

# XOCHICALCO, THE CITY OF HIDDEN TREASURES



Xochicalco, a city not far from Mexico City, is worth visiting. It offers plenty of history and historical sights that can be admired both outside, on an archeological site, or inside, in museum or exhibition hall. The ball fields and the Observatory should not be missed either.

**Xochicalco, an important pre-Hispanic city of great beauty yet little visited by tourists,** is not far from Mexico City, Cuernavaca or Acapulco. It is built on terraced hills that overlook a peaceful valley that once contained the city reservoir. From the Main Plaza, you can see faint lines of the ancient trade highways which connected Xochicalco with Meso-American cities as far east as El Tajin on the Yucatan coast.

Its acquaintance with Mayan civilizations is evident in the design of the Ball Courts and some of the steel figures. **The city was greatly influenced by Teotihuacan and its famous yellow-haired, bearded god Quetzalcoatl, who is honored in the Main Plaza's Temple of Quetzalcoatl** (the Feathered Serpent Pyramid). When Teotihuacan chief Topiltzan, who was educated at Xochicalco and believed to be the Quetzalcoatl in human form, was forced to abdicate, he promised to return in the year CE Acatl (1519) - the same year blond, bearded Pedro de Alvarado, one of Cortez' officers, landed with his army in Yucatan.

Xochicalco also offers **an excellent museum and exhibition hall** that provides background to the city. The road from the museum to the archeological site follows a pre-Hispanic highway. **The ball fields** are religiously significant: the fields represent the universe, and the hard rubber balls (hit with the hips) are the wandering stars. War was fought over good vs. evil or other opposing forces, and the player who first put the ball through a ring won. **Before each game players were ritually purified by steam baths in the elaborate Center Complex.** The East Complex held a large cistern. The Acropolis stairway entrance, in front of the substantial Pyramid, leads to a plaza with granaries. The eight serpents coiled around the Pyramid's sloping base celebrate the date 9 Reptile Eye, when priests from over Mesoamerica met here to observe a solar eclipse that caused them to correct their calendar.

At **the hexagon-shaped Observatory**, with inner passageway, and chamber with chimney shaft, you can watch the sun's travel to the Tropic of Cancer May 14 or 15, and its return trip July 28 or 29. Around 1900 the fertility goddess sculpture La Malinche was discovered at a building ruin now under excavation. The statue was moved to the Cuernavaca Museum.

By Paula Griswold

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