

Home » News » Regional » Morelia's Remarkable Renaissance

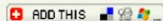
Morelia's Remarkable Renaissance

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19 2003 18:00 | JUAN CARLOS HERNÁNDEZ

Image

'Morelia authorities spent some 600,000 dollars on illuminating many of the city's colonial buildings, including the 18th century cathedral. Locals and visitors agree the effect is astonishing.

' - Photo By JC Hernandez



I never liked Morelia much. It was usually just a stopover on the way to my parents' hometown that lay deeper in Michoacan. Cars commanded the streets, and pedestrians elbowed their way through crowded sidewalks. The city center seemed like a collection of old churches, convents and government buildings smothered by street vendors, trash and graffiti. A few years ago as I zigzagged through street vendors by the cathedral I was stunned by the sight of a plaque declaring the center of Morelia a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site. As I looked at the putrid puddles in front of a nearby taco stand, and the trash around the plaque, I wondered what had inspired such an inane declaration.

But I was unaware that some passionate Morelianos had already begun to reclaim the city's center and truly make it worthy of the title the UNESCO had bestowed on it.

In 1996, Michoacan's state government released a plan for Morelia's municipal development, which included the widening of some streets and the reorganization of some neighborhoods, but largely ignored the problems of the downtown area. Enrique Villcaña Palomares, a former instructor at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolas Hidalgo (Michoacan's largest public university), saw this as an opportunity. He gathered individuals with the right political ties and deep-running civic pride and drew up a plan to restore Morelia's center, which they presented to government officials in 1999.

The plan had three main parts: relocate 25 government offices, the bus terminal and the scores of street vendors. The goal was to decongest, beautify and make the entire city center a delightful place to be in while improving the quality of life of the city overall.

It's been a resounding success. The vendors now sell their wares in brand new markets, the streets are spotless and traffic flows freely.

Palomares, now general coordinator for the Historic Center's restoration, proudly declares: "Isn't my city beautiful. I've always loved living here, but I love it even more now."

It seems that everyone wants to help the city. Morelianos approach him about restoring their homes to their original colonial glory. The federal government has chipped in by sponsoring the Nuestra Belleza Mexico beauty contest to show off the city to a national audience. The state government helped pay for the restoration of the murals by Alfredo Zalce, Michoacan's best-known artist, in the government palace.

And on August 8, Michoacan Governor Lazaro Cardenas-Batel joined thousands of locals and visitors outside Morelia's 18th century cathedral to flip the switch on a six-million peso lighting and restoration project.

A new face

On a recent visit, I walked from one end of Avenida Madero to the other, stopping in small shops with stone-facades and admiring the cleanliness of it all. So I wasn't surprised when I noticed a platoon of orange-suited street cleaners in action, wiping and crunching away the garbage. From there, I proceeded to the bustling Mercado de Dulces (Candy Market) located in the courtyard of a Jesuit school built in 1650. It was closing so I only bought a small ate de membrillo (quince jelly candy) to snack on as I walked along. (Ates, by the way, are a specialty in Morelia and a tradition as old as its convents.) By this time the special night illumination had come on, and as I came within two blocks of the Cathedral I stood with my mouth agape. Restoration authorities are highlighting historically significant buildings with powerful and creative lighting and the Colegio de San Nicolas is one of them. Two of Mexico's independence heroes, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and Jose Maria Morelos were students there, and the 16th century building also hosted some distinguished 20th century figures such as poet Pablo Neruda and artist Diego Rivera.

Continuing on to the main plaza, I set my eyes on the cathedral for the first time since its restoration. My jaw dropped. A total of 672 white lights illuminate the cathedral without distorting the natural pink color of its stone, highlighting its subdued baroque facade, and making it the crowning jewel of Morelia's rebirth.

After absorbing the sublime rays in the darkness, I continued on eastward toward the Roman-style aqueduct built in 1705. The highest of its 253 arches reaches 7.52 meters in height and carry the eye to the limit of colonial Morelia, marking the end of the breathtaking promenade.

I sat in a cafe near the aqueduct, tired but happy. As I ordered a drink, I realized that I had just seen a small side of this gem called Morelia and that I would to return soon to discover its other treasures and surprises.

< Prev

Next >

STOP!
DON'T buy Mexican property... until you read this book!
▼ Buying & Selling
▼ Trusts & Deeds
▼ Taxes & Fees
You need to know about the legal system & processes in Mexico!

Practical Guide to
BUYING PROPERTY IN MEXICO
Carry Musgrave
Provides step-by-step with a working overview of the Mexican legal system and the property buying process in 100+ important examples

Click for more info...
JaliscoCondos.org

Site Menu

Contact Us
Advertise - Publicidad
Video
Photo Galleries
Help
Links
Metro Arts Calendar
Crossword / Sudoku
Guadalajara Calendar
Obituaries
Ajijc Events Calendar
Classifieds