



## PUEBLA: BETWEEN THE MOUNTAINS

SUMMARY INFORMATION		Similar To
Urbanized Area* Population	1,650,000	Portland, Munich, Leeds
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	115	Liverpool, Canberra, Brasilia, Guangzhou, Taegu
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	300	
Population per Square Mile	14,300	Seville, Hiroshima, Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto
Population per Square Kilometer	5,500	
*Continuously built up area		

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Puebla is the largest of the four far exurbs at the points of the compass outside Mexico City.

The road from Mexico City (federal highway 190-D) leads along the west side of the low-income suburb of Nezahualcoyotl (an unpronounceable word my friend and Ciudad de Mexico resident Lilia Gallegos says can be called “Neza”), and reaches Puebla in 75 miles. The road begins a long, straight grade up the mountain, and as the urbanized area is left, new housing developments will now be seen on both sides of the road, evidence of Mexico’s new housing development boom.

The road quickly becomes one of the world’s great drives. It is six lanes and has curves that are by no means of US interstate standards. Some are marked at below 40 miles per hour, but enjoyment requires a rather higher speed. The sharp, but well-engineered curves continue to the summit and then down the other side until a long straight grade leads to the floor of the broad valley between the four volcanoes on which Puebla sits. The fourth volcano is Matlalcueyatl, at 14,600 feet, higher than the highest peaks in California or Colorado. This name appears even more unpronounceable than Netzahualcoytl, but I forgot to ask Lilia what it’s really called. Matlalcueyatl is located directly to the north of Puebla.



Puebla is the capital of the state of Puebla, which is ringed by the highest mountains in North America outside the Yukon Territory and Alaska. On the border with the state of Mexico are volcanic peaks of Popocatepetl (17,900 feet) and Iztaccihuatl 17,300, famous for how they loom over the valley of Mexico (Mexico City). To the east,



shared with the state of Vera Cruz, is Mexico's highest peak, also a volcano, Orizaba (18,400 feet).

Driving toward Puebla, the first strong sign of urbanization is the Volkswagen assembly plant on the north side of the freeway. Then there are the inevitable Pemex petrol stations (the state owned oil company enjoys a monopoly on selling gasoline) on both sides of the toll road, and related businesses. Then there is the large, overhead sign that spans the entire roadway, welcoming you to Puebla and announcing its more than 1,000,000 "habs" (people). I

had not been aware how large Puebla had become until I drove through there and saw the sign a few years ago.

The main entry, off the freeway, to the city is attractive. There are stores, residences, many trees and boulevard islands. Puebla is an old city and has some of Mexico's most attractive colonial architecture.

The core of the city itself is one of the best urban experiences to be found in Mexico. A large cathedral predictably dominates the scene. It is on the usual, typical, well treed central plaza (Zocalo), which has stores on four sides, divided from the streets by arcades. The central area is a grid of narrow streets with tasteful colonial, low rise buildings. The buildings are colorful.

Puebla is one of those few cities in the world where most streets are numbered (at least in the core), both east-west and north-south. East-west streets are simply named by their number, either Pontiente (to the west of the square) or Oriente (to the east of the square). The east-west streets are even numbered to the north side of the square, such as 2 Oriente or 2 Pontiente and to the south of the square the streets are numbered with odd numbers, such as 5 Oriente and 5 Pontiente. Similarly, north-south streets are odd to the west of the square and might be called 5 Sur (south) or 5 Norte (north). To the east of the square the even numbered streets will be found, such as 32 Sur and 32 Norte. It seems doubtful, but perhaps Brigham Young based his street naming conventions on Puebla. Of course, like so much else in urban planning, the street numbering system is not carried out throughout much of the urban area. But it surely makes finding locations in the core much more simple.

A good cup of Starbucks quality coffee will be found at the "Italian Coffee Company," a chain with outlets around central Mexico. Note that the name is not something like Café de Italia, S.A., but is rather an English translation. Don't go in thinking that someone speaks English, however. The outlet near Centro is adjacent to a new Wal-Mart supercenter that is so successful that local law enforcement will be found directing traffic. A number of other stores share the center,





Zocalo

including a large clothing store called “Suburbia,” indication that the universal dream is well on its way to fulfillment in Mexico.

But like elsewhere in Mexico, much of the community would not warm the hearts of new urbanists. There are the usual informal appearing businesses that line streets outside Centro. There are also more than enough of the self-built, semi-formal houses that predominate in so much of Mexico.

But Puebla, like Toluca, could be a significant beneficiary of spillover growth from Mexico City. Its international airport has service from throughout the nation and from Houston.



Outside Centro



Centro



Puebla Outside Centro



Puebla Outside Centro



By Wendell Cox

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