. Stone carvings here include two Olmec heads weighing in at almost 20 tons.

**Maya** Has exhibits from southeast Mexico, Guatemala, Belize and Honduras. A full-scale replica of the tomb of King Pakal, discovered deep in the Templo de las Inscripciones at Palenque, is breathtaking. On the outside patio are reproductions of the famous wall paintings of Bonampak and of Edificio II at Hochob, in Campeche, constructed as a giant mask of the rain god, Chac.

**Cultur del Occidente** Profiles cultures of western Mexico from Nayarit, Jalisco, Michoacán, Colima and Guerrero states. Reproductions of the region’s characteristic shaft tombs are on display.

**Cultur del Norte** Covers the Casas Grandes (Paquimé) site and other cultures from arid northern Mexico, and traces their links with indigenous groups of the US southwest.

In a clearing about 100m in front of the museum’s entrance, indigenous Totonac people perform their spectacular voladores rite – ‘flying’ from a 20m-high pole (see p678) – several times a day.

**MUSEO RUFINO TAMAYO**

A multilevel concrete and glass structure east of the Museo Nacional de Antropología, the Tamayo Museum (Map pp120-1; ☎ 5286-6519; www.museotamayo.org in Spanish; cnr Paseo de la Reforma & Gandhi; admission $1.50, free Sun; 10am-6pm Tue-Sun; M Auditorio) was built to house international modern art donated by Oaxaca-born Rufino Tamayo and his wife, Olga, to the people of Mexico. Exhibitions of cutting-edge modern art from around the globe alternate with thematically arranged shows from the Tamayo collection.

**SEGUNDA (2ª) SECCIÓN**

The second section of the Bosque de Chapultepec lies west of the Periférico. In addition to family attractions, there is a pair of upscale lake-view restaurants on the Lago Mayor and Lago Menor.

Kids will enjoy La Feria (Map pp120-1; ☎ 5230-2121; passes from $2.75; 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9pm Sat & Sun; M Constituyentes), an old-fashioned amusement park with some hair-raising rides. A ‘Super Ecolín’ passport ($7.50) is good for all the rides except the
roller-coaster and a few others; a ‘pase mágico’ ($2.75) includes two dozen children’s rides and five big kids’ rides. There is separate admission for the white-whales show.

Your children won’t want to leave Papalote Museo del Niño (Map pp120-1;  \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); www.papalote.org.mx; adult/child 2-11yr & seniors $9/8; \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); 9am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 9am-11pm Thu, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun;  \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); Constituyentes). At this innovative, hands-on museum, kids can put together a radio program, lie on a bed of nails, join an archaeological dig and try out all manner of technological gadget-games. Everything is attended by child-friendly supervisors. The museum also features a 3-D IMAX movie theater.

Just north of Papalote, the Museo Tecnológico (Map pp120-1;  \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); 5516-0964; admission free; \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); 9am-5pm;  \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); Constituyentes), managed by the Federal Electricity Commission, showcases Mexico’s technological developments, with interactive exhibits on electricity and transportation as well as a planetarium. The Museo de Historia Natural (Natural History Museum; Map pp120-1;  \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); 5515-6304; admission $1.75, Tue free; \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); 10am-5pm Tue-Sun;  \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); Constituyentes), a 10-minute walk west of Papalote, presents the evolution of life on earth under a series of colored domes.

Circling around the Lago Menor, you’ll find the Fuente de Tlaloc by Diego Rivera, a huge mosaic-skinned sculpture of the rain god lying in an oval pool in front of the old Chapultepec water works. To the north is the beautiful Fuente de Xochipilli, dedicated to the Aztec ‘flower prince,’ with terraced fountains around a talud tablero–style pyramid (a steep building style typical of Teotihuacán).

GETTING THERE & AWAY
Chapultepec metro station is at the east end of the Bosque de Chapultepec, near the Monumento a los Niños Héroes and Castillo de Chapultepec. Auditorio metro station is on the north side of the park, 500m west of the Museo Nacional de Antropología.

From anywhere on Paseo de la Reforma west of the Alameda Central, buses saying ‘Metro Chapultepec’ reach Chapultepec metro station, while ‘Metro Auditorio’ buses pass right outside the Museo Nacional de Antropología. Returning downtown, any ‘Metro Hidalgo/La Villa’, ‘Alameda’ or ‘Garibaldi’ bus, from either metro Chapultepec or heading east on Reforma, follows Reforma at least as far as metro Hidalgo.

To get to the 2a Sección and La Feria, from metro Chapultepec take the ‘Paradero’ exit and catch a ‘Feria’ bus at the top of the stairs. These depart continuously and travel nonstop to the 2a Sección, dropping off riders at the Papalote Museo del Niño, Museo Tecnológico and La Feria.

Polanco
This affluent residential quarter north of Bosque de Chapultepec (Map pp120–1), where the streets are named after writers Luis Barragán (1902–88) led Mexico to the forefront of international modern architecture through a very personal view about living space. Born into an hacendado family in Jalisco state, he developed a passion for horse riding from an early age. Trained as a civil engineer, he taught himself architecture, making his name as a modernist designer of urban dwellings. His most visible work is the group of colorful skyscraper sculptures at the gateway to Ciudad Satélite, on Bulevar Ávila Camacho (aka the Periférico) north of downtown Mexico City. His works were both informed by the currents of modernism and imbued with the light and colors of Mexico’s landscapes, villages and colonial architecture. Barragán received the Pritzker Prize, international architecture’s highest honor, in 1980.

South of the Bosque de Chapultepec’s 2a Sección, Barragán’s home – which he inhabited from 1948 until his death 40 years later – was designated a Unesco World Heritage site in 2004 ‘as a masterpiece of human creative genius.’ With its purposely circuitous passageways, seamless integration of outdoor and indoor spaces, bold swathes of Mexican folk tones, and a rooftop terrace that has the sky as its canopy, the Casa Luis Barragán (Map pp120-1;  \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); 5272-4945; www.casaluisbarragan.org; General Francisco Ramírez 12; admission $7.50; \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); 10am-1pm & 4-5pm by guided tour only;  \( \text{Map } 120-1 \); Constituyentes) is a monument to both Barragán’s vision and the Mexican worldview.
and scientists, contains lots of restaurants, art galleries and embassies, some luxury hotels and the Sectur tourist office (p127). Much of the architecture is in the California Colonial style of the 1930s and 1940s, with carved stone doorways and window surrounds. A tour of Polanco could be combined with a visit to the nearby Museo Nacional de Antropología (p138).

Xochimilco & Around
About 20km south of downtown Mexico City, the urban sprawl is strung with a network of canals lined by gardens. These are the so-called ‘floating gardens’ of Xochimilco (so-chi-meel-co), remnants of the chinampas where the indigenous inhabitants grew their food. Gliding along the canals in a trajinera (gondola) is an alternately tranquil and festive experience. Nearby attractions include an ecological theme park and one of the city’s best art museums.

MUSEO DOLORES OLMEDO PATIÑO
Set in a peaceful 17th-century hacienda, the Olmedo Patiño museum (Map p124; 5555-1221; Av México 5843; admission $2.75, free Tue; 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), 2km west of Xochimilco, has perhaps the biggest and most important Diego Rivera collection of all. You’ll see xoloitzcuintles, a pre-Hispanic hairless canine breed, roaming the estate’s extensive gardens.

Dolores Olmedo Patiño, who resided here until her death in 2002, was a socialite and a patron of Rivera. The museum’s 137 Rivera works – including oils, watercolors and lithographs from various periods – are displayed alongside pre-Hispanic figurines and folk art. Another room is reserved for Frida Kahlo’s paintings.

To get there take the Tren Ligero (light rail) from metro Tasqueña and get off at La Noria. Leaving the station, turn left at the top of the steps, walk down to the street and continue to an intersection with a footbridge. Here turn a sharp left, almost doubling back on your path, onto Antiguo Camino a Xochimilco. The museum is 300m down this street.

XOCHIMILCO
Xochimilco, Náhuatl for ‘Place where Flowers Grow,’ was an early target of Aztec hegemony, probably due to its inhabitants’ farming skills. The Xochimilcas piled up vegetation and mud in the shallow waters of Lake Xochimilco, a southern offshoot of Lago de Texcoco, to make fertile gardens called chinampas, which later became an economic base of the Aztec empire. As the chinampas proliferated, much of the lake was transformed into a series of canals. Approximately 180km of these waterways remain today and provide a favorite weekend destination for defeños (residents of Mexico City). The chinampas are still under cultivation, mainly for garden plants and flowers such as poinsettias and marigolds.

On weekends a fiesta atmosphere takes over as the town and waterways become jammed with people arranging boats to cruise the canals. Local vendors and musicians hover alongside the partygoers serving food and drink, playing marimbas and taking photos with old box cameras. (For a more relaxed atmosphere, come on a weekday.)

Hundreds of colorful trajineras await passengers at the village’s nine embarcaderos (boat landings). Nearest to the center are Salitre and San Cristóbal embarcaderos, both 400m east of the plaza; and Fernando Celada, 400m west on Guadalupe Ramírez. Boats seat 14 to 20 persons; official cruise prices ($13 to $15 per hour) are posted at the embarcaderos. On Saturday, Sunday and holidays, 60-person lanchas colectivos run between the Salitre, Caltongo and Nativitas embarcaderos charging $1 per passenger.

You can get a taste of Xochimilco in one hour, but it’s worth going for longer; you’ll see more and get a proper chance to relax. You can arrange for your trajinera to stop at Nativitas embarcadero for some shopping at its large artesanías market.

Though the canals are definitely the main attraction, Xochimilco village is also worthy of exploration. East of Jardín Juárez stands the 16th-century Parroquia de San Bernardino de Siena (Map p124), with elaborate gold-painted retablos (altarpieces) and a large tree-studded atrium. To the south is the bustling Mercado de Xochimilco.

To reach Xochimilco, take the metro to Tasqueña station, then continue on the Tren Ligero ($0.20) to its last stop. Upon exiting the station, turn left (north) and follow Av Morelos to the market, plaza and church. If you don’t feel like walking, bicycle taxis will shuttle you to the embarcaderos ($3).
PARQUE ECOLÓGICO DE XOCHIMILCO
Owing to its cultural and historical significance, Xochimilco was designated a Unesco World Heritage site in 1987. However, encroaching urbanization and illegal settlement along the canals have put a strain on this unique habitat, and at least one endemic species of the zone, the axolotl – a fish-like salamander – is in danger of extinction. Thus in 1991 the Ecological Park of Xochimilco (☎ 5673-8061; Periférico Oriente 1; adult/senior/child $1.50/0.50/0.20; ☀ 9am-6pm) was established, about 3km northeast of downtown Xochimilco, both to recover the zone’s fragile ecosystem and to provide a retreat for stressed-out urbanites.

Covering some 2 sq km, the protected area comprises a botanical garden, artificial lakes and a variety of waterbirds. Stroll the pleasant pathways, or rent a bicycle or pedal boat for more extensive exploration. In the park’s southeast corner, chinampas have been set aside to demonstrate traditional indigenous cultivation techniques. A visitors center has displays on plants and birds.

Trajineras departing from Embarcadero Cuemanco, 2km west of the park entrance, ply this lower-key section of the canals. This is also the best point of departure for an excursion to the Isla de las Muñecas (p150).

To reach Parque Ecológico de Xochimilco, take the Tren Ligero to the Periférico station. Exit on the Xochimilco-bound side, then go through the tunnel that underpasses the Periférico freeway. Emerging from the tunnel, turn right and walk to where you catch a ‘Cuemanco’ pesero (colectivo; minibus); the park entrance is a 10-minute ride.

San Ángel
Just a little over 60 years ago, San Ángel was a village separated from Mexico City by open fields. Today it’s one of the city’s most charming suburbs, with quiet cobbled streets lined by both old colonial and expensive modern houses, and a variety of things to see and do.

Av Insurgentes Sur and Av Revolución run north to south through eastern San Ángel.

PLAZA SAN JACINTO
Every Saturday the Bazar Sábado (p177) brings masses of color and crowds of people to San Ángel’s Plaza San Jacinto.

The Museo Casa del Risco (Map p122; ☎ 5616-2711; Plaza San Jacinto 15; admission free; ☀ 10am-5pm) houses a museum in the former monastic quarters of the Carmelite order. Irrigated by the waters of the Río de la Magdalena, its orchard was once a source of cuttings and seeds for much of colonial Mexico. The convent is a storehouse of magnificent sacred art, including eight oils by Mexican master Cristóbal Villalpando. The polychrome and gilt ceiling decoration are unique examples of this type of work in Mexico. The big draw, however, is the dozen mummies in the crypt. Thought to be the bodies of 17th-century benefactors of the order, they were uncovered during the revolution by Zapatistas looking for buried treasure.

MUSEO CASA ESTUDIO DIEGO RIVERA Y FRIDA KAHLO
One kilometer northwest of Plaza San Jacinto is the Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Studio Museum (Map p122; ☎ 5550-1518; Diego Rivera 2, cnr Av Altavista; admission $1, free Sun; ☀ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun). Designed by their friend, the architect and painter Juan O’Gorman, the innovative abode was the home of the artistic couple from 1934 to 1940, with a separate house for each of them. If you saw Frida, you’ll recognize the building, which served as a location in the film.

Though the museum has only a few examples of Rivera’s art and none of Kahlo’s, it does hold a lot of memorabilia. Rivera’s house (the pink one) has an upstairs studio. Across the street is the San Ángel Inn (p164), in the 17th-century Ex-Hacienda de Goicoechea, once the home of the marquises of La Selva Nevada and the count of Pinillas. The former pulque hacienda is where Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata agreed to divide control of the country.

TEMPLO Y MUSEO DE EL CARMEN
The austere Templo de El Carmen houses a museum (Map p122; ☎ 5616-2816; www.museodeelcarmen.org in Spanish; Av Revolución 4; admission $3, free Sun; ☀ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) in the former monastic quarters of the Carmelite order. Irrigated by the waters of the Río de la Magdalena, its orchard was once a source of cuttings and seeds for much of colonial Mexico. The convent is a storehouse of magnificent sacred art, including eight oils by Mexican master Cristóbal Villalpando. The polychrome and gilt ceiling decoration are unique examples of this type of work in Mexico. The big draw, however, is the dozen mummies in the crypt. Thought to be the bodies of 17th-century benefactors of the order, they were uncovered during the revolution by Zapatistas looking for buried treasure.
JARDÍN DE LA BOMBILLA
Popular with Chilango families, this pleasant park spreading east of Av Insurgentes has pedal-driven carts and motorized buggies for the kids. The Monumento a Álvaro Obregón (Map p122) marks the spot where the Mexican president was assassinated during a banquet in 1928. Obregón’s killer, José de León Toral, was involved in the Cristero rebellion against the government’s anti-Church policies.

GETTING THERE & AWAY
The La Bombilla station of the Av Insurgentes Metrobus is about 500m east of the Plaza San Jacinto. To Coyoacán, catch a ‘Metro General Anaya’ bus from in front of the flower market on the east side of Av Revolución; this will drop you by the Coyoacán market.

Ciudad Universitaria
The University City (Map pp110-11; Universidad), 2km south of San Angel, is the main campus of Latin America’s largest university, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), and a modern architectural showpiece. To see a map go to www.mapa.unam.mx.

Founded in 1553 as the Royal and Papal University of Mexico, the institution was modeled after Spain’s University of Salamanca. Most of the modern campus was built between 1949 and 1952 by a team of 150 young architects and technicians. It’s a monument to both national pride and an educational ideal in which almost anyone is entitled to university tuition. And its prestige remains solid: in an international survey conducted in 2005 by The Times Higher Education Supplement, UNAM was ranked as the No 1 university in Latin America and among the top 100 higher-education institutions in the world.

UNAM has over 260,000 students and 31,000 teachers. It has often been a center of political dissent, most notably prior to the 1968 Mexico City Olympics (see the boxed text, p106).

Most of the faculty buildings are scattered over an area about 1km square at the north end. As you enter from Av Insurgentes, it’s easy to spot the Biblioteca Central (Central Library), 10 storeys high and covered with mosaics by Juan O’Gorman. The south wall, with two prominent zodiac wheels, covers colonial times, while the north wall deals with Aztec culture. The east wall shows the creation of modern Mexico; and the more abstract west wall may be dedicated to Latin American culture as a whole.

La Rectoría, the administration building at the west end of the wide, grassy Jardín Central, has a vivid, three-dimensional Siqueiros mosaic on its south wall, showing students urged on by the people. Fanciful animal sculptures by José Luis Cuevas dot the vast lawn, where students cram for exams or coo to sweethearts.

South of the Rectoría stands the Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte ( 5622-0305; www.muca.unam.mx; admission free; 10am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun), with eclectic exhibits from the university collection and some contemporary art.

Further east, illustrating the Facultad de Medicina, is an intriguing mosaic by Francisco Eppens in which Spanish and indigenous profiles combine to form a mestizo face.

Rebuilt for the 1968 Olympics, the Estadio Olímpico, to the west of Av Insurgentes, seats 80,000. A Rivera mosaic resembling a volcanic cone graces the main entrance.

A second section of the campus, about 2km south, contains the Centro Cultural Universitario (see p170), hosting films and the performing arts in its theaters and concert halls; and the Museo Universitario de Ciencias (Universum; 5622-7287; www.universum.unam.mx in Spanish; admission $3.75; 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun), a science museum with kids’ activities and workshops. Other attractions include UNAM’s botanical gardens; the Unidad Bibliográfica, housing part of Mexico’s National Library; and the Espacio Escultórico (Sculptural Space), focused on a striking work by Mathias Goeritz consisting of triangular concrete blocks around a lava bed.

Student cafés, open to everyone during academic sessions, are in both the architecture and philosophy buildings at the Jardín Central’s west end, and in the Centro Cultural Universitario.

GETTING THERE & AWAY
Take the metrobus to its southern terminus, where you can catch a ‘Perisur’ pesero (see map p122) to the west side of the university. For the northern part
of the campus, get off at the first yellow footbridge crossing Av Insurgentes, just before the Estadio Olímpico. For the southern section, get off at the second yellow footbridge after the Estadio Olímpico. Returning, catch any pesero marked ‘San Ángel-Revolución,’ getting off just after it turns left to catch the metrobuses.

Otherwise, take the metro to Universidad station, on the east side of the campus. The university runs three bus routes (free) from the metro station between 6:30am and 10:30pm Monday to Friday. Ruta 1 goes west to the main part of the campus; Ruta 3 heads southwest to the Centro Cultural Universitario.

Coyoacán
About 10km south of downtown, Coyoacán (‘Place of Coyotes’ in the Náhuatl language) was Cortés’ base after the fall of Tenochtitlán. It remained a small outlying town until urban sprawl reached it 50 years ago. Close to the university, and once home to Leon Trotsky and Frida Kahlo (whose houses are now fascinating museums), Coyoacán retains its own identity, with narrow colonial-era streets, plazas, cafés and a lively atmosphere. Especially on weekends, assorted musicians, mimes and crafts markets draw large but relaxed crowds from all walks of life to Coyoacán’s central plazas.

VIVEROS DE COYOACÁN
A pleasant approach is via the Viveros de Coyoacán (Map p123; 5554-1851; admission free; 6am-6pm; M Viveros), the principal nurseries for Mexico City’s parks and gardens. The 390,000-sq-meter swath of greenery, 1km west of central Coyoacán, is popular with joggers and perfect for a stroll, but watch out for belligerent squirrels! From metro Viveros, walk south along Av Universidad and take the first left, Av Progreso; or enter on Av México near Calle Madrid.

A block south of Viveros is the quaint Plaza Santa Catarina, with a 17th-century chapel by the same name. The adjacent Centro Cultural Jesús Reyes Heroles (Map p123; 5639-3937; Francisco Sosa 202; 9am-7pm; M Viveros) is a colonial estate hosting art exhibits, concerts and culinary demonstrations in a Talavera-tiled kitchen. The 700m walk east along Av Francisco Sosa to Plaza Hidalgo passes some beautiful 16th- and 17th-century houses.

PLAZA HIDALGO & JARDÍN DEL CENTENARIO
The focus of Coyoacán life, and scene of most of the weekend fun, is its central plaza – actually two adjacent plazas: the eastern Plaza Hidalgo, with a statue of Miguel Hidalgo; and the western Jardín del Centenario, with a coyote fountain.

The Casa de Cortés (Map p123; 5658-0221; Jardín Hidalgo 1; admission free; 8am-8pm; M Viveros), on the north side of Plaza Hidalgo, is where conquistador Cortés established Mexico’s first municipal seat during the siege of Tenochtitlán, and later had the defeated emperor Cuauhtémoc tortured to make him divulge the location of Aztec treasure (the scene is depicted on a mural inside the chapel). Cortés resided here until 1523 when the colonial government was transferred to Mexico City. In front of the building is a domed gazebo contributed by the Díaz regime in 1910.

The 16th-century Parroquia de San Juan Bautista and its adjacent ex-monastery dominate the south side of Plaza Hidalgo. Half a block east, the Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares (Map p123; 5554-8968; Hidalgo 289; admission free; 10am-6pm Tue-Thu, 10am-8pm Fri-Sun; M Viveros) hosts innovative exhibitions on popular culture, covering such topics as lucha libre (wrestling) and the role of maize in society. Outside, an amazing tree of life from Metepec marks the 500th anniversary of the meeting of the old and new worlds.

MUSEO FRIDA KAHLO
The ‘Blue House’ (Map p123; 5554-5999; Londres 247; adult/child 6-12yr $3.25/2; 10am-6pm Tue-Sun; M Coyoacán), six blocks north of Plaza Hidalgo, was the longtime home of artist Frida Kahlo (see the boxed text, opposite). Kahlo and her husband, Diego Rivera, were part of a glamorous but far from harmonious leftist intellectual circle (which included, in the 1930s, Leon Trotsky), and the house is littered with mementos. In addition to their own and other artists’ work, it contains pre-Hispanic objects and Mexican crafts collected by the couple.

The Kahlo art expresses the anguish of her existence; one painting, El Marxismo Dará la Salud (Marxism Will Give Health), shows her casting away her crutches. In the upstairs studio an unfinished portrait of Stalin stands
before a poignantly positioned wheelchair. The folk-art collection includes Mexican regional costumes worn by Kahlo, and Rivera’s collection of retablo paintings.

MUSEO LÉON TROTSKY

Having come second to Stalin in the power struggle in the Soviet Union, Trotsky was expelled in 1929 and condemned to death in absentia. In 1937 he found refuge in Mexico. At first Trotsky and his wife, Natalia, lived in Frida Kahlo’s Blue House, but after falling out with Kahlo and Rivera they moved a few streets away, to Viena 45.

The Trotsky home (Map p123; 5554-0687; Río Churubusco 410; admission $2.75; 10am-5pm Tue-Sun; Coyoacán), whose main entrance is at the rear of the old residence, remains much as it was on the day when a Stalin agent finally caught up with the revolutionary. The fatal attack took place in Trotsky’s study. Assassin Ramón Mercader, a Catalan, had become the lover of Trotsky’s secretary and gained the confidence of the household. On August 20, 1940, Mercader approached Trotsky at his desk and asked him to look at a document. He then pulled an ice axe from under his coat.

FRIDA & DIEGO

Diego Rivera, born in Guanajuato in 1886, first met Frida Kahlo, 21 years his junior, while painting at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, where she was a student in the early 1920s. Rivera was already at the forefront of Mexican art and a socialist; his commission at the school was the first of many semi-propagandistic murals on public buildings that he was to execute over three decades. He had already fathered children by two Russian women in Europe and in 1922 married Lupe Marín in Mexico. She bore him two more children before their marriage broke up in 1928.

Kahlo, born in Coyoacán in 1907, contracted polio at age six, leaving her right leg permanently thinner than her left. In 1925 she was horribly injured in a trolley accident that broke her back, right leg, collarbone, pelvis and ribs. She made a miraculous recovery but suffered much pain thereafter and underwent many operations to try to alleviate it. It was during convalescence that she began painting. Pain – physical and emotional – was to be a dominating theme of her art.

Kahlo and Rivera both moved in left-wing artistic circles and met again in 1928; they married the following year. The liaison, described as ‘a union between an elephant and a dove,’ was always a passionate love-hate affair. Rivera wrote: ‘If I ever loved a woman, the more I loved her, the more I wanted to hurt her. Frida was only the most obvious victim of this disgusting trait.’ Both had many extramarital affairs.

Kahlo’s beauty, bisexuality and unconventional behavior – she drank tequila, told dirty jokes and held wild parties – fascinated many people. In 1934, after a spell in the USA, the pair moved into a new home in San Ángel (see p142), with separate houses for each of them, linked by an aerial walkway. Rivera and Kahlo divorced in 1940 but remarried soon after. She moved into the Blue House and he stayed at San Ángel – a state of affairs that endured for the rest of their lives, though their relationship endured too. Kahlo remained Rivera’s most trusted critic, and Rivera was Kahlo’s biggest fan.

Kahlo had only one exhibition in Mexico in her lifetime, in 1953. She arrived at the opening on a stretcher. Rivera said of the exhibition, ‘Anyone who attended it could not but marvel at her great talent.’ She died, at the Blue House, the following year. Rivera called the day of her death ‘the most tragic day of my life... Too late I realized that the most wonderful part of my life had been my love for Frida.’

Though Kahlo’s work was little appreciated during her lifetime, it has since become the most highly valued of any Mexican painter – or of any female artist – fetching more at international auctions than Rivera’s. (Kahlo’s Self-Portrait with Curly Hair sold for $1.3 million at a Christie’s auction in 2003.)

Frida, the 2002 hit biopic, brought the painter even wider recognition. Though the film did very well in Mexico, it got mixed reviews from intellectuals who complained that none of the actors (except Salma Hayek, who played Kahlo) were Mexican – and even worse, that they spoke English, a betrayal of the vocally anti-American Frida.
and smashed the pick end into Trotsky’s skull. Mercader was arrested and spent 20 years in prison.

Memorabilia and biographical notes are displayed in outbuildings, and videos on the life of the revolutionary are continuously screened in a room off the patio, where a tomb engraved with a hammer and sickle contains the Trotskys’ ashes.

EX-CONVENTO DE CHURUBUSCO
The 17th-century former Monastery of Churubusco, scene of one of Mexico’s heroic military defeats, stands east of Av División del Norte.

On August 20, 1847, Mexican troops defended the monastery against US forces advancing from Veracruz in a dispute over the US annexation of Texas. The Mexicans fought until they ran out of ammunition and were beaten only after hand-to-hand fighting. General Pedro Anaya, when asked by US general David Twiggs to surrender his ammunition, is said to have answered, ‘If there was any, you wouldn’t be here.’ Cannons and memorials outside recall these events.

Most of the monastery now houses the Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones (National Interventions Museum; Map p123; 5604-0699; cnr Calle 20 de Agosto & General Anaya; admission $2.75; Sun free; 9am-6pm Tue-Sun; General Anaya). Displays include an American map showing operations in 1847, material on the French occupation of the 1860s and the plot by US ambassador Henry Lane Wilson to bring down the Madero government in 1913. Parts of the monastery gardens are also open.

To reach Churubusco, catch an eastbound ‘M(etro) Gral Anaya’ pesero or bus on Xicoténcatl at Allende, a few blocks north of Coyoacán’s Plaza Hidalgo. Alternatively, walk 500m from the General Anaya metro station.

ANAHUACALLI
This dramatic museum (Map pp110-11; 5617-4310; Calle del Museo 150; admission $3.25; 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), 3.5km south of Coyoacán, was designed by Diego Rivera to house his collection of pre-Hispanic art. A fortress-like building made of dark volcanic stone, the ‘House of Anáhuac’ (Aztec name for the Valle de México) also contains one of Rivera’s studios and some of his work, including a study for ‘Man at the Crossroads,’ the mural that was commissioned for the Rockefeller Center in 1934.

If the air is clear, there’s a great view from the roof. In November elaborate Day of the Dead offerings pay homage to the painter.

To get to Anahuacalli, take the Tren Ligero (from metro Tasqueña) to the Xotepingo station. Exit on the west side and walk 200m to División del Norte; cross and continue 600m along Calle del Museo.

GETTING THERE & AWAY
The nearest metro stations (1.5km to 2km) to central Coyoacán are Viveros, Coyoacán and General Anaya. If you don’t fancy a walk, get off at Viveros station, walk south to Av Progreso and catch an eastbound ‘M(etro) Gral Anaya’ pesero to the market.

Returning, ‘Metro Viveros’ peseros go west on Malitzin; ‘Metro Coyoacán’ and ‘Metro Gral Anaya’ peseros depart from the west side of Plaza Hidalgo.

San Ángel–bound peseros and buses head west on Av MA de Quevedo, five blocks south of Plaza Hidalgo. To Ciudad Universitaria, take a ‘CU’ pesero west on Belisario Domínguez, from the corner of Centenario.

Cuicuilco
Cuicuilco (Map pp110-11; 5606-9758; Insurgentes Sur; admission free; 9am-5pm), between San Fernando and Anillo Periférico, is one of the oldest significant remnants of pre-Hispanic settlement within the DF. The civilization dates as far back as 800 BC, when it stood on the shores of Lago de Xochimilco. In its heyday in the 2nd century BC, the ‘place of singing and dancing’ counted as many as 40,000 inhabitants and rivaled Teotihuacán in stature. The site was abandoned a couple of centuries later, however, after an eruption of the nearby Xitle volcano covered most of the community in lava.

The principal structure is a huge circular platform of four levels, faced with volcanic stone blocks, that probably functioned as a ceremonial center. Set amid a park studded with cactus and shade trees, the platform can be easily scaled for sweeping views of the southern districts including the formidable Xitle. The site includes a small museum.
To reach Cuicuilco, take the metrobus to the end of the line, then catch a Perisur bus. The site is a five-minute walk south of the Perisur shopping mall.

**Tlalpan**
Tlalpan is ‘what Coyoacán used to be’ – an outlying colonial village with a bohemian atmosphere and some impressive 18th-century architecture. Municipal seat of the city’s largest delegación, Tlalpan sits at the foot of the southern Ajusco range and enjoys a cooler, moister climate. There are some fine restaurants along the arcades of the cute little plaza and a boisterous cantina nearby, **La Jaliscense** (5573-5586; Plaza de la Constitución 6). The **Capilla de las Capuchinas Sacramentarias** (5573-2395; Hidalgo 43; admission $4.50; 9:30-noon & 4-6pm Mon-Thu), the chapel of a convent for Capuchine nuns designed by Luis Barragán in the 1940s, is a modernist gem amid the colonial relics. In addition to its historical collection, the **Museo de Historia de Tlalpán** (5573-0173; Plaza de la Constitución 10; admission free; 10am-7pm Tue-Sun) stages eclectic concert series.

A trip out to Tlalpan could be combined with a visit to Cuicuilco (see opposite). From metro Tasqueña, take the Tren Ligero to the Estadio Azteca station, then catch a ‘Centro de Tlalpan’ pesero.

**Parque Nacional Desierto de los Leones**
Cool, fragrant pine and oak forests dominate this 20-sq-km national park (6am-5pm) in the hills surrounding the Valle de México. Some 23km southwest of Mexico City and 800m higher, it makes a fine escape from the carbon monoxide and concrete.

The name derives from the **Ex-Convento del Santo Desierto de Nuestra Señora del Carmen** (admission $1; 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), the 17th-century former Carmelite monastery within the park. The Carmelites called their isolated monasteries ‘deserts’ to commemorate Elijah, who lived as a recluse in the desert near Mt Carmel. ‘Leones’ may stem from the presence of wild cats in the area, but more likely refers to José and Manuel de León, who once administered the monastery’s finances.

The restored Ex-Convento has exhibition halls and a restaurant. Tours in Spanish (weekends only) are run by guides garbed in cassock and sandals who explore the patios within and expansive gardens around the buildings, as well as some underground passageways. The rest of the park has extensive walking trails. (Robberies have been reported, so stick to the main paths.)

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**
Take one of Flecha Roja’s frequent ‘Toluca Intermedio’ buses from the Terminal Poniente bus station to La Venta, on Hwy 15 ($1, 30 minutes). Tell the driver your destination and you should be dropped at a yellow footbridge near a caseta de cobro (toll booth). Cross the footbridge and you’ll see the Desierto de los Leones signpost on a side road to the south. On weekends taxis may wait here to take people up the 4km paved road to the Ex-Convento. Other days you’ll probably have to walk, but traffic will be light and it’s a pleasant, gently rising ascent.

**Tlatelolco & Guadalupe**

**PLAZA DE LAS TRES CULTURAS**
So named because it symbolizes the fusion of pre-Hispanic and Spanish roots into the Mexican mestizo identity, the **Plaza of the Three Cultures** (Map pp110-11; 5583-0295; Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas, cnr Flores Magón; admission free; 8am-6pm; Tlatelolco) displays the architectural legacy of three cultural facets: the Aztec pyramids of **Tlatelolco**, the 17th-century Spanish **Templo de Santiago** and the former Foreign Relations Secretariat building on the plaza’s south side, planned for conversion into a cultural center. A calm oasis north of the city center, the plaza is nonetheless haunted by echoes of its somber history.

Tlatelolco was founded by an Aztec faction in the 14th century on a separate island in Lago de Texcoco and later conquered by the Aztecs of Tenochtitlán, who built a causeway to connect the two ceremonial centers. In pre-Hispanic times it had the largest market in the Valle de México. Cortés defeated Tlatelolco’s defenders, led by Cuauhtémoc, in 1521. An inscription about that battle in the plaza translates: ‘This was neither victory nor defeat. It was the sad birth of the mestizo people that is Mexico today.’

Tlatelolco was also a symbol of modern troubles. On October 2, 1968, 300 to 400
student protesters were massacred by
government troops on the eve of the Mexico
City Olympic Games (see the boxed text,
p106). The area subsequently suffered some
of the worst damage of the 1985 earthquake
when apartment blocks collapsed, killing
hundreds.

You can view the remains of Tlatelolco’s
main pyramid-temple and other Aztec
buildings from a walkway around them.
Like the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlán,
Tlatelolco’s main temple was constructed
in stages, with each of seven temples super-
imposed atop its predecessors. The double
pyramid on view, one of the earliest stages,
has twin staircases which supposedly as-
ccended to temples dedicated to Tlaloc and
Huitzilopochtli. Numerous calendric glyphs
are carved into the outer walls.

Recognizing the religious significance of
the place, the Spanish erected the Templo de
Santiago here in 1609, using stones from the
Aztec structures as building materials. Just
inside the main (west) doors of this church
is the baptismal font of Juan Diego (see below).
Outside the north wall of the church, a
monument erected in 1993 honors the
victims of the 1968 massacre.

Along Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas,
northbound ‘Central Autobuses del Norte’
peseros and trolleybuses pass right by the
Plaza de las Tres Culturas.

BASÍLICA DE GUADALUPE

In December 1531, as the story goes, an
indigenous Christian convert named Juan
Diego stood on Cerro del Tepeyac (Tepeyac
Hill), site of an old Aztec shrine, and beheld
a beautiful lady dressed in a blue mantle
trimmed with gold. She sent him to tell
the bishop, Juan de Zumárraga, that he had
seen the Virgin Mary, and that she wanted
a shrine built in her honor. But the bishop
didn’t believe him. Returning to the hill,
Juan Diego had the vision several more
times. After her fourth appearance, the
lady’s image was miraculously emblazoned
on his cloak, causing the church to finally
accept his story, and a cult developed
around the site.

Over the centuries Nuestra Señora de
Guadalupe (named after a Spanish manifes-
tation of the Virgin whose cult was particu-
larly popular in early colonial times) came
to receive credit for all manner of miracles,
hugely aiding the acceptance of Catholi-
cism by Mexicans. Despite the protests of
some clergy, who saw the cult as a form of
idolatry with the Virgin as a Christianized
version of the Aztec goddess Tonantzin (the
basilica was built over a pyramid dedicated
to her), in 1737 the Virgin was officially
declared the patron of Mexico after she
had extinguished an outbreak of plague in
Mexico City. Two centuries later she was
named celestial patron of Latin America
and empress of the Americas. Today her
image is seen throughout the country, and
her shrines around the Cerro del Tepeyac
are the most revered in Mexico, attracting
thousands of pilgrims daily and hundreds
of thousands on the days leading up to her
feast day, December 12 (see p151). Some
pilgrims travel the last meters to the shrine
on their knees. In 2002 Pope John Paul II
canonized Juan Diego.

By the 1970s the old yellow-domed
basilica, built around 1700, was swamped
by worshipers and was sinking slowly into
the soft subsoil. So the new Basílica de Nuestra
Señora de Guadalupe (M La Villa-Basilica) was built
next door. Designed by Pedro Ramírez
Vázquez, architect of the Museo Nacional
de Antropología, it’s a vast, round, open-
plan structure with a capacity for over
40,000 people. The image of the Virgin
hangs above and behind the main altar,
with moving walkways to bring visitors as
close as possible.

The rear of the Antigua Basilica is now the
Museo de la Basílica de Guadalupe (Map pp110-11;
5577-6022; admission $0.50; 10am-6pm Tue-
Sun; M La Villa-Basilica), with a fine collection
of colonial art interpreting the miraculous
vision.

Stairs behind the Antigua Basilica climb
about 100m to the hilltop Capilla del Cerrito
(Hill Chapel), where Juan Diego had his
vision, then lead down the east side of
the hill to the Parque de la Ofrenda with
gardens and waterfalls around a sculpted
scene of the apparition. Continue on down
to the baroque Templo del Pocito, a circular
structure with a trio of tiled cupolas, built
in 1787 to commemorate the miraculous
appearance of a spring where the Virgen de
Guadalupe had stood. From there the route
leads back to the main plaza, re-entering
it beside the 17th-century Capilla de Indios
(Chapel of Indians).
An easy way to reach the Basílica de Guadalupe is to take the metro to La Villa-Basílica station, then walk two blocks north along Calz de Guadalupe. You can reach the same point on any ‘Metro Hidalgo–La Villa’ pesero or bus heading northeast on Paseo de la Reforma. To return downtown, walk to Calz de los Misterios, a block west of Calz de Guadalupe, and catch a southbound ‘Metro Hidalgo’ or ‘Metro Chapultepec’ pesero.

WALKING TOUR
The historical hub of all Mexico, the Centro Histórico is the most densely packed and fascinating part of the city and worthy of extended exploration. The obvious point of departure is the Zócalo. Take it all in from the terrace of the Hotel Majestic (1; p154) on the west side of the plaza, then investigate the sites around it: the Catedral Metropolitana (2; p128) and Palacio Nacional (3; p128).

Next strike east along Calle Moneda. The first building on the left contains Mexico’s first registered cantina, El Nivel (4; p166), ‘The Level.’ Next door is the former Archbishop’s Palace (5; p130) and further down Moneda is New Spain’s first mint, now home to the Museo Nacional de las Culturas (6; p130).

WALK FACTS
Distance: 2.5km
Duration: 3½ to 5 hours

Circling around the Palacio Nacional, you’re engulfed in the frenetic ambulante activity of the zone; vendor stalls spread for blocks in every direction. Return via Corregidora to the Zócalo. Crossing Pino Suárez, note the sculpted scene on your left depicting the foundation of Tenochtitlán (7). Stroll westward through the arcades that front the pair of buildings housing the Federal District Department (8) and continue along Calle 16 de Septiembre. On the Zócalo’s southwest corner stands the Porfiriato cupcake that is now the Gran Hotel Ciudad de México (9; p153). Turn right on La Palma; to your left is the Centro Joyero (10) with scores of gold and jewelry vendors.

Take a left up Av Madero, admiring the avenue’s panoply of majestic edifices. At the next intersection stands the baroque Iglesia de la Profesa (11; ☏ 5521-8362; Isabel la Católica 21), headquarters of the Jesuits until their expulsion in 1767. Next in line are the Palacio de Iturbide (12; p132) and the Iglesia de San Francisco (13; ☏ 5521-7731; Av Madero 7), a remnant of the vast Franciscan convent built over the site of Moctezuma’s private zoo in the 16th century and divvied up under the reform laws of the 1850s. The lion’s head at the southwest corner with Motolinía marks the level reached by the flood of 1629. Stop for refreshments at Sanborns inside the beautiful Casa de Azulejos (14; p132).

Proceed west to the Torre Latinoamericana (15; p132), where you could zoom up to the observation deck for the big picture.
Back at ground level, conclude the tour by taking a bench in the Alameda Central (16; p134) or attending a chamber music recital at the Palacio de Bellas Artes (17; p134).

COURSES
A number of institutes can help get your Spanish up to speed.
Alliant International University (Map pp118-19; 3 S264-2187; www.alliantmexico.edu; Álvaro Obregón 110, Roma; M Insurgentes) Small private US university offering various Spanish courses and activities for travelers and professionals ($120 to $160), plus degree programs with classes taught in English; also hosts guided cultural tours and open lectures and seminars.
Centro de Cultura Mexicana Para Extranjeros, Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana (Center of Mexican Culture for Foreigners; Map pp114-15; 3 S130-3386, toll-free from US or Canada 866-357-1671; www.ucsj.edu.mx/CCME; Izazaga 92; M Isabel la Católica) Two programs are offered at this 17th-century ex- convent turned progressive university (see p133): for beginners, a four-week summer-intensive Spanish course with a history, art and culture component taught in English ($1500 including lunch prepared by the university’s gastronomy students); and for those with some knowledge of Spanish, two- to three-month culture courses, taught in Spanish, on an eclectic range of topics, from 20th-century Mexican poetry to gastronomic spaces of Mexico ($250 to $400). Lodging can be arranged.
Centro de Enseñanza Para Extranjeros (Foreigners Teaching Center; 5 5622-2467; www.cepe.unam.mx; Universidad 3002, Ciudad Universitaria) The national university (see p143) offers six-week intensive classes meeting three hours daily ($300). Students who already speak Spanish may take courses on Mexican art and culture, which are taught in Spanish and run concurrently with the UNAM semester.

MEXICO CITY FOR CHILDREN
As elsewhere in Mexico, kids take center stage in the capital. Many theaters stage children’s plays and puppet shows on weekends and during school holidays, including the Centro Cultural del Bosque (p172) and the Centro Nacional de las Artes (p172). Cartoons are a staple at cinemas around town, including weekend matinees at the Cineteca Nacional (p170) and the hotel Condesa df (p157), though keep in mind that children’s films are often dubbed in Spanish (unlike other films which are subtitled). Consult the Niños sections of Tiempo Libre and Donde Ir magazines for current programs.

Museums often organize hands-on activities for kids, and the Museo Nacional de Arte (p131) offers children’s art workshops Saturday and Sunday.
Mexico City’s numerous parks and plazas are usually buzzing with kids’ voices. Bosque de Chapultepec is the obvious destination, with the Papalote Museo del Niño (p140), La Feria (p139) and the Chapultepec zoo (p138), not to mention several lakes with rowboat rentals. But also consider Condesa’s Parque México (p136), where Sunday is family activities day. There are craft workshops and face painting and you can rent bicycles for a spin around the lush grounds. Plaza Hidalgo (p144) in Coyoacán is another fun-filled spot with balloons, street mimes and cotton candy.

In Xochimilco (p141), kids find the sensation of riding the gondolas through the canals as magical as any theme park. Also in this part of town is the Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño (p141), where peacocks, ducks and a pack of pre-Hispanic dogs roam the gardens, and children’s shows are performed in the patio Saturday and Sunday at 1pm.
Be sure to take the kids through a market for an eye-opening tour of local fruits, piñatas and pig’s heads.

QUIRKY MEXICO CITY
Anyone who’s spent time in Mexico will understand why French poet André Bretón called it ‘the surrealist country par excellence.’ Though it’s hard to pin it down, something strange lurks beneath the surface of everyday life, popping up in the oddest places.
El Cuadrilátero (see p159) Owned by luchador (wrestler) Super Astro, it features a wall of wrestlers’ masks, many donated by his ring pals and enemies.
Isla de las Muñecas (Island of the Dolls) For a truly surreal experience, head for Xochimilco (p141) and hire a trajinera to the Isla de las Muñecas. Whatever festive mood you may have set out with will turn to dread approaching this remote spot, where thousands of dolls, many partially decomposed or missing limbs, hang from trees and rafters. The installation was created by recently deceased island resident don Julián, who fished the playthings from the canals to mollify the spirit of a girl who had drowned nearby. The best departure point for the four-hour round-trip is the Cuemanco landing, near the Parque Ecológico de Xochimilco.
Mercado de Sonora (Map pp110-11; cnr Fray Servando & Rosales; M Merced) Has all the ingredients for Mexican witchcraft. Aisles are crammed with stalls hawking things
like Lucky Hunchback potion, amulets, voodoo dolls and other esoterica. Located south of Mercado de la Merced, this is also the place for a limpia (spiritual cleansing), a ritual that involves clouds of incense and an herbal brushing.

**Plaza Sex Capital** (Map pp114-15; 5518-7337; Av 16 de Septiembre 11; 11am-9pm; San Juan de Letrán) In a country not usually associated with libidinous expression, Plaza Sex Capital is on the cusp of naughty consumerism. Devoted entirely to the erotic urge, this new shopping mall features scores of sex shops, a 3-D cinema and a sex museum, plus a food court with exotic dancers to spice up your salsa.

**Virgen del Metro** (Map pp114-15; cnr Paseo de la Reforma & Zarco; Hidalgo) Housed in a small tiled shrine is this evidence of a recent miracle. Metro riders in June 1997 noticed that a water leak in Hidalgo station had formed a stain in the likeness of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Following the discovery, thousands flocked to witness the miraculous image. The stone section was removed and encased in glass at the Zarco entrance to metro Hidalgo.

**TOURS**

**Recorridos Dominicales** (5662-8228, ext 526; www.cultura.df.gob.mx/culturama/visitasguiadas; 10:45am-1pm Sun) The DF cultural ministry offers Sunday walking tours. Routes vary weekly with participants divided among 10 guides. The website lists the week’s destination and departure point.

**Tranvía** (5512-1012, ext 0202; adult/child $3.25/2; 10am-5pm) Runs a motorized version of a vintage streetcar around a 45-minute circuit of the Centro Histórico, with guides relating fascinating bits of lore (in Spanish) along the way. On Thursday night there’s a special cantina tour ($9.50 including cocktail, reservation required). Tours depart from Av Juárez by Bellas Artes.

**Turibús Circuito Turístico** (5133-2488; www.turibus.com.mx in Spanish; adult/child 4-12 $11/6, 2-day pass $15/8; 9am-9pm) Provides an overview of the key areas. The total recorrido (route) lasts about three hours, but you can get off and back on at any designated stop along the way. Tickets are sold on board for the red double-decker bus. Red banners mark stops along Reforma, at the southwest corner of the Zócalo, and by the Auditorio Nacional, among other places. Buses pass every 30 minutes or so. The fare includes headphones for recorded explanations in English, French, Italian, German or Japanese.

**FESTIVALS & EVENTS**

Mexico City celebrates some unique local events in addition to all the major nationwide festivals (see p976), which often take on a special flavor in the capital.

**Festival de México en el Centro Histórico** (www.fchmexico.com; late March) The Centro Histórico’s plazas, temples and theaters become venues for a slew of international artists and performers.

**Semana Santa** (late March or early April) The most evocative events of Holy Week are in the Iztapalapa district, THE SAINT OF TEPITO

Garbed in a gold-trimmed white gown, wearing a wig of dark tresses and clutching the staff of the Grim Reaper in one bony hand, a scale in the other, the skeletal figure bears an eerie resemblance to Mrs Bates from the film *Psycho*. She is Santa Muerte (Saint Death) and she is the object of a fast-growing cult in Mexico, particularly in the rough Barrio Tepito, where the principal altar (Map pp110-11; Tepito) stands in a glass booth on Alfarería north of Mineros. Possibly rooted in pre-Hispanic ritual, Santa Muerte has been linked to Mictlantecuhtli, the Mexican god of death.

The cult counts an estimated two million members in Mexico, who tend to come from society’s lower economic echelons. On the first day of each month, as many as 6000 devotees line up at the Tepito altar, which is surrounded by candles, cigarettes, jewelry and various relics that can be purchased nearby.

The saint’s popularity is feared to be rivaling that of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and for that very reason the Roman Catholic Church has harshly denounced the cult and sought to have its official status removed.

Calling itself the Traditional Catholic Mex-USA Church, the cross-border sect has 15 temples in Los Angeles and one in Mexico City. The **Santuario Nacional de la Santa Muerte** (National Sanctuary of Saint Death; Map pp110-11; 5702-8607; Bravo 35; 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun; Morelos), in the Morelos neighborhood near Tepito, sees around 90 worshipers a day. Exorcisms are held Thursday at noon and 6pm.

While the altar and sanctuary are open to the public, travelers who choose to visit either site should be aware that the Tepito neighborhood is notorious among Mexicans as a scene of criminal activity and that church members may not welcome the scrutiny of curious onlookers.
9km southeast of the Zócalo, where more than 150 locals act out a realistic Passion Play. The most emotive scenes begin at noon on Good Friday, when Christ is sentenced, beaten and crowned with real thorns. He then carries his cross up Cerro de la Estrella, where he is ‘crucified.’

**Grito de la Independencia** (September 15) Thousands gather in the Zócalo on the eve of Independence Day to hear the Mexican president’s version of the Grito de Dolores (Cry of Dolores), Hidalgo’s famous call to rebellion against the Spanish in 1810, from the central balcony of the Palacio Nacional at 11pm. Afterwards, there’s a spectacular fireworks display over the cathedral.

**Día de Muertos** (November 2) In the lead-up to Day of the Dead, elaborate ofrendas (offerings) show up everywhere from public markets to metro stations. Some of the best are at Anahuacalli (p146) and the Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño (p141), while a contest for the most creative ofrenda is held at the Zócalo. Major vigils take place in the Panteón Civil de Dolores cemetery, west of Bosque de Chapultepec; and at San Andres Mixquic, in the extreme southeast of the Distrito Federal.

**Fiesta de Santa Cecilia** (November 22) The patron saint of musicians is honored with special fervor at Plaza Garibaldi (Map pp114–15).

**Día de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe** (December 12) At the Basílica de Guadalupe (p148), the Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe caps 10 days of festivities honoring Mexico’s religious patron. On December 11 and 12, groups of indigenous dancers and musicians from across Mexico perform on the basilica’s broad plaza in uninterrupted succession. The numbers of pilgrims reach the millions by December 12, when religious services go on in the basilica almost around the clock.

**SLEEPING**

The range of places to stay is enormous, from basic guesthouses to top-flight hotels. Accommodations are described here first by neighborhood, then by price range.

In general, the best moderately priced rooms are in the areas west of the Zócalo, near the Alameda Central and Plaza de la República. These are sometimes in charming old colonial style with high ceilings and attractive balconies. Several hostels geared to international budget travelers provide another economical option.

Midrange accommodations provide comfortable, if sometimes small, rooms in multistorey buildings with restaurants and bars. They often trade character for modern convenience. Hotels in this category are concentrated in the Plaza de la República and Roma neighborhoods, though they’re found all over town. Note that places with the word ‘garage’ on the sign generally cater to short-term tryst-seeking guests, but these ‘love motels’ can be good-value options.

Top-end hotel rooms run from $85 up to the sky and range from comfortable medium-sized, tourist-oriented hotels to modern luxury high-rises for business travelers. Top-end places are most densely concentrated in the Zona Rosa and Polanco.

**Centro Histórico**

Despite ongoing investment and improvements in the Historic Center, accommodations remain surprisingly affordable. Most of the suitable places are on Av 5 de Mayo and the streets to its north and south.

**BUDGET**

**Hostel Catedral** (Map pp114-15;  5518-1726; www.hostelcatedral.com; República de Guatemala 4; dm HI members/nonmembers $10/13, r incl breakfast $33;  Zócalo;  Backpacker central in Mexico City, the capital’s only HI affiliate is abuzz with a global rainbow of young travelers. Every facility you might need is here, the location couldn’t be more central and the place is cordially managed. Off the guest kitchen, a delightful deck overlooks the cathedral.

**Hotel Isabel** (Map pp114-15;  5518-1213; www.hotel-isabel.com.mx; Isabel la Católica 63; s/d from $18/20;  ) The Isabel is a long-time budget-traveler’s favorite, and it’s easy to see why. Just a few blocks from the Zócalo, it offers large, well-scrubbed rooms with old but sturdy furniture, high ceilings and great balconies, plus a hostel-like social scene.

**Hostal Virreyes** (Map pp114-15;  5521-4180; www.hostalvirreyes.com.mx; Izazaga 8; dm $10, r $23;  Salto del Agua;  ) Once a prestigious hotel, the Virreyes has quite naturally morphed into a hostel–student residence. Dorms are spacious, facilities user-friendly, and the lobby lounge hosts hip events. An ISIC card will get you a 10% discount.

**Hotel Rioja** (Map pp114-15;  5521-8333; Av 5 de Mayo 45; s/d from $18/20;  Allende) A superior value, the Rioja is a well–maintained lodging in the middle of everything. Unlike at many hotels in this category, the owners have invested in renovations, and the quality of its facilities matches those of places at twice the price.
Hostel Amigo (Map pp114-15;  tel 5512-3464; www.hostelamigo.com; Isabel la Católica 61A; dm $10, r incl breakfast $30; M Isabel la Católica) This brand-new hostel occupies a lovingly preserved 250-year-old former nuns’ residence. The atmosphere is casual, with coy common areas, and if you like to party you’ll find plenty of amigos and amigas who share your interest.

Hostal Moneda (Map pp114-15;  tel 5522-5821, 800-221-72-65; www.hostalmoneda.com.mx; Moneda 8; dm $13, r incl breakfast $27; M Zócalo) Sitting on one of the city’s most exuberant and historic streets, the Moneda is an altogether more modest affair than the nearby Hostel Catedral, but it has been established longer, and has its faithful fans. Chief among its assets are the well-informed, bilingual staff, environmentally friendly water and energy systems, and a terrific multi-purpose rooftop. There are also laundry facilities and an airport pick-up service.

Hotel Azores (Map pp114-15;  tel 5521-5220; www.hotelaazores.com; República de Brasil 25; s/d from $24/28; M Zócalo; P) Just off the fascinating Plaza Santo Domingo, the uncharacteristically modern Azores boasts a cheerily designed and scrupulously maintained interior. Of the 65 rooms, just eight overlook the street through picture windows.

Hotel Washington (Map pp114-15;  tel 5512-3502; Av 5 de Mayo 54; s/d $19/24; M Allende) If you’re sticking to a budget but don’t want to sacrifice comfort, and prefer to be right in the middle of things, the Washington will do nicely, and you’ll likely be amid similar-minded travelers.

Hotel Zamora (Map pp114-15;  tel 5512-8245; Av 5 de Mayo 50; s/d $10.50/14, with private bathroom $18/21; M Allende) Absolutely no frills here, but it’s clean, friendly and cheap, with hot showers and a safe. Ask for a front room: the balconies over Av 5 de Mayo are worth the price alone.

Hotel Juárez (Map pp114-15;  tel 5512-6929; 1a Callejón de 5 de Mayo 17; s/d $15/19; M Allende) Nestled in an L-shaped alley, the Juárez is another incredibly cheap but perfectly good choice in the thick of things, though just out-of-the-way enough to ensure a tranquilo night’s sleep. True, its feng shui may need an overhaul, but the shoestring travelers who regularly check in here don’t seem to mind. Try and get a balcony onto the main street.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Catedral (Map pp114-15;  tel 5518-5232; www.hotelcatedral.com; Donceles 95; s/d/tr from $38/52/68; M Zócalo; P) Though short on colonial charm, this comfortable lodging has clearly considered its location, directly behind the Metropolitan Cathedral. Even if you get an interior room, you can lounge on the rooftop terraces, with impressive cityscapes in all directions.

Hotel Gillow (Map pp114-15;  tel 5518-1440; www.hotellillow.com; Isabel la Católica 17; s/d/tr from $39/51/61; M Allende; P) A historic building with standard midrange facilities, the Gillow boasts old-fashioned service and spacious carpeted rooms around a sunlit central courtyard. For views, request a Av 5 de Mayo or Isabel la Católica unit.

Tulip Inn Ritz (Map pp114-15;  tel 5130-0160, 800-201-52-56; www.tulipinnritzmexico.com; Madero 30; r $75; M Bellas Artes; P) Popular with Euro groups on tour who appreciate its prime location, simpático staff and modern conveniences, the 70-year-old Ritz was recently spruced up by new overseers from Holland. About half of the 117 large rooms overlook Madero or Bolívar, while the rest face a tranquil patio.

Hotel Capitol (Map pp114-15;  tel 5512-0460; República de Uruguay 12; s/d $30/37; M San Juan de Letrán; P) Opposite the computer shopping center, this friendly establishment offers plain rooms around a central hall with fountain. Romantically inclined guests often opt for the Jacuzzi-equipped suites.

TOP END

Gran Hotel Ciudad de México (Map pp114-15;  tel 1083-7700; reservaciones@granhotelciudaddemexico.com.mx; Av 16 de Septiembre 82; s/d $228/269; M Zócalo; P) The Gran Hotel flaunts the French art-nouveau style of the pre-revolutionary era. Crowned high overhead by a stained-glass canopy crafted by Tiffany in 1908, the vast atrium is a fin-de-siècle fantasy of curved balconies, original wrought-iron elevators and chirping birds in zoosized cages. Rooms do not disappoint in comparison.

Holiday Inn Zócalo (Map pp114-15;  tel 5130-5130, 800-009-99-00; www.holidayinnzocalo.com.mx; Av 5 de Mayo 61; r $100, ste from $147; M Zócalo; P) The northernmost of three upper-echelon hotels facing the Zócalo, the Holiday Inn seems the least pretentious, eschewing colonial
trimmings for contemporary comfort. And its rooftop-terrace restaurant ranks with those of its neighbors.

Hotel Majestic (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5521-8600; www.hotelmajestic.com.mx; Madero 73; r $130, ste from $175; M Zócalo; P X Q) This Best Western franchise has a lot going for it, including an attractive colonial interior, an unbeatable location and perhaps the most panoramic terrace restaurant on the Zócalo. Rooms, however, are less fabulous than you’d expect at these prices.

Alameda Central & Around

BUDGET

Hotel Toledo (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5521-3249; López 22; s/d $17/25; M San Juan de Letrán) The area is in transition, but this older establishment remains rooted in another era. Though teetering on the edge of divedom, the place is cozy enough and some may appreciate its retro style.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Monte Real (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5518-1149; www.hotelmontereal.com.mx; Revillagigedo 23; s/d $48/54; M Juárez; P O) This modern option, across the way from the new Museo de Artes Populares, gets high marks for its eager-to-please staff and well-maintained facilities. Similarly unremarkable but perfectly comfortable places with decent restaurants abound in this zone.

Hotel Fleming (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5510-4530; www.hotelfleming.com.mx; Revillagigedo 35; s/d/tr $30/36/41; M Juárez; P )

Hotel Marlowe (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5521-9540; www.hotelmarlowe.com.mx in Spanish; Independencia 17; s/d/tr $40/47/62; M San Juan de Letrán; P X Q)

TOP-END

Hotel Sheraton Centro Histórico (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5130-5252, 800-470-70-70; www.sheratonmexico.com; Juárez 70; r from $350; M Hidalgo; P X Q) A cornerstone in the downtown redevelopment project, the sleek Sheraton towers above quiant Alameda Central. Most travelers are here on business, but anyone desiring a dose of comfort and sublime cityscapes should be more than satisfied. At the time of writing a huge spa was being developed, with saunas, massage clinic and fitness center.

Hotel de Cortés (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5518-2181, 800-509-23-40; www.hoteldecorcetes.com.mx; Hidalgo 85; s/d $152/217; M Hidalgo; X Q) Once a hospice for pilgrims of the Augustinian order, this Best Western property has a long history of sheltering travelers, with rooms encircling a lovely late-18th-century patio. If you don’t mind the price tag, staying here will give you a genuine taste of colonial Mexico.

Plaza de la República & Around

Though less convenient, this mainly residential area a few blocks west of the Alameda is relatively tranquil and boasts a number of reasonably priced accommodations options.

BUDGET

Casa de los Amigos (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5705-0521; www.casadelosamigos.org; Mariscal 132; dm $9.50, s/d with shared bathroom $12/24; M Revolución; X Q) Not technically a hostel, the Quaker-run Casa is primarily a residence for NGOs, researchers and others seeking social change, but welcomes walk-in travelers. It generally attracts a more serious individual than the average hostel and thus has a more low-key atmosphere. Meditation sessions, discussions with community members and Spanish conversation are available to guests, who may volunteer to help run the Casa for a reduced rate. A hearty breakfast ($1.50) is served Monday to Friday in the ground-floor dining room. There’s a two-night minimum stay.

THE AUTHOR’S CHOICE

Mexico City Hostel (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5512-3666; www.mexicocityhostel.com; República de Brasil 8; dm $13, private r per person $18; M Allende; X Q) Amid a slew of hostel options in the Centro, this just-unwrapped addition stands out. Steps from the Zócalo, the solid colonial structure has been artfully restored, with original wood beams and stone walls as a backdrop for modern energy-efficient facilities. An enormous mural graces the sunlit entry hall, with stone arches framing passages to cafeteria and TV rooms on the upper levels. In the spacious dorms, three or four sturdy bunk beds stand on terracotta floors. Immaculate bathrooms trimmed with azulejo tile amply serve around 100 occupants. Rates include a buffet breakfast.
**Hotel Oxford** (Map pp114-15; 5566-0500; Mariscal 67; s/d $10.50/17; M Revolución) Some find a special allure in this art-deco remnant of 1940s Mexico City which sits on the delightful Plaza Buenavista behind the Museo de San Carlos. Others just call it a dive. If it’s seedy charm you’re after, the Oxford’s bar will do nicely, and they’ll send up drinks until 4am.

Also worth checking is:

**Hotel Mallorca** (Map pp114-15; 5566-4833; Serapio Rendón 119; s/d from $23/27; M San Cosme; P) Doubles come in two sizes.

**MIDRANGE**

Almost all of the following places have convenient on-site restaurants serving ‘international’ cuisine.

**Palace Hotel** (Map pp114-15; 5566-2400; Ramírez 7; s/d $32/48; M Revolución; P) The gregarious Asturians who run the Palace have renovated massively, highlighting the spacious rooms with appealing Mexican tones. Broad balconies give terrific views down palm-lined Ramírez to the Plaza de la Revolución. Cash-paying guests get substantial discounts.

**Hotel Sevilla** (Map pp114-15; 5566-1866; www.sevilla.com.mx; Serapio Rendón 124; s/d $25/35, ‘modern’ s/d $41/51; M San Cosme; P) Opposite the Jardin del Arte this oft-recommended business hotel is divided into ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ sections. Rooms in the latter are air-conditioned with some facing the Monumento a la Madre (Monument to Motherhood).

**Hotel New York** (Map pp114-15; 5566-9700; Edson 45; s/d $29/48; M Revolución; P) A few blocks northeast of Plaza de la República, this is an upscale option in a zone crammed with cut-rate hotels. Rates include breakfast and four Sky channels.

**Hotel Casa Blanca** (Map pp114-15; 5096-4500; www.hotelcasablanca.com.mx; Lafragua 7; s/d $64/81; M Juárez; P X X) Here’s a five-star hotel with all the trimmings for much less than the chains. A sexy new lobby bar jazzes up the otherwise ’60s ambience, with a pink color scheme in the 270 rooms. Bonus: a rooftop pool with adjacent lounge.

**Hotel Mayaland** (Map pp114-15; 5566-6066; www.hotelmayaland.com; Antonio Caso 23; s/d $36/47; M Juárez; P) A business-oriented hotel on a rather sterile street, this has well-maintained facilities with a Maya motif.

**Hotel Jena** (Map pp114-15; 5097-0277; Terán 12; s/d/tr $64/74/95; M Hidalgo; P X X) Not as tall as it looks (the imposing black tower is strictly for show), the Jena’s huge rooms are among the most luxurious in this range, and it’s just a block and a half from Reforma.

**Hotel Prim** (Map pp114-15; 5592-4600; www.hotelprim.com; Versalles 46; s/d $54/62, ste $77; M Cuauhtémoc; P) The hulking Prim does not present an attractive facade, but it’s decent value and a quick hike from Reforma, the Zona Rosa or Colonia Roma. The junior suites are the best deal, with cozy living rooms, huge beds and two bathrooms.

The following two lodgings are along Serapio Rendón, just above the Jardín del Arte. What they lack in character they make up for in convenience, comfort and price.

**Hotel Compostela** (Map pp114-15; 5566-0733; Sullivan 35; traditional s/d $26/32, modern $35/40; M San Cosme; P) Friendliest of the two; ‘modern’ rooms are more luxurious, with bigger bathrooms.

**Hotel Astor** (Map pp114-15; 5148-2644; hotel.astor@mexico.com; Antonio Caso 83; s/d $35/45; M San Cosme; P X X)

**TOP END**

**Hotel Imperial** (Map pp114-15; 5705-4911, 800-714-29-09; Paseo de la Reforma 64; r $152; M Hidalgo; X X) The century-old Imperial is an immediately recognizable cake wedge of a building, with a gold cupola crowning its front turret. The dictator Porfirio Díaz unwrapped this chichi edifice in 1904, and it remains a refreshingly stylish structure alongside the monolithic chain hotels in the vicinity of the Columbus traffic circle. Unfortunately, room decor fails to match the building’s Porfirian splendor.

**Hotel Sevilla Palace** (Map pp114-15; 5566-8877, 800-700-70-70; www.sevillapalace.com.mx; Paseo de la Reforma 105; r $115, ste from $165; M San Cosme; P X X) While it’s neither quaint nor cutting edge, this 400-room monolith is extremely comfortable and well-run with unusually cordial service, as well as a pretty amazing rooftop pool deck.

**Zona Rosa & Around**

Accommodations right in the glitzy Pink Zone are expensive, but a couple of popular midrange places are nearby (book ahead).

Many of the top-end options offer discounts for walk-ins.
BUDGET
Hostal San Sebastián (Map pp118-19; 5208-6528; sansebastianhostal@hotmail.com; Estolícomo 29; dm $11, s/d with shared bathroom $22/32; M Insurgentes; M) Appropriately for the area, this is a gay-oriented hostel, though any open-minded traveler is welcome. There are plenty of good reasons to stay here, whatever your orientation, among them a great location, stylish decor and well-maintained facilities. On weekends, the hostel’s Mitomaniá Café turns into a cabaret.

Villa H (Map pp118-19; 5208-5880; www.geocities.com/villahmx; Génova 30-H; dm $12, s/d incl breakfast $23/32; M Insurgentes; P) Casual but fastidiously maintained, this new hostel in a cul-de-sac off party corridor Génova should appeal to fun-loving travelers and neatness freaks alike. The environment is gay-friendly but open to all.

MIDRANGE
Casa González (Map pp118-19; 5514-3302; casa.gonzalez@prodigy.net.mx; Río Sena 69; s/d from $32/41; M Insurgentes; M) A family-run operation for nearly a century, the Casa is a perennial favorite for long-term stays, offering ‘suites’ that are essentially studio apartments with kitchens.

Hotel Maria Cristina (Map pp118-19; 5703-1212; Río Lerma 31; s/d from $61/67; M Insurgentes or Chilpancingo; P M) Guests appreciate the grandeur and tranquility of this facsimile of an Andalusian estate, though most of the colonial charm has been poured into the lobby lounge and adjacent gardens rather than the rooms.

Hotel Bristol (Map pp118-19; 5208-1717; www.hotelbristol.com.mx; Plaza Necaxa 17; s/d/ste from $52/60/69; M Chilpancingo; P M M) A good-value option in the pleasant but central Cuauhtémoc neighborhood, the Bristol caters primarily to business travelers, offering quality carpet, a soothing color scheme and an above-average restaurant.

TOP END
Four Seasons Hotel (Map pp118-19; 5230-1818; www.fourseasons.com/mexico; Paseo de la Reforma 500; r $363-480; M Chapultepec; P M M M) One of the city’s most elegant lodgings, the Four Seasons was designed to resemble a French-Mexican late-19th-century structure, with aristocratically furnished rooms facing a beautifully landscaped central courtyard.

Sheraton Maria Isabel Hotel (Map pp118-19; 5242-5555, in the US 800-598-1753; www.sheraton.com/mariaisabel); Paseo de la Reforma 325; r from $299; M Insurgentes; P M M M M) Overlooking the Independence monument and next door to the US embassy, the Sheraton’s two towers have accommodated businesspeople, diplomats and journalists for over three decades. Among its varied attractions are a rooftop pool, fitness center, Starbucks branch and nightly mariachis. About half of the 755 rooms were redone in 2004.

Condesa & Roma
BUDGET
Hostel Home (Map pp118-19; 5511-1683; www.hostelhome.com.mx; Tabasco 303; dm student/nonstudent $9.50/10; M Insurgentes; P) Housed in a fine Porfirato-era building, this small (20-bed) hostel is on narrow tree-lined Calle Tabasco, a tranquil gateway to the Roma neighborhood. Managed by youthful, easygoing staff, the Home is a good place to meet other travelers and find out what’s going on. Catch metrobus ‘Álvaro Obregón.’

Hotel Embassy (Map pp118-19; 5208-0859; Puebla 115; s/d/tr $25/30/33; M Insurgentes; P) Despite a charmless location, this well-maintained modern lodging is conveniently placed a couple of blocks from the metro, and right next door to the excellent Cantina Covadonga (see p169).

MIDRANGE
Casa de la Condesa (Map pp118-19; 5574-3186; reservations@extendedstaymexico.com; Plaza Luis Cabrera 16; s/ste $43/80; M Insurgentes; P) Right on the delightful Plaza Luis Cabrera, the Casa makes a tranquil base for visitors on an extended stay, offering ‘suites’ that are essentially studio apartments with kitchens.

Hotel Milán (Map pp118-19; 5584-0222; www.hotelmilan.com.mx; Álvaro Obregón 94; s/d $53/40; M Insurgentes; P M) The Milán makes a good place to land in Mexico City. Though lacking in character, it’s comfortable and well-maintained and sits on the main corridor of bohemian Colonia Roma.

Hotel Park Villa (Map pp118-19; 5515-5245; www.hotelparkvilla.com.mx; General Gómez Pedraza 68; s/d $48/64; M Juanacatlán; P) The Park Villa is the only lodging on the Condesa side of
Bosque de Chapultepec. Just across from the vast swath of greenery, the hotel is in a self-contained compound with its own peaceful garden restaurant and a tiny zoo containing a couple of sleepy lions.

**Hotel Roosevelt** (Map pp118-19; 5208-6813; www.hotelroosevelt.com.mx; Insurgentes Sur 287; s/d from $36/51/59; M Insurgentes; P) On the eastern edge of Condesa, this functional hotel is the only midpriced option near the modish nightlife zone. Also within easy reach of the Cuban club district, it should appeal to nocturnally inclined travelers. Catch metrobus ‘Álvaro Obregón.’

**Hotel Parque Ensenada** (Map pp118-19; 5208-0052; www.hotelensenada.com.mx; Álvaro Obregón 13; s/d from $54/58; M Cuauhtémoc; P) Though not exactly innovative in design, the Puebla, on the eastern edge of Colonia Roma, is squeaky clean, cordially managed and extremely quiet.

### TOP END

**La Casita** (Map pp118-19; 5286-3001; www.hottellacasita.com.mx; Durango 280; r incl breakfast $150; M Sevilla; C) This stately mansion was restored to its early-20th-century splendor to become one of the capital’s most distinctive boutique hotels. Each of the 29 rooms has been uniquely appointed to bring out its original charm.

**Condesa df** (Map pp118-19; 5241-2600; www.condesadf.com; Veracruz 102; r from $182; M Chapultepec; ) Opened in 2005, this c 1920s structure has been quirkily made over in a style that perfectly reflects the hip ‘new Condesa.’ Every detail has been specially crafted, from the peanut-shaped coffee tables to the globular lampshades over the bar, already one of Condesa’s trendiest nightspots (see the boxed text, p168).

**Polanco**

North of Bosque de Chapultepec, this area has some of the best business accommodations and a couple of excellent boutique hotels.

**Camino Real México** (Map pp120-1; 5263-8888; www.caminoreal.com; Calz Mariano Escobedo 700; r $215; M Auditorio or Chapultepec; P X X ) With over 700 rooms and covering 33,000 sq meters of grounds, the Camino Real is a monumental endeavor. It’s also a national architectural landmark, boldly designed by Mexican Ricardo Legorreta.

**Habita Hotel** (Map pp120-1; 5282-3100; www.hotelhabita.com; Presidente Masaryk 201; s/d from $228/310/369; M Polanco; P X X ) Mexican architect Enrique Norten turned a functional apartment building into one of the city’s top boutique hotels. Decor in the 36 rooms is boldly minimal, and the sleek rooftop bar, Area, is Polanco’s hottest nightspot (see p169).

**W Mexico City Hotel** (Map pp120-1; 9138-1800; www.whotels.com; Campos Elíseos 252; r from $397; M Auditorio; P X X ) One of the four sentinels opposite the Auditorio Nacional, Latin America’s first W is a 25-floor business hotel that’s determined to break away from the stodginess of its neighbors.

### Southern Districts

**Hostal Cactus** (Map pp110-11; 5530-0839; hostalcactus@yahoo.com; La Quemada 76; dm $10; M Etiopia) This homey hostel is in Colonia Narvarte, a pleasant residential zone that is well connected to both the Centro and Coyoacán. Staying here, you’re essentially sharing a home with a few dozen other travelers in a very casual setting.

**El Cenote Azul** (Map pp110-11; 5554-8730; www.elcenoiteazul.com; Alfonso Pruneda 24; dm $9; M Copilco) This small, laid-back hostel is one of the only accommodations near the UNAM campus. Conditions are backpacker basic but everything is kept quite clean and comfortable.

### Airport

**Camino Real Aeropuerto** (Map pp110-11; 5277-7200; www.caminoreal.com/aeropuerto; Puerto México 80; r $210; P X X ) For early-morning departures, the hotel is conveniently connected by sky-tunnel to the airport’s domestic terminal.

### EATING

The capital offers eateries for all tastes and budgets, from taco stalls to exclusive restaurants. Some of the best places are cheap; some of the more expensive ones are well worth the extra money.

The center is a good area to sample chiles en nogada (large, mild poblano chilies stuffed with a ground-meat filling containing fruits,
nuts and spices, and covered with a sauce of cream, cheese and walnuts), mole poblano (Puebla-style mole; a traditional stew) or other traditional Mexican fare, while Condesa, Polanco and Roma offer plenty of European, Asian and Argentine restaurants (see the boxed text, p165). Those on a budget will find literally thousands of restaurants and holes-in-the-wall serving a comida corrida (set lunch) for as little as $3. Market buildings are good places to look for these while tianguis (weekly street markets) customarily have an eating section offering tacos, barbacoa (Mexican-style barbecue) and quesadillas (cheese folded between tortillas and fried or grilled). See also the boxed text, opposite.

Certain items can be found all over town. In the evening tamales are delivered by bicycle, their arrival heralded by an eerie moan through a cheap speaker. You’ll know the camote (sweet potato) man is coming by the ear-splitting steam whistle emitting from his cart, heard for blocks around. The same vendor offers delicious baked plantains, laced with cream on request.

The city is also peppered with modern chain restaurants whose predictable menus make a sound, if unexciting, fallback. Branches of VIPS, Sanborns, Wings and California restaurants serve US-style coffee-shop fare and Mexican standards. International chains, from KFC to Starbucks, are well represented, too.

**Centro Histórico**

Perhaps the quintessential Mexico City experience is dining or sipping cocktails overlooking the vast Zócalo with the Mexican tricolor waving proudly over the scene. The three upscale hotels overlooking the plaza offer abundant buffet breakfasts most days, although the food isn’t as spectacular as the vista. If it’s not too busy you can enjoy the view for the price of a drink.

**QUICK EATS**

Taquería Beatriz (Map pp114-15; tacos $1; 9am-5pm; San Juan de Letrán) This unassuming hole-in-the-wall, opposite Uruguay 31, has served outstanding tacos for nearly a century. Rajas (sliced peppers), mole, chicharrón (fried pork skins) in salsa and other items are skillfully stuffed into handmade tortillas.

Tacos de Canasta Chucho (Map pp114-15; 5521-0280; Av 5 de Mayo 17A; tacos $0.35; 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat; Allende) These bite-sized tacos are filled with things like refried beans, chicharrón and mole (just the sauce), and arranged in a big basket. A couple of pails contain the garnishes: spicy guacamole and marinated carrot chunks and chilies.

**BUDGET**

Restaurante Dzib (Map pp114-15; 5709-9402; Regina 54-C; set lunch $2.75; 8am-6pm Mon-Sat; Isabel la Católica) This deceptively large dining hall must be the ultimate comida corrida joint, serving toothsome four-course lunches. Friday is seafood day.

Vegetariano Madero (Map pp114-15; 5521-6880; Madero 56; 4-course lunches $4; 8am-7pm; Allende; V) Despite the austere entrance, there’s a lively restaurant upstairs where a pianist plinks out old favorites. The meatless menu includes tasty variations on Mexican standards. Balcony seating lets you observe the street activity.

Restaurante Vegetariano (Mappp114-15; 5521-1895; Mata 13; 8am-10pm; Allende) This more modern, street-level branch of Vegetariano Madero is near the main restaurant.

Café El Popular (Map pp114-15; 5518-6081; Av 5 de Mayo 52; breakfast & set lunches $2.50-4; 24hr; Allende) An amazing number of people squeeze into this tiny split-level café. Fresh pastries and good combination breakfasts (fruit, eggs, frijoles – beans – and coffee) are the main attractions. Café con leche (coffee with milk; $1) is served chino style (ie you specify the strength).

Café La Blanca (Map pp114-15; 5510-9260; Av 5 de Mayo 40; 3-course lunch $4.75; Allende) White-coated waiters and orange upholstery set the tone for this 1960s’ relic offering hearty breakfasts and daily lunch specials. Sit at the U-shaped counter or grab a table by the window for people-watching over a cappuccino ($1.75). Be sure to sample the tamales de nata – sweet with a hint of anise.

**MIDRANGE & TOP END**

Half the fun of eating in the Centro Histórico is basking in the atmosphere of some extraordinary colonial buildings.

Los Girasoles (Map pp114-15; 5510-0630; Tacuba 8A; starters from $3, main courses $8.50-13; 1pm-midnight Tue-Sat, 1-9pm Sun & Mon; Allende; P) Beside the Museo Nacional de Arte, this fine...
restaurant specializes in *alta cocina mexicana*. The menu boasts an encyclopedic range of Mexican fare, from pre-Hispanic (ant larvae), to colonial (turkey in tamarind mole), to innovative (snapper fillet in rose-hip salsa).

**La Casa de las Sirenas** (Map pp114-15; % 5704-3225; República de Guatemala 32; main courses $12-15, desserts $4; ☑ 1-6pm Mon, 1-11pm Tue-Fri, 8am-11pm Sat, 8am-6pm Sun; M Zócalo) Ensconced in a 17th-century home behind the cathedral, this atmospheric restaurant serves creatively prepared and attractively presented Mexican cuisine. Dinner on the terrace might start with mushrooms sautéed in *chipotle* (a type of chili), followed by a sesame sea bass, then corn flan. And to drink? Some 180 varieties of tequila ($3 to $10 a shot) are served in the downstairs salons.

**El Cuadrilátero** (Map pp114-15; % 5521-3060; Luis Moya 73; Luis Moya 73; ☑ 7am-8pm Mon-Sat; M Juárez) Not just wrestlers, but also ordinary denizens of the Centro frequent this shrine to *lucha libre*, famous for its gigantic tortas, versions of which are displayed at the entrance. If you manage to consume a 1.3kg cholesterol-packed Torta Gladiador in 15 minutes, it’s free.

**La Fonda del Hotentote** (Map pp114-15; % 5522-1025; Las Cruces 40-3; dishes $8-12; ☑ lunch Sun-Fri; M Pino Suárez) In the wholesale-paper district southeast of the Palacio Nacional, this lunchtime-only *comedor* (eating place)

### MARKET FARE

Some of the best eating in Mexico City is not found in any restaurant but in the big covered *mercados* and *tianguis* (weekly street markets).

- **Mercado San Camilito** (Map pp114-15; Plaza Garibaldi; pozole $3.75; ☑ 24hr; M Garibaldi) The block-long building contains over 70 kitchens serving Jalisco-style *pozole*, a broth brimming with hominy kernels and pork, served with garnishes like radishes and oregano. (Specify *maciza* if pig noses and ears fail to excite you.) Also served are *birria*, a soulful goat stew, and *tepache*, a fermented pineapple drink.

- **Mercado Medellín** (Map pp118-19; Coahuila, btwn Medellín & Monterrey; M Chilpancingo) Features an extensive eating area with cheap and filling *comidas corridas*, as well as several excellent seafood restaurants.

- **Parrillada Bariloche** (Map pp118-19; Bazar de Oro; ☑ Wed, Sat & Sun; M Insurgentes) This stall along the southern aisle of an upscale street market grills some of the least-expensive Uruguayan-style steaks and sausages in town, along with excellent side salads. Reach it by metrobus ‘Durango.’

- **Caldos de Gallina Vale** (Map pp118-19; Mercado Cuauhtémoc, Av Cuauhtémoc; M Cuauhtémoc) A giant pot of chicken broth bubbles away at this simple stall on the east side of the rustic market on the northeastern edge of Colonia Juárez. The friendly proprietors add chicken pieces, giblets and/or hard-boiled eggs to your broth, which you can garnish with some seriously spicy salsas.

- **Tianquis de Pachuca** (Map pp118-19; Agustín Melgar; ☑ 10am-4pm Tue; M Chapultepec) The ‘food court’ at the north end of the weekly Condesa street market offers many tempting options, but none so mouthwatering as the *mixiotes*, steamed packets of seasoned mutton, whose contents may be rolled into thick tortillas and garnished with fiery *chiles de manzana* (very hot, yellow chili peppers).

- **Mercado de Antojitos** (Map p123; Higuera, cnr Plaza Hidalgo & Caballo Calco; M Coyoacán) Near Coyoacán’s main plaza, this busy spot has all kinds of snacks, including deep-fried quesadillas, *pozole*, *esquites* (boiled corn kernels served with a dollop of mayo), *tamales* and *flautas* (chicken tacos, rolled long and thin then deep-fried; garnished with lettuce and cream).

- **Tostadas Coyoacán** (Map p123; % 5659-8774; Allende btwn Malitzin & Xicoténcatl; tostadas $1.50-2; ☑ noon-6pm M Viveros) Inside Coyoacán’s main market is one of the best places to eat anywhere in town. The attractive array of platters here will stop hungry visitors in their tracks. Tostadas are piled high with things like ceviche, marinated octopus and pig’s feet, mushrooms and shredded chicken.
brings a touch of class to Mexican standards without putting on airs. Highlights include red-snapper tamales, nopales (cactus paddles) in chile guajillo (slightly chili) sauce, and pollo tocatlán (chicken steamed in maguey leaves with aromatic herbs). Desserts are equally enticing.

**Restaurante Chon** (Map pp114-15; 5542-0873; Regina 160; main dishes $8.50-16; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat; M Pino Suárez) Pre-Hispanic fare is the specialty of this cantina-style restaurant. Sample maguey worms (in season), specialty of this cantina-style restaurant. Way before. A fantasy of mango sauce. grasshoppers, wild boar or armadillo in a chi
n
**Hostería de Santo Domingo** (Map pp114-15; 5526-5276; Domínguez 72; dishes $7-16; 9am-10:30pm; M Allende) Whipping up classic Mexican fare since 1860, this hugely popular (though not touristy) restaurant has a festive atmosphere, enhanced by chamber music. It’s famous for its enormous chiles en nogada ($16), an Independence Day favorite, served here year-round.

**Casino Español** (Map pp114-15; 5510-2967; Isabel la Católica 29; 4-course lunch $6.50; lunch Mon-Fri; M Allende) The old Spanish social center, housed in a fabulous Porfirio-
nera building, has a popular cantina-style eatery downstairs and an elegant restaurant upstairs. Stolid execs loosen their ties here for a long leisurely lunch, and the courses keep coming. Spanish fare, naturally, highlights the menu (Thursday there's cocido madrìlène, a Madrid-style stew with chick peas and sausage) though tacos dorados (chicken tacos, rolled and deep fried) and chiles en nogada are equally well-prepared.

**Café de Tacuba** (Map pp114-15; 5518-4950; Tacuba 28; 5-course lunch $15, main courses $5-12; M Allende) Before the band there was the restaurant. Way before. A fantasy of colored tiles, brass lamps and oil paintings, this mainstay has served antojitos (tortilla-based snacks like tacos and gorditas) since 1912. The food is overrated, but the atmosphere is just right for a plate of pambazos (filled roll fried in chili sauce) or tamales with hot chocolate.

**Alameda Central & Around**

**Quick Eats**

**El Califa de León** (Map pp114-15; San Cosme 56-B; tacos from $1.75; 11am-2am; M San Cosme) Practically hidden amid the surrounding ambulante activity, this standing room-only taquería is sought out by taco mavens from all over. Unlike at thousands of similar places, the twist here is that the beef is not chopped up but grilled in thin slices. The salsas – chipotle and salsa verde – are exceptional.

**Tacos Xotepingo** (Map pp114-15; 5709-4548; Balderas 42; tacos $1.25-2.50; 11am-11pm; M Balderas) With seating inside the big dining hall, on the sun-dappled patio or alongside the formidable grill, this taco temple makes a great pit stop after shopping at the Ciudadela crafts market, opposite.

**Churrería El Moro** (Map pp114-15; 5512-0896; Eje Central Lázaro Cardenas 42; hot drink with 4 churros $3; 24hr; M San Juan de Letrán) A fine respite from the Eje Central crowds, El Moro manufactures long, slender deep-fried churros (doughnut-like fritters), just made to be dipped in thick hot chocolate. It’s a popular late-night spot, perfect for winding down after hours.

Both the Cloister Café at the Museo Franz Mayer (p134) and the more upscale Café del Palacio at Bellas Artes (p134) offer sandwiches, salads and pastries between exhibits.

**Budget**

**Café Trevi** (Map pp114-15; 5512-3020; Colon 1; breakfast combos $2.75-5, 4-course lunch $3.50; M Hidalgo) This remnant of old Alameda culture has a cheery retro vibe. In addition to the great-value comida del día, it prepares various pasta dishes.

**Mi Fonda** (Map pp114-15; 5521-0002; López 101; paella $2.75; lunch; M San Juan de Letrán) Working-class Chilangos line up for their share of paella valenciana, made fresh daily and patiently ladled out by women in white bonnets. Jesús from Cantabria in Spain oversees the proceedings. Space is limited but you can share a table.

**Midrange**

**El Regiomontano** (Map pp114-15; 5518-0196; Luis Moya 115; grilled goat $15; 11am-10pm; M Balderas) Lettered on the window is the message, ‘Baby goats very young kids’ and there they are, spayed on stakes and grilling over a circle of coals, norteno-style. A single platter serves two.

**Boca del Río** (Map pp114-15; 5535-0128; Ribeira de San Cosme 42; seafood cocktails from $4.50, fish from $7; 9am-11pm; M San Cosme) This old-fashioned seafood purveyor has its fish
delivered daily from the coast. Have a seat at the long stainless-steel counter and enjoy shrimp, oyster or octopus cocktails (or eat all three in one serve, *campechano* style), served with a lemon squeezer, bottle of *habanero* (a fiery chili) salsa and package of Saltines.

**Zona Rosa & Around**

While the Zona Rosa is packed with places to eat and drink, the culinary offerings tend to disappoint, with one notable exception: the various authentic Asian restaurants aimed primarily at the neighborhood’s growing Korean community (see the boxed text, p165). Fast-food junkies can get their fix on Génova between Hamburgo and Liverpool, with all the major franchises.

**BUDGET**

**Beatricita** (Map pp118-19; 5511-4213; Londres 1900; set lunch $4.50; 10am-6pm; M Insurgentes) This popular lunchtime destination has a solid *comida corrida* and friendly service. Friday is *pozole* day.

**MIDRANGE**

**Fonda El Refugio** (Map pp118-19; 5525-8128; Liverpool 166; dishes $8-10; 1-11pm Mon-Sat, 1-10pm Sun; M Insurgentes; P) Your best bet for Mexican fine dining in the Zona Rosa, the Fonda El Refugio serves regional specialties like *mole* and *escamoles* (ant larvae) in a charming old house.

**Restaurante Vegetariano Yug** (Map pp118-19; 5333-3296; Varsovia 3; buffet lunch $6.50; 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-8pm Sat, 1-8pm Sun; M Insurgentes; V) Just south of Reforma, Yug has its own spin on the classic Mexican snack. Tables are set with a palette of savory salsas in sturdy clay bowls.

**Konditori** (Map pp118-19; 5511-0722; Génova 61; dishes $6-10; M Insurgentes) This Scandinavian café is a favorite along the Pink Zone’s main pedestrian thoroughfare. Some people make a special trip here for the weekend brunch ($10) accompanied by live jazz.

**TOP END**

**Les Moustaches** (Map pp118-19; 5333-3390; Río Sena 88; main dishes $13-20; 1-11:30pm Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun; M Insurgentes; P) This is one of the city’s most sophisticated French restaurants, with tables in an elegant patio. Start off with pâté de foie gras, then choose from duck in Grand Marnier sauce, beef Wellington or lobster thermidor. For dessert, there are tempting crepes and soufflés.

**Condesa**

La Condesa has become the hub of the eating-out scene, and dozens of informal bistros and cafés, many with sidewalk tables, compete for space along several key streets. It must be added, however, that style often triumphs over substance here, and popularity does not necessarily correlate with quality. Most higher-end Condesa restaurants offer valet parking for around $2.50 (plus tip).

**QUICK EATS**

**El Califas** (Map pp118-19; 5271-7666; Altata 22, cnr Alfonso Reyes; tacos $1.50-3; 1-3:30pm; M Chilpancingo; P) This very popular *taquería* on Condesa’s southern edge puts its own spin on the classic Mexican snack. Tables are set with a palette of savory salsas in sturdy clay bowls.

**El Tizoncito** (Map pp118-19; 5286-7321; Tamaulipas 122, cnr Campeche; tacos from $0.70; noon-3:30am Sun-Thur, until 4:30pm Fri & Sat; M Patriotismo) The original branch of the city-wide chain has been going for nearly 40 years. It claims to have invented tacos *al pastor* (ie cooked on a spit, shepherd style), and half the fun is watching the grillmen deftly put them together. If there are no seats, try the bigger location two blocks east on Campeche.

**Nevería Roxy** (Map pp118-19; Mazatlán 89, cnr Montes de Oca; scoops from $0.80, banana splits $3; 11am-9pm; M Chapultepec) For dessert, try the old-fashioned Roxy which makes fresh sherbet on-site. Another branch is at Tamaulipas 161 at Alfonso Reyes, close to metro Patriotismo.

A **pickup truck** (Map pp118-19; 11am-3pm Mon-Sat; M Chilpancingo), at the corner of Tamaulipas and Alfonso Reyes, has crowds lining up midmorning for tasty quesadillas and *carnitas* (chunks of pork simmered in lard, then served with corn tortillas and guacamole).

**BUDGET**

**El Figonero** (Map pp118-19; 5211-9951; Campeche 429-C; set lunch $3.50; 8:30am-4pm Mon-Sat; M Patriotismo) In the midst of all the trendiness
is this little neighborhood place, offering a comida corrida that’s a bit more creative than usual. Show up before 3pm to avoid the rush.

**Green Corner** (Map pp118-19; 📧 5264-3939; Mazatlán 81; breakfast $3, salads & sandwiches $3-4; 🕓 7:30am-10pm; ☑️ Patriotismo; ☑️) Not just a place to purchase natural products like whole-wheat bread and tofu, Green Corner also makes a delightful spot for a healthy breakfast, with sidewalk tables on a laid-back corner.

**Frutos Prohibidos** (Map pp118-19; 📧 5264-5808; Amsterdam 244; wraps $4-5; 🕓 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun; ☑️ Patriotismo; ☑️) When you need a break from biftek, Forbidden Fruits puts together healthy salads, wraps and fruit-juice combos. Consider taking out for a picnic in nearby Parque México. Catch metrobus ‘Campeche.’

**Don Keso** (Map pp118-19; 📧 5211-3806; Amsterdam 73, cnr Parra; baguettes & salads $3-4; 🕓 10am-midnight Mon-Wed, 10am-2am Thu-Sat, 1-9pm Sun; ☑️ Insurgentes) This casual, reasonably priced hangout near Parque México has great baguettes and salads, plus an exciting cocktail selection. Crowds rush in for the good-value comida corrida ($5).

**MIDRANGE & TOP END**

Condesa’s culinary heart is the intersection of Av Michoacán, Vicente Suárez and Atlixco. After 8pm the following places are often filled to capacity and getting a table means waiting around for a while. More good restaurants and cafés ring Parque México.

**El Zorzal** (Map pp118-19; 📧 5273-6023; Alfonso Reyes 39, cnr Tamaulipas; steaks $9.50-19, pasta $5.50-6.50; ☕️ 1-11pm; ☑️ Patriotismo; ☑️) Run by Buenos Aires–native Julio, this is the best of many options for Argentinean fare, with imported cuts, as well as fresh pasta and generous salads. The parrillada ($26), a mixed grill served on a chopping board, feeds at least two.

**La Sábia Virtud** (Map pp118-19; 📧 5286-6480; Tamaulipas 134B; main courses $7-9; ☑️ Patriotismo; ☑️) Nouvelle cuisine from Puebla is lovingly presented at this cozy spot. Mole is prepared in the classic Santa Clara convent style or the restaurant’s own verde version.

**Café La Gloria** (Map pp118-19; 📧 5211-4180; Vicente Suárez 41; pasta & salads $5-6, main dishes $8-10; ☕️ 1pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 1-11pm Sun; ☑️ Patriotismo; ☑️) Check out the blackboard specials at this hip, casual bistro with an international clientele.

**Fonda Garufa** (Map pp118-19; 📧 5286-8295; Michoacán 93; pasta $7, steaks $13; ☕️ 2pm-midnight Mon, 8am-midnight Tue & Wed, 8am-1am Thu-Sat, 8am-11pm Sun; ☑️ Patriotismo; ☑️) One of the first in the zone to put tables on the sidewalk and fire up a grill, Garufa remains a popular and romantic spot.

**Don Asado** (Map pp118-19; 📧 5286-0789; Michoacán 77; steaks from $9; ☕️ Tue-Sun; ☑️ Patriotismo) Perhaps it’s the way they grill their steaks and sausages – slowly, over coals – or perhaps it’s their affordable prices, but there’s often a line outside this cozy Uruguayan place. A parrillada (board for two or three) is a good way to sample some of the choicest cuts, such as tira de asado (ribs, sliced into strips) or bife de chorizo (boneless sections of loin).

**Bistrot Mosaico** (Map pp118-19; 📧 5584-2932; Michoacán 10; starters $4-9, main courses $9-16; ☕️ noon-11:30pm Mon-Sat, noon-5:30pm Sun; ☑️ Chilpancingo; ☑️) A slice of Paris just west of Av Insurgentes, this unpretentious bistro is the successful creation of French restaurateur François Avernin. It’s trendy for a reason: the service is stellar, the salads fresh and varied, and the wines well chosen. Picnickers can stock up on pâté and escargots at the deli counter.

**Barracuda Diner** (Map pp118-19; 📧 5211-9480; Av Nuevo León 4A, cnr Av Sonora; burgers $6.50-8.50; ☕️ 1pm-4am Mon-Thu, 24hr Fri-Sun; ☑️ Sevilla) This retro-style diner does a fine facsimile of gringo comfort food, including cheeseburgers and macaroni and cheese, fish and chips, plus some pretty far-out milkshakes (mmm, mamey).

**Roma**

**QUICK EATS**

An unassuming street stall labeled hamburguesas (Map pp118-19; cnr Morelia & Colima; burgers $1.50; ☕️ 10am-midnight; ☑️ Cuauhtémoc) does a roaring trade in hamburgers al carbón (charcoal-broiled), garnished with lettuce, tomatoes and chilies. Across Morelia, another popular stall produces exquisite deep-fried quesadillas, filled with things like huitlacoche (corn mushrooms) and squash blossoms. Mornings before 10:30am, look for superb tamales oaxaqueños at the corner of Álvaro Obregón and Tonalá.
THE AUTHOR’S CHOICE

María del Alma (Map pp118-19; 5533-0403; Cuernavaca 68, Condesa; starters $4-6, main courses $7-12; 1:30-11pm Mon-Fri, until 1:30am Sat, until 6pm Sun; M Patriotas; P) A culinary escape to the Mexican state of Tabasco, María del Alma is a bit removed from the Condesa hubbub. Dining is in a leafy patio among singing birds and a romantically inclined pianist. Enjoy a guanabana margarita as tabasqueño owners Jorge and Fernando describe such regional treats as tamales de chipilín. For a main dish, try sea bass steamed in aromatic herbs. Be sure to save room for the mind-blowing desserts, say, dulce de coco con almendra, a scoop of sweet, shredded coconut spiced with chocolate.

BUDGET

El 91 (Map pp118-19; 5208-1666; Valladolid 91; dishes $4-9.50; 1-7pm Sun-Fri; M Sevilla) Lunch is served to piano accompaniment at this triple-deck restaurant-bar – dumbwaiters deliver the food to the top terrace. It offers a different menu daily, with a long list of homemade soups and main dishes.

Taquería El Jarocho (Map pp118-19; 5564-4077; Manzanillo 49, cnr Tapachula; tacos $1.75; 7am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-7pm Sun; M Chilpancingo) Scrambled eggs in salsa verde, cactus leaves with shrimp cakes, and brains a la mexicana are among the two-dozen taco fillings to choose from at this snack bar. Get two tacos for one from 8am to 9:30am and 8:30pm to 10pm.

Non Solo Panino (Map pp118-19; 3096-5128; Plaza Luis Cabrera, Guanajuato 102; sandwiches & salads $4-6; 1pm-midnight Mon-Sat; M Insurgentes; P) The plaza’s dancing fountains make a lovely backdrop for Italian sandwiches stuffed with things like mozzarella, pesto and smoked salmon.

Los Bisquets Obregón (Map pp118-19; 5584-2802; Álvaro Obregón 60; breakfast $4-5, antojitos $4.50-6; M Insurgentes; P) The flagship branch of this nationwide chain overflows most mornings; fortunately there are a couple more nearby. Chilangos flock here for the pan chino (Chinese pastries) and café con leche, dispensed from two pitchers.

Pozolería Tixtla (Map pp110-11; 5233-2081; Hernández y Dá valos 35; pozole $3.50; 11am-9:30pm; M Lázaro Cárdenas) East of Roma, in working-class Colonia Algarín, this old-fashioned dining hall attracts plenty of families with hefty appetites. The specialty (it’s been perfecting for 35 years) is Guerrero-style green pozole, a soulful variation on the classic pork and hominy broth, garnished with crackling chicharrón and creamy avocado slices.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Contramar (Map pp118-19; 5514-3169; Durango 200; starters $5-9, main courses $12-14; 1:30-6:30pm; M Insurgentes; P) Fresh seafood, artfully prepared, is the star attraction at this stylish dining hall with a seaside ambience. The specialty is tuna fillet Contramar style – split, swabbed with red chili and parsley sauces, and grilled to perfection.

Ixchel (Map pp118-19; 3096-5010; Medellín 65; main dishes $15; 1pm-3.30am Mon-Sat; M Insurgentes; P) ‘Fusion’ is an overused term among Condesa and Roma bistros, but this late-night supper club takes it seriously. Ixchel’s innovative chef deftly fuses Mexican elements (grasshoppers, squash blossoms) with Mediterranean and Asian fare (risotto and tempura). The upstairs Salón Azul adds another dimension (Wednesday to Saturday nights), with DJs supplying the appropriately chilled ambience.

Polanco & Bosque de Chapultepec

BUDGET & MIDRANGE

For moderately priced fare in Polanco, head for Av Presidente Masaryk between Dumas and France; a string of sidewalk cafés lines the south side of the street.

Caldos d’Leo (Map pp120-1; 5580-0515; Ejército Nacional 1014-B; chicken soup $3-5; 8am-8pm; M Polanco; P) The sfopa especial d’Leo – packed with hard-boiled egg, sliced avocado, garbanzo beans and chicken giblets – is a meal in itself.

Klein’s (Map pp120-1; 5281-0862; Presidente Masaryk 360-B; antojitos $5-10; M Polanco; P) With sidewalk seating on Presidente Masaryk, Klein’s is a popular hangout for the local Jewish community. Though most of the fare is typically Mexican (enchiladas, carne a la tampiqueña), you can also get bagels or a plate of kosher salami and eggs.
TOP END
La Hacienda de los Morales (Map pp120-1; 5096-3054; Vázquez de Mella 525; main dishes $17-30; 1pm-1am; M Polanco; P) Often the setting for banquets and receptions, the 400-year-old hacienda serves sumptuous variations on Mexican and Spanish classics in its elegant dining room. Reservations are advisable and dress is formal.

Villa María (Map pp120-1; 5203-0306; Homero 704; main dishes $8-15; 1:30pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 1:30-7pm Sun; M Polanco; P) A large spread with an invariably celebratory atmosphere, the Villa María makes a good choice for that special meal a la mexicana. Original recipes incorporate regional styles from around the Republic. Mega-margaritas come in 10 versions.

Colonia del Valle
Fonda Margarita (Map pp110-11; Adolfo Prieto 1346; main dishes half/full portion $2/2.75; 5:30-11:30am Mon-Sat) Possibly the capital’s premier hangover-recovery spot – witness the line down the street on Saturday mornings – it’s a hangover-recovery spot – witness the line down the street on Saturday mornings – the humble fonda (eating place) opposite Parque Tlacoquemécatl whips up big batches of comfort food for the day ahead. Soulful fare like pork back in chile guajillo sauce is doled out of giant pots. Don’t miss the huevos refritos (eggs scrambled with refried black beans). Catch metrobus ‘Parque Hundido.’

Taquería Villamelón (Map pp110-11; 5563-2779; Alberto Balderas 3a; tacos $1; 9am-6pm Thu-Sun) After the corrida, stop by this popular joint just outside the bullring, whose name translates as ‘bullfighting neophyte.’ There are ample bowls of salsa – the house blend is plenty hot – to spice up your sausage, pork rind or cecina (a thin cut of meat, flavored with chili and sautéed or grilled) tacos, or all three combined. Catch metrobus ‘Ciudad de los Deportes.’

San Ángel
BUDGET
Bazar Sábado (Map p122; Plaza San Jacinto 11; quesadillas $1.50; 10am-7pm Sat; M Miguel Angel de Quevedo) For a break from shopping, grab a few fresh-made quesadillas in the plaza of the market building; there’s also a lunch buffet ($18).

El Convento (Map p122; Plaza del Carmen 4; churros & chocolate $3; M Miguel Angel de Quevedo) Next door to the Carmelite ex-convent (see p142), this is a popular stop for churros, sprinkled with sugar and served alongside French or Mexican chocolate (spiked with tequila on request).

MIDRANGE & TOP END
Capicua (Map p122; 5616-5211; Av de la Paz 14-B; tapas & raciones $4-7; M Miguel Angel de Quevado; P) One of several restaurants in a little mall off Av Insurgentes, Capicua offers toothsome tapas in sleek surroundings. Served in abundant portions, the pulpos a la gallega (octopus boiled with potato, drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with paprika) and tortilla de patata (potato tortilla) are the best you’ll find this side of Madrid, and the wine list is equally impressive.

Saks (Map p122; 5616-1601; Plaza San Jacinto 9; main dishes $8-11.50; 7:30am-6pm Sun-Thu, 7:30am-midnight Fri & Sat; M Miguel Angel de Quevado; P V) At this mostly vegetarian restaurant with a splendid terrace, choose from meatless specialties like poblano chilies stuffed with corn-fungus, huge salads and squash blossom crepes. Breakfast combos are popular, with plenty of fruit, fresh-baked bread and a half-liter of juice.

Fonda San Ángel (Map p122; 5550-1641; Plaza San Jacinto 3; main dishes $8.50-11; M Miguel Angel de Quevado; P V) On weekends, this attractive restaurant by the plaza does an abundant brunch buffet ($10), with all kinds of egg dishes, pastries and fresh-squeezed juices, plus great quesadillas.

San Ángel Inn (Map p122; 5616-1402; Diego Rivera 50; main dishes $9-19; 1pm-1am Mon-Sat, 1-10pm Sun; P) Next to the Estudio Diego Rivera, this ex-hacienda serves Mexican and European cuisine. Even if you don’t splurge for dinner, have one of its renowned margaritas or martinis in the garden. Walk or take a taxi 1km northwest from San Ángel’s Plaza San Jacinto. On foot, one pleasant route is west on Galeana, then north on Leandro Valle

Coyoacán
QUICK EATS
Supertacos Chupacabras (Map p123; Mayorazgo, cnr Av Universidad; tacos $0.70; 7am-3am Mon-Sat, 7am-midnight Sun; M Coyoacán) Named after the mythical ‘goat sucker’ (something like the Loch Ness monster), this mega taco stall provides an ideal stand-up snack between metro Coyoacán and the Cineteca
Nacional. The beef and sausage tacos can be enhanced by availing yourself of the fried onions, *nopales* and other tasty toppings that fill half a dozen huge clay casseroles in front. As the sign says, ‘*Si es de res aqui es*’ (If it’s made of beef, here it is).

**El Tizoncito** (Map p123; 5554-7712; Aguayo 3; tacos from $0.70; noon-2:30am Sun-Thu, noon-3:30am Fri & Sat; M Viveros) Branch of the popular taco chain that originated in Condesa.

**Nieves de Coyoacán** (Map p123; Plaza Hidalgo 31; scoops from $1; 8am-10pm or 11pm; M Viveros) This obligatory weekend stop has homemade ice cream and popsicles in flavors ranging from corn to Nescafé.

Coyoacán’s best deep-fried snacks are found at **Churros Allende** (Map p123; Allende 38; from $0.70; M Viveros). Get in line for a bag – cream-filled or straight up – then stroll over to El Jarocho for coffee (p170).

**Chamorros Coyoacán** (Map p123; 5659-0340; Madrid 29; main dishes $2.50-3.75; 1-6pm Mon-Sat; M Coyoacán) Office workers fill this barn-like structure at lunchtime. Most patrons order the *chamorros* ($7.50), Flintstone-size joints of pork, and stuff the morsels into homemade tortillas.

**Fonda El Morral** (Map p123; 5554-0298; Allende 2; breakfast $5.50-7.50, antojitos $4-6; M Viveros) This large restaurant with tiled arches is good for a traditional breakfast or evening *huchepos* (slightly sweet Michoacán-style *tamales*) and chocolate, served in clay mugs.

**MIDRANGE & TOP END**

**El Jardín del Pulpo** (Map p123; cnr Allende & Malitzin; cocktails $3.75-6.50, fish dishes $11-15; 10:30am-6pm; M Viveros) Fresh-fish platters, shrimp and oyster cocktails and *caldos* (broths) are served at this locale on a corner of the main market. Everyone sits on benches at long tables.

**Los Danzantes** (Map p123; 5658-6054; Jardín del Centenario 12; dishes $8.50-13; M Viveros) Los Danzantes puts a contemporary spin on Mexican cuisine with dishes like *fusilli con chapulines* (grasshopper pasta) and squash blossom salad. You’ll also find mezcal cocktails and cigars from San Andrés in Veracruz.

**ETHNIC EATING**

Though Chilangos tend to be conservative in their tastes, the city hosts enough foreign communities to cater to more internationally inclined palates. Note that generally *cafés chinos* (Chinese restaurants) are more likely to serve enchiladas and biscuits than authentic Chinese fare.

**Hong King** (Map pp114-15; 5512-6703; Dolores 25A; dishes $5-7; 11am-11pm; M Bellas Artes) The most popular restaurant in Mexico City’s small Chinatown, with set Cantonese meals ($5.50 to $15, minimum two people) and some vegetarian offerings such as the tofu with veggie stir-fry.

**King Felafel** (Map pp118-19; 5514-9030; Londres 178, cnr Florence; sandwiches $2, salads $3.50; 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat; M Insurgentes) Middle-Eastern fast-food place with felafel, hummus and tabouleh, run by a Syrian Jew who knows all the family recipes.

**U Rae Ok** (Map pp118-19; 5511-1233; Hamburg 232; main dishes $6-8; Mon-Sat; M Insurgentes) Core of the Korean community, the Zona Rosa has several authentic restaurants catering to it. This simple upstairs locale has the finest *bul-go-gi* (grilled marinated beef) and *chigae* (hearty soup), at the best prices.

**Kolobok** (Map pp110-11; 5541-7085; Diaz Mirón 87; salads $3.50, combo platters $4; 9am-8pm; M Buenavista) Run by a Russian family, this humble place facing the charming Alameda of the Santa María La Ribera neighborhood has excellent layered salads, tasty ‘Russian empanadas’ and borscht, of course.

**Restaurante Shalala** (Map pp118-19; 5286-5406; Tamaulipas 93, cnr Alfonso Reyes, Condesa; sushi from $2, noodle & rice dishes $8; 1-11pm Mon-Sat, 1-8pm Sun; M Patriotismo; P V) Long-standing Japanese deli noted for its authenticity (owner Hiroshi is a Tokyo native) and casual atmosphere. Standouts include the tempura and *negitoro don* (fresh tuna with sesame oil served on a bed of rice).
DRINKING
Cafés, bars and cantinas are all major social venues on the capital’s landscape. Starbucks is a latecomer to a long-standing café tradition fueled by beans from Veracruz, Oaxaca and Chiapas. Coyoacán in particular is jammed with java joints. The bar scene is extraordinarily lively with a high degree of specialization, from Irish pubs to martini clubs. Cantinas, Mexico’s pubs, are traditionally a male domain but women are welcome nowadays.

Prices for drinks vary quite a bit, but generally beers are around $2 to $3, and mixed drinks range from $4 to $10.

Centro Histórico
CAFÉS
Take a coffee break at any of these charming downtown locales.

Café Jakemir (Map pp114-15; 5709-7038; Isabel la Católica 74A; 9am-8pm Mon-Sat; M Isabel la Católica) Run by a family of Lebanese coffee traders from Orizaba, this old distribution outlet transformed into a popular café has excellent and inexpensive cappuccinos.

Café La Habana (Map pp114-15; 5535-2620; Morelos 62; 8am-11pm Mon-Sat, 8am-10pm Sun; M Juárez) This grand coffeehouse is a traditional haunt for writers and journalists, who linger for hours over their café americano. Legend has it that Fidel and Che plotted strategy here prior to the Cuban revolution.

Other options:
La Selva Café (Map pp114-15; 5521-4111; Bolívar 31; 8:30am-10pm; M Allende) Branch of the Chiapas coffee distributor in the stunning patio of a colonial building.

Café del Pasaje (Map pp114-15; 5521-0683; Pasaje Iturbide; 8am-9:30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-9:30pm Sun; M Allende) Nice journal-writing spot on traffic-free Gante.

Café Cordobés (Map pp114-15; 5512-5545; Ayuntamiento 18; 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun; M San Juan de Letrán) Good spot for a standup cortado (espresso with a little foamed milk) amid a busy shopping district; bulk coffee from Veracruz at reasonable prices.

BARS
La Gioconda (Map pp114-15; 5518-7823; Filomena Mata 18; 2-10pm Mon-Thu, 2pm-3am Fri & Sat; M Allende) Dark and light draft beer are poured in this happening little pub off a pedestrian thoroughfare.

Bar Mancera (Map pp114-15; 5521-9755; Venustiano Carranza 49; cover Fri & Sat night $5; noon-10pm Mon-Thur, noon-2am Fri & Sat; M San Juan de Letrán) This ancient gentlemen’s salon with ornate wood carving and well-used domino tables has been adopted by young clubbers who set up turntables Friday nights from around 9pm.

Hostería La Bota (Map pp114-15; Callejón de Mesones 7; 10am-8pm Mon-Wed, 10am-2am Thu-Sat; M Isabel la Católica) A cultural beachhead in the rough-and-tumble southern fringe of the Centro, this fun and funky new bar is one component of the Casa Vecina community arts center. The warped bullfighting paraphernalia and mismatched furniture seem attuned to a contemporary Spanish sensibility.

El Nivel (Map pp114-15; 5522-9755; Moneda 2; noon-midnight Mon-Sat; M Zócalo) The country’s first cantina proudly displays its license (No 1), dating from 1855. On the site of the hemisphere’s first university, it’s within shouting distance of the Palacio Nacional, and since its opening, every Mexican president except Vicente Fox has stopped in for a trago (drink). The botanas (drinking snacks) here are particularly fine.

Salón Corona (Map pp114-15; 5512-5725; Bolívar 24; 9am-midnight; M Allende) Punks and suits crowd this boisterous, no-frills bar, running since 1928. Amiable staff serve up tarros (mugs) of light or dark cerveza de barril (draft beer) and bottles of almost every known Mexican beer for $2.50 each.

Los Portales de Tlaquepaque (Map pp114-15; 5518-6344; Bolívar 56; 9am-2am; M San Juan de Letrán) Sharing a downtown spot with a number of other straightforward saloons, this two-storey operation has the best-stocked bar and liveliest atmosphere.

La Ópera Bar (Map pp114-15; 5512-8959; Av 5 de Mayo 10; 1pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 1-5:30pm Sun; M Allende) This early-20th-century watering hole only opened its doors to women in the 1970s. With original booths of dark walnut and an ornate tin ceiling (said to have been punctured by Pancho Villa’s bullet on an otherwise slow night), it’s a pleasant setting for a tequila (but seek dinner elsewhere).

Zona Rosa & Around
The Pink Zone can seem pretty sleazy with so many dark-suited bouncers and
touts trying to lure business into strip joints, but there are plenty of fully clothed establishments, too.

**CAFÉS**

Sanborns Café (Map pp118-19; ☏ 5207-9760; Londres 149; 24hr; M Insurgentes) Chilangos customarily meet here for a business breakfast or lunch. After hours, the round-the-clock coffee shop makes a convenient port-of-call between clubs. Perhaps the fresh-juice combos are the most exciting item on an otherwise bland menu.

Cafetería Gabi’s (Map pp118-19; ☏ 5511-7637; Nápoles 55, cnr Liverpool; M Mon-Sat; M Insurgentes) Cluttered with caffeine-related paraphernalia, this family-run coffeehouse in an otherwise nondescript section of Colonia Juárez

**PULQUERÍAS**

Before discotheques, even before cantinas, Mexico had pulquerías. Named after the drink they served, these seedy hovels were the working-class watering hole for the better part of 400 years, before refrigeration and more conventional beverages starting pushing them to the side.

When the Aztecs ruled Mexico, pulque, extracted from the maguey plant, was used only in rituals and by the elite. Its production was strictly controlled and drunkenness was severely punished. When the Spanish arrived, pulque hit the streets. The milky, low-alcohol brew was sold from open-air stands and the method of service was just as primitive: purveyors would ladle the drink from large basins into earthenware cups. As the day wore on, these cups would be smashed by rowdy patrons once the contents were drained – ¡epa!

The ancient beverage was widely consumed in Mexico City throughout the colonial period, chiefly among the city’s underclasses – statistics of the era show an annual per capita consumption among adults of 187 gallons. In the mid-17th century there were some 200 pulquerías operating in the Centro. The government restricted their locations to outlying neighborhoods, a factor that may have contributed to the wicked brew’s eventual demise. In the meantime, other potent potables, such as beer brought by German immigrants, as well as mezcal and tequila, began to gain greater popularity and supplant pulque as the intoxicant of choice. True pulque is homemade, not bottled, and therefore not viable for large-scale commercial production.

Nowadays just a handful of pulquerías still function. They tend to be extremely rustic places, and some remain male-only enclaves. However, they are highly social venues with patrons in a conversant mood. Food is served (often for free) and jukeboxes are normally set just below blast volume. The viscous white liquid may be served straight up or in the somewhat more palatable curado (flavored form). Coconut, pineapple and mango are popular, along with some odd variations like beet, oat (sprinkled with cinnamon) and celery.

- **Las Duelistas** (Map pp114-15; Aranda 30; 6:30am-9pm Mon-Sat; M Salto del Agua) Behind the swinging doors is this larger pulquería alongside the Mercado San Juan. Pulque is dispensed straight out of the barrel in a wide range of flavors, including pistachio and pine nut (and for the brave, in shrimp and oyster cocktails Friday and Saturday).

- **La Risa** (Map pp114-15; 5709-4963; Mesones 71; 9am-8pm Mon-Sat; M Isabel la Católica) Going since 1900, ‘The Laugh’ is popular among bohemian young men and women who engage in intellectual pursuits like playing chess or reading history while drinking their pulque, and the jukebox features a more contemporary selection than usual.

- **La Hermosa Hortensia** (Map pp114-15; Plaza Garibaldi 4; 10am-midnight; M Garibaldi) Opening onto Plaza Garibaldi, this makes a good pulquería for beginners: its hygiene is a cut above the norm, they’re used to seeing foreigners, and the atmosphere is 100% ‘familiar.’

- **El Recreo de Manzanares** (Map pp110-11; Manzanares 30; 9am-7pm Mon-Sat; M Zócalo) At this hole-in-the-wall near the Mercado de la Merced, you’ll find a group of grizzled characters in a festive mood sitting around a long table sharing pitchers of pulque ‘natural,’ a scene straight from the Golden Age.

- **La Hija de los Apaches** (Map pp118-19; 5511-0071; Cuauhtémoc 39; 9am-9:30pm Mon-Sat; M Cuauhtémoc) This working-class pulquería has long been a haunt of professional boxers.
MEXICO CITY

buzzes with conversation midmornings and early evenings, when the occupants of neighboring offices pour in for a rich café con leche (coffee with milk) and a crispy banderilla (stick-like glazed pastry).

BARS

Bar Milán (Map pp118-19; 5592-0031; Milán 18; 9pm-midnight Tue & Wed, 9pm-3am Thu-Sat; M Cuauhtémoc) Tucked away on a quiet backstreet, this cave-like hangout gets as crowded as the metro. Purchase beer tickets, then make your way over to the cactus-trimmed bar. The soundtrack ranges from classic rock to Café Tacuba; don’t be surprised when the crowd spontaneously bursts into chorus.

Yuppie’s Sports Café (Map pp118-19; 5533-0919; Génova 34; 1pm-2am; M Insurgentes) For those who need their sports fix, this gringo-style betting and viewing parlor has about 50 TVs showing the big game.

Condesa

CAFÉS

Café La Selva (Map pp118-19; 5211-5170; Vicente Suárez 38; M Patriotismo) The Mexican Starbucks serves organic coffee from Chiapas, produced by small-scale indigenous coffee growers. The Condesa branch is the hippest place in town for a coffee break.

Café Bola de Oro (Map pp118-19; 5286-5659; Nuevo León 192-B; 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat; M Chilpancingo) An outlying branch of the Xalapa coffee purveyor, this is a good place to score a bag of Coatepec beans or simply enjoy a cup of Veracruz’ fine, full-bodied blends.

Caffé Toscano (Map pp118-19; 5584-3681; Michoacán 30; 7:30am-11pm; M Chilpancingo) This sidewalk café sits on a delightful corner of Parque México, making a fine setting for a latte and the morning paper – grab one off the rack.

BARS

Condesa’s bar scene continues to thrive, and new places are popping up (and shutting down) all the time. The following are relatively well established and filled beyond capacity Thursday through Saturday evenings. The confluence of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León has emerged as a major bar zone, earning a reputation as a haven for fresas (literally ‘strawberries,’ a derogatory term for upper-class youth).

Black Horse (Map pp118-19; 5211-8740; Mexico 85, cnr Tamaulipas; 6pm-2am Tue-Sat; M Patriotismo) This authentic British pub is a useful addition to the Condesa scene, and not just because you can get bangers and mash and watch the soccer match (projected on one wall). It also boasts an international social scene and has excellent bands playing the back room most nights.

El Centenario (Map pp118-19; 5553-4454; Vicente Suárez 42; noon-midnight Mon-Sat; M Patriotismo) An enclave of tradition in the heart of modish Condesa, this little gem is jammed most evenings.

THE AUTHOR’S CHOICE

Condesa df (Map pp118-19; 5241-2600; Veracruz 102, cnr Guadalajara; 1pm-midnight Mon-Wed, 1pm-1:30am Thu-Sat, 1-11pm Sun; M Chapultepec) The bar of the fashionable new boutique hotel (see p157) has fast become an essential stop on the Condesa nightlife circuit. Action focuses on the triangular atrium and wackily decorated alcoves around it, where businessfolk, artists and the occasional film star gather before moving on to still hotter spots. Up on the roof terrace, guests lounge on big-wheel wicker sofas, nibble on sushi and enjoy views of verdant Parque España across the way.

Mitote (Map pp118-19; 5211-9150; Amsterdam 53; 8pm-2am Tue-Sat; M Chilpancingo) Mitote (Náhuatl for ‘ruckus’), a lively little joint near Parque España, lives up to its name. Owner Walter works the quirkily decorated lounge like a good host. If you’re hungry, try the tasty tapas.

Malafama (Map pp118-19; 5553-5138; Av Michoacán 78; tables per hr $7.50; M Patriotismo) Not an exclusively male domain by any means, Condesa’s billiard hall is as trendy as its bars and cafés. The well-maintained tables are frequented by both pool sharks and novices.

Hookah Lounge (Map pp118-19; 5264-6275; Campeche 284; 1pm-12:30am Mon-Wed, until 2am Thu-Sat; M Chilpancingo) Moroccan tapestries and pillows set the tone for this North African fantasy augmented by house music. Bring friends and share a water pipe (from $10),
available in a bewildering array of flavors. Belly dancers perform Wednesdays.

**Pata Negra** (Mappp118-19;  @ 5211-5563; Tamaulipas 30;  @ 1:30pm-2am;  M Patriismo) Nominally a tapas bar, this oblong salon draws a friendly, clean-cut crowd of 20-something Chilangos and expats. There’s live music on both levels, with the upper Salón Pata Negra striking a more bohemian tone.

**Cafeïna** (Map pp118-19;  @ 5212-0090; Nuevo León 73;  @ 1pm-2am;  M Patriismo) This sleek café-bar hybrid has crushed-velvet armchairs and a narrow terrace, and is a good vantage point for gawking at gorgeous arrivals over a latte or Cafeïna (espresso martini). Star DJs work the room from a central module.

**Celtics** (Map pp118-19;  @ 5211-9081; Tamaulipas 36;  @ 1:30pm-3am Mon-Sat;  M Patriismo) An Argentinean-run facsimile of an Irish pub, Celtics remains hugely popular with young *defeños*. A Guinness will set you back S$6 here, a draft Sol, S3. The soundtrack is more U2 than Chieftains; bands play Monday and Tuesday nights.

**Roma**

**CAFÉS**

**Enanos de Tapanco** (Map pp118-19;  @ 5564-2274; Orizaba 161, cnr Querétaro;  @ 8am-11:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11:30pm Sat, 3:30-10:30pm Sun;  M Centro Médico) Possibly Mexico City’s coolest café, the ‘Dwarves of the Loft’ also functions as an art gallery. Cappuccinos and quiches are served along with an eclectic music selection. There’s live music Friday and story-telling Tuesday evening.

**Café de Carlo** (Map pp118-19;  @ 5574-5647; Orizaba 115;  @ 1pm Mon-Sat;  M Insurgentes) Coffee connoisseurs head for this unassuming sidewalk café, with an aromatic roasted and vintage espresso machine.

**La Mediterránea** (Map pp118-19;  @ 5208-7810; Orizaba 87;  @ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat;  M Insurgentes) Almost hidden on a tree-lined corridor, this Turkish teahouse has sidewalk tables and a small tapestry-draped salon for savoring exotic teas, strong Turkish coffee and fabulously rich desserts.

**BARS**

**La Bodeguita del Medio** (Map pp118-19;  @ 5553-0246; Cozumel 37;  @ 2pm-2am Tue-Sat, 2pm-midnight Sun & Mon;  M Sevilla) The walls of various salons are scribbled with verses and messages at this animated branch of the famous Havana joint. Have a *mojito*, a Cuban concoction of rum and mint leaves ($4.50), and enjoy the excellent *son cubano* combos that perform here.

**Lamm** (Map pp118-19;  @ 5514-8501; Álvaro Obregón 99;  @ until 2am Mon-Sat;  M Insurgentes) In the evening the open-air restaurant of the Casa Lamm turns into a hip lounge where a smart set congregates until the wee hours. There’s live *música cubana* and jazz Tuesday and Wednesday.

**Taberna Red Fly** (Map pp118-19;  @ 1054-3616; Orizaba 143;  @ 6pm-midnight Mon-Wed, 6pm-2am Thu-Sat;  M Centro Médico) An elegantly furnished space in a typical Porfiriato-era residence, the Red Fly gets busy on weekends when a youthful, alternative crowd moves in. The upstairs lounge is reserved for DJ sessions and occasional live music.

**Tierra de Vinos** (Map pp118-19;  @ 5208-5133; Durango 197;  @ 1-8pm Mon & Tue, 1pm-midnight Wed-Sat;  M Insurgentes) Mexico is not a nation of oenophiles, so this wine-tasting salon is a pleasant surprise. The wine list changes monthly, with most of the world’s vineyards represented, and there’s classic Spanish fare to complement your choice.

**Cantina Covadonga** (Map pp118-19;  @ 5533-2922; Puebla 121;  @ 1pm-3am Mon-Fri;  M Insurgentes) Echoing with the sounds of clacking dominoes, the old Asturian social hall is a traditionally male enclave, though hipsters of both sexes have increasingly moved in on this hallowed ground.

**Polanco**

Though not as cutting-edge as Condesa, this well-heeled neighborhood gets quite lively after dark.

**Segafredo** (Map pp120-1;  @ 5281-1203; Dumas 71-C;  @ 8am-midnight Sun-Wed, 8am-2:30am Thu-Sat;  M Polanco) The Bologna-based chain expertly prepares all the espresso variations, from *caffe latte fredo* to *macchiato con panna*. Attracted by wireless access, laptop-users often occupy the upper level, which has an open-air terrace attached.

**Área** (Map pp120-1;  @ 5282-3100; Presidente Masaryk 201;  @ 7-11pm Mon-Wed, 7pm-2am Thu-Sat;  M Polanco) Atop the Hábita Hotel, this rooftop bar does a brisk trade in exotic martinis, as videos are projected on the wall of a nearby building.

**Terra de Galicia** (Map pp120-1;  @ 5280-7737; Dumas 7;  @ 1:30pm-1:30am Mon-Sat, 3:30am-midnight Sun;  M Auditorio;  P) Galicia’s signature beer
is dispensed from copper tanks here, along with authentic Spanish tapas.

**Moon Bar** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 5263-8887; Mariano Escobedo 700; cover for events; 9pm-2am Wed-Sat; **M** Auditorio) Inside the Camino Real hotel is this ambient open-air lounge, where a select clientele unwind on canopied beds under the moonlight.

**Coyoacán**

**Café El Jarro** (Map p123; ☎ 5658-5029; Cuauhtémoc 134, cnr Allende; 6am-1am; **M** Coyoacán) This immensely popular joint churns out $0.70 cappuccinos for long lines of java hounds. As there’s no seating inside, people have their coffee standing in the street or sitting on curbside benches. The branch just around the corner makes great tortas, and both branches have terrific doughnuts. An **El Jarro branch** (Map p123; ☎ 5659-9107; Av México 25-C) is convenient to Viveros park.

**La Guadalupana** (Map p123; ☎ 5554-6253; Higuera 2; noon-12:30am Mon-Sat; **M** Viveros) Serving drinks for over seven decades, this rustic tavern breathes tradition down to the blasé clientele unwind on canopied beds under the moonlight.

**El Hijo del Cuervo** (Map p123; ☎ 5658-7824; Jardín del Centenario 17; 5pm-1am Mon-Wed, 1pm-2am Thu-Sun; **M** Viveros) This enormous stone-walled **antro** (den) has a classic rock ambience with groups of friends packing into its various salons and sharing pitchers of beer. Bands rock the house Tuesday and Wednesday nights.

**ENTERTAINMENT**

There’s so much going on in Mexico City on any given evening, it’s hard to keep track. **Tiempo Libre**, the city’s comprehensive what’s-on magazine, will help you sort it all out. Published Thursday, it covers live music, theater, movies, dance, art and nightlife, with lots of family options, and gay venues. Other useful guides include the comprehensive monthlies **Donde Ir** and **Chilango**, the latter with a **Time Out** supplement. **Primera Fila**, a Friday section of the **Reforma** newspaper, has lots of entertainment listings.

**Ticketmaster** (☎ 5325-9000; www.ticketmaster.com.mx in Spanish) sells tickets for all the major venues via Internet, phone or any of these outlets.

**Auditorio Nacional** (Map pp120-1; Paseo de la Reforma 50; 11am-6pm; **M** Auditorio)

**Liverpool** Centro (Map pp114-15; Venustiano Carranza 92; 11am-7pm; **M** Zócalo) Polanco (Map pp120-1; Mariano Escobedo 425; 11am-8pm; **M** Polanco)

**Mixup** Centro Histórico (Map pp114-15; Madero 51; 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-8pm Sun; **M** Zócalo); Calle 16 de Septiembre (Map pp114-15; Calle 16 de Septiembre 14; **M** San Juan de Letrán; Zona Rosa (Map pp118-19; Género 76; 9am-9pm; **M** Insurgentes)

**Cinemas**

Mexico City is a banquet for moviegoers. Almost everything is screened here and ticket prices are around $4, with many places offering discounts on Wednesday. Except for children’s fare, movies are in original languages, with Spanish subtitles. **Reforma** and La Jornada have daily listings.

The following multiplexes have mostly Hollywood fare, with the odd Mexican hit.

**Cine Diana** (Map pp118-19; 2122-6060; Paseo de la Reforma 423; **M** Sevilla) It faces La Diana Cazadora.

**Cinemex Palacio** (Map pp114-15; 5512-0348; Iturbide 25; **M** Juárez)

**Cinemex Real** (Map pp114-15; 5512-7718; www.cinemex.com.mx; Colón 17; **M** Hidalgo)

There are other theaters offering a more eclectic program.

**Cinemex Casa de Arte** (Map pp120-1; 5280-9156; Anatole France 120; admission $4.50; **M** Polanco)

**Lumiere Reforma** (Map pp118-19; 5514-0000; Rio Guadalquivir 104; admission $4; **M** Sevilla)

In addition, several repertory cinemas cater to film buffs.

**Centro Cultural Universitario** (Map pp110-11; 5665-0709; Insurgentes Sur 3000; tickets $2.25) UNAM’s two cinemas screen films from its collection of over 35,000 titles. Programming for this and other UNAM-system cinemas can be found at: www.unam.mx/filmoteca/Cines/cines.htm. See p143 for directions on how to get there.

**Cinematógrafo del Chopo** (Map pp114-15; 5702-3494; Dr Atl 37, Colonia Santa María La Ribera; tickets $2.25; **M** San Cosme)

**Cineteca Nacional** (Map p123; 1253-9390; www.cinetecanacional.net in Spanish; Av México-Coyoacán 389; tickets $3.50; **M** Coyoacán) Thematically focused film series are shown on six screens, with at least one for Mexican cinema. There are cafés and bookstores at the center of the complex, 700m east of metro Coyoacán. In November the Cineteca hosts the Muestra Internacional de Cine, Mexico City’s international film festival.
Contempo Cinema (Map pp118-19; ☏ 5208-4044; Londres 161; www.contempocinema.com; M Insurgentes) Emphasis on gay and erotic themes; inside the Zona Rosa’s Plaza Ángel shopping center.

Salon Cinematográfico Fósforo (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5702-3494; San Ildefonso 43; tickets $2.25; M Zócalo) Inside the Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso (p131).

Dance, Classical Music & Theater

Orchestral music, opera, ballet, contemporary dance and theater are all abundantly represented in the capital’s numerous theaters. Museums, too, serve as performance venues, including the Museo de la Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público (Map pp110-11; 5546-5484; www.chopo.unam.mx in Spanish; González Martínez 10; M San Cosme). The national arts council (Conaculta) provides a rundown on its website (www.cnca.gob.mx in Spanish) and in Friday’s La Jornada.

Palacio de Bellas Artes (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5521-9251; Av Hidalgo 1; box office 11am-7pm; M Bellas Artes) The Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional and prestigious opera and dance companies perform in the palace’s ornate theater, while chamber groups appear in the recital halls. It’s most famous, though, for the Ballet Folclórico de México (tickets $27-46; 8:30pm Wed, 9:30am & 8:30pm Sun), a two-hour festive blur of costumes, music and dance from all over Mexico. Tickets are usually available the day of the show at the Palacio or from Ticketmaster (see opposite).

Centro Cultural Universitario (Map pp110-11; ☏ 5622-7185; www.agendacultural.unam.mx in Spanish; Av Insurgentes Sur 3000) Ensconced in the woodsy southern section of the national university

GAY & LESBIAN MEXICO CITY

The Zona Rosa is the focus of the gay scene, particularly Calle Amberes, where gay-oriented clubs and cafés have been sprouting up. Condessa, too, has seen a surge in gay cultural venues. Homópolis magazine, available free in some clubs, and www.sergay.com.mx (in Spanish) have useful information.

BGay BProud Café México (Map pp118-19; ☏ 5208-2547; www.bgaybproud.com; Amberes 12-B; 11am-11pm; M Insurgentes) A good place to start your explorations, this casual café functions as a sort of nerve center for DF gay life, particularly among a younger crowd.

Butterflies (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5761-1861; Izazaga 9; cover incl 2 drinks $7; 9pm-4am Tue-Sun; M Salto del Agua) Just outside metro Salto del Agua, Butterflies is an airplane hangar–sized space that still manages to get densely packed, with five bars, a snack bar and elaborately choreographed stage shows. It’s fun for straights, too, as long as you don’t mind crowds, thick smoke and loud, loud music.

Living (Map pp118-19; ☏ 5286-0671; www.living.com.mx; Paseo de la Reforma 483, Roma; cover $12; 11pm-4am Fri & Sat; M Sevilla) Housed in a magnificent Italianate mansion near the Torre Mayor, Living is a temple of ecstatic nightlife for the 20-something set, both gay and straight. On the enormous main dance floor, world-class DJs cook up high-volume house sessions as sculpted performance artists/exotic dancers gyrate. Other scenes unfold in other lounges.

El Viena (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5512-0929; República de Cuba 2E; 1pm-3am; M Bellas Artes) The city’s only gay cantina is a friendly if nondescript place, attracting a varied crowd, from truck drivers to journalists. And the jukebox is terrific.

Bar Oasis (Map pp114-15; ☏ 5521-9740; República de Cuba 2-G, Centro; 3pm-1am Sun-Thu, 3pm-3am Fri & Sat; M Bellas Artes) Next to El Viena, this disco has an entertaining show featuring lip-synching trannies.

Lipslick (Map pp118-19; ☏ 5514-4920; Amberes 1, cnr Paseo de la Reforma; cover Wed-Fri $7.50, Sat $11; Wed-Sat; M Insurgentes) At this large (capacity 950) club for an upscale 18-to-35 set, the fun goes on in three distinct settings: a subdued lower lounge for chilling out with friends, the ‘Black Terrace’ for close encounters, and an excellent upstairs terrace for all-out revelry. Thursday is girls’ night.

La Perla (Map pp114-15; ☏ 1997-7695; República de Cuba 44; cover $9.50; 11:30pm & 1:30am Fri & Sat; M Bellas Artes) Once a red-light venue, this small cabaret has been reborn in the age of irony as a cradle of kitsch, with hilarious drag shows featuring uncanny impersonations of stars like Paulina Rubio and Celia Cruz. It attracts a mixed crowd, perhaps more straight than gay, in the mood to slum it. Be sure to arrive by 10:30pm to get in.
campus, the complex comprises five theaters, including the Sala Nezahualcóyotl, home of the UNAM Philharmonic; the Teatro Alarcón, which puts on plays; and the Sala Miguel Covarrubias, a contemporary dance venue. See p143 for directions.

Centro Nacional de las Artes (CNA; Map p123; 1253-9400, ext 1035; www.cenart.gob.mx in Spanish; Río Churubusco 79; M General Anaya) This sprawling art institute has events across the artistic spectrum, many free. Exit metro General Anaya (Línea 2) on the east side of Calz de Tlalpan, walk north to the corner and turn right.

Centro Cultural del Bosque (Map pp120-1; 5280-6228; cnr Paseo de la Reforma & Campo Marte; box office noon-3pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri & prior to events; M Auditorio) This complex behind the Auditorio Nacional features six theaters, including the Teatro de la Danza, dedicated to modern dance. On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, children’s plays and puppet shows are staged.

If your Spanish is up to it, you might sample Mexico City’s lively theater scene. The website www.mejorteatro.com.mx (in Spanish) covers the major venues. Performances are generally Thursday to Sunday evenings with weekend matinees.

Foro Shakespeare (Map pp118-19; 5533-4642; Zamora 7, Condesa; tickets free-$14; M Chapultepec) Small independent theater with eclectic program.

Teatro Blanquita (Map pp114-15; 5512-8264; Eje Central Lázaro Cardenas 16, Centro; tickets $8-15; M Bellas Artes) Classic variety theater.

Teatro La Capilla (Map p123; 3095-4077; www.geocities.com/losendebles; Madrid 13, Coyoacán; tickets $8-10; M Coyoacán) Highlighting contemporary Mexican playwrights.

Live Music
The variety of music is impressive, with traditional Mexican, Cuban, folk, jazz, rock and other styles being played in concert halls, clubs, bars, museums, on public transportation and on the street. The ‘Espectáculos Nocturnos’ and ‘Espectáculos Populares’ sections in Tiempo Libre cover events.

Free concerts take place most weekends on the Zócalo. Coyoacán is another good bet most evenings and all day Saturday and Sunday: musicians, comedians and mimes turn its two central plazas into a big open-air party.

Additionally, a number of Colonia Roma and Condesa bars and restaurants turn into live-music venues after dark (see p168).

CONCERTS
Auditorio Nacional (Map pp120-1; 5280-9250; www.auditorio.com.mx in Spanish; Paseo de la Reforma 50; M Auditorio) Major gigs by Mexican and visiting rock and pop artists take the stage at the 10,000-seat Auditorio Nacional (National Auditorium).

Salón 21 (Mapp120-1; 5255-1496; Andrómaco 17, cnr Moliere; cover varies; M Polanco) A warehouse-sized venue for touring salsa stars as well as rock, world and other performers. With excellent sound, wall-length bar and dance floor for thousands, this is one of Mexico’s most cutting-edge clubs.

Teatro de la Ciudad (Map pp114-15; 5510-2942; Donceles 36; M Allende) Built in 1918, this lavishly restored 1500-seat hall gets some of the more interesting touring groups.

Teatro Metropolitan (Map pp114-15; 5510-1035; Independencia 90; M Juárez) Artists as diverse as Café Tacuba, Bobby McFerrin and the Russian National Ballet have played this medium-sized hall.

MARIACHIS
Five blocks north of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Plaza Garibaldi (Map pp114–15) is where the city’s mariachi bands gather. Outfitted in fancy costumes, they tootle their trumpets, tune their guitars and stand around with a drink until approached by someone who’ll pay for a song (about $10) or whisk them away to entertain at a party.

Plaza Garibaldi gets going by about 8pm and stays busy until around midnight. For food, try the Mercado San Camilito north of the plaza.

El Tenampa (Map pp114-15; 5526-6176; 1pm-3am; M Garibaldi) Graced with murals of the giants of Mexican song and enlivened by its own songsters, this festive cantina on the north side of the plaza is an obligatory visit.

ROCK
The street-market Tianguis Cultural del Chopo (see the boxed text, p177) has a stage at its north end every Saturday afternoon for young and hungry alternative, metal and punk bands.

Dada X (Map pp114-15; 2454-4310; www.dadax .com.mx in Spanish; Bolívar 31, cnr Calle 16 de Septiembre;
depending on event, free-$10; from 9pm Thu-Sat; (M San Juan de Letrán) Black-clad youth gravitate toward this space on the upper floor of a magnificent colonial building. The varied program includes cult films, poetry readings and live music, which might be anything from ska to electronica.

**Multiforo Alicia** (Map pp118-19; 5511-2100; Av Cuauhtémoc 91; cover $5; 8pm-2am Fri & Sat; (M Cuauhtémoc) Behind the graffiti-scarred facade is Mexico City’s premier rock club. A suitably smoky, seatless space, the Alicia stages up-and-coming punk, surf and ska bands, who hawk their music at the store downstairs.

**Pasagüero** (Map pp114-15; 5521-6112; Motolinía 33; (M Allende) Some visionary developers took a historic building and transformed its ground level into a space for various cultural happenings, especially rock and electronica gigs. A key venue in the Centro redevelopment scheme, the club only opens for events: phone to find out what’s on.

**JAZZ**

**Papa Beto** (Map pp118-19; 5592-1638; www.papabeto.com in Spanish; Villalongin 196, Colonia Cuauhtémoc; cover $7.50; 1st/2nd set 9:30pm/11pm Tue-Sat; (M Insurgentes) Run by a Japanese expatriate to highlight the impressive wealth of local talent, this club is the city’s top jazz venue. Tuesday night is reserved for jam sessions with surprise guests.

**Zinco Jazz Club** (Map pp114-15; 5512-3369; Motolinía 20; cover varies with event; from 9pm Wed-Sun; (M Allende) Another new space in the Centro, Zinco is a subterranean supper club featuring local players and occasional big-name touring artists.

**LATIN DANCE**

The city’s many aficionados have a circuit of clubs and salones de baile (dance halls) to choose from. Even if you don’t dance, you’ll enjoy just listening to the great music and watching the experts on the dance floor. At the clubs listed here, it’s customary to go in a group and share a bottle of rum or tequila (around $60, including mixers).

Cuban dance clubs abound in Colonia Roma, particularly near the intersection of Insurgentes and Medellin.

You might learn a few steps at the Plaza de Danzón (Map pp114–15), northwest of La Ciudadela near metro Balderas. Couples crowd the plaza every Saturday afternoon to do the danzón, an elegant though complicated Cuban step that infiltrated Mexico in the 19th century. Lessons in danzón and other steps are given from noon to 4pm.

**Salón Los Ángeles** (Map pp110-11; 5597-5181; Lerdo 206; cover $3.25; 6-11pm Tue & Sun; (M Tlatelolco) ‘Those who don’t know Los Ángeles don’t know Mexico’ reads the marquee, and for once the hyperbole is well deserved. Cuban-music fans won’t want to miss the outstanding orchestras here nor the incredibly graceful dancers who fill the vast floor. Particularly on Tuesday evening, when an older crowd comes for danzones, it’s like the set of a period film. Salón Los Ángeles is in a rough area so take a taxi.

**El Gran León** (Map pp118-19; 5564-7110; Querétaro 225; cover $5.50; 9pm-3:30am Thu-Sat; (M Chilpancingo) This club hosts the city’s finest Cuban son ensembles. Two or three groups take the tropical stage nightly. Unescorted (and escorted) women should expect to be invited up onto the tightly packed dance floor.

**Mamá Rumba** (cover $6.50; 9pm-3am Thu-Sat) Roma (Map pp118-19; 5564-6920; Querétaro 230, cnr Medellin; (M Chilpancingo); San Ángel (Map p122; 5550-8099; Plaza San Jacinto 23; (M Miguel Angel de Quevedo) Mamá Rumba features contemporary salsa, attracting a younger, upscale crowd. It’s also a gathering place for the local Cuban community. Be sure to arrive early for a table, as the club invariably fills beyond capacity.

**Primer Cuadro** (Map pp114-15; 5521-2016; Bolivar 12; from 9pm Thu-Sat; (M Allende) At this stylish bookstore-restaurant, the evening’s entertainment begins with trova (songs), then shifts into dance mode as Cuban salseros take the stage and a mostly over-30 set fills the floor.

**CABARET**

**La Casa de Paquita la del Barrio** (Map pp110-11; 5583-8131; Zarco 202; 8:30pm Fri & Sat; cover $14; (M Guerrero) Located in the rough-and-tumble Guerrero district, Paquita’s house is a bastion of popular culture. Following a series of openers, Paquita la del Barrio, the corpulent TV and recording star, takes the stage and proceeds to run through a sublime set of plaintive ballads, almost all of which express disdain for her suitors – her
asides are deliciously bitter. Phone ahead to find out if Paquita is performing.

El Bataclán (Map pp118-19; 5511-7390; Popocatépetl 25, cnr Amsterdam; cover $15; 9pm Tue-Sat; M Insurgentes) A theater within a club (La Bodega), this intimate cabaret showcases some of Mexico’s most vivid performers, with frequent appearances by the wonderfully surreal Astrid Haddad. Afterwards, catch top-notch Cuban son combos in La Bodega’s various salons.

Bar El Vicio (Map p123; 5659-1139; www.laseinaschulas.com in Spanish; Madrid 13; cover $10-15; Coyoacán) Alternative cabaret with liberal doses of irreverent comedy and great music.

Hexen-Café (Map pp118-19; 5514-5969; Jalapa 104; cover free-$7; shows 8:30pm Thu-Sat; M Insurgentes) This pocket of German culture has an eclectic performance program, ranging from poetry marathons to Cuban jazz.

TROVA & TRADITIONAL

Cafebrería El Pendúlulo (www.pendulo.com in Spanish; cover varies; shows from 9:30pm) Condesa (Map pp118-19; 5286-9493; Av Nuevo León 115; M Chilpancingo); Zona Rosa (Map pp118-19; 5208-2327; Humborgo 126; M Insurgentes); Polanco (Map pp120-1; 5280-4111; Dumas 81; M Polanco) Leading Mexican trovadores play each branch of this café-bookstore.

El Balcón Huasteco (Map pp110-11; 5341-6762; Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz 248, cnr Av de los Maestros; from 6pm Thu-Sat; M Normal) A center for the Huastec culture of Hidalgo and Veracruz, this old house stages the region’s finest trios. There are wooden platforms for traditional zapateando dancing and snacks from the area.

Café Corazón (Map p122; 5550-8854; Frontera 4; cover $6-8; 9:30pm Fri & Sat; M Miguel Angel de Quevedo) Folk singers in the Silvio Rodríguez mold take the small stage at this temple of trova near San Ángel’s Plaza San Jacinto. Catch metrobus ‘La Bombilla.’

Dance & Electronica

The capital’s thriving club scene has become an obligatory stop on the international DJ circuit. To find out what’s going on, pick up flyers at Condesa’s Malafama billiard hall (p168).

AM (Map pp118-19; 5286-8572; Nuevo León 67; cover $9.50; from 10pm Wed-Sat; M Patriotismo) Condesa’s super-trendy new nightspot takes up a floor of the mammoth Plaza Condesa building. A narrow hall eerily enhanced by liquid illumination, it has fast become the choice for electronica aficionados, with great sound and an ever-changing cast of DJs.

La Terraza (Map pp114-15; 5521-1925; www.ccemx.org; from 10pm Fri & Sat; M Zócalo) The top terrace of the Spanish cultural center has gained a reputation for its excellent weekend DJ sessions.

Continental DJ Club (Map pp118-19; 5525-6268; www.continentaldjclub.com; Florecia 12; cover $15; from 10pm-10am Wed-Sat; M Insurgentes) Mirror balls, pulsing beats, hip dancers and video projections keep after-hours scenemakers hypnotized at this cutting-edge hall, known for its internationally acclaimed guest DJs. Progressive house predominates, but there is variety.

Pink (Map pp120-1; 5282-1635; Dumas 107; cover $9.50; from 7pm-4am Tue-Sat; M Polanco) A less self-consciously hip venue than usual for Polanco, Pink is a party palace. Within a kitschily designed circular lounge, young singles, along with the occasional artist or model, sip Pink martinis and sing along with hits en español.

Kubrik (Map p122; 5616-6972; Av de la Paz 39; from 10pm Thu-Sat; cover $9.50; M Miguel Angel de Quevedo) This state-of-the-art club pulls in close to a thousand well-heeled hedonists who lounge on its numerous sofas or jump around on the levitating dance floor. Take metrobus ‘La Bombilla’ to San Ángel.

El Colmillo (Map pp114-15; 5592-6114; Versalles 52; cover $9.50; from 11pm Thu-Sat; M Cuauhtémoc) DJs crank the volume to coccyx-crunching levels at this hallucinogenic hangout. Gyrate to deep house, psychedelic trance etc; the cocktail list is equally varied. The more subdued upstairs lounge has performance events.

Pervert Lounge (Map pp114-15; 5510-4457; Uruguay 70; cover $9.50; from 11pm-5am Thu-Sat; M Isabel la Católica) A magnet for 20-something hipsters, the garage-like space offers kitschy decor, two turntables and some very large speakers.

Sports

SOCCER

The capital stages two or three fútbol (soccer) matches in the national Primera División almost every weekend of the year. There are two seasons: January to June and
August to December. Mexico City has four teams: América, nicknamed Las Águilas (the Eagles), Las Pumas of UNAM, Cruz Azul and Atlante. The newspaper Esto has the best coverage.

The biggest match of all is El Clásico, between América and Guadalajara, filling the Estadio Azteca with 100,000 flag-waving fans – an occasion surprising for the friendliness between rival fans. This is about the only game of the year when you should get tickets in advance.

Tickets ($7.50 to $40 for regular season games) are usually available at the gate right up to game time, or from Ticketmaster (see p170). There are several stadiums that host games.

**Estadio Azteca** (Map pp110-11; 🏶 5617-8080; www. esmas.com/estadioazteca in Spanish; Calz de Tlalpan 3665) The country’s biggest stadium (capacity 114,000) is home to both the América and Atlante clubs. Games are played on weekend afternoons; check the website for kickoff times. Take the Tren Ligero from metro Tasqueña to Estadio Azteca station.

**Estadio Azul** (Map pp110-11; 🏶 5563-9040; www.cruz-azul.com.mx in Spanish; Indiana 260, Colonia Nápoles) The stadium is next door to the Plaza México bullring. Cruz Azul home games kick off at 5pm on Saturday. Catch metrobus ‘Ciudad de los Deportes.’

**Estadio Olímpico** (Map pp110-11; 🏶 5522-0491; www.pumasunam.com.mx in Spanish; Insurgentes Sur 3000, Ciudad Universitaria) Home of the Pumas; games start at noon on Sunday. See p143 for directions.

**BASEBALL**

Mexico City has one team in the Liga Mexicana de Béisbol, the Diablos Rojos (www.diablos.com.mx). During the regular season (March to July), they play every other week at the Foro Sol (Map pp110-11; 🏶 5764-8415; cnr Av Churubusco & Viaducto Río de la Piedad; tickets $2-8; 🕒 7pm Mon-Fri, 4pm Sat, noon Sun). From Ciudad Deportiva station, on metro Línea 9, it’s a five-minute walk to the ballpark.

**BULLFIGHTS**

If you’re not put off by the very concept, a corrida de toros is quite a spectacle, from the milling throngs and hawkers outside the arena to the pageantry and drama in the ring itself.

One of the largest bullrings in the world, Monumental Plaza México (Map pp110-11; 🏶 5563-3961; Rodin 241, Colonia Nochebuena) is a deep concrete bowl holding 42,000 spectators. It’s a few blocks west of Av Insurgentes. Catch metrobus ‘Ciudad de los Deportes.’

From November to March, professional fights are held on Sunday from 4pm. From June to October, junior matadors fight young bulls. Six bulls are fought in an afternoon, two each by three matadors.

The cheapest seats, less than $5, are in the Sol General section – the top tiers on the sunny side of the arena. Seats in the Sombra General section, on the shady side, cost slightly more. The best seats are in the Barreras, the seven front rows, and cost $50. Between the Barreras and General sections are the Primer (1er) Tendido and Segundo (2o) Tendido.

Except for the biggest corridas, tickets are available up to the killing of the third bull, though the best seats may sell out early. You can buy advance tickets from 9:30am to 2pm and 4pm to 7pm Saturday, and from 9:30am onward Sunday.

For more on bullfights, see p66.

**LUCHA LIBRE (MEXICAN WRESTLING)**

Mexico City’s two wrestling venues, the 17,000-seat Arena de México (Map pp114-15; Dr Lavista 189, Colonia Doctores; 🏶 5588-0266; tickets $3.50-7; 🕒 8:30pm Fri; M Cuauhtémoc) and the smaller Arena Coliseo (Map pp114-15; 🏶 5526-1687; República de Perú 77; tickets $2-4; 🕒 7:30pm Tue, 5pm Sun; M La- gunilla) are taken over by a circus atmosphere each week, with flamboyant luchadores (wrestlers) like Shocker and Tarzan Boy going at each other in teams or one-on-one. There are three or four bouts, building up to the most formidable match-ups.

**SHOPPING**

If you explore the public and street markets, it’s common to negotiate a bit on the price. Before you start, consider what you are willing to pay, then offer that or a little less.

**Markets**

Mexico City’s markets are worth visiting, not just for their extraordinarily varied contents, but also for a glimpse of the frenetic business conducted within. Besides the major ones listed here, neighborhood markets (indicated by ‘Mi Mercado’ signs) also make for an interesting wander.

**Mercado Insurgentes** (Map pp118-19; Londres, Zona Rosa; 🕒 9:30am-7:30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun; M Insurgentes) Between Florencia and
Amberes, and packed with crafts – silver, textiles, pottery, leather and carved wooden figures – but you’ll need to bargain to get sensible prices.

**Centro de Artesanías La Ciudadela** (Map pp114-15; Balderas, cnr Dondé;  10am-6pm;  Balderas) A favorite destination for good stuff from all over Mexico. Worth seeking out are Oaxaca alebrijes – whimsical representations of animals in wood (local 6, northernmost aisle, near Balderas entrance); guitars from Paracho (local 64 off central patio); and Huichol beadwork (local 163, off Dondé at parking entrance). Prices are generally fair even before you bargain.

**Mercado de Artesanías San Juan** (Map pp114-15; Ayuntamiento, cnr Buen Tono;  9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-4pm Sun;  San Juan de Letrán) Four blocks east of La Ciudadela, with similar goods and prices. Part of the Mercado San Juan complex, it is noted for its local and specialty foods.

**La Lagunilla** (Map pp114-15; cnr Rayón & Allende;  9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun;  Garibaldi) This enormous complex comprises three buildings: building No 1 contains clothes and fabrics, No 2 food, and No 3 furniture. This occupies four whole blocks dedicated to the buying and selling of daily needs, and features photogenic food displays.

**Mercado de Jamaica** (Map pp110-11; cnr Guillermo Prieto & Congreso de la Union, Colonia Jamaica;  8am-7pm;  Jamaica) A huge, colorful flower market. The numerous stalls display both baroque floral arrangements and more exotic blooms like tropical orchids and heliconias.

**STREET MARKETS**

In most neighborhoods, you’ll find a tianguis (from the Nahua tianguiztil) at least once a week selling the freshest fruits and vegetables, with vendors shouting out ¿Qué le damos?‘ (What can we give you?). Tianguis generally set up by 10am and break down around 5pm.

**Bazar Artesanal de Coyoacán** (Map p123; Plaza Hidalgo, Coyoacán;  Sat & Sun;  Viveros) Has handmade hippie jewelry and indigenous crafts, jugglers, fortune-tellers, candles and incense.

**Bazar de la Roma** (Map pp118-19; Parque Ignacio Chávez & Álvaro Obregón, Colonia Roma;  Sat & Sun;  Cuahtémoc) East of Av Cuauhtémoc, this market has used and antique items, large and small: books, beer trays, posters and furniture. There is also a similar antiques and art market along Álvaro Obregón on the same days.

**Bazar del Oro** (Map pp118-19; Calle de Oro, Roma;  Wed, Sat & Sun;  Insurgentes) This upscale street market between Insurgentes and Plaza Cibeles has clothing, gifts and an excellent eating section (see the boxed text, p159). You can catch metrobus ‘Durango.’

**Jardín del Arte** (Map pp118-19; btwn Sullivan & Villalongín;  Sun) Also known as the Sullivan Market, this one has a large selection of paintings and art supplies, plus some food. Catch metrobus ‘Reformador.’

**Plaza del Ángel** (Map pp118-19; btwn Amberes & Florencia, Zona Rosa;  Sun;  Insurgentes) Sells antique silverware, jewelry, furniture and art.

**Tepito** (Map pp114-15; Héro de Granaditas;  Wed-Mon;  Lagunilla) The mother of all street markets: maze of semipermanent stalls spreading east and north, between Eje 1 Oriente and Reforma, from La Lagunilla, with miles of clothes, pirated CDs and DVDs and electronics. Also known as the Thieves Market for its black-market goods and pickpockets.

**Tianguis Domínical de la Lagunilla** (Map pp114-15; cnr González Bocanegra & Rayón;  Sun;  Garibaldi) Hunt for antiques, old souvenirs and bric-a-brac; books and magazines are alongside the Lagunilla building. Look for exvoto paintings by Alfredo Vilchis & Sons (or have your own miracles depicted).

**Shops**

The well-heeled residents of Mexico City shop in modern malls with designer-clothing stores and cosmeticians. Among the more accessible are Plaza Loreto (Map p122) in San Ángel; Plaza Insurgentes (Map pp118–19), on Insurgentes at the edge of Colonia Roma; Plaza Coyoacán (Map p123) near metro Coyoacán; and Plaza Molíre (Map pp120–1), at Molíre and Horacio in Polanco.

**Fonart Mixcoac** (Map pp110-11;  5563-4060; Patriotismo 691;  9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun;  Mixcoac; Alameda (Map pp114-15;  5521-0171; Juárez 89;  10am-7pm;  Hidalgo); Reforma (Map pp118-19;  5328-5000, ext 53089; Paseo de la Reforma 116;  10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat;  Cuahtémoc) The government-run handicrafts store sells quality wares from around the country, from Olinalá lacquered boxes...
to Teotitlán del Valle blankets, as well as pottery and glassware. Prices are fixed and fair. The largest branch is the one in Mixcoácat.

**Bazar Sábado** (Map p122; Plaza San Jacinto 11, San Ángel; 10am-7pm Sat; Miguel Angel de Quevedo) The bazaar showcases some of Mexico's best handcrafted jewelry, woodwork, ceramics and textiles. Prices are high but so is quality. Artists and artisans also display work in Plaza San Jacinto itself, and in nearby Plaza del Carmen. Between the two plazas are some interesting boutiques and antique shops, many open daily, including the Casa del Obispo (Map p122).

**CENTRO HISTÓRICO**

Mexico City's most upscale department stores, **El Palacio de Hierro** (Map pp114-15; 5728-9905; Av 20 de Noviembre 3; Zócalo) and **Liverpool** (Map pp114-15; 5133-2800; Venustiano Carranza 92; Zócalo) both maintain their original c-1930s stores downtown.

The streets around the Zócalo are lined with stores specializing in everyday goods; you'll find clusters of shops selling similar items on the same street. To the west, photography supplies and used books show up on Donceles, sports gear and backpacks on Venustiano Carranza, and perfumes along Tacuba. Jewelry and gold outlets, as well as numismatists shops, are found along La Palma, while opticians are sighted along Madero. To the south, shoes show up on Pino Suárez and Av 20 de Noviembre; and electric guitars and other instruments along Bolivar. To the north, there's costume jewelry on República de Colombia and Venezuela streets and beauty products along Calle del Carmen. Going east, there are tons of tools along Corregidora. Look for underwear down Correo Mayor, and bicycles on San Pablo west of Mercado La Merced.

Hundreds of computer stores huddle in the **Plaza de la Computación y Electrónica** (Map pp114-15; Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas; San Juan de Letrán), south of Uruguay.

Tucked away in the backstreets are some special items.

**Dulcería de Celaya** (10:30am-7pm) Centro Histórico (Map pp114-15; 5521-1787; Av 5 de Mayo 39; Allende) Traditional candy store operating since 1874 with candied fruits and coconut-stuffed lemons; worth a look just for the ornate building.

**Hoja Real** (Map pp114-15; 5518-5200; Uruguay 12; San Juan de Letrán) Cigars from San Andrés, Veracruz.

**La Europea** (Map pp114-15; 5512-6005; Ayuntamiento 25; San Juan de Letrán) Big selection of reasonably priced tequilas and wines.

**Palacio de las Máscaras** (Map pp114-15; 5529-2849; Allende 84; 11am-6pm Mon-Sat; Garibaldi) More than 5000 masks from all over the country; Lagunilla market area.

**ZONA ROSA**

This area has a variety of boutiques aimed at tourists. Between Génova and Florencia are a couple of arcades with access from Hamburgo or Londres. Plaza La Rosa is a good place to look for clothes. Plaza del

**TIANGUIS CULTURAL DEL CHOPO**

One of the weirder street markets in town, the **Tianguis Cultural del Chofo** (Map pp110-11; Calle Juan Nepomuceno; 10am-4pm Sat; Buenavista) is a gathering place for the city's various youth subcultures. Punks, goths, metalheads and all the other urban tribes gravitate here each Saturday to buy and trade CDs, hear live bands, find out about upcoming events and exchange ideas. Established in 1980 at the Museo Universitario del Chofo, it moved eight years later to its current location near the now-defunct Buenavista railroad station, and has been thriving ever since. Of the hundreds of vendor stalls that extend along two aisles for several blocks, most are devoted to music CDs, with many specializing in subgenres like progressive rock, hardcore and ska. One vendor, Ramón García Bolaños, on the west side near the entrance to the market, has more than 3000 discs of rock mexicano on offer. There's an art gallery, a book club with poetry readings, and a stall for NGOs dealing with the environment and animal rights. At the far end is a concert stage for young-and-hungry bands, plus a trading post where people bring crates of CDs to swap.

Anyone interested in plugging into Mexico's alternative currents should roam amid this 'temple of the counterculture,' as commentator Carlos Monsivais termed it.
Ángel has a number of classy antique and art shops; more are strung along Amberes and Estocolmo. Insurgentes is the closest metro stop to these plazas.

POLANCO
Designer-clothing houses line Presidente Masaryk in the blocks west of Anatole France. More boutiques occupy the Pasaje Polanco (Map pp120–1) and nearby streets.

GETTING THERE & AWAY
Drop into the Instituto Nacional de Migración (Map pp120–1; 9am-1:30pm Mon-Fri; M Polanco) to get your tourist card stamped or check what other documents are needed.

Note that all passenger train services from Mexico City have been discontinued.

Air
Aeropuerto Internacional Benito Juárez (Map pp110–11; 5571-3600; www.aicm.com.mx in Spanish), 6km east of the Zócalo, is Mexico City’s only passenger airport. Recent renovations have expanded its capacity to 30 million passengers annually, making it the largest airport in Latin America. See p988 for information on international flights and p996 for information on domestic flights. See p989 for airlines serving Mexico City.

The single terminal is divided into eight salas (halls):
Sala A Domestic arrivals.
Sala B Check-in for Aeroméxico, Mexicana and Aero California; Hotel Camino Real access.
Sala C Check-in for Avia. Salas
Sala D Check-in for Azteca and Magnicharters.
Sala E2 International arrivals.
Sala F & J Check-in for international flights.
Sala G International departures.

The terminal’s shops and facilities include numerous casas de cambio; Tamibe (5726-0578) in Sala E2 stays open 24 hours. Peso-dispensing ATMs on the Cirrus and Plus networks are easily found.

Telmex card phones and Internet terminals abound; cards are available from shops and machines. Car-rental agencies and luggage lockers (up to 24hr $5; 24hr) are in Salas A and E2.

Direct buses to Cuernavaca, Querétaro, Toluca, Puebla and Córdoba depart from platforms adjacent to Sala E (see the table, p180). Ticket counters are on the upper level, off the food court.

AIRLINE OFFICES
Aero California (Map pp118–19; 5207-1392; Paseo de la Reforma 332, Zona Rosa; M Insurgentes)
Aeromar (Map pp118–19; 5514-2248, 800-237-66-27; Sheraton Maria Isabel Hotel, Paseo de la Reforma 325; M Insurgentes)
Aeroméxico (5133-4010) Juárez (Map pp114–15; Paseo de la Reforma 80; M Juárez); Zona Rosa (Map pp118–19; Paseo de la Reforma 445; M Cuauhtémoc)
Air Canada (Map pp120–1; 9138-0289, ext 2228, 800-719-28-27; 13th fl, Blvd Ávila Camacho 1, Colonia Lomas de Chapultepec; M Auditorio)
Air France (Map pp120–1; 2122-8200, 800-123-46-60; 8th fl, Jaime Bálmases 8, Colonia Los Morales; M Polanco)
Alitalia (Map pp118–19; 5533-1240, 800-012-59-00; 6th fl, Río Tiber 103, Colonia Cuauhtémoc; M Insurgentes)
American Airlines (Map pp118–19; 5209-1400; Paseo de la Reforma 300, Zona Rosa; M Insurgentes)
Avia (5716-9005, 800-006-22-00; Airport)
Avianca (5546-3073, 800-705-79-00; Paseo de la Reforma 193; M Insurgentes)
British Airways (Map pp120–1; 5387-0300; 14th fl, Jaime Bálmases 8, Colonia Los Morales; M Polanco)
Continental Airlines (Map pp120–1; 5283-5500, 800-900-50-00; Andrés Bello 45, Polanco; M Auditorio)
Copa Airlines (Map pp118–19; 5241-2000; Berna 6; M Insurgentes)
Cubana (Map pp120–1; 5250-6355; Sol y Son Viajes, Homero 613, Polanco; M Polanco)
Delta Airlines (Map pp118–19; 5279-0909, 800-123-47-78; Paseo de la Reforma 381; M Sevilla)
Iberia (Map pp120–1; 1101-1515; Ejército Nacional 436, Colonia Chapultepec Morales; M Polanco)
Japan Air Lines (Map pp118–19; 5422-0150, 800-024-01-50; 36th fl, Torre Mayor, Paseo de la Reforma 505; M Chapultepec)
KLM/Northwest (Map pp120–1; 5279-5390; 11th fl, Andrés Bello 45, Polanco; M Auditorio)
Lineas Aéreas Azteca (Map pp118–19; 5716-8989, 800-229-83-22; Niza 17, Zona Rosa; M Insurgentes)
Lufthansa (Map pp120–1; 5230-0000; Paseo de las Palmas 239, Colonia Lomas de Chapultepec; M Auditorio)
Magnicharters (Map pp114–15; 5141-1351; Donato Guerra 9, cnr Bucareli; M Juárez)
Mexicana (5448-0990, 800-502-20-00) Juárez (Map pp114–15; Juárez 82, cnr Balderas; M Juárez); Zona Rosa (Map pp118–19; Paseo de la Reforma 312, cnr Amíbres; M Insurgentes)
Los Morales (Map pp120–1; Pabellón Polanco Shopping Mall, Ejército Nacional 980)
United Airlines (Map pp118-19; © 5627-0222, 800-00-30-777; Hamburgo 213, Zona Rosa; M Sevilla)

Bus
Mexico City has four long-distance–bus terminals serving the four compass points: Terminal Norte (north), Terminal Oriente (called TAPO, east), Terminal Poniente (west) and Terminal Sur (south). All terminals have baggage-check services or lockers ($1 to $5 per item), as well as tourist information modules, newsstands, card phones, Internet, ATMs and snack bars. For directions to the bus stations, see p184.

There are also buses to nearby cities from the airport (see the table, p180). For trips up to five hours, it usually suffices to go to the bus station, buy your ticket and go. For longer trips, many buses leave in the evening and may well sell out, so buy your ticket beforehand.

One helpful resource is Ticketbus (© 5133-2424, 800-702-80-00; www.ticketbus.com.mx), an agency that reserves and sells tickets for more than a dozen bus lines out of all four stations. For ADO GL, UNO and ETN, Ticketbus offers purchase by phone or Internet with Visa or MasterCard (plus $4 service fee per ticket). In addition to the Ticketbus locations below, a couple more are inside the international departures terminal at the airport. Outlets are open 9am or 10am to 2:30pm, and 3:30pm to 7pm or 8pm Monday to Friday, and 9am or 10am to 2pm or 3pm Saturday.

Buenavista (Map pp114-15; Revolución)
Centro Histórico (Map pp114-15; Isabel la Católica 83E; M Isabel la Católica)
Condesa (Map pp118-19; Iztacáhuatl 6, cnr Insurgentes; M Chilpancingo)
Polanco (Map pp120–1; Presidente Masaryk, cnr Hegel; M Polanco)
Reforma (Map pp118-19; Paseo de la Reforma 412; M Sevilla) Across from La Diana Cazadora.
Roma Norte (Map pp118-19; Puebla 46; M Cuauhtémoc)
Roma Norte (Map pp118-19; Mérida 156; M Hospital General)
Zócalo (Map pp114-15; Turismo Zócalo, Venustiano Carranza 67; M Zócalo)

For certain destinations you have a choice of terminals, thus avoiding the need to travel across town for connections. Oaxaca, for example, is served by TAPO, Sur and Norte terminals.

See the table, p180 for a list of daily services from Mexico City. More information can be found in other town and city sections of this book. It’s all subject to change, of course.

Check schedules by phoning the bus lines or by visiting their (sometimes functional) websites.

ADO Group (© 5133-2424, 800-702-80-00; www.ticketbus.com.mx) Includes ADO, ADO GL, UNO, OCC, AU.

Estrella Blanca Group (© 5729-0707) Includes Futura, Elite, Turistar.

Estrella de Oro (© 5689-3955; www.estralladeoro.com.mx in Spanish)


ETN (© 5089-9200, 800-800-0386; www.etn.com.mx)

Omnibus de México (© 5141-4300, 800-765-6636; www.odm.com.mx in Spanish)


Pullman de Morelos (© 5549-3505; www.pullman.com.mx in Spanish)

-terminal Norte

Largest of the four, the Terminal Central de Autobuses del Norte (Map pp110-11; © 5587-1552) serves points north, including cities on the US border, plus some points west (Guadalajara, Puerto Vallarta), east (Puebla, Veracruz) and south (Acapulco, Oaxaca). Over 30 bus companies have services here. Deluxe and 1st-class counters are mostly in the southern half of the terminal. Luggage-storage services are at the far south end (open 24 hours) and in the central passageway; the latter section contains a hotel-booking agency.

-terminal Oriente

Terminal de Autobuses de Pasajeros de Oriente (Map pp110-11; © 5762-5977), usually called TAPO, serves points east and southeast, including Puebla, Veracruz, Yucatán, Oaxaca and Chiapas. Bus-line counters are arranged around a rotunda with a restaurant and Internet terminals at the center. There’s an ATM outside the AU counters and luggage lockers in Tunnel 3 beside Estrella Roja.

-terminal Poniente

Terminal Central de Autobuses del Poniente (Map pp110-11; © 5271-4519) is the departure point for buses heading to Michoacán and shuttle services running to nearby Toluca. In addition, ETN offers service to Guadalajara.
## Buses From Mexico City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Terminal in Mexico City</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Bus Company</th>
<th>Daily Departures</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<td></td>
<td>deluxe</td>
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<td>every 30min</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Futura</td>
<td>5am-8pm</td>
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<td>Bahías de Huatulco</td>
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<td>Futura</td>
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<td>Campeche</td>
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<td>Cancún</td>
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## MEXICO CITY

### Buses From Mexico City

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<th>Daily Departures</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

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TERMINAL SUR

Terminal Central del Sur (Map p123; 5689-9745) serves Tepoztlán, Cuernavaca, Taxco, Acapulco and other southern destinations, as well as Oaxaca, Huatulco and Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo. Estrella de Oro (Acapulco, Taxco) and Pullman de Morelos (Cuernavaca) counters are on the right side of the terminal, while OCC and Estrella Roja (Tepoztlán) are on the left side of the terminal. In Sala 1, you’ll find a left-luggage service, agents booking Acapulco hotels and an ATM.

Car & Motorcycle RENTAL

Car-rental companies have offices at the airport and in the Zona Rosa. Rates generally start at about $50 per day, but you will often do better by booking ahead via the Internet.

Avis (Map pp118-19; 5511-2228; Paseo de la Reforma 308; M Insurgentes)

Thrifty (Map pp118-19; 5207-1100; Paseo de la Reforma 322; M Insurgentes)

ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

The Ángeles Verdes (Green Angels) can provide assistance from 8am to 8pm. Phone 5250-8221 and tell them your location. For more information, see p1002.

ROUTES IN & OUT OF THE CITY

Whichever way you come in, once past the last caseta (toll booth) you enter a no-man’s land of poorly marked lanes and chaotic traffic. These casetas are also the points from which ‘Hoy No Circula’ rules take effect (see p186).

East

From Puebla, the highway eventually feeds traffic left into Ignacio Zaragoza. Stay on Zaragoza for about 10km, then move left and follow signs for Río de la Piedad (aka Viaducto Miguel Alemán), exiting left after the metro crosses the highway. From the Viaducto, exits access all the key areas. Get off at Viaducto Tlalpan to reach the Zócalo. Av Monterrey goes through Colonia Roma and the Zona Rosa.

Coming out of the airport, head south along Blvd Puerto Aéreo. After you cross Zaragoza, watch for signs to Río de la Piedad and Viaducto Alemán.

Heading for Puebla, Oaxaca or Veracruz, take the Viaducto Alemán east. This is most conveniently accessed off Av Cuauhtémoc,
the southern extension of Bucareli (Eje 1 Poniente). Immediately after crossing over the Viaducto – just before the Liverpool department store – turn left for the access ramp. Take the Viaducto to Av Zaragoza, then follow the signs for Oaxaca until you join the Puebla highway.

**North**

From Querétaro, the last toll booth as you approach the city is at Tepotzotlán. Continue south, following signs for Cd Satélite and Toreo. Beyond the skyscraper sculptures marking the gateway to Satélite, move into the lateral at the first signs indicating the ‘Río San Joaquín’ exit, which appears just north of the giant dome of the Toreo arena. Take this exit; the ramp curves left over the Periférico. Keep right as you go over, then follow signs for ‘Circuito Interior.’ After passing the Corona factory, take the Thiers exit. Keep left, following signs for Reforma, and you’ll end up on Río Misisipi, which intersects Reforma at the La Diana roundabout. Turn left on Reforma to get to the Centro Histórico, or continue straight ahead for Colonia Roma.

Leaving the city, the simplest option is to take Reforma to the west end of Bosque de Chapultepec, then a right exit to pick up the Periférico northbound.

From Pachuca, Hidalgo and northern Veracruz, the inbound route is one of the easiest, if no less chaotic, since the highway feeds into Av Insurgentes; follow signs for the Centro Histórico and Zona Rosa. Leaving the city, take Insurgentes north (also the route to Teotihuacán).

**South**

After the last caseta on the autopista from Cuernavaca, continue straight, taking a right exit for Calz Tlalpan (some signs are hidden behind trees). Calz Tlalpan eventually feeds into Av 20 de Noviembre, which ends at the Zócalo. Leaving town, turn right (south) at the Zócalo onto Pino Suárez, which becomes Calz Tlalpan. Follow Tlalpan about 20km south, then watch for a Y where signs point left for the autopista.

**West**

Coming from Toluca, about 4km past the high-rises of Santa Fe, keep right and follow signs for Av Constituyentes (don’t take the exit for Reforma). Constituyentes passes under the Circuito Interior near the eastern end of Bosque de Chapultepec. Turn left after the underpass to pick up the Circuito, then follow signs for Reforma to get to the Zona Rosa and downtown. Or, continue straight ahead on Juan Escutia (Eje 2 Sur) right into Condesa. Heading west out of the city, take Av Chapultepec to Constituyentes, then follow the signs for the cuota (toll highway) or libre to Toluca.

**GETTING AROUND**

Mexico City has an inexpensive, easy-to-use metro and an equally cheap and practical bus system plying all the main routes. Taxis are plentiful, but some are potentially hazardous (see p127).

**To/From the Airport**

The metro is convenient to the airport, though hauling luggage amid rush-hour crowds can be a Herculean task. Authorized taxis provide a painless, relatively inexpensive alternative.

**METRO**

The airport metro station is Terminal Aérea, on Línea 5 (yellow). It’s 200m from the terminal: leave by the exit at the end of Sala A (domestic arrivals) and continue past the taxi stand, to the station.

To the city center, follow signs for Dirección Politécnico; at La Raza (seven stops away) change for Línea 3 (green) toward Dirección Universidad. Metro Hidalgo, at the west end of the Alameda, is three stops south; it’s also a transfer point for Línea 2 (blue) to the Zócalo.

To get to the Zona Rosa from the airport, take Línea 5 to ‘Pantitlán’ the end of the line. Change for Línea 1 (pink) and get off at metro Insurgentes.

Going to the airport, take the Av Aeropuerto Municipal exit on the Dirección Politécnico side, and proceed directly to the terminal.

**TAXI**

Steer clear of street cabs outside the airport. Safe and reliable ‘Transporte Terrestre’ taxis, recognizable by their yellow doors and airplane logos, are controlled by a fixed-price ticket system.
Purchase taxi tickets from booths labeled ‘Sitio 300’ (those labeled ‘ProTaxi’ sell tickets for Suburban van taxis), located in Sala E2 (international arrivals), on your left as you exit customs, and by the Sala A (domestic arrivals) exit. Fares are determined by zones (shown on a map next to the booth). A ride to the Zócalo or Alameda Central is $12, to the Zona Rosa or Plaza de la República $15. One ticket is valid for up to four passengers and luggage that will fit in the trunk.

Taxi stands for the Sitio 300 taxis are outside Salas A and E. Porters may offer to take your ticket and luggage the few steps to the taxi, but hold on to the ticket and hand it to the driver. Drivers won’t expect a tip for the ride, but will of course welcome one.

To reserve a Transporte Terrestre taxi to the airport call %5571-9344; fares are slightly higher in this direction.

To/From the Bus Terminals
The metro is the fastest and cheapest way to any bus terminal, but it’s tricky to maneuver through crowded stations and cars. Taxis are an easier option, but avoid street cabs outside the terminals. Fortunately, all terminals have ticket booths for ‘taxis autorizados,’ with fares set by zone ($2 from 9pm or 10pm to 6am). An agent at the exit will assign you a cab. Ignore hustlers who tell you there are no authorized cabs left, or who try to take your ticket before you reach the taxi.

TERMINAL NORTE
Metro Línea 5 (yellow) stops at Autobuses del Norte, just outside the terminal. To the center, follow signs for ‘Dirección Pantitlán,’ then change at La Raza for Línea 3 (green) toward ‘Dirección Universidad.’ (The La Raza connection is a six-minute hike through a ‘Tunnel of Science.’)

The taxi kiosk is in the central passageway; a cab for up to four people to the Alameda or Zócalo costs $8; to Colonia Roma, $7.50.

TERMINAL ORIENTE (TAPO)
This bus terminal is next door to metro San Lázaro. To the center or Zona Rosa, take Línea 1 (pink) toward ‘Dirección Observatorio.’

The authorized taxi booth is at the top (metro) end of the main passageway from the rotunda. The fare to the Zócalo is $5.50; to the Zona Rosa, $6.50.

ADO Group’s deluxe lines (UNO, ADO GL) run a shuttle service, called Citibus, to/from area hotels and to (not from) the airport. There are six departures from Monday to Friday to the Hotel del Ángel (Río Lema 154) and eight to the airport (fewer on weekends). Purchase tickets ($3.75) at TAPO or the hotel. Contact Ticketbus (p179) for schedules and other pickup locations.

TERMINAL PONIENTE
Observatorio metro station, the eastern terminus of Línea 1 (pink), is a couple of minutes’ walk across a busy street (the pedestrian bridge has been closed until further notice). A taxi ticket to Colonia Roma costs $6.50; to the Zócalo it’s $9.

TERMINAL SUR
Terminal Sur is a two-minute walk from metro Tasqueña, the southern terminus of Línea 2 which stops at the Zócalo. For the Zona Rosa, transfer at Pino Suárez and take Línea 1 to Insurgentes (Dirección Observatorio). Going to the terminal, take the ‘Autobuses del Sur’ exit, which leads upstairs to a footbridge. Descend the last staircase on the left to reach the terminal.

Authorized taxis from Terminal Sur cost $9 to the Zona Rosa; $8 to the Centro Histórico. Ticket booths are by the main exit and in Sala 3.

Bicycle
Though not commonly used as transport in Mexico City (except by delivery boys), bicycles are a viable way to get around and are often quicker and more pleasant than riding on overcrowded, recklessly driven buses. Although careless drivers and potholes can make DF cycling an ‘extreme sport,’ if you stay alert and keep off the major thoroughfares, it’s manageable.

The recently completed ciclovía is an extensive bike trail that follows the old bed of the Cuernavaca railroad as far as the Morelos border. It extends from Av Ejército Nacional in Polanco through the Bosque de Chapultepec, skirting the Periférico freeway from La Feria to Av San Antonio, with several steep bridges passing over the freeways. The trail then continues south to the Parque Ecológico de la Ciudad de México, for a total distance of 90km.
Another path follows Av Chapultepec along a protected median from Bosque de Chapultepec to the Centro Histórico, though a detour through the streets of Colonia Roma is ignored by motorists. A third route runs along Paseo de la Reforma from the Auditorio Nacional to the Museo Rufino Tamayo. Follow the red stripe.

Bicitekas ([www.bicitekas.org](http://www.bicitekas.org) in Spanish) is an urban cycling group that organizes rides starting from the Monumento a la Independencia at 9pm every Wednesday, and from the Zócalo at 10am Sunday. Groups of up to 100 cyclists ride to destinations like Coyoacán and Ciudad Satélite. Participants must be sufficiently robust to handle treks of up to 40km. Helmets and rear lights are required.


Rent bicycles at Taller de Bicicletas Orozco (Map pp118-19; ☎ 5286-3582; Av México 13A; ☏ 10:30am-8pm Tue-Sun; M Sevilla), at Parque México in Condesa. Prices are $2.75 per hour or $19 per day (ID plus deposit required), with better rates for longer periods.

**Bus, Pesero & Trolleybus**

Mexico City’s thousands of buses and peseros (also called microbuses or combis) operate from around 5am till 8pm or 9pm daily; electric trolleybuses until 11:30pm. Only a few routes run all night, notably those along Paseo de la Reforma and the new metrobus along Av Insurgentes. This means you’ll get anywhere by bus and/or metro during the day but will probably have to take a few taxis after hours.

Peseros are generally gray-and-green minibuses operated by private firms. They follow fixed routes, often starting or ending at metro stations, and will stop at virtually any street corner. Route information is randomly displayed on cards attached to the windshield. Fares are $0.25 for trips of up to 5km, $0.30 for 5km to 12km and $0.40 for more than 12km. Add 20% to all fares between 11pm and 6am. Municipally operated full-size orange buses (labeled ‘RTP’) and trolleybuses only pick up at bus stops; fares are $0.20 (exact change only) regardless of distance traveled.

Seeking to alleviate traffic along one of the capital’s most congested thoroughfares, in 2005 the city installed the metrobus on Av Insurgentes. Where once a motley assortment of smoke-belching buses competed for passengers along this north–south artery, now a uniform fleet of 24m-long Volvo vehicles plies a dedicated inner lane. The metrobus stops at metro-style stations amid the traffic, spaced at three- to four-block intervals. Access is by prepaid card, issued by machines at the entrance to the platforms, and rides cost $0.30. Rechargeable cards ($0.80) are placed on a sensor device for entry. The metrobus runs round the clock, though frequency is reduced to every 20 minutes between midnight and 5am, when the fare increases to $0.50.

Pesero routes ply practically every street that crisscrosses the Centro Histórico grid, while trolleybuses follow a number of the key ejes (priority roads) throughout the rest of the city.

Some useful routes are listed below.

*‘Autobuses del Sur’ & ‘Autobuses del Norte’* trolleybus: Eje Central Lázaro Cardenas between north and south bus terminals (stops at Plaza de las Tres Culturas; Plaza Garibaldi; Bellas Artes/Alameda; metro Hidalgo)

*‘Metro Hidalgo-La Villa’* bus or pesero: Paseo de la Reforma between Auditorio Nacional or metro Chapultepec and Basílica de Guadalupe (stops at Zona Rosa; Av Insurgentes; Alameda/metro Hidalgo; Plaza Garibaldi; Plaza de las Tres Culturas)

*‘Metro Sevilla-P Masaryk’* pesero: Between Colonia Roma and Polanco via Av Álvaro Obregón and Av Presidente Masaryk (stops at metro Niños Héroes; Av Insurgentes; metro Sevilla; Leibnitz)

*‘Metro Tacubaya-Balderas-Escandón’* pesero: Between Centro Histórico and Condesa, westbound via Puebla, eastbound via Durango (stops at Plaza San Juan; metro Balderas; metro Insurgentes; Parque España; Av Michoacán)

**Car & Motorcycle**

Touring Mexico City by car is strongly discouraged, unless you have a healthy reserve of stamina and patience. Even more than elsewhere in the country, traffic rules are seen as suggested behavior. Red lights may be run at will, no-turn signs are ignored and signals are seldom used. On occasion you may be hit by the bogus traffic fine, a routine means for traffic cops to increase their miserly salaries. Nevertheless, you may want to rent a car here for travel outside the city. Avoid parking on the street; most midrange and top-end hotels have guest garages.
DRIVING RESTRICTIONS
To help combat pollution, Mexico City operates its ‘Hoy No Circula’ (Don’t Drive Today) program, banning many vehicles from being driven in the city between 5am and 10pm on one day each week. Cars under 10 years old (supposedly less polluting) with a calcomanía de verificación (verification hologram sticker) are exempted. This sticker is obtained under the city’s vehicle-pollution assessment system.

For other vehicles (including foreign-registered ones), the last digit of the license plate numbers determine the day when they cannot circulate. Any car may operate on Saturday and Sunday.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Prohibited last digits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>9, 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Metro
The metro system offers the quickest way to get around Mexico City. About 3.9 million people ride the metro on an average weekday, making it the world’s fourth-busiest subway. It has 175 stations and 177km of track on 11 lines. Trains arrive every two to three minutes during rush hours. At $0.20 a ride, including transfers, it’s also one of the world’s cheapest subways.

All lines operate from 5am to midnight weekdays, 6am to midnight Saturday, and 7am to midnight Sunday. Platforms and cars can become alarmingly packed during rush hours (roughly 7:30am to 10am and 3pm to 8pm). At these times the forward cars are reserved for women and children, and men may not proceed beyond the ‘Solo Mujeres y Niños’ gate.

With such crowded conditions, it’s not surprising that pickpocketing occurs, so watch your belongings.

Nevertheless, the metro is easy to use. Lines are color-coded and each station is identified by a unique logo. Signs reading ‘Dirección Pantitlán,’ ‘Dirección Universidad’ and so on name the stations at the ends of the lines. Check a map for the direction you want. Buy a boleto (ticket), or several, at the taquilla (ticket window), feed it into the turnstile, and you’re on your way. When changing trains, look for ‘Correspondencia’ (Transfer) signs. Maps of the vicinity around each station are posted near the exits.

Taxi
Mexico City has several classes of taxi. Cheapest are the cruising street cabs, mostly Volkswagen Beetles but also Nissans and other Japanese models. These are not recommended due to the risk of assaults (see p127). If you must hail a cab off the street, check that it has actual taxi license plates: numbers begin with the letter L (for libre, or free), and a green stripe runs along the bottom. Check that the number on them matches the number painted on the bodywork. Also look for the carta de identificación (also called the tarjetón), a postcard-sized ID that should be displayed visibly inside the cab, and ensure that the driver matches the photo. If the cab you’ve hailed does not pass these tests, get another.

In libre cabs, fares are computed by taxímetro (meter), which should start at 5.8 to 6.4 pesos ($0.50 to $0.60). The total cost of a 2km or 3km ride in moderate traffic – say, from the Zócalo to the Zona Rosa – should be $2 to $2.50. Between 11pm and 6am, add 20%.

A radio taxi costs two or three times as much, but the extra cost adds an immeasurable degree of security. Their plates begin with S – for sitio (taxi stand) – and bear an orange stripe. When you phone, the dispatcher will tell you the cab number and the type of car. Hotels and restaurants can call a reliable cab for you.

Some reliable radio-taxi firms, available 24 hours, are listed below. Maps in this chapter show the locations of some key sitios.

Servitaxis (☎ 5516-6020, 5516-6034)
Sitio Parque México (☎ 5286-7129, 5286-7164)
Taxi-Mex (☎ 9171-8888, 5634-9912)
Taxis Radio Unión (☎ 5514-8124)