

Mexico 2006

This trip can be described at various points as "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly".

The Good

I got into Mexico a day ahead of the conference and used it to tour the stone temples of Cempoala. A tour guide walked us around the archeological site, and supplied details of life of the Totonacs that built it. We got to climb one of pyramids and had a bird's eye view of the area. All of the buildings have not been excavated as they are done when funds are available. Another memorable part of the tour was a performance of the Voladores de Papantla. They re-enacted a tradition of their ancestors in which five of them climbed a sixty-foot pole. One played the flute while four, tethered by the foot to the top of the pole, jumped off and spun around while dropping almost to the ground. This ancient tradition may have inspired bungee jumping.

Veracruz is a coastal city so the sea breeze kept it comfortable to be outside. The conference took place at the World Trade Centre so the facilities were excellent. My hotel adjoined a shopping mall and on evenings I browsed the shops and people watched. I was initiated into the Mexican's chivalrous behaviour even on the flight over when I was helped to get my hand luggage in the overhead bin. At the mall I got to witness more of this, as young men pulled chairs out for their dates and older men walked hand-in-hand with their wives. I was also fascinated with the Mexican navy dress uniform worn on a Sunday that included a sword.

One night we were treated to Mexican music and dancing. Some of it was reminiscent of parang with similar instruments and songs but with the addition of a wooden xylophone. The female dancers were dressed in white lace and black aprons. A dance was performed in which a large red ribbon was placed on the ground and the male and female pairs took turns shifting the end of ribbon with their feet until at the end of the dance they had tied it into a bow. They ended the show with fireworks and as it took place by the sea it was beautiful to see the light reflected in the water.

The Bad

Despite my precautions with bottled water and avoiding ice I succumbed the day before my departure to Montezuma's Revenge.

The Ugly

I missed my flight from Mexico City to Miami which meant I missed my connection to Trinidad. I was given a choice of spending the night in Mexico or Miami and given the state of my stomach I figured it would be better to at least get as far as Miami. Keeb did not get my message about not coming that night and waited for hours for me at the airport. When I got into Miami at 1:00 in the morning I was told the Airport hotel was booked up and no, I could not use their phone to find another hotel. I could either go back into the deserted airport to find a courtesy phone or flag down a shuttle bus outside and hope the hotel has rooms. When I finally got into a hotel the person at the service desk (too perky by far!) asked me if I was superstitious and when I said no, he assigned me to room 666. I figured it really could not get much worse. And happily, it did not. I got home okay the next day.