

# States of Spanish Immersion in Mexico

*Kate Sommers-Dawes* explores Mexico's indigenous roots in Guadalajara, Cuernavaca, and Mexico City

**Mexico, the United States' Spanish-speaking neighbor** to the south, is approximately three times the size of Texas and consists of 32 states and the federal district that houses its capital. While most of the population speaks Spanish, its national language, many indigenous languages are still spoken, including the Oaxacan language of Zapotec.

The country, home to some 100 million inhabitants, basks in a rich cultural history dating back to 600 B.C.E., when the Olmec people settled near what is now Veracruz. The civilization of Mexico's indigenous peoples continued to flourish through the empires of the brilliant Mayans and the legendary Aztecs up until the arrival of Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés in 1519.

Despite Mexico's tumultuous history of conquest and revolution, the ruins of these ancient civilizations endure. The temples and monuments of Chichén Itzá, an ancient Mayan city in the Yucatán Peninsula, have survived from the first century A.C.E. and the world's third largest pyramid, attributed to the Toltec, can be seen in the pre-Columbian city of Teotihuacán.

## Guadalajara

The Spanish colonial history of Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city, is evident in architecture and landmarks such as its celebrated Metropolitan Cathedral, whose construction began in 1561, took over 30 years to complete, and blends colonial and neo classical architecture. The capitol of the state of Jalisco and credited as the birthplace of Tequila, Guadalajara enjoys a mild alpine climate at 5200 feet and, in the next few years, will be home to the world's sixth Guggenheim museum.

**CIRIMEX, or the Center for International Resources**, in Guadalajara offers complete immersion programs in Spanish language and Latin culture with a one-on-one format. These integrated language

and culture programs are presented in a variety of settings. Classroom sessions teaching grammar, vocabulary, rhetoric, and other language skills are complemented with pedagogic use of guided tours and lectures. Students also participate in activities designed to familiarize participants with cross-sections of social, economic, political, and ethnic communities to provide a variety of settings for exercising communication skills. The activities acquaint students not only with the language of the groups but also with their lifestyles and dynamics, together with their relation to and interaction with competing and subsisting groups and communities.

Located in Tlaquepaque is **Guadalajara Language Center**. Tlaquepaque, which is known for its mariachis, is a neighborhood of Guadalajara located only 20 minutes from the city's center. Programs are designed for those interested in improving their understanding of the Spanish language and Mexican culture. The school emphasizes oral communication as well as an understanding of the knowledge and rules of grammar. In addition to traditional Spanish courses, the school offers a course called "Survival Spanish" for those who desire a short but intense experience. The class is a one-day crash course intended to give the basics for communicating with locals.

**Vancouver Language Centre** offers 6 levels of Spanish language instruction using a communicative method that enables students to gain confidence in speaking and listening. To evaluate each student's ability, a placement test is given on the first day and students are placed into separate levels according to their grammar/conversation skills. A homestay while studying Spanish, English, or TEFL language programs at Vancouver Language Centre offers students the unique chance to become immersed in Mexican culture and the Spanish language. The climate in Guadalajara is said to be one of the nicest and

