



Community News

The Work Continues

This fall, the crew began construction of the infrastructure (water, sewer, electricity) as well as the street, curbs and sidewalks. We were delighted to learn that they are ahead of schedule. They also began laying the foundations for the first two houses. It is an exciting time for us because we get to see Los Sabinos grow from the ground up.

We are proud of our construction team, a group of men who are all local workers and highly skilled. With little by way of machinery or heavy equipment, they are literally building our subdivision (and your home) by hand and they take great pride in building homes for prospective neighbours. There is no doubt that their pride and craftsmanship will be reflected in the finished product – a house that will last for a very long time.

It should be noted that Los Sabinos is contributing to the local economy by using local workers and by purchasing as much of the construction materials locally as possible.



the crew and the infrastructure construction



house construction begins



LEARN SPANISH

Although many locals in Oaxaca speak English, it is a good idea to learn a bit of Spanish. We highly recommend a Spanish Language school that caters to tourists and other visitors to Mexico. The **Instituto Cultural Oaxaca** is located in the city of Oaxaca and has a gorgeous setting (a half-acre walled garden) and a fabulous building – previously a 19th Century mansion. The teachers and staff are qualified, friendly, and courteous. It is the place to learn Spanish in Oaxaca. For more information, check out www.instculturaloax.com.mx. We highly recommend it!

The Night of the Radishes December 23



For over 100 years, there has been an annual contest in the Zocalo (or town square). It began as an opportunity for local farmers to show off their produce but it evolved into a contest of a whole different sort. Today, the Night of the Radishes brings individuals and groups together to see who can build the most unusual, the

most elaborate, or the most interesting display entirely out of local radishes. The results, as you can see from the photos above) are astonishing, especially considering that the contestants must do all of the building in the zocalo in a single day. (There is a section of the contest devoted to displays built from corn husks as well).

It is not unusual for over 10,000 people (tourists and locals alike) flocking to the zocalo after dark on December 23 to see the fantastic creations.



Getting to Oaxaca

There are a number of ways to get to Oaxaca from Canada or the United States. The easiest and most convenient is to fly Continental Airlines through its hub in Houston, Texas. They have a direct flight from there to the Oaxaca airport.

It can be done more economically by flying to Mexico City and taking a bus from there. The bus trip is about 6 to 7 hours over a new road. The night bus is comfortable and modern. If you make the trip during the day, you will have the opportunity to see some spectacular scenery on the way.

Exploring the Oaxaca Area

Although there are several big box stores and a shopping mall in Oaxaca, many people choose to obtain their necessities in the local open-air markets. Most towns have a small market that is open every day but also have a market day once a week. At that time, the number of stalls at the market increases a great deal. For example, in Etla, Wednesday is market day and the stalls spill out of the market area and line one street for several blocks. Everyone who has anything to sell puts up a booth and on market day, you can be guaranteed of maximum freshness. Although one can buy almost anything they want at the markets – including Central de Abastos, the main market in the city of Oaxaca which is the largest outdoor market in the Americas – when you do so, you are almost always paying more than you have to. This is especially true with handicrafts and art but it also applies to everyday items as well and if you have the time to explore, there is an interesting alternative worth taking advantage of.

In the state of Oaxaca, many villages specialize in particular items that the people produce for sale. Some are mundane. For example, the town of Zaachila produced charcoal for use in traditional stoves and grills and Tlacolula makes mezcal. Other products are seasonal. San Antonino produces most of the flowers that are used during the day of the dead celebrations. Each of these towns is worth a visit. However, there are also a number of towns or villages that specialize in the handicrafts and art that have made Oaxaca famous. You can go to any one of these towns and watch the items being made and then purchase them directly from the artist or craftsman. My wife and I often look at a piece we bought and fondly recall the conversations we had with the artist and his or her family. Some of them have become our friends.

In San Bartolo Coyotepec, the people specialize in making a black pottery that is not found anywhere else. Initially the pottery was utilitarian but has evolved into a mind-boggling array of objects including statues, candle holders, and everything else under the sun, including the sun.

The folks in Santa Maria Atzompa produce a glassy multi-colored pottery that ranges from extremely crude to well-

made and is available in a wide array of objects and styles.

Teotitlan del Valle is famous for its woven rugs of all sizes. They are available in traditional designs or in contemporary and modern styles. No Oaxacan home is complete without one.

Perhaps the most unusual objects are made in San Martin Tilcajete. There they carve and paint fantastic creatures out of wood. Some are life-like and represent real animals – one of my favorites is a 2-foot long praying mantis – while many are brightly painted creatures that exist only in the carver's mind. These alebrijes are unusual and fun. When you get to San Martin, the toughest decision you'll have to make is which ones to leave behind.

I could go on and on but these are the highlights. You will want to visit all of these communities time and time again. We have been in and around Oaxaca for more than a decade but we still take great delight in going to the villages and seeing what is new. My wife teases me that we have our house in Santa Martha only so that we can collect more of the Oaxacan art.





Many of the residents of Santa Martha are farmers and they do things the old fashioned way. Here, one of our neighbours plows his field with a team of oxen. There are not many tractors or mechanized plows for a couple of reasons: the plots of land tend to be small (too small for big equipment) and the oxen need to be looked after but compared to a tractor, they are inexpensive. The capital needed to buy a tractor, plus the maintenance costs and fuel make these kinds of machines beyond the reach of most local farmers.

The principal crop is corn (maize), an important staple in the region. When the Spanish first arrived, they tried to force the farmers to switch to wheat but the attempt was a failure. The climate of Oaxaca is perfectly suitable for corn but not for wheat. Cereal grains like wheat and barley do not thrive in the Oaxacan valleys.

EVR Canada

275 Glendale Blvd
Red Deer AB
Canada T4P 3L3