

Orizaba *A City of Many Names*

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The Iron Palace was brought from Belgium in three ships in the nineteenth century.

Orizaba has had many names. The first was of Nahuatl origin, Ahuializapan, meaning “joy on the water.” During the time of the conquistador Hernán Cortés, it was called Oricahua or Ahuilicaba. The current name, Orizaba, was first used in 1559. The poet Rafael Delgado called it “rainy”; the populace called it the city of “Our Lady of the Bridges” because of the 37 bridges crossing the Orizaba River. Today, a tour of the river bank includes 13 of those bridges.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Located in a valley of central Veracruz, surrounded by high mountains, at the foot of Citlaltépetl or Orizaba Peak, the area was inhabited in pre-Hispanic times by Toltecs and Totonacs. Shortly before the arrival of the Spaniards, despite ferocious resistance, Ahuilizapan was conquered by the Aztecs who demanded tribute. In the sixteenth century Orizaba was born on what was an old indigenous settlement, and

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developed thanks to commercial cultivation of sugar cane and then tobacco and trade which sprang from its being the stopping-off-point for travelers between Veracruz, the viceroyalty's main port, and the capital of New Spain. It was at its viceregal height around 1764 when Carlos III established the tobacco monopoly, reserving the cultivation, processing and sale of tobacco to the region of Orizaba, Zongolica and Córdoba.

A century later, the Orizaba Valley became an important industrial area thanks to its climate and topography. Superb waterfalls favored the establishment of many hydro-electrical plants that provided much-needed electricity to the region. With easy communication, Orizaba was the birthplace of the textile industry and has been an important produc-

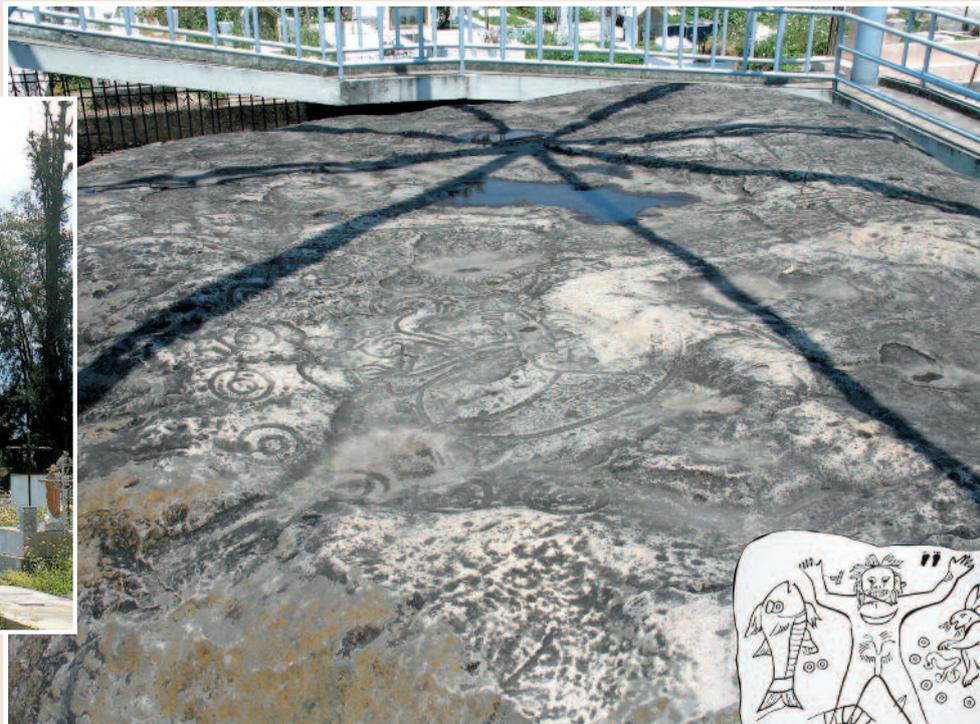
er of paper, cement and beer. It was also the site for decisive episodes in the history of the early twentieth-century workers movement.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS

Surrounded by heights like the easily climbed Borrego and Escámela Hills, Orizaba offers magnificent trails for those who like walks in the open air. Situated in the foothills of the mountains surrounding Orizaba Peak, it is crisscrossed with innumerable, crystal clear, cold springs fed by melting snows that captivate the visitor. At the top of Borrego Hill, an iron cross honors the Mexican soldiers fallen during the battle against invading French troops

The municipal cemetery is interesting not only because of the popular art work displayed in the sculptures over the tombs, but also because it holds the famous "Stone of the Giant" on whose surface pre-Hispanic sculptors carved out figures representing a ritual flaying.

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Mauricio Degollado



in 1862. The hill boasts a beautiful view of the city with the bell towers of the San Miguel Cathedral, the San José de Gracia Parish Church, the Calvary Church, the Our Lady of Carmen Church and many more beautiful examples of architecture and sacred art. Orizaba has the largest number of churches, 17, of any city in the state of Veracruz.

One of the most special buildings worthy of a visit is the old Municipal Palace. Built in Belgium in the nineteenth-century European architectural style, its iron structure was sent in pieces to Mexico aboard three steamships. The so-called Iron Palace, an elegant building in the art nouveau style was

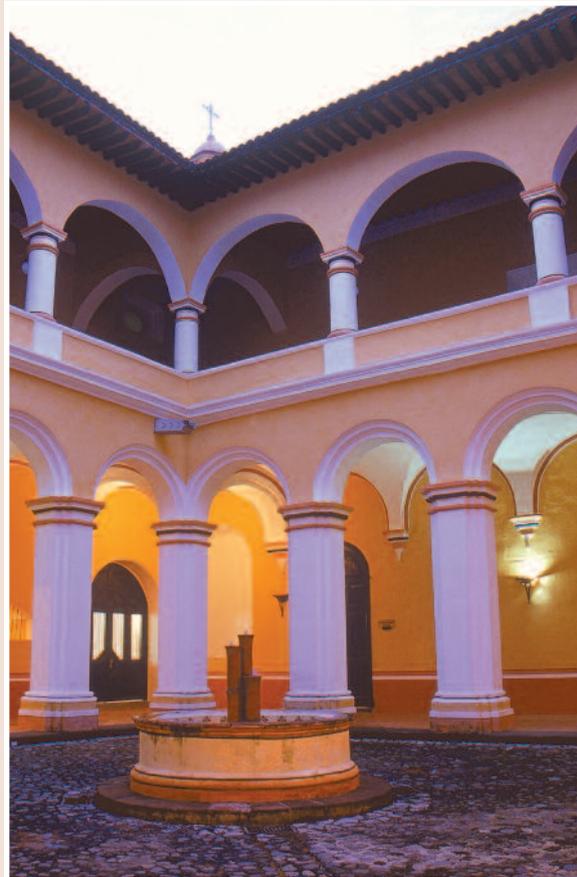
inaugurated on Independence Day 1894 after overcoming problems like the lack of funds to pay the Belgian manufacturer and the need to even out the marshy ground it was to be erected on. For 90 years, the palace was the town hall, until it was replaced by the current, neo-classical building constructed during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, which houses a mural by José Clemente Orozco.

The State Art Museum, with its large collection of works by Mexican and foreign artists, is housed in a magnificent eighteenth-century religious building. Originally used as the Saint Felipe Neri Oratory in 1776, it was built next to the sanc-

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Del Carmen Church. Orizaba has the largest number of churches, 17, of any city in the state of Veracruz.

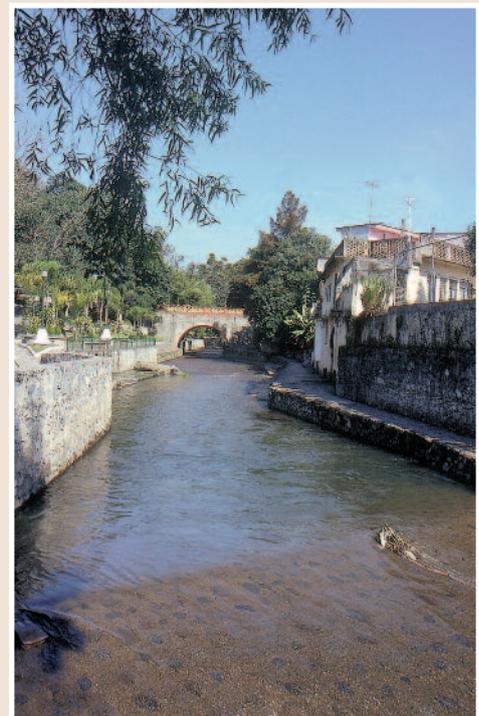


One of the city's landmarks, the Mier y Pesado Foundation Building.

tuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe; in addition to its religious purposes, for many years it was used as a hospital. The museum has eight rooms and the collection includes works that go from the viceregal period to contemporary art. Some of the rooms exhibit works by artists visiting Veracruz, foreign artists like Rugendas, Humboldt, Heidi or Claudio Linati, who showed the New World to Europe, and works by Mexicans like José María Velasco and Diego Rivera, including a Rivera collection made up of 36 pieces in different techniques and formats.

The municipal cemetery is interesting not only because of the popular art work displayed in the sculptures over the tombs, but also because it holds the famous “Stone of the Giant.” This is the popular name for a 8.3-meter x 6.8-meter megalith on whose surface pre-Hispanic sculptors carved out figures representing a ritual flaying during the ceremony of Tlacaxipehualiztli, celebrated in honor of Xipe Totec. On the surface of the calcareous, slightly chalky, irregular shaped river stone is a figure of a captive warrior being sacrificed, a frog, a picture of Tlaloc and two dates that presumably mark important historical events.

Orizaba, previously an obligatory stopping-off-place for travelers, is today a city with attractions of its own that prompt the contemporary visitor to a longer stay. ■■■



A walkway along the Orizaba River.