

## **Fond Memories And A Common Sense Approach To Living In Morelia, Mexico** by: **David B. Wix**

For me, living in Morelia was a very rewarding experience. It was certainly far different than what I had been used to in the United States. When I went there in 1997, technology existed, however, technicians were at times limited in their knowledge compared to their counterparts in the United States. Therefore, on occasion, computer equipment did not work as well as what I had been accustomed to. And, computer services were much more limited. For instance, when I first arrived at Centro Mexicano Internacional (CMI, my school in Morelia), there was one computer available 10 to 30 minutes a day to students for email services. If I wanted additional time and services, I had to go rent one of the two or three available computers at a local cyber café a few blocks down the street from CMI.

Now, I could have felt disheartened like some of the American students at my school, however, I viewed it as an interesting challenge. Instead of reading emails during my available computer time, I would download them, print them, and read them later. Then, I would hand write out any replies I wanted to send, type them up on a non-internet computer in Microsoft Word. Afterwards, I saved them to a disk, and the next day cut and paste my replies into my emails and sent them during my 10 to 30 minutes of computer time.

### **Morelia's Transportation System**

Welcome to the world of the Combi, Morelia's at times challenging bus system! Consisting of a fleet of VW buses, the normal capacity is 15-18 people. However, it was not unusual to see more than 20 people sandwiched into every nook and cranny of the Combi. It was times like that that I really hoped everyone had used their deodorant. The nice thing is that Combis went virtually everywhere and one never had to wait very long for another in the event of missing the previous one. And, with such closeness, it was impossible not to get to know fellow passengers. I met many wonderful people that way. There were times, however, I must admit I broke down and took a taxi when I felt I needed my space. That was alright too, though, because as long as one negotiates the price prior to starting out, most trips are quite reasonable. For instance, in 1997, I could ride pretty much anywhere in El Centro (downtown) for anywhere between \$2 and \$3. Even longer trips across town were generally never more than \$8 to \$10.

Most generally, I felt safe riding in either mode of transportation. One Combi experience I had, however, was a bit tense (funny now, not too much then). I decided to take a scenic tour around town one day. For most of the trip, there was one other person besides me and the bus driver. He sat up in the front seat with the driver and got into an intense political discussion that eventually turned to the subject of Gringos. It was obvious neither of them cared much for the fact that Gringos were living "south of the border." I sat quietly listening, hoping that I was dark skinned enough to resemble one of them. By that time, my Spanish was good enough that I could hold my ground in most conversations. I felt tremendously relieved, though, when the driver looked over at me and said "you are from Brazil, right?" I didn't actually say yes, but I managed a quick remark in my limited vocabulary of Portuguese, enough to satisfy him and his friend at least. After that, I confined my Combi trips to shorter runs and more crowded buses.

### **Getting Used To Living On "Mexico Time"**

The first time I taught an English class on a Saturday, I was exposed to the concept of doing things on "Mexico time." Saturdays classes were always a bit more relaxed than ones during the week as most school administrators were gone. Students as well as teachers let their hair down a bit more than usual.

I generally was not as strict about breaks as I had to be during the week, so, 5 minute breaks on occasion turned to 10-15 minute ones. It was alright, though, because we almost always got through all of our assigned material. Now, lunch break was a different matter. The first time I let my class take off for lunch, they went off by themselves. It was supposed to be a one hour lunch break, of course. Well, 1:00 PM turned into 1:30, 1:45, 2:00. Finally, a little after 2:00 my class returned. When I asked one of the students what happened, one of them said “sorry teacher, we were just on Mexico time today.” So, after that, I went to lunch with my class and kept them together as a group. Instead of feeling penalized, they loved it. And, I used the time to teach a few lessons not in the book.

### **My Students**

While at CMI, I taught classes of all levels, from beginner to advanced, from niños (children) to adultos (adults). I even got called upon to teach a class in linguistics to a group of teachers. My favorite class of all, I must say, was a group of 10 to 12 year olds. At first, I was not sure I would survive with all the antics that they pulled on me. Most of them wanted to play in class and rarely ever do their homework. Now how does one appeal to a 10 year old to get them to stay to task? Well, I commended them for how intelligent they were. Then, with the more difficult ones, I mentioned how nice it would be to meet their parents and report on their “progress” in my class. Now, the latter choice worked. After that, I never had a bit of trouble. In one of our last classes I asked each of my young charges to write about their favorite place, person, or thing. One of the girls, about 11 at the time, really touched my heart. She got up to describe her favorite person. “My favorite person is my English teacher David. His Spanish is not always the best. But, he is a good teacher and I love him.” I think I had a lump in my throat about a mile long that day.

### **Shopping Conditions**

Just like with the buses of Morelia, shopping areas can be overcrowded and a challenge. There was more than one occasion I experienced pushing and shoving (never violent though) to get through to a counter to purchase food or other items. A Mercado (Mexican market) is nothing like the grocery stores I had been used to in the United States. Of course, there are a few supermarket style grocery stores in Morelia that are similar, but, they aren’t near as much fun to go to as the Mercados. As I mentioned in one of my previous articles – one can purchase almost anything in a Mercado (hopefully all legal). I used to spend a lot of my free time walking all over El Centro to the various shops and Mercados. I remember buying things from CDs to leather goods to delightful foods I had never experienced before. At my favorite clothing store, Milano’s, I was able to buy an entire new wardrobe for less than \$150. I found leather jackets and coats at a stall not far from the downtown library for \$50 to \$75 that would easily cost \$400 to \$500 in the United States. Morelia has some of the best bargains I have ever found if one is willing to spend the time and energy to look.

### **Conclusion**

Living in a different country with a different language and different customs is not for the faint of heart. This is my point – living in Morelia is different than where you live right now. Some of Morelia is quite modern, other parts are not. One cannot expect conditions to be exactly the same as in the United States or other more modernized countries. But, if you have a sense of adventure and use common sense, you can have a wonderful time and some marvelous experiences. I did. I have memories that will last a lifetime. I met people, saw places and things, learned new things, lived and experienced things that I will always treasure.

When you go to Morelia, go with an open mind. Be willing to learn, live a different lifestyle, experience new things. Above all, use common sense and have humility. If you do, you will have fond, priceless, unique memories that will always hold special meaning for you.

## **About The Author**

The author, David Wix, lived, worked, and traveled extensively in Mexico during 1997 and has degrees in history and languages. Currently he is working as an insurance producer in Arizona. He has had articles published in his areas of expertise and is currently working on a couple of books to be published in the near future. Author's website: <http://www.dave-wix.com> and <http://www.travelwriters.com/davewix>.

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