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FAT TIRE TOURISTS: EXPLORING THE RUINS OF THE HACIENDA ERRE, FOUNDED IN 1710

Treasure of the Sierra Madre

Leave the beaches to the spring-break sunbathers, the real action South of the Border is up in the mountains and out on the singletrack.

By Jayme Moye

Mexico is a vacation spot of legendary clichés—beautiful beaches, the rowdy Señor Frog’s Bar & Grill franchise, bad hangovers. But it’s selling our southerly neighbor short to limit our travel to only the resorts that embody those stereotypes. Destinations like Cancun, Cabo and Cozumel, don’t exactly demonstrate the true spirit of the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. And let’s face it; most of us were too drunk to remember much anyway.

For those looking for a more authentic, and perhaps healthier, alternative to Mexico’s 24-hour beach party, consider exploring the interior state of Guanajuato by mountain bike. Here you’ll find a different Mexico than the one you remember (or don’t remember) from spring break. Known as the heart of Mexico, not only for its central location in the country, but for its crucial role in the Mexican revolution in the early 1800s, Guanajuato is a land of historic haciendas, artist colonies, tequila spirits made from the blue agave plant, World Heritage sites and the scenic Sierra Madre Mountains – all conveniently connected by mountain bike-able trails.

THE ACCOMMODATIONS

If you’re going for authenticity, it’s hard to beat staying at a 450-year-old hacienda. Set against a mountain backdrop, **Hacienda Las Trancas** (haciendalatrancas.com) was originally a *presidio*, a fort along the silver trail, whose main function was to house and guard caravans of silver. Today, it’s a scenic retreat located just northeast of Dolores Hidalgo, the town where Father Miguel Hidalgo uttered his famous cry for the independence of Mexico in front of his parish

church on September 16, 1810.

Each of Las Trancas’ 11 suites is unique; some have two levels, some dramatic grotto style tubs, one has an altar (beside the bed, of all places), and another, a spiral staircase leading to a rooftop terrace. With three home-cooked Mexican meals sourced from the hacienda’s organic vegetable garden served daily, you won’t want to eat anyplace else. Executive Chef Yolanda and her team of three prepare every meal down-home style with a touch of gourmet. Expect fresh tortillas made from whole corn kernels, local favorites like huevos rancheros and delectable deserts like creamy mango ice cream. When you’re not eating or biking, schedule a massage at the spa or go for a guided horseback ride in the cactus-studded countryside behind the hacienda; the twice-daily tours are included in the price of your stay.

THE TRAILS

Mountain biking in central Mexico offers varied terrain ranging from dirt paths to cobblestone

roads. Sightseers can bike remote trails connecting UNESCO World Heritage Sites, where you won’t see another person for miles. One memorable 30-km ride goes from Dolores Hidalgo through Hacienda Erre, one of the oldest in the country. From there, pedal to the small rural community of Atotonilco to visit a church complex founded in 1764, now a World Heritage Site thanks to its pre-Reformation religious art. Hop off your bike to take in the stunning Mexican Baroque mural work that adorns the main nave and chapels, then walk to the shop across the street to purchase a *caguama*, which translates as “turtle,” but refers to a 32-ounce bottle of beer.

Off the main sightseeing arteries, you’ll find backcountry singletrack and doubletrack winding through the *chaparral* — arid shrub lands in the shadow of the Sierra Madres, wide-open cattle pastures and fields of wildflowers. You’ll also encounter rolling paths through the woods that follow the historic donkey trails of the silver road routes.

None of the trails are marked, so it’s best to bring a guide. Alberto Martinez, otherwise known as Beto, is the local expert. A former mountain bike racer, Beto runs a bike shop in San Miguel de Allende, and leads tours (bici-burro.com). Best of all, on the last day, after returning the bikes to his shop, Beto has been known to pull out a bottle of his favorite local tequila and pour shots for the group. •

GO THERE

Beyond Boundaries Travel (owned by Colorado Springs resident Doug Lofland) is leading a mountain bike trip through central Mexico February 19-26. Fly United Airlines to Leon, connecting through Houston. No need to bring your bike, they’re provided, but check your tires. Beto runs the tire pressure on his fleet of Cannondales very high by Colorado standards, so you’ll want to let some air out before you ride the bumpy silver route trails. For more details, and additional dates, see beyondboundariestravel.com



ARRIBA! CRUISING THROUGH THE CHAPARRAL OUTSIDE THE TOWN OF ATOTONILCO

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