

Wonderful Huatulco

Mexico is the second largest country in Latin America, and the only one located in North America. With its more than 120 million people, it is large enough to have regional food, music, and cultural biases. Along the Mayan Rivera, for example, the coast faces the Caribbean Sea, and much of the food, music, culture, and certainly climate is very similar to the Latin Caribbean islands.



Since college days, I have enjoyed this country, its history, people, customs, culture, food, and music. And with the exception of the negative impact of narcotraffic and common border town reputations, these warm people are

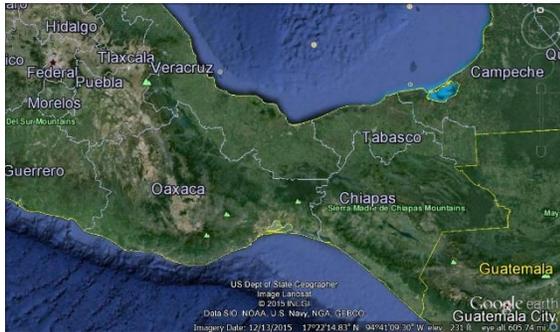


hardworking, affectionate, and gracious. After living in Latin America for six years and learning Spanish, I embraced the peoples of Latin America even more and my pro-Latin stance in life has been an enriching blessing. Due to my affection for Mexico and its people, my goal of a hobby was to visit all states of the Mexican Union, which came to completion in October, 2014, when I experienced Day of the Dead celebrations in Oaxaca City, my last state on the list and one of my favorites.

Yet, I still had not realized my dream of 25 years, to see and experience Huatulco which I had heard so much about. After accidentally meeting Dr. Bob, the CEO of Christian Dental Society, and Diane Meyer from Colorado Springs, at a course on volunteering at the ADA dental convention in Washington, DC, I begged to add my name to the list of 75 people who would be traveling to Huatulco, for a dental/medical/vision mission to Puerto Escondido, OAX, and surrounding villages. My elation came two days later when they confirmed I could go. So I postponed my conflicting cataract eye surgery and prepared my instruments. A 25-year-old dream was about to come true!



Nestled in the most southern part of Mexico lies the very interesting State of Oaxaca, destination for our first dental mission of 2016. Oaxaca lies next to Chiapas and very close to Guatemala, with food, mole, artisan, music, and culture



all its own. The narrowest neck of Mexico is located where Veracruz and Oaxaca sit, above and below each other. This was an attempted site years ago, for a canal, then railway, to connect the Gulf of Mexico with the Pacific Ocean for a shortcut. When founding father Benito Juárez descended from his Zapotec community in the

mountains of Oaxaca, he did not know how to read or to speak Spanish, only indigenous Zapoteca. His superior intellect and leadership ability led him to later become the only indigenous president of Mexico.

It is very easy to be smitten with Oaxaca's superb food, black mole over a variety of meats, culture, architecture, highland settings, and delicious contradictions.

Oaxaca City is the capital (pop. 500,000) roughly in the center of the state, and Huatulco is to the south. There are actually two Huatulcos, Santa Maria Huatulco is the governing center for the on the coast; 26 km south is the beautiful coast of Oaxaca, location, with nine separate and 46 beaches (only 9 usable). When mentioned, refers to Bahias de Huatulco, the coastal, recreational town.



municipality and not Bahias de Huatulco, on the more tourist-like named famous bays swimmable, 37 not Huatulco usually



Two hours west by car is another coastal town, Puerto Escondido, famous for fishing, surfing, and diving, and its beautiful Zicatela principal beach. (Our two tank-dive displayed many brightly colored fish, turtles, and occasional eel or ray). Our work sites for the mission involved several suburb villages outside of Puerto Escondido. For three days, the



groups split up and worked different sites: group headed directly



two
One

farther west, to the village of Tututepec to volunteer for three days; our group headed into the mountains, with a two-hour rutted dirt road ride, to the village of San Baltazar Loxicha, in the mountain district of Pochutla. The generous people fed about 40 of us in their homes with authentic Oaxacan cooking, often on clay stoves stoked with wood. On one occasion we had chicken mole for breakfast, and needless to say, we kept going on that fuel until well after lunch time. The patients were humble, appreciative, and courteous: After removing a #8 with 3+ mobility on a lady, she returned 45 minutes later to present me with a whole



hand of my most favorite banana from Puerto Rico days, platano manzano (apple bananas, tasting like a 50/50 mix of banana and apple). The emotion tugged at my heart as I accepted this kind, humble gift of appreciation, knowing these people have very little. The groups did a fantastic job of taking care of physical needs, dental-medical-vision, but were also giving attention to spiritual healing of the people with an impact on them I have not seen, a high priority for both Imperial Valley and Colorado groups.



We provided care in a different village each day, setting up lightweight portable chairs of corrugated plastic treated to make it antibacterial, designed and produced by Gayle



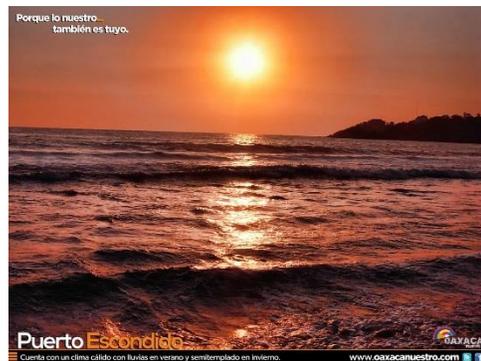
Cheatwood, DDS, of Holtville (Imperial Valley), CA; he is CEO of Dental Vision



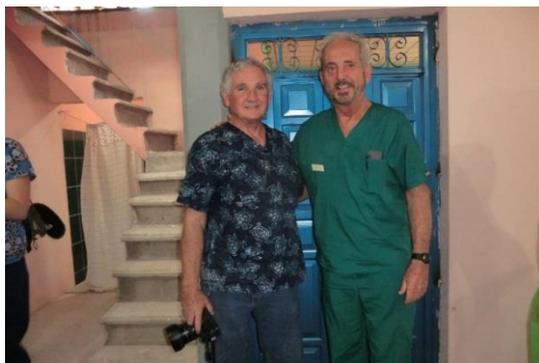
Missions, a very active, vibrant organization that can work anywhere in the world in bush dental clinics with completely portable equipment, even 12 volt and solar energy capability; Bob Meyer, DMD, CEO of Christian Dental Society had several designs of portable control units which we used (Bell Dental and Task Force by

Aseptico). Full-day clinics were performed for very needy villagers in Colonia Libertad, San Pedro Totolápan, Colotepec, and Barra de Navidad. Many years ago with a small hospital project in rural Puerto Rico I learned that, when you arrive, there is a line; when you stop for lunch, there is a line; and when you have to pack up and leave, there is still a line. We treat as many patients as possible,

efficiently, kindly, and professionally, but we never get to the end of the line. There is always more need. The local ground crew did a great job of advertising our visit and of monitoring how many people who could be seen in the amount of time. The sincere appreciation of the people is the blessing we all took with us as we sadly had to leave, part of our heart remaining behind. Over the years, I have advised many colleagues that, when that exhausted feeling of burn-out syndrome hits you, it's time for a mission trip. Everyone who participates to help needy people had their burn out cured by the rich, often emotional blessing received. During my senior year at Loma Linda, driving to Monument Valley clinic, Utah, to work on Navajo patients, I thought I was going to bless them with my magical fingers: The surprise to me, and on every mission effort since, was that I received more from the people than I could ever give to them. We in our profession have training and talent that allows us to get close to people and to help. Get involved in some way to aid the needy, and you will find it true that you are blessed beyond measure.



Scottish missionary David Livingstone, MD, said: "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: The only ones among you who will be really happy, are those who have sought and found how to serve." I wish for you to experience this kind of happy!



My sincere thanks to Doctor Cheatwood and the Imperial Valley group, Doctor Meyer and the Colorado Contingency and Christian Dental Society, Pastor Moore, of the Iglesia Bautista Trinidad and el ministerio Gracia Y Verdad in Imperial Valley, and the incredible team of hard-working professional and lay people who did such an amazing job of sharing love and professional care in a mission setting with needy people.

Ronald E. Fritz, DDS, MPH, FADI

Videos of Totolapan mission, by George Fareed, MD:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1BYJLdoDjg&spfreload=10>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wn3q7NbItyM>

Justin's video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hC9CrZU0Wgs>