

# Of earthquakes and minotaurs

by Sukaina Kubba

Our trip from Mexico to Zihuatanejo was pretty luxurious until the bathroom of the bus began to smell. I have never been on a bus like this one. There were only fourteen seats on a bus that would normally carry forty-five people. We lay back, our televisions were switched on and a young man served us coffee and juice.

I was awake for a large part of the eight hour trip, to ensure they wouldn't open any windows because of the stories we had heard about robbers. The bus was unbearably hot. When we got to Zihuatanejo, a fog of wet air was hanging over the whole city. It was still and seemed almost dead. Valdemar,



in the corridor going to La Esperanza

a young architect, came to meet us at the bus station, with an open truck. We were driven to Zihuatanejo Hotel and Manuel gave us fifteen minutes to shower and come down to meet him.

This was our first visit to the little restaurant where we ended up eating lunch every day for two months. After a short walk around the beach and through some parts of this small fishing town, we figured we knew the place pretty well. In retrospect, I realise that it took us half of our time there to have some understanding of how the town worked. I still don't know whether there was a map of Zihuatanejo available or not; we never really bothered to get one.

The next day we were in our pink apartment which was fortunately located in front of the only landmark in town, the Japanese roundabout. We had air conditioning in the living room, running water in the taps, two bedrooms and a small space with bunk beds. Due to my Abu Dhabi background, I preferred to sleep in the living room with the air-conditioning boosted to the

maximum. Except for cleanliness problems and frequent nightly attacks by huge cockroaches, we certainly were comfortable.

Thanks to Juliette, we woke up pretty early every morning, and went to the market for fruits, bread and milk. After a quick but delicious breakfast, we were ready to go, although some of us had to stick around and wait for Jean-Maxime, while he put on his sun-block and got his pencil crayons ready. Then we'd walk to the bus stop and drop off our mail. By the time we reached La Esperanza the sun was up and high and the morning rainfall had already stopped. The first two hours of work were bearable. It was

not a real space. We couldn't help but make up stories about each place. Sometimes a little change of scenery scared us. We almost freaked out when we saw the toothless old man, who always sat near the restaurant with his steel cane, walking in the market.

Under our apartment was Luterio, the minotaur of the maze in our apartment building. He would suddenly appear from among the dense vegetation, point at me and say, "¡Inaqui mala, corazón negro!" and ask if I was carrying any bombs. He would also cut off our water, probably because we never told him the truth about why there were four women and three men living together. Jean-

*Tremblements de terre, coquerelles, cyclones, fiestas: notre voyage au Mexique fut parsemé d'anecdotes et de surprises. En voici un délicieux comprimé!*

*Terremotos, cucarachas, ciclones y fiestas: nuestro viaje en la tierra de México fue una experiencia llena de anécdotas y sorpresas. Aquí pueden leer una deliciosa recopilación de las mismas!*



Dance festival in Zihuatanejo



In the restaurant

sufficient to sit in the shade and be fed mangos and have exotic juices offered by the people of La Esperanza. By noon the drinks would increase because everyone thought we were mad to be walking around in the sun and surveying, measuring and sketching without protection. Although we were all terribly exhausted, and must have seemed as ridiculous as we felt, we'd repeat the same pattern every day, staying until two pm.

If we weren't fed again by someone in La Esperanza we'd go to the restaurant (I don't know if it had a name) and feast. By the end of the trip our feasts were interrupted by frequent visits to the bathroom, a symptom of the attack of La Tourista. Siesta was never sufficient. I usually fell into a state of delirium. Some of the most amazing times were our trips to and from the restaurant. We felt drugged by the furious yet soothing Zihuatanejo sun. After a little bit of exposure to the sun, we didn't even feel its power any more. We gaped as we passed the frozen fronts of concrete houses and shops. Each front seemed like an image or a photograph,

Maxime tried to convince him that this was our collective honeymoon, but he didn't seem to believe that. Once our water was cut off for four days and we had to place signs saying "Sinister Zone," on the bathroom doors, to warn Aitor who was just coming back from Mexico City. It took us too long to figure out that we could go to the roof, fill up some buckets with water from the taps, and pour the water down the toilet bowl. In the meantime our whole apartment smelled like an overused public toilet.

We went back to La Esperanza in the afternoon and everything seemed much calmer. Sometimes we also went to the beach. Because we took it for granted, our visits were not as frequent as they should have been. Generally the late afternoons and evenings were pretty mellow, unless we were invited to a wedding or small celebration, or went to Ixtapa to join the tourists in the universal Western dance scene.

Now, everything was more or less under control until the earthquakes hit. I don't know what it was, but I have never been

so traumatized in my life. I was drafting on our glass table (the silliest piece of furniture in an earthquake zone) when the table started to shake. I screamed "Serge, stop it!" then turned to look at him and realized that the whole world was shaking. Serge and I ran under the door frame and screamed for the three people in the bedrooms to get up. It lasted a minute and I hardly remember much more than the horrible roar, the concrete column that felt like jelly, and the big hug that Serge and I gave each other when it was all over.

at once and for those two weeks I had to deal with both my physical and mental traumas. I remember that, while we were dancing in Ixtapa one crazy night, I went through my whole life in an hour, without the aid of narcotics. That wasn't too bad because I was jumping around like a mad woman; it was when I was sitting that I would cease to control myself and break down.

Fortunately I and every one else survived the whole Mexico experience and I was surprised that I still had some of my fragile sanity when I got back to Montreal.



In the restaurant again

Unfortunately we got at least one earthquake a day, for the next few days. My body had never been so sensitive to any vibration before. I could feel a car passing by in the street and think it was another earthquake and I would lose it again. I guess the earthquakes shook some memories out of my system too. They weren't terrible memories or anything, but they all came out

The speed and madness of earthquakes, cyclones and dances turned everything else into a frightening stillness. The long silences broken only by those very few moments of madness, made it seem that we had been there forever or only for a few hours. But the international calendar always runs and, objectively, I know we were there for a couple of months.