

DISCOVERING MEXICO

A Rich Land of Contrasts Awaits Those Who Wander From Standard Tours

By VIRGINIA LEE WARREN

MEXICO CITY — Although their numbers are about 12 per cent less than last summer, visitors from the United States are as common here as native women with babies strapped to them with shawls. But there is one vast difference in addition to the very obvious: while the native women and their inevitable infants are to be seen in the most fashionable streets as well as the poorest, the Americans have prescribed for themselves such a constricted orbit that out of the thousands who come across the Rio Grande only a few determined hundreds see anything of the real Mexico.

In perhaps no other country is the constant course of tourists so easy to chart. In the capital they flock to such completely American places as the Reforma Hotel or the Genève or the Ritz and seldom stray far from that comfortable, familiar atmosphere, managing either to find it or to take it with them wherever they go.

Even in midsummer when the climate in altitudes lower than Mexico City's is much hotter than most Americans like, they go in droves down to Cuernavaca, where they drink too much; up to Taxco, where they buy silver and take a quick look at the cathedral, and down again to seaside Acapulco, where they complain bitterly of prices.

Standard Trips

This is the standard trip for the tourist who has only a couple of weeks in Mexico, which applies to the majority, since the average stay is fourteen days, and it can be accomplished with plenty of American atmosphere in the midst of American companionship all the way, with only a bit of carefully tamed local color strewn along the edges.

Other standard trips for Americans are down to Fortín, where gardenias are floated in swimming pools for their benefit; to Orizaba, where they spend a good deal more time looking at orchids than at the second highest peak in North America, or up to Lake Pátzcuaro where fishermen use butterfly-shaped nets, and to the volcano Parícutin, which shows up best at night.

In these smaller places, touristy though they may be, the visitor from the United States can scarcely remain completely unaware of Mexicans. But in the capital, especially if he stays at the Reforma, he is likely to dwell in a very special little world made up of half a dozen near-by expensive restaurants and fashionable shops. And when he says, "You know, the people are pretty well off here, much better than in most of Europe," the resident who has seen the actual grinding poverty of the country, even in glittering Mexico City, can only shake his head in wonder and despair.

The Real Mexico

Within a few blocks of the elegant Reforma Hotel is Calle Bucarelli, one of the most intensely Mexican streets in the downtown section, and the visitor who wishes to know something about the way Mexicans live and work in metropolitan surroundings should find a stroll through its short length rewarding. He is not likely to linger long. Here there are no silver jewelry shops, no stacks of bright-hued sarapes which a Mexican wouldn't be caught dead in, and no lacquered trays or boxes. The tourist will not like the odors from dozens of open-front restaurants and food

stalls; he will not like the over-all filth. But he will be glimpsing a bit of true Mexican life.

And if he wants to see the natives in more attractive but unspoiled surroundings let him go to suburban Coyoacán's lovely little plaza on a Sunday afternoon and watch sprawling families at ease in the park while young lovers stroll playfully by.

There is something to be said in defense of the herd-like activities of tourists once they stray from the few large cities; the changing of water and food causes sufficient trouble even when American-style cuisine is insisted upon and drinking water is chosen with as much care as if it were vintage wine.

Two Kinds of Sightseers

There is a vast difference between the summer and winter crowds. At this time of year the visitors run heavily to school teachers, summer school students, and families on their annual two weeks' holiday. It is a crowd with less money to spend, but it is more serious in its efforts to see Mexico, its members linger in museums and cathedrals.

Winter visitors are likely to prefer races and bullfights, they throw money around on deep-sea fishing at Acapulco, have silver tea services made to order, and manage to turn any night club in Mexico City into an exact replica of a night club in New York. As the European resorts reopen it is doubtful if they will continue to come here in such impressive numbers. Mexico will miss them. Of the \$29,000,000 spent here last year by tourists, by far the larger share per person was contributed by visitors who came from the United States in December, January and February.

Twenty-six per cent of the average tourist's dollar is spent in shopping—with baskets, handbags, and lacquered trays and boxes accounting for a good part of that amount. Gloves are fairly popular but those made here are seldom up to American standards in cut or workmanship. No silver article here is cheap and the prices in Taxco, heart of the silver industry, are usually higher than in Mexico City.

Reaction From Male Tourists

Men tourists, and they outnumber women on a yearly basis in Mexico by 6 per cent, invariably insist upon going to the bullfights and almost as invariably say, "The Mexicans can have them. Not for me."

Men from north of the border also usually want to visit the National Pawnshop and to climb the pyramids just outside Mexico City. And they like to buy leather articles and sarapes. A few of them put on sombreros but mostly they leave the native dress side to women.

The women do not let them down. They soon appear in woven sandals and puff-sleeved, low-necked cotton blouses with bright voluminous skirts. They also have a predilection for brilliant flannel coats with palm trees, adobe houses, cacti, and toreadors appliquéd on them.

Prices at most popular resorts are sky-high, and so while the tourists with whom one chats in Sanborn's or in the lobby of the Genève range from a Utah school teacher on her first trip to a world-traveled dress buyer from Manhattan, they all have started out on their vacation with one thing in common: a neat little pile of American dollars. Mexico is definitely not for poor folks.