Vassar Travel Program

JANUARY 14–23, 2020

MEXICO TODAY
An Exploration through Material, Expressive & Culinary Cultures
Hello, Vassar Travelers!

We are delighted to be your faculty hosts for a January 2020 Vassar Travel Program “Mexico Today: An Exploration through Material, Expressive, and Culinary Cultures.” We are Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Professor of Anthropology and Women’s Studies, and Leslie Offutt, Associate Professor of Latin American History, and we have drawn on our deep familiarity with Mexican history and culture to design an itinerary that explores the cultural wealth, diversity, and vibrancy of contemporary Mexico.

Our tour begins in the modern heart of Mexico, the beautiful capital Mexico City, where our visits include the renowned National Museum of Anthropology, the National Palace (to view the murals of Diego Rivera), and the colonial core of the city (the Zócalo). Attendance at an evening performance of the Ballet Folklórico, a visit to Xochimilco to learn about contemporary chinampa agriculture, and a wonderful food tour of San Juan Market round out our activities in CDMX. We next travel to the beautiful colonial city of Puebla de los Ángeles, which is nestled at the base of the twin volcanoes Popocatépetl and Iztaccihuatl. In Puebla we indulge in the wonderfully rich moles for which the city is famous, learn about the development of the decorative art style known as Indian Baroque, and visit a talavera tile factory, the other product for which Puebla is famed. Leaving Puebla, we make our way to Oaxaca, stopping along the way to visit an internationally renowned ceramicist in his charming home/studio in the village of Yanhuitlán. After a lunch of homemade tamales, we then continue on to Oaxaca de Juárez, the capital city of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse of the Mexican states. Using Oaxaca as our home base, we travel into the surrounding countryside, where we meet with local artists and artisans, learn about conservation and restoration projects from a specialist in the field, visit workshops that produce traditional textiles and intricately carved wooden items (alebrijes), and enjoy guided tours of the archaeological sites of Monte Albán and Mitla. And of course there will be food—not only a tour of Oaxaca’s central market, a chocolate mill, and a mezcal distillery, but a cooking class with the owner of one of Oaxaca’s most respected restaurants. You might even be tempted to try the regional specialty—chapulines (although at least one of us will not join you in that treat)!

We have extensive experience leading Vassar Travel Program tours. Leslie has accompanied alumnae/i on tours to Cuba, Mexico, Chile and Argentina, and Lisbon and Madeira, and Colleen has accompanied Vassar Travel Program tours to Cuba, Oaxaca, the Yucatán, and Iceland. We have also worked together on many occasions leading student study trips to Cuba and Mexico. On our latest trip in spring 2018 we led 30 students on a two-week trip through Mérida, Mexico City, Puebla, and Oaxaca, looking at the expressive, material, and culinary cultures of central and southern Mexico. We have made use of this experience to design this unique opportunity for you to gain historical and ethnographic insights into the cultures and people of the places we visit. We look forward to sharing with the group our love and knowledge of Mexico, its cultures, and its history.

Sincerely,

Colleen Ballerino Cohen
Professor of Anthropology
and Women’s Studies

Leslie S. Offutt
Associate Professor of History
**Travel with Vassar Professors**  
Leslie Offutt & Colleen Ballerino Cohen

**PROFESSOR LESLIE OFFUTT** teaches Latin American history at Vassar College. A member of the History department, which she chaired from 2009-12, she is also a founding member of both the International Studies and Latin American and Latina/o Studies programs, and has directed the latter program on four separate occasions (1994-98; 2004-5; 2012-13; 2017-18). A specialist in early Latin America, her teaching incorporates an appreciation of the European, indigenous, and African contributions to Latin American societies. Her scholarship combines social history and ethnohistory; her book *Saltillo, 1770-1810: Town and Region in the Mexican North* (2001) explores the interrelation between urban core and rural periphery in a frontier region, and her more recent work looks at community formation in a Northern Mexican indigenous town in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, explored through the lens of native language documents.

**PROFESSOR COLLEEN BALLERINO COHEN** teaches cultural anthropology at Vassar College. She has served as Chair of the Anthropology Department, she is a member of the Latin American Latino/a Program faculty, and was a founding member and Director of the Women’s Studies and Media Studies Programs. She is a proud fifth-generation California native, with roots extending to the Mexican historical period. Her research in the British Virgin Islands and Cuba focuses on nationalism and identity, gender, tourism, and expressive culture, including the expression of culture through food, dance, and music. She has published numerous books and articles and produced several ethnographic films on Caribbean festival, Caribbean popular culture, and the relation between tourist development and nation-building.
TUESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2020

Arrival in Mexico City

Fly independently to Mexico City’s international airport (MEX). Take a group transfer to your hotel, the luxurious four-star Hotel Histórico Central, offering an ideal location in the colonial heart of Mexico City. Enjoy a welcome dinner together at an outstanding rooftop restaurant overlooking the cathedral and the Zócalo, the main square.

Hotel Histórico Central (D)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2020

Vibrant Cultural Expressions

Drive to Xochimilco, best known for its extensive canals and colorful boats carrying local families, tourists, mariachi bands, and food and souvenir vendors. Take a boat to Yolcán, a nonprofit collective whose mission is to revive ancient farming techniques and sustain farmers who grow organic produce for Mexico City’s top restaurants. Following a delicious lunch, return to the historic center to view Diego Rivera’s famous murals in the National Palace. Following free time for dinner, attend the riveting Ballet Folklórico performed in the Palace of Fine Arts, a phenomenal Art Deco building with an amazing stained glass theater curtain designed by Tiffany.

Hotel Histórico Central (B, L)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, 2020

Local Cuisine & Gastronomic Culture

Attend a morning lecture by Professors Offutt and Cohen. Set out to the bustling San Juan food market and sample an array of local foods including tostadas, homemade mole, blue-corn tlacoyos, Mexican cheeses, as well as flavored waters and pulque, during a special tour arranged by Eat Mexico whose on-the-ground team carefully plans food tours that emphasize “the deliciousness of the food; the richness of Mexican food history and gastronomic culture; and the vendors who prepare the food.” Spend the afternoon viewing the incomparable sculptures and artifacts exhibited at the National Museum of Anthropology.

Hotel Histórico Central (B, L)
FRIDAY, JANUARY 17, 2020

Puebla: Talavera Pottery & Popular Arts

Check out of your hotel and drive to Puebla, arguably Mexico City’s most elegant colonial city. Take a short detour to the incomparable Santa María Tonantzintla church elaborately decorated from floor to ceiling with fabulous gilded and colorful woodcarvings of faces, cherubs, saints, and foliage—an unforgettable sight that embodies the Indian Baroque style. At a talavera workshop, learn about talavera production during a special demonstration of the process. After lunch see the remarkable tiled kitchen of the 18th-century Santa Rosa Convent that now houses the Museum of Popular Arts’ excellent collection of handicrafts typical to the state of Puebla. Check into the five-star Quinta Real, housed in a beautifully restored 16th-century convent. At dinner, sample moles at one of Puebla’s best restaurants.

Quinta Real Hotel (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 18, 2020

Puebla’s Treasures

Following a morning lecture by Professor Offutt, visit the Amparo Museum, one of Mexico’s top museums, featuring an excellent collection of pre-Hispanic and Colonial Art. See the Biblioteca Palafoxiana, one of the world’s finest historic libraries. Next visit the Capilla de Rosário, which has been called the “Eighth Wonder of the World” because of its ornate and colorful gold gilded ornamentation. Following lunch at one of the city’s most popular restaurants, walk through Puebla’s renowned market, the Mercado de Sabores Poblanos. Conclude your day with a walk through the University area and enjoy free time to shop for souvenirs at the Barrio del Artista (Artists’ neighborhood).

Quinta Real Hotel (B, L)

SUNDAY, JANUARY 19, 2020

Oaxaca’s Santo Domingo Church

Meet a renowned local potter in the village of Yanhuitlán followed by a home-cooked lunch. Continue to Oaxaca and check into the lovely, four-star Parador de Alcalá, situated on a charming pedestrian street in the heart of Oaxaca’s colonial center. During an orientation walking tour, see the exuberant interior of the Santo Domingo church, described by Aldous Huxley as “one of the most extravagantly gorgeous churches in the world.” Dine together in a delightful patio restaurant.

Parador de Alcalá (B, L, D)
MONDAY, JANUARY 20, 2020

Monte Albán & Oaxacan Woodcarvers

Spend the morning at awe-inspiring Monte Albán, the ancient Zapotec capital. This archaeological site features a ceremonial plaza as well as a ball court, observatory, various tombs, and a number of pyramids. Meet a nationally recognized ceramist who depicts local legends in her sculptures in her home studio. Following lunch, continue to San Antonio Arrazola, home of the internationally famous Oaxacan woodcarvers. Meet a family of carvers in their home studio and examine the whimsical and imaginative styles produced by various craftspeople in the area. Oaxaqueños have carved masks and toys for hundreds of years, but recently their magical carvings have captured the imaginations of collectors from all over the world. Enjoy an optional visit to an ASARO (Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca) arts collective gallery to learn about Oaxaca’s vibrant political street art movement.

Parador de Alcalá (B, L)

TUESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2020

Oaxaca’s Craft & Cuisine

Following a morning lecture by Professor Cohen, walk to the nearby Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca, housed in a former Dominican monastery, and view magnificent Zapotec jewelry discovered in “Tomb 7” of Monte Albán. Enjoy lunch and a cooking class with the chef of one of Oaxaca’s best restaurants. Stroll through the Zócalo, the main plaza and heart of the colonial city, and visit Oaxaca’s colorful city market, filled with mountains of flowers, handwoven textiles, mounds of freshly ground Oaxacan chocolate, breads formed in every shape imaginable, and clusters of fresh produce. Taste Oaxaca’s world famous hot chocolate during a visit to one of the city’s chocolate mills.

Parador de Alcalá (B, L)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2020

Mitla & Zapotec Weaving

Set out for Tlacochahuaya and meet Mireya Olvera, who has been instrumental in the restoration of the town church’s sanctuary. Drive into the Oaxacan Valley to the palatial ruins of the Mitla archaeological site that features impressive stone mosaics. Original Mitla designs are incorporated into the patterns of distinctive textiles displayed in the textile market near the site. Continue to Teotitlán del Valle, a major Zapotec weaving village famous for its traditional weaving techniques and use of natural dyes. Meet one of the village’s most prominent families of weavers and, after being treated to a home-hosted lunch, learn the process of hand dyeing wool with natural dyes and weaving on treadle looms. At a mezcal distillery, taste samples and learn about mezcal production. Bid adiós to Mexico during a festive dinner at an unforgettable rooftop restaurant.

Parador de Alcalá (B, L, D)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2020

Adiós Mexico

Transfer to Oaxaca’s international airport (OAX) for return flights to the United States.

Photos (from top): Monte Albán (Eduardo Robles Pacheco), Oaxaca market (Eduardo Robles Pacheco), and mezcal production (Russ Bowling)
MEXICO TODAY: AN EXPLORATION THROUGH MATERIAL, EXPRESSIVE, AND CULINARY CULTURES

DATES: January 14–23, 2020

TOUR COST:

Land Package .............................................................. $4,695
Single Supplement ......................................................... $495

Tour price is per person based on double occupancy, with a minimum of 15 paying participants. Land prices are calculated as of April 2019 and are subject to change.

ACTIVITY LEVEL: Moderate, good walking ability advised

DEPOSIT & FINAL PAYMENT: A deposit of $1,000 per paying participant is required to guarantee participation in the program. This deposit may be paid by check or by Visa or MasterCard. Final payment will be invoiced and is due on August 26, 2019 by check only to International Seminar Design, Inc. Registrants will be accepted beyond this date on a space-available basis with payment in full by check only.

FLIGHTS: Airfare is not included in the tour price. Participants are responsible for all aspects of their air arrangements to Mexico City and from Oaxaca.

TERMS & CONDITIONS: International Seminar Design, Inc. (ISDI) acts only as an agent for the participant with respect to transportation, accommodations, and all other services relating to this tour. ISDI, the Vassar Travel Program, and/or their agents assume no responsibility or liability for any act, error or omission, or for any injury, loss, accident, delay or irregularity, which may be caused by any defect in any aircraft, ship, train, bus, or other carrier, or through neglect or default of any subcontractor or other third party, which may be used wholly or in part in the performance of their duty to the participants of the tour. ISDI and the Vassar Travel Program reserve the right to cancel any tour prior to departure for any reason including insufficient numbers of participants, as well as the right to decline to accept or retain any person as a member of the tour at any time. If bookings fall below the minimum required, passengers will be advised of additional costs or itinerary alterations before departure date.

CANCELLATIONS & REFUNDS: All cancellations must be received in writing by ISDI, and charges are calculated as of the day notification is received in writing by ISDI. If a tour member cancels, the following scale of charges is incurred: There is a non-refundable administrative fee of $500 per person. The costs associated with any tickets purchased for planned activities (as indicated in the itinerary) are non-refundable. Written cancellation received by ISDI on or before August 26, 2019: full refund minus $500 per person administrative fee. Written cancellation received by ISDI between August 27 and November 26, 2019: $2,350 per person. Cancellations received after November 26, 2019: no refund. After the tour has commenced, it is not possible to issue any refunds. No refunds for any unused portion of the tour including, but not limited to, occasional missed meals or any missed sightseeing tours. Costs for promotion, staff, and other group expenses are not refundable. In the case of cancellation, substitutions are not acceptable. The tour cost is non-transferable, and no substitutions are allowed. If ISDI or the Vassar Travel Program cancels the tour due to low registrations, active registrants will receive a full refund of all tour payments.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: ISDI and the Vassar Travel Program strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance. ISDI will send you travel insurance information upon tour registration. In the event that you must cancel your participation in a travel program, trip cancellation insurance may be the only source of reimbursement.

TOUR PRICE INCLUSIONS: Hotel accommodations, entrance fees to sites, and transportation by deluxe private motor coach as outlined in itinerary; breakfast daily, 8 lunches, 4 dinners, 2 glasses of wine or beer at welcome and farewell dinners; expert, local English-speaking guides for planned sightseeing; services of an ISDI Tour Manager; handling of two pieces of luggage per person upon arrival and departure at the hotels; gratuities for hotel housekeeping staff, guides, and motor coach drivers; bottled water on private motor coach; taxes and service fees.

TOUR PRICE EXCLUSIONS: Airfare, airline taxes, and fuel surcharges; individual transfers to and from the airport; excursions, activities, or meals marked optional on the itinerary; personal items; personal services; airport tax, fuel surcharges, and travel extensions; personal insurance for health, baggage, and tour cancellation; any other items not specifically included in the itinerary.

FOR QUESTIONS OR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:
International Seminar Design, Inc.
Tel: 202-244-1448 | Email: info@isditravel.com

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Background image: Interior details at Santo Domingo Church, Oaxaca / Cordelia Persen
Enclosed is my credit card information or deposit by check made payable to International Seminar Design, Inc. in the amount of $1,000 per person.

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- [ ] Double Occupancy; I will share a room with _______________________________________________________
- [ ] Single Supplement ($495)
- [ ] I would like a roommate but will pay the price of the single supplement if one cannot be found.

**EACH PARTICIPANT MUST SIGN** (registration invalid without signature)
The undersigned has read the tour itinerary and recognizes and accepts any risks therein. The undersigned also understands and hereby agrees for and on behalf of his/her dependents, heirs, executors, administrators and assigns to abide by the conditions set forth in the terms and conditions listed in this brochure and to release and hold harmless the Vassar Travel Program, International Seminar Design, Inc (ISDI), and any of their officers, trustees, agents, licenses, or representatives from any and all liability for delays, injuries, or death or for the loss of and/or damage to his/her property however occurring during any portion of, or in relation to, this tour.

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