

Stop 1: La Plaza de las Tres Culturas

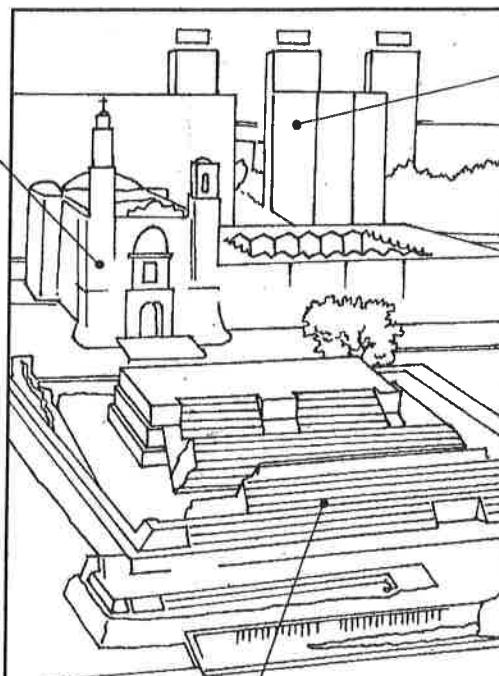
Guide to Mexico City

La Plaza de las Tres Culturas

La Plaza de las Tres Culturas (The Plaza of the Three Cultures) provides an unusually compact look at Mexican history and culture. The plaza commemorates the coming together of three cultures—Aztec civilization (1345–1521), the Spanish colonial period (1521–1820), and the modern twentieth century. The plaza is surrounded by architectural samples from Aztec, Spanish colonial, and present-day cultures in Mexico.

Spanish Colonial Church and School

After the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs, the Spanish constructed a Catholic church, a convent, and several schools on top of the Aztec ruins. The church is called the *Templo de Santiago* (Temple of Santiago) and was completed in 1609. The school attached to the church was completed in 1779. The buildings are excellent examples of early and late colonial architecture.



Modern Buildings

Many modern office and apartment buildings surround the plaza.

Aztec Ruins

In the plaza lie the ancient ruins of what was once an Aztec ceremonial center and marketplace. The last battle against the Spaniards took place here in 1521 and Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec king, fell prisoner.

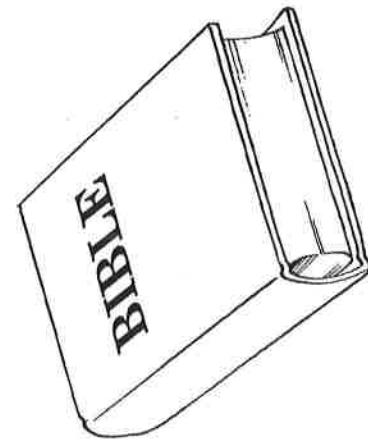
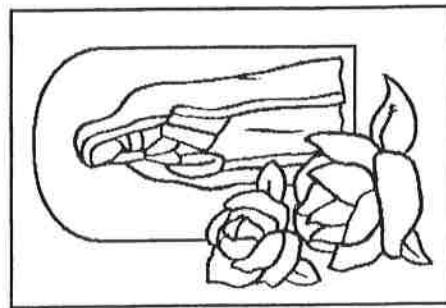
Stop 2: La Basílica de Guadalupe

The Story of Juan Diego and the Virgin of Guadalupe

On December 9, 1531, a poor Indian named Juan Diego is said to have seen a vision of the Virgin Mary (the mother of Jesus) in a blue mantle (cloak). She apparently told him to build a church on the spot where she stood. The Virgin was dark skinned and so had special meaning to Juan Diego and other Indians. The vision appeared on the hill of Tepeyac, where Indians had always worshipped Tonantzin, mother of gods. In this way, the event symbolized a fusing of Christian and Aztec religions.

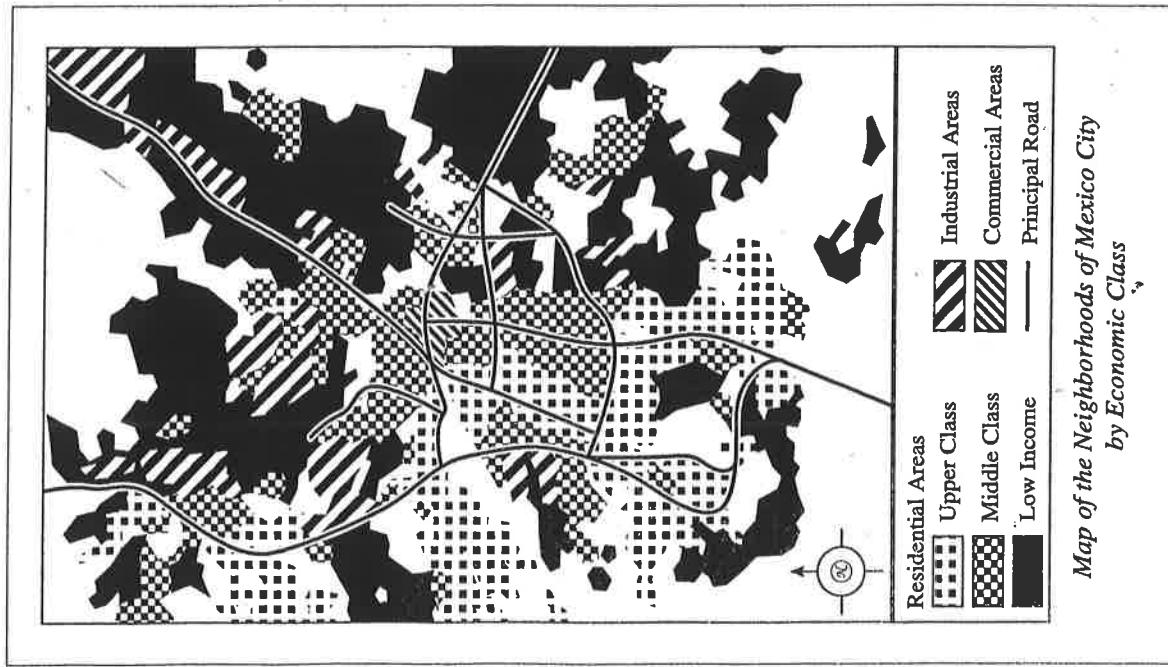
The local bishop asked Juan Diego for evidence proving that he had indeed seen the Virgin Mary. Juan Diego saw the vision a second time, three days later, and the Virgin's image became miraculously emblazoned on his cloak. The bishop immediately ordered the building of a church on the spot, and upon its completion Juan Diego's cloak with the image of the Virgin was hung in the church, framed in gold.

The Virgin of Guadalupe is today the patron saint of Mexico. Over the centuries, millions upon millions of the devout and the curious have come to view the miraculous image of the dark-skinned Virgin Mary on Juan Diego's cloak. In the modern basilica (church), built in 1976, one can walk behind the altar for a view of the cloak, which hangs behind bulletproof glass above the altar. Every December 12, penitents (believers) walk for days from distant homes to the basilica, approaching on their knees to show their devotion to the Virgin.



Stop 3: High-Income Neighborhood

Student Information 2.4A



Hola (hello). My name is José Fernández, and I'm a professor of urban studies. I study the challenges facing cities, such as Mexico City. As you may have noticed, housing in Mexico City reflects the wide economic gap between the rich and poor.

As the map to the left shows, low-income Mexicans tend to live in the east and north. Many poor people began coming to Mexico City in the 1960s to claim land on the outskirts of the city. They became known as "squatters" because they built shelter from discarded wood or cardboard on any land that was not being used by its owner. Squatter settlements often lack common services, such as safe drinking water and health-care facilities.

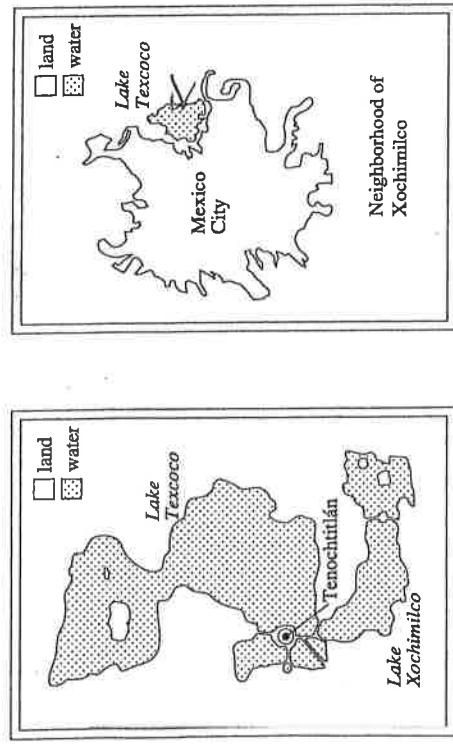
Middle-class housing settlements are scattered throughout Mexico City. Middle-income Mexicans have access to basic government services, such as water, electricity, sewage, and public transportation.

The rich live in extreme luxury in high-income neighborhoods in the west and south. They have easy access to Mexico City's best hospitals, schools, and shopping areas.

Now we are trying to decrease the rapid growth of Mexico City so that the government can provide housing and services for all citizens, rich and poor.

Stop 4: Environmental Studies Station

Water



Since Aztec times, the lakes in the Valley of Mexico have been drained, leaving little water in the modern-day city.

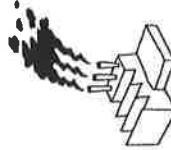
- Fresh water—for drinking and farming—has always been scarce in the Valley of Mexico because many of the lakes are salty. The Aztecs, Spanish, and modern Mexicans have all had to import fresh water.
- From 1973 to 1993 Mexico City's population swelled from 10 million to over 20 million. The city consumes approximately 16,000 gallons of water per second.
- Mexico City relies on water brought in at great expense from far away. For example, tap water is pumped 4,000 feet from the Cuitzamala Valley to Mexico City at a cost of \$12,000 per quart.
- 8 million Mexicans living in Mexico City lack running water.

Air

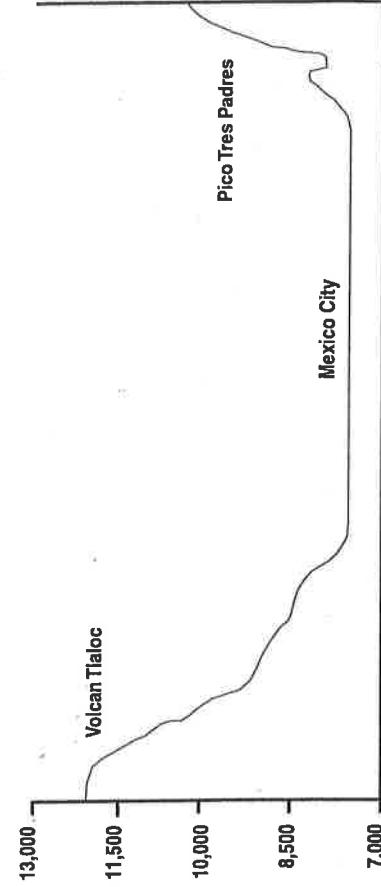


- The air of Mexico City is extremely polluted.
- 45 percent of all cars in Mexico are in the Mexico City. Some scholars estimate that as much as 85 percent of pollution in Mexico City comes from cars.

- Each day over three million vehicles and 35,000 factories in the Valley of Mexico emit about 13,000 tons of pollutants into the air.
- Every year vehicles and factories produce 51,000 tons of sulfur dioxide, a destructive air pollutant. Other air pollutants, including carbon monoxide and lead, create headaches, eye and skin irritations, and breathing problems.



Feet Above
Sea Level



In this topographical profile of the Valley of Mexico we can see why air pollution is easily trapped in the valley.