

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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You Really Need a Guide

MEXICO – We have been convinced that a tourist agency guide or one furnished by one of Mexico's leading hotels comes very near to being a necessity – much more so probably than in Europe. Of course if one person in a party could speak or understand Spanish the problem would not be so great, or if the tourist had months instead of weeks to see all or even part of the interesting sights of the country, that too would make traveling much more simple

Under the guidance of Ramon we have visited the pyramids, University City, Jardines del Pedregal, Puebla, Orizaba and Veracruz. We have seen the famous Talavera tile and pottery being made, textile weaving, glass blowing, leather being made into handsome handbags, suitcases and shoes, and many other handcraft articles for which this country is famous.

We have found the people here most gracious and more than willing to please. The bus drivers and civilians on the road are courteous and all very interested in the California license plate. Driving is fast but seemingly cautious for even with all the cattle, dogs, burros, sheep and people – many people – we have seen no sign of any accident. One observance we have made is there is no horn blowing here unless it is an absolute necessity. On many of the roads there are signs posted: "Do Not Blow Your Horn."

As we motored through the country from Mexico City to Veracruz going by way of Cordova and Orizaba and returning by way of Jalapa, I am sure we saw several hundred church buildings. In the one small city of Cholulu alone we saw at least half of the 365 churches it is claimed there are there within a close radius of the center plaza.

Puebla (City of Angels) has a population of 148,070. It is the fourth largest city in the Republic and is situated on a plain with a sweeping view of four volcanoes. Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl to the west. Malintzin to the north and Orizaba to the east. We found the city very beautiful. It was founded in 1531 on the eve of Archangel St. Michael. There is a legend that the natives were unable to lift the heavy bells into the Cathedral tower, so the angels did the work for them during the night

In Puebla we visited the Hidden Convent of Santa Monica, which will, we think, always remain an unpleasant memory. It was discovered by government officials in 1936, after such groups had been forbidden. The nuns had been living there secretly since 1857 and must have lived an extremely austere existence, from the sight of the living quarters, articles used in self-inflicted punishments and the dullness of the many rooms and numerous secret passages. The building is now a museum and is included in all guided tours.

There is a funny little sheet published here called "Esta Semana". One page is in English and the other in Spanish. It tells all the things going on such as jai-alai, grand opera, Mexican dances, hotels, restaurants, all sorts of things. It is free, comes out on Thursday, and you can pick it up many places and it is well worth looking over. The title means "This Week."