

## **Oaxaca, Mexico Sample Itinerary**

***A note:** All of our itineraries are flexible. Our philosophy at Crooked Trails is to let the country guide our experiences and not to live by a strict itinerary. If unexpected events arise, we may change plans to take advantage of the situation or deal with an issue. However, we will do all we can to offer you everything that is on the schedule. Please be flexible yourself and allow the program to unravel in beautiful and mysterious ways.*

### **Day 1**

Arrive in Oaxaca. We'll gather as a group this afternoon to get to know each other and then head out into Oaxaca city for dinner. Evening in Oaxaca. (D)

### **Day 2**

Our journey into the festival begins with a visit to some of the tradespeople who supply elements for the festival. One of the key elements in any Oaxacan festival - and this one is no exception - is fireworks. From huge bottle rockets to grand pyrotechnic displays burned in the church courtyard at the heart of the festival, the trade of the firework man, or *cohetero*, is essential. We'll visit a fireworks shop (please, no smoking!) and see how this work is done. Bread is another essential element and we'll step into a traditional bakery to watch some of the process of making ceremonial bread. And of course no fiesta is complete without good firewater. In Oaxaca there is a whole village dedicated to making good, strong brew from the agave, also known as the century plant. We'll visit a still that creates some fine mescal. In the afternoon we'll settle into our little hotel, which will be our home for the next five nights. Evening in Teotitlan del Valle. (LD)

### **Day 3**

Today is the major market day in this part of the world. Just as everyone in Teotitlan and all the surrounding villages does, we'll go down to Tlacolula to become part of a wonderful and ancient tradition, Sunday market. Most of the food that is created for the festival comes from here. Chocolate is an important festival drink and while in the market we'll buy some cacao beans and have them milled into our own chocolate. Once we've had our fill of the sights, sounds and smells of the market, we'll head to a place of serenity to counter balance the excitement of the market. In the afternoon we'll spend some time exploring the silent ruins of the Zapotec palaces and fortress of Yagul, all alone on a small mesa surrounded by cactus, cornfields and soaring hawks. Evening in Teotitlan. (BLD)

### **Day 4**

Cooking and eating are, of course, central themes in any festival. With that in mind we head this morning to a nearby village of artisans who have produced pottery for the last 3,000 years or so. We'll meet some of these traditional masters and see how this pottery is made. Then we return to Teotitlan, for the festival begins in earnest today with a village-wide parade, 150 Zapotec women

adorned in flowers and images of saints, fireworks, brass band, masked dancers.... Evening in Teotitlan. (BLD)

### **Day 5**

We will spend the morning doing what most households are doing this morning: making tamales for the fiesta. We'll work with a Zapotec family helping with the process of creating Teotitlan style tamales. In the afternoon it's off to the church yard, for the ceremonial dancing will have begun. Teotitlan is famous, among other things, for the *danza de la pluma*, or the feather dance. This is a ritual dance performed by 8 to 20 dancers that metaphorically depicts the conquest, and aside from that is colorful and a lot of fun to watch. Indeed, have a peek-  
<http://www.metamorfosisdocumentationproject.com/plumaDocumentary.html>.  
Later in the evening the party continues with the spectacular burning of the *castillo*, the booming, spark-filled fireworks exhibition in the courtyard of the church. If you are thinking 4<sup>th</sup> of July, you've got it wrong. It's a bit more in your face and sizzling than that. Evening in Teotitlan. (BLD)

### **Day 6**

Today is the peak day of the festival! For those who wish to get up early this morning, we can visit the early morning mass for the feather dancers in which they offer their pledge to service as ritual dancers. This is followed by a breakfast for the dancers, families and friends. We are invited. Later is the open mass for the village in general. The *mayordomo* or festival host will be offering a lunch at his house for ALL comers. We are, once again, invited. The feather dancers will dance 8 hours today. Throughout the day and into the night the village will be buzzing with life, the fair will be in town with rides and booths, there will be a band, a dance, fireworks, tamales, chocolate, mescal. Evening in Teotitlan. (BLD)

### **Day 7**

And today Teotitlan is very subdued. We wake up slowly and ease into the day. Today we bid farewell to this village. We load up and head to Oaxaca city, settle in to our hotel and then visit the town. We'll do a short walking tour of the city to get your bearings set and take in some of the beauty, and after lunch we'll set you free to continue exploring under your own sail. Evening in Oaxaca. (BL)

### **Day 8**

Having been so wonderfully and intensely involved in the living culture of Oaxaca, today we take some time to get a sense of the history behind that culture. We'll visit the spectacular Regional Museum of Santo Domingo in the morning, and after lunch we'll travel up a nearby hill to explore the ruined Zapotec ceremonial and market center of Monte Alban, which in its heyday 1,200 years ago was something like a Oaxaca version of Rome. This evening we tidy up and head out for a tasty, final group dinner before saying farewell. (LD)

### **Day 9**

Your breakfast is included this morning before you head to the airport and back to the far away land called home. (B)