



Sin Nieve: A Long Weekend in Mexico City

Just before the season's first snowfall hit Denver, I escaped to Mexico City. And I do mean *just*. Big, fluffy flakes were accumulating as our flight left the runway around 6 a.m. "Sin nieve" -- in English, "without snow" -- is Mexico City's forecast year-round. Adiós, suckers!

I had never been to Mexico City. My father grew up there, so much of the furniture, art, and stories of our family have an unmistakable Mexican flavor. I've always felt a natural connection to the culture and a nagging need to see it for myself. I don't know what I was expecting, but what I got blew me away.

Cosmopolitan and hip, cultured and modern, as safe and clean as any big American city, and absolutely gorgeous -- CDMX quickly became one of my favorite places I've ever been.

After a nearly one-hour Uber ride, we made it from the airport to our glamorous Airbnb in the *Barrio Mágico* ("magical neighborhood") of Roma. As we pulled up

SOME ADVICE: I highly recommend that you stay away from taxis as rates are "negotiable" and drivers are often unsavory. Uber is legal, convenient, and insanely affordable. Mexico City's traffic is epic and the city is massive, so give yourself plenty of time to get around.

to the curb, my friend turned her phone to me and said with a chuckle, "By the way, this Uber was only \$7."

The easy, shaded streets of Colonia Roma lounge between wide median parks dotted with fountains, sculptures, and seating areas. Roma, and the adjacent neighborhood of La Condesa, are known to house much of the city's -- "¿cómo se dice?" -- bohemian or hipster scene. Young, fashionable creative types hang out at the trendy bars, restaurants, coffee shops, and swingin' hotspots that pepper the area.

Roma and Condesa began in the early 20th century as neighborhoods for the elite, but declined toward the end of the 1970s and a major earthquake in 1985 left much of the area badly damaged and

ignored. Cheap rent opened the door for gentrification and rejuvenation in the 1990s which continues today.

A beautifully eclectic mix of exciting architecture abounds in Mexico City. Intricately adorned colonial stone and stucco stand next to technicolor art deco and sleek midcentury modern, all in the shadow of soaring, ultra-contemporary towers of steel and glass.

Just down from the iconic Monumento a la Independencia, commonly known as El Ángel, is Mexico City's tallest building, Torre Reforma. Standing 809 feet tall, the Torre Reforma is one of the most formidable skyscrapers in the world, built to withstand an earthquake of 8.5 on the Richter Scale. The tower's foundation



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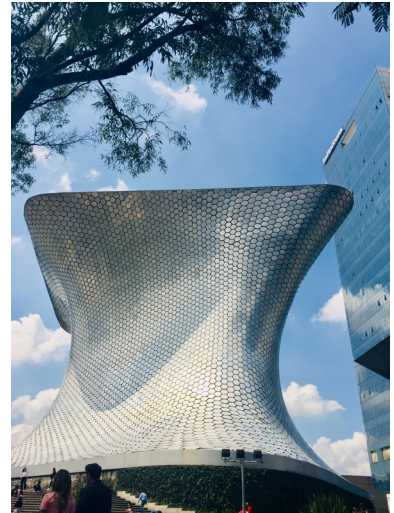
descends 196 feet below the ground to promote stability. One whole side of its triangular footprint is constructed of reinforced concrete connected by smaller elements called coupling beams to help dissipate seismic energy. But the Torre Reforma isn't just strong, it's kind. Rated LEED Platinum, the structure features rainwater and greywater recycling and uses wind power to reduce reliance on grid-based electricity.

Mexico City has more museums than any other city in the world (over 150). Friday, we made the difficult decision to forgo the jam-packed, relatively expensive Frida Kahlo house and museum, Casa Azul, and instead headed to the affluent neighborhood of Polanco to check out the Museo Soumaya. This free museum was built by Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim Helú to showcase his own private collection which includes paintings by Botticelli, Rubens, El Greco, and Dalí, mosaics by Diego Rivera, and even one of ten castings of *The Thinker* by French sculptor Auguste Rodin.

But the building is a masterpiece all its own. Designed by Mexican architect Fernando Romero, the undulating façade is armored by 16,000 hexagonal aluminum tiles that shimmer in the sun like scales on a swimming fish. The surrounding buildings feel newly polished and impossibly white. They hold upscale apartments, offices, and luxury car dealerships, so this is where you'll come to pick up your Tesla or Alfa Romeo after you pop into Prada or Dolce & Gabbana for some new looks.

I fell in love with Mexico City's culture of balconies. The mild climate allows open-air eateries and drinkeries to perch on upper floors, just above the sidewalk hustle. It's the perfect way to catch a breeze

FUN FACT: Mexico City's elevation is 7,382 feet, that's 2,102 feet higher than Denver's mile-high.



(Left) The Metropolitan Cathedral of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary into Heavens (Right) Museo Soumaya armed with 16,000 hexagonal aluminum tiles. (Previous page) Luxury apartments along Paseo de la Reforma.

and get in some quality people-watching while knocking back a few cold cervezas.

Saturday, we made our way through the narrow cobblestone streets of the Centro Histórico to the Plaza de la Constitución – the Zócalo! I'd never seen anything like it. Covering 57,600 square meters, this massive square has been a gathering place for almost a thousand years. The Zócalo is just one block southwest of the Templo Mayor which, according to Aztec mythology, is the center of the universe. It still feels very much like the center of the universe today.

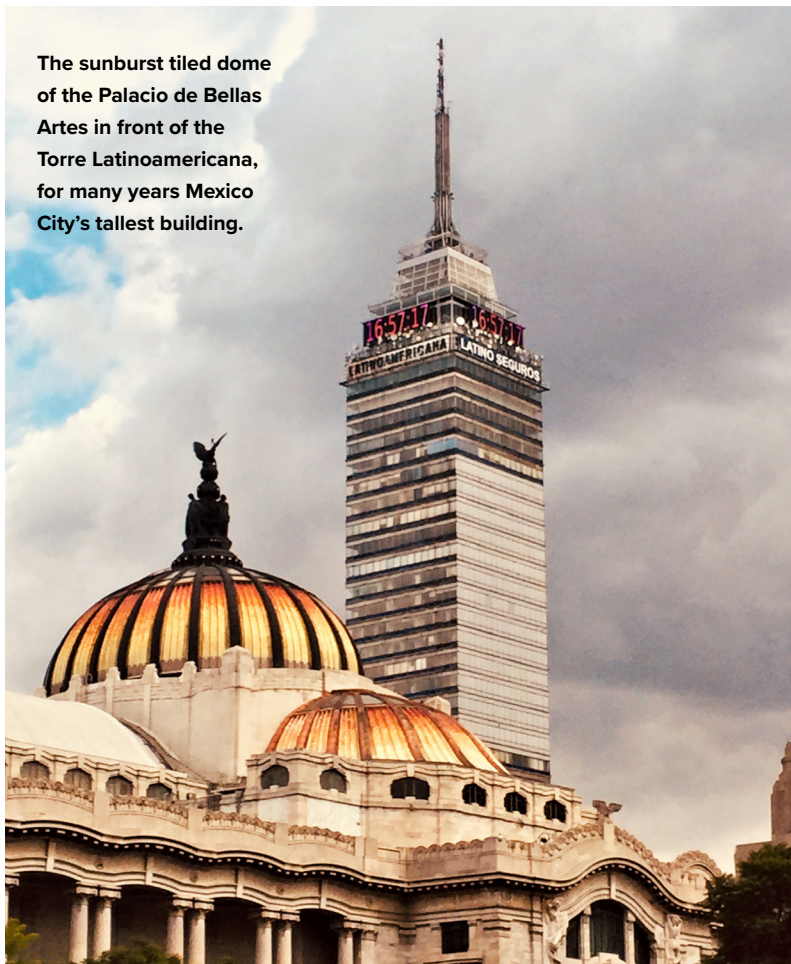
The Spanish destroyed the ancient Aztec temples that once bordered this

square and used the stones to construct the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary into Heavens (heretofore just called "the cathedral"), which was originally consecrated in 1534. The cathedral rivals anything that Europe has to offer and is definitely worth a trip inside.

Near the cathedral, we boarded the Turibus, a double-decker, hop-on hop-off sightseeing bus for a mere 160 pesos (around \$8). We settled into seats on the open-air top level and enjoyed the perfect weather while we inched amongst the traffic to take in the sites. We saw the Palacio de Bellas Artes with its massive dome tiled like a rising sun, El Ángel golden and glowing, Chapultepec Park (one of the largest city parks in the western hemisphere), Chapultepec Castel, and more museums, more monuments, more unexpected beauty. All along Paseo de la Reforma, the city's main artery, they were planting bright orange marigolds, or "cempazuchitl," in honor of the upcoming Day of the Dead. It was perfect!

SUGGESTION: When I was younger, I used to make fun of people who took sightseeing buses, but now I'm all about them! It's the ideal way to cover a lot of ground while getting your history. You have the option of hopping off at any or all of the dozens of stops along the route. And don't forget to ask the driver for a headset so you can hear the English version. (Or Italian or French or Japanese or whatever a polyglot could want. Dozens of languages are available.)

The sunburst tiled dome of the Palacio de Bellas Artes in front of the Torre Latinoamericana, for many years Mexico City's tallest building.



The Thinker and The Gates of Hell by French sculptor Auguste Rodin at the Museo Soumaya.

A WORD OF CAUTION: Lots of restaurants use filtered water for their ice, but some don't. My advice is to steer clear unless you can be absolutely sure. Spanish for "no ice" is "sin hielo" (pronounced "seen YAY-lo").

Around the corner from the Zócalo, near the corner of Simón Bolívar and Cinco de Mayo Boulivare, is a wonderful restaurant called El Bajío. This is the newest location of a popular chain and occupies a freshly refurbished, grand historic building complete with courtyards, stately staircases, bold artwork, and of course, balconies. This was our fanciest meal of the trip. Steak, carnitas, fresh guacamole, and tequila blanco served with traditional sangrita accompaniment. Meaning "little blood", sangrita is an acidic, spicy tomato concoction meant to complement the flavors of

the tequila. I was sold! This place was awesome, though not a lot of meatless options for my vegetarian friend. The bill for three of us came to \$60 which included a 20% tip.

On the night of Sunday, October 13th, a full, bright harvest moon swept the rooftops of La Condessa with pink. Some of my old friends and new amigos gathered, grilling carne asada and ears of corn slathered with lime juice and Cotija cheese. We enjoyed Coronas while congratulating ourselves and each other on how much our Spanish had improved

over those few short days – no doubt largely due to the gracious patience of our hosts. We took a few last group photos and promised we'd be back soon. And we definitely will.

Again, I don't know what I was expecting, but it wasn't this. And I think that's CDMX's M.O. – upending expectations. Affable people, affordable prices, resplendent with history and art, and pulsing with a contagious electricity that keeps you charged and moving. We felt so welcomed everywhere we went.

I probably shouldn't tell you this, but direct, round-trip tickets from Denver to CDMX are only around \$250 this January. If the last couple of weeks are any indication of the winter to come, I may have to head back sooner rather than later to the land of "sin nieve" (no snow).

¡Te amo, Ciudad de Mexico! 🇲🇽

SPEAKING OF TIPS: Mexico City loves meat. Vegetarian restaurants, or even vegetarian options at traditional restaurants, are hard to come by. So, if that's your bag, do some research before you venture out because the chances of you happening upon one are slim to none.