

After Dark: Oaxaca Nightlife

From cool and classy to centuries-old and traditional, Oaxaca never fails to entertain

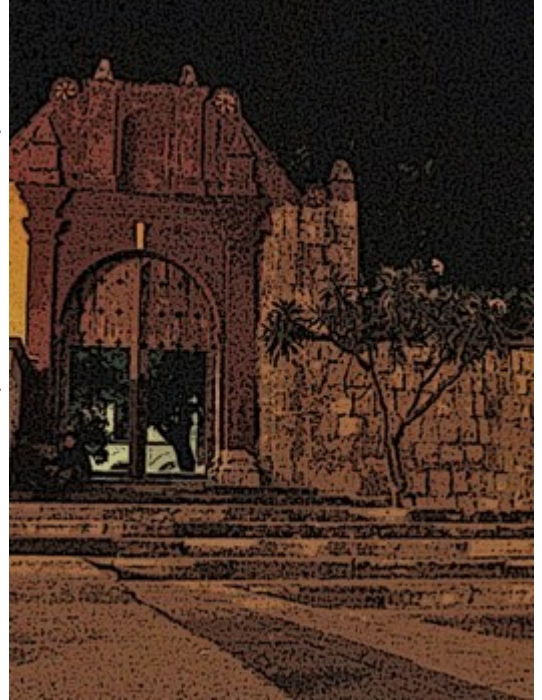
Whether it's sassy and sultry, simmering with sensuality or slow and easy with a soothing after dinner drink, Oaxaca nightlife serves up a full buffet of choice for everyone's taste buds. Depending on the level of euphoria sought, patrons can relax to the mellow rhythms of marimba sonatas or get their groove going with hot and fiery salsa dancing until the wee hours. The night is always young for those who care to embrace what the locals call *la vida nocturna*. Here are some of the options:

Music and Dance

Oaxacans love their music performed live and the city hosts a surprising number of artists and bands. You'll find jazz, blues, salsa, folkloric shows, rock and roll, even opera and orchestral music performances.

Around the *zócalo* in the open-air cafés, you can sip wine while listening to nouveau flamenco or Andean music. Traditional live music is often played outdoors on the plaza.

Arrive early at one of the most popular salsa spots in town, La Candela, and you'll likely be offered complimentary salsa lessons. Things heat up by 11 p.m. with a live band and flamboyant dancers crowding the floor. If you're a beginner, you can get lost in the crowd and boogie to your heart's content. The spectacular bar-restaurant resides in a lovely old colonial mansion. Murgia 413 at Pino Suárez.



Near the cathedral, El Sol y La Luna exudes good vibes with its jazz and tropical rhythms. An ongoing display of varied and innovative art adds to the ambience. Enjoy dinner and stay for music that's always upbeat. Reforma 302, Centro Histórico.

Another hot spot with a provocative moniker, La Tentación (The Temptation) claims to offer an atmosphere where people of all colors, local and foreign, can succumb to the sounds of live salsa, meringue, cumbia and reggae. The action begins about 10 p.m. and alternates live music with a DJ who mixes Mexican and international pop tunes. Extremely popular and eclectic, La Tentación's pulsing rhythms and high energy ambience make for a memorable stop on your club rounds. Located at Matamoros 101, Centro.

Lee Daley - Travel Writer / Photographer

www.leadaleytravelwriter.com

www.epicureandestinations.com

Performing and Fine Arts

If your heart beats to a smoother pace, you'll find many quieter choices from fine film showings to art gallery openings. Most hotels provide guests with current cultural calendars but it's wise to pick up a copy of Oaxaca's free English newspaper, *Oaxaca Times*, or get it online at www.oaxacatimes.com.

Dance programs and concerts take place all year at the beautiful Teatro Macedonio Alcalá. Stop by the theater to check the week's schedule, usually posted near the front doors. Independencia 900.

The Benito Juárez Theater regularly presents musical and dramatic performances including folkloric Mexican dancers. Most events occur Thursdays through Saturday evenings. Avenida Juárez 703.

Cineastes can get their silver screen fix at Cine El Pochote, an art-house cinema screening experimental, international and classic films. Located at García Vigil 817.

In the historic center just four blocks from the zócalo, the Hotel Camino Real puts on an extravagant professional flamenco performance on Friday evenings. Included is a buffet dinner. A former convent, the hotel is unique in all of Mexico. It was built in 1576 and has been meticulously restored. Faded original frescoes grace the tiled corridors and bougainvillea blossoms spill over the walls onto the courtyards. Spending a romantic evening here would make a fitting climax to a stay in Oaxaca.

Art Galleries

On Friday and Saturday evenings the museums and galleries host events where students, artists, art lovers, expats and travelers gather. Appetizers and drinks are consumed; art is admired and even purchased. Innovative art — sculpture, photography, traditional weaving, even video and graphic design — is one of Oaxaca's hallmark characteristics.

La Mano Mágica is one of Oaxaca's major galleries hosting frequent openings. The gallery houses a front exhibition space, with a store selling exquisite local handicrafts in the back. The gallery showcases a wide selection of contemporary art of investment quality. Alcalá 203, between Morelos and Matamoros.

Galería Gráfica Soruco hosts shows by renowned artist Francisco Toledo, founder of Oaxaca's Museum of Contemporary Art, as well as other established artists who display their etchings, engravings and lithographs in this fine showplace. Located on the Plazuela Labastida.

Famous artist Rodolfo Morales helped found Arte de Oaxaca, a gallery that promotes young Oaxacan artists in Mexico and internationally. His efforts have seen much success. Oils, gouache and various media make up the collection. Morales, whose work has inspired so many, is also represented. A print workshop is connected with the gallery. At Murguía 105 between Alcalá and 5 de Mayo.

Arte Mexicano is considered one of the most important galleries in Oaxaca. This gallery has also successfully promoted its artists and craftspeople world-wide. One part of the gallery sells popular art including wonderful wooden iguanas by the outstanding Gerardo Ramírez from the village of Arrazola. The gallery boasts a lengthy list of renowned artists and holds openings often. Alcalá 407 in the Plaza Santo Domingo.



Festivals

Exuberant traditional festivals, both religious and pre-Hispanic, often continue into the evening hours in Oaxaca. These events can be accompanied by fairs, exhibits and lots of gaiety. Each has special parties. The religious processions can be opulent, with popular dances thrown into the act. Bullfights, beauty pageants and fireworks add to the brouhaha. You may not know about the event until you hear a brass band playing or catch sight of *monos*, giant *papier maché* figures. Join in the festivities. It's a great way to have fun while gaining a deeper insight into Oaxaca's people and customs.



Nelson Rockefeller visited Oaxaca in the 1970s looking for pieces for his fine art collection. He said, "The people are living and celebrating the quintessence of their heritage in a setting of unparalleled beauty. In Oaxaca one sees the drama of this endless flow of creativity still pulsing with the vitality of a great people."

For up-to-date listings of the goings-on in the city, check the Oaxaca Calendar at www.oaxacacalendar.com.

Lee Daley - Travel Writer / Photographer

www.leedaleytravelwriter.com

www.epicureandestinations.com