



Guanajuato children parade in 2009 past the Plaza de La Paz in front of the domed Guanajuato Basilica, welcoming Ashland visitors participating in 40th Anniversary celebrations of Sister City relations.

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50 years of Sister City relations

BY **KERNAN TURNER ASHLAND AMIGO CLUB** February 18, 2019

Celebrations this spring recognizing the 50th anniversary of Sister City relations between Guanajuato and Ashland will resemble family reunions, a time for greeting old friends and recalling past gatherings.

Celebrants from Guanajuato will be hosted in Ashland April 5-10, and an Ashland delegation will spend May 27 to 31 in Guanajuato.

The people of Guanajuato always welcome Ashlanders with open arms, taking them into their homes and helping them get acquainted with the culture and history of their amazing city, which traces its founding to 1578. Ashlanders do the same.

Often cited as the most strikingly beautiful city in Mexico, Guanajuato, population 70,000, has been recognized since 1988 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

At one city entrance, an 11-foot-high Ashland mural stretches 75 feet along a wall of the Ashland Paseo (boulevard) that leads to a turnaround with an obelisk dedicated to Señora Chela Tapp-Kocks, the Southern Oregon University professor who first proposed the 1969 linking of Guanajuato and Ashland. Simultaneously, she and others created the Ashland Amigo Club, whose many volunteers have helped keep Sister City relations alive for half a century.

Nestled in a narrow valley, its hillsides carpeted with homes brightly painted in blues, greens and reds, Guanajuato overflows with charms. Its narrow, cobblestoned streets lead to many delights.

The historic heart of the town is the triangular Plaza de La Paz (Peace Plaza), the imposing, deep-yellow, domed Guanajuato Basilica, and an assortment of colonial buildings, their lower floors serving as cafes, shops and government offices. It is said national hero Benito Juarez once declared Guanajuato the capital of Mexico from the Plaza.

Other prominent buildings include the Teatro Juarez, constructed between 1873 and 1903, with Doric columns at the entrance and statues on the rooftop; the Alhóndigas de Granaditas, a public corn granary that played a major role in Mexico's first armed rebellion against Spanish rule; and the University of Guanajuato, approached by an imposing flight of stairs. The university has a student exchange agreement with Southern Oregon University and an enrollment of more than 17,000, spread over four campuses and several cities.

Popular with visitors is the Callejon del Beso (Alley of the Kiss), where two balconies on opposite sides of the alley are separated by fewer than 5 feet. The legend says young lovers sneaked kisses by reaching across the street from their balconies, and couples who kiss in the alley below are guaranteed years of bliss.

The city's museums include the birthplace of Mexican Muralist Diego Rivera; the Don Quijote (Quixote) Iconographic Museum, where every exhibit is about the delusional knight of La Mancha; and the Museo de Las Momias, a collection of more than 100 mummified corpses of men, women and children removed from a nearby cemetery.

The most distinctive feature of Guanajuato is its subterranean roadway system in tunnels created originally to divert floodwaters overflowing from mountain streams during the summer rainy season. Cars enter the tunnels and pop up in another part of town, reducing traffic on overhead streets.

The city's major cultural event is the Festival Cervantino, named for Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Spanish author of "Don Quixote." It attracts thousands of spectators each year to concerts, plays and other cultural and artistic activities featuring world-class performers. The festival is scheduled this year for Oct. 9-27.

Guanajuato is the capital of the State of Guanajuato, population nearly 6 million. The city is 6,600 feet above sea level, squeezed between mountains of even higher elevations. The city is a half hour from an international airport and an hour's drive from the metropolitan area of Leon, population exceeding 1.6 million.