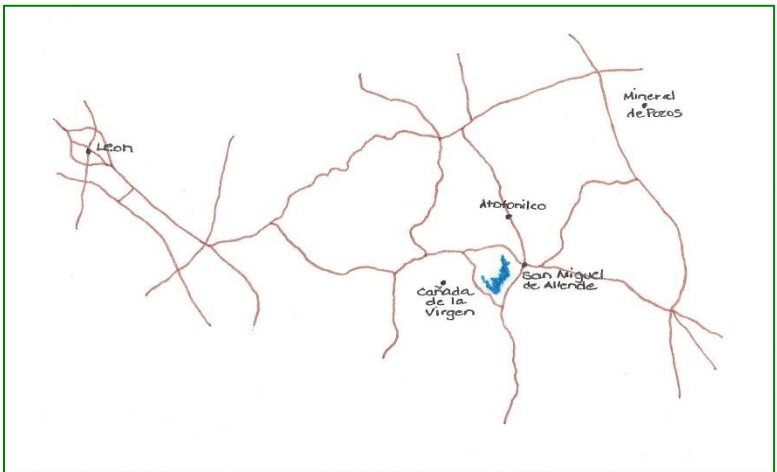


# San Miguel de Allende

# MEXICO



**February 21 – March 6, 2019**

## February 20 & 21: Getting There

After several days of keeping a close watch on the weather, I left on Wednesday, February 20, taking the last bus to Logan, so that I would be there for my 7:15 am flight to Houston, where I was to meet the rest of the group. Our flight was delayed 45 minutes while they de-iced the plane. The pilot must have put the pedal to the metal, because we were only about 15 or 20 minutes late getting to Houston, which was just as gray and dreary as Boston, but without the snow on the ground. It was a long walk plus a train ride and another long walk to get to the gate for the next flight. Where were my peeps? Was their flight delayed? A few minutes later Gwen, our fearless leader, came out to see if I had arrived. They were having lunch. Since I had been able to procure a REAL brekkie at Logan, I did not join them.



When we arrived at Leon, our driver met us for a wild 2-hour drive to San Miguel de Allende, looking very natty in circa 1970 brown polyester jeans and a tight-fitting camo shirt. The van was

apparently built for people with no legs, as there were only inches between the rows of seats. The windows were sealed shut, and, if there was a/c, it was quite anemic. The driver was everything I



have heard about Mexican drivers, careening down the road, taking his half out of the middle, passing cars with vehicles coming at us, roaring along, stop signs only a suggestion. Apparently, the van had no shocks to speak of, as we bounced and jounced along.

We arrived at Casa Contenta at around 5:00 pm, a very charming B&B in San Miguel de Allende. After we went to our rooms (Margitta and I are in Violeta on the second floor), it was back out to gather for margaritas, guac, and nachos on one of the terraces at the hotel. Later we ordered pizza, as most of us were travelled out and too tired to go out for dinner.



## **February 22: A Tour of San Miguel de Allende**

Friday was a beautiful, WARM, sunny day. We were awakened by dogs barking, roosters crowing, church bells, and lots of birds. After a yummy breakfast, we had a walking tour of the city. The city has attracted many ex-pat citizens from the U.S., some of whom attend the city's school of fine arts, the Allende Institute, which was established in 1938.

The grid,  
Mexican style.

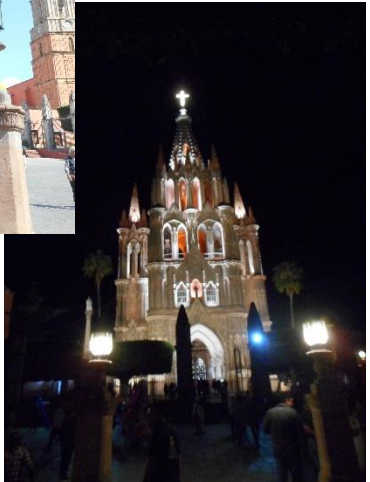


Located in the city's historic, cobblestoned center, San Miguel's most famous sight is its parish church, the neo-Gothic Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel, whose dramatic pink "wedding cake" towers rise above the main plaza, el Jardín.

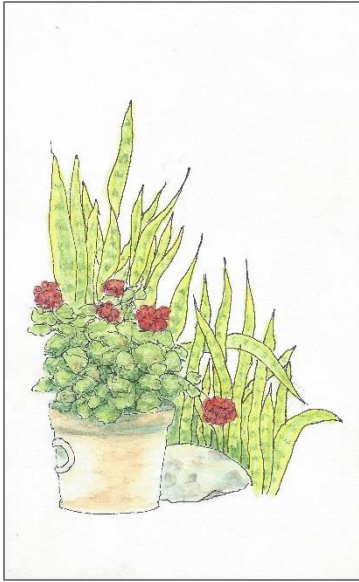
Later, I managed to do a small drawing of part of one of the



pretty little courtyard gardens where we are staying. For this trip, I decided to just do drawings and do all the journaling on the computer. At 4:30 we gathered for our daily Show 'n' Tell. That evening we had our group dinner at Vivali Ristorante. Afterwards,

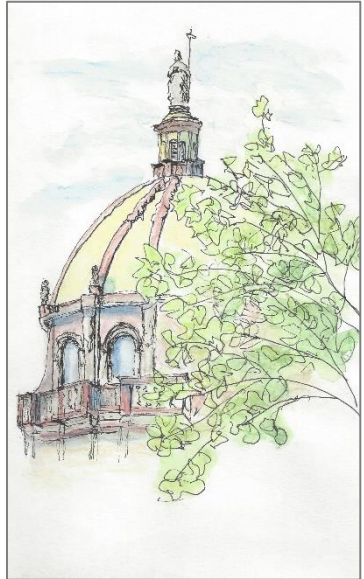
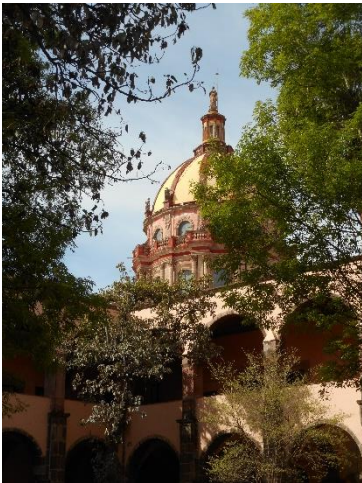


some of us took a walk to see the town at night. It was a happenin' place, with lots of people, including families, out and about.



## February 23: Sketching

Saturday was another beautiful day. We could hear fireworks off in the distance this morning. After another yummy breakfast, we hiked up the hill to Bellas Artes for a morning of painting. I definitely bit off more than I could chew with today's painting! Next stop was a walk to the Mercado Ignacio Ramirez, where there were all manner of stalls selling food, trinkets, crafts, and flowers, some of it quite tacky, with trap de turista written all over it. Abby, Martha, Mary, Margitta, and I had dinner at Hecho en

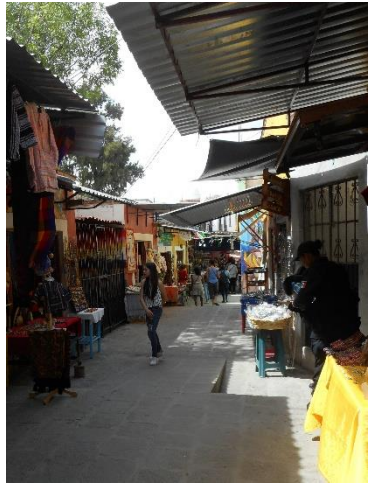




Mexico. It was a bit of a trap de turista, with lots of Americans. I tried the chicken mole with jicama salad and grilled nopal (prickly-pear cactus). The chicken was excellent, although the sauce was just okay. The salad was really yummy. The cactus was kind of blah.

### **February 24: Parque Juárez**

Sunday was another sunny day, a bit warmer. Breakfast was yummy, even better than the other days. We spent the morning plying our brushes in Parque Juárez to the accompaniment of the singing of many birds.



I painted near the butterfly garden, where there are lots of

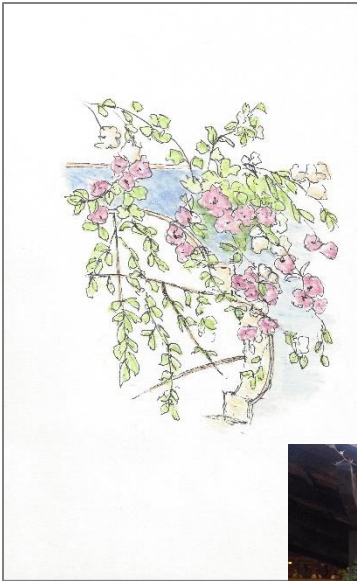




Monarch butterflies; they come here from up north to spend the winter and lay their eggs.

Afterwards, Margitta, Martha, Kathleen, Abby, Florence, and I walked past the lavaderos públicos (public washtubs) up to El Chorro, the spring that is the site of San Miguel's founding. Up more steps we went to La Capilla de Santa Cruz del Chorro, a 16th-century church and one of the oldest structures in San Miguel. Spent the afternoon working on the terrace outside





our room and in the studio upstairs. Martha, Margitta, Mary, and I ate dinner at Buenos Aires Bistro, an Argentinian restaurant. The critter smelled wicked good, but I was concerned about being able to convey to the Food Facilitator how I like my meat, or if they would even cook it that way. Instead I opted for a salad and homemade ravioli, which was to die for, so I was quite content. Dessert was yummy, too.

## February 25: Fábrica La Aurora

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Monday was a bit cooler with a mix of sun and clouds, although there was still plenty of sun. We

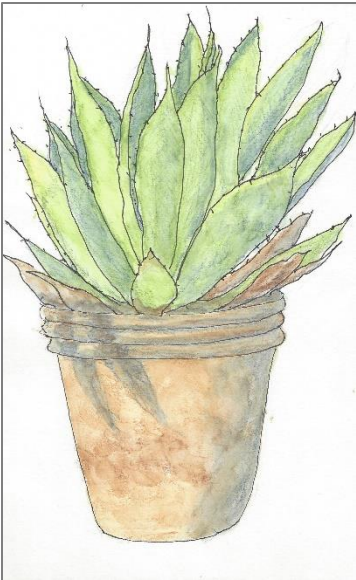


cabbed it to Fábrica La Aurora Centre de Arte y Diseno, a former textile mill that has been turned into artists' studios, galleries, and upscale boutiques. Six of us gathered for lunch at the café. I was still full from our wonderful breakfast, so I had a restorative cappuccino and a piece of corn bread as my something-something. I now know the word for butter; it's *mantequilla*. When we got back, Martha and I walked to a little store near our hotel for cold drinks, where I treated myself to a Mexican coke.





After Show 'n' Tell, Margitta, Martha, Abby, Kathleen, and I walked to Casa Don Quijote. It was a large restaurant, and the only other table was people from our group, who were almost done. There was only one little old man working as chef, and our



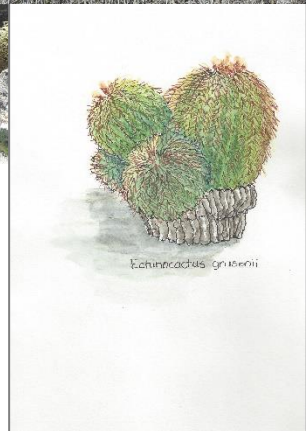
dinners came out to us one at a time. Abby and I both ordered nachos with chicken and an order of guac; Kathleen had the same order sans guac. Even our three orders came out one at a time, with the guac arriving much later. The food was very good, however, and I had a wonderful margarita that was almost big enough to take a swim in.

## February 26: Charco del Ingenio jardin botánico

Tuesday was sunny and warm. After another wonderful breakfast, we did the cab thing again and went to el Charco del Ingenio jardín botánico, which is dedicated to the conservation of nature, especially Mexican flora. There is a canyon, a reservoir, and lots of wonderful cacti and



other plants. It is very wild and high desert, with nice dirt walking paths. I did my one little drawing, which seems to be as much as I can do in a day. Since I always try to finish it on site, there is never enough time later to do another painting and get my journal up to date.



I tried the prickly-pear cactus ice cream, which was a glorious deep shade of purple and similar to an ice in consistency – just the thing for a warm afternoon.

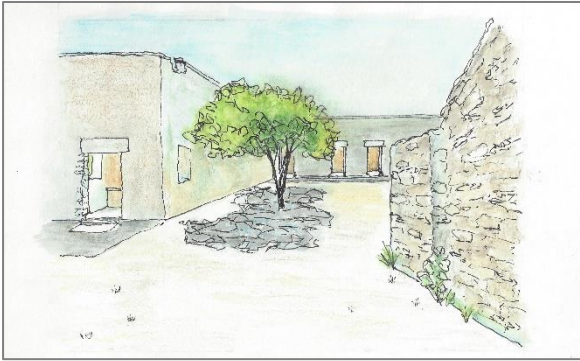
### **February 27: Pozos**

Wednesday was sunny and warm again. I'm lovin' this! Brekkie was a half hour earlier, because we were off on a day trip to Pozos, an old mining town about an hour away from San Miguel de Allende, which is even higher in elevation than where we are staying. After passing through many farm-



lands, we traveled over a very rough dirt road to the Cinco Señores mine, which was open from 1870-1905. Our guide was

very informative, explaining how the silver was mined and processed, and how that changed over the years with better tools



and technology. He also gave us some historical background about the area. In the 1960s, underground springs flooded the silver mines; there has been no mining since that time.

We had a wonderful lunch at the hotel in town – I tried the chili rellenos, which



were yummy. We had a little time to explore the town before getting back on the van for a visit with Luis Cruz





Martinez, who makes and plays flutes and drums originally made by Pre-Columbian indigenous people. They had no stringed instruments or written music. After Show 'n' Tell, most of us decided we were too full from lunch to do dinner as well as being tired, so Sue, Jim, Margitta, Martha, Abby, and I went to the little store near here for empanadas and assorted goodies. We ate out on the terrace, where we were joined by Mary, Kathleen, Cynthia, and Gwen.

## February 28: Atotonilco

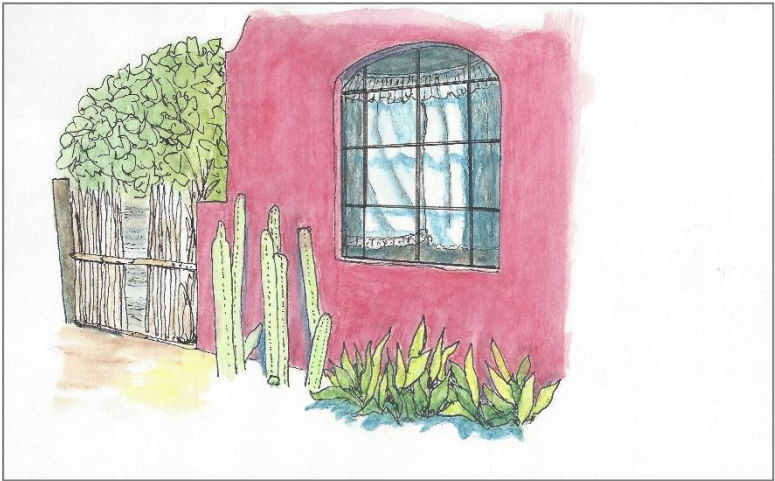


On Thursday, the sky was blue, the birds were singing. What a treat to be away from the winter cold and the big, puffy coat! Today's adventure was to Atotonilco about half an hour away from where we

are staying. We traveled by van. Our first stop was at the Santuario de Jesus Nazareno de Atotonilco, an example of baroque art and architecture. Most of the church was



built between 1740 and 1776. After construction was completed, the artist Miguel Antonio Martínez de Pocasangre spent more than 30 years painting the walls and ceiling of the nave



with detailed religious histories and personages. It is sometimes referred to as the “Sistine Chapel of Mexico.”

We took a very dusty walk to Galeria Atotonilco, a house and gallery. We were able to

tour part of the house after we went to the gallery. The owners of the gallery live in the ad-joining house, which is loaded with more art, some of it for sale. We then took a short walk to Nirvana, where we had a wonderful lunch.





Worked on my journal for a bit when we got back to the hotel. Martha, Mary, Kathleen, and I procured some edibles from the little store, which we ate on the terrace, where we were joined by Florence. Afterwards, Martha, Abby, Kathleen, and I joined industrious Margitta in the studio for some painting time.

### **March 1: San Miguel**

Friday night there were firecrackers off and on during the night, but I still managed to get a good night's sleep. Another sunny morning, with the birds singing, and the occasional meow of someone of the feline persuasion. Perhaps it was the one I saw sauntering along the top of the wall outside our room the other morning.



Mary, Martha, and I went to The Opal Mine, a store that sells opal jewelry. Australia is the top opal producer in the world; their opals come in three colors. Mexico is the number two producer; their

opals come in approximately 20 different colors. We were offered water or almond tequila; of course, I opted for a taste of the latter, which was quite nice. There was a silver shop across the street, which we also visited.

We headed up to the square in front of the Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel to see the dancers celebrating Christ of the Conquest, an annual festival that takes place on the first Thursday and Friday of March. Hundreds of colorful conchero or "Chichimeca" dancers dressed in pre-Hispanic style outfits arrive from the surrounding towns, representing different styles of dance and dress in many colors. The conchero dancers get their name from the stringed instrument similar to a lute that is used in the dance ceremonies — and often made out of armadillo shell. In addition, drums and rattling shells on the legs of the dancers made for a stirring accompaniment to the dancing.

After more shopping, we stopped for lunch at El Correo, which was excellent, where I continued my scientific testing of margaritas. There was a very tempting looking bakery near the restaurant, so we went there and got some goodies for later.

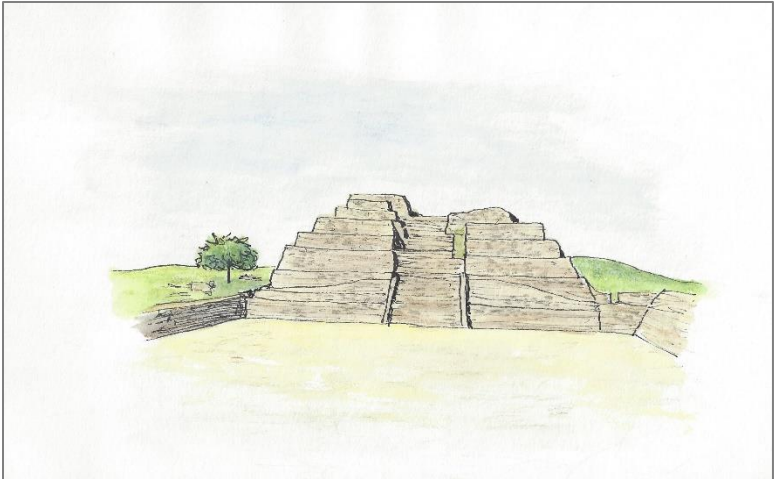
## **March 2: Cañada de la Virgen**

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Saturday was another beautiful, warm, sunny day. This was an early day, as we had to meet our van at 9:00 for today's adventure to Cañada de la Virgen, about 45 minutes from San Miguel. Our guide was Albert Coffee, a professional anthro-





pologist who worked on the ruins' excavation. He was a wonderful, very knowledgeable guide, who told us about the structures on the site, as well as Meso-american culture and history, local ecology, and local customs. Most of us walked up to the top of the pyramid. The steps were very steep and narrow.



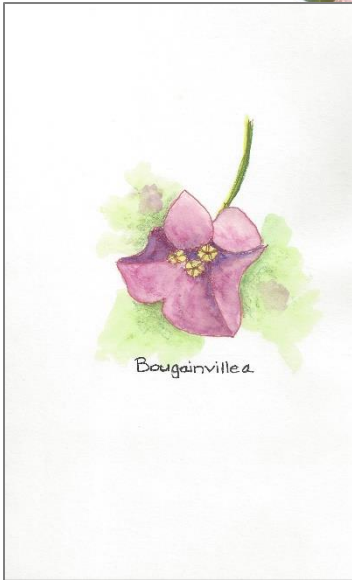
Margitta, Martha, Kathleen, Abby, Stacey, and I walked to Café 1910, a teeny restaurant that was about a 10-minute walk from our hotel. This was definitely a hidden gem, not overrun with touristas from the US. The menu was all in Español, although our Food Facilitator had a good command of the English language. It

was very good, and most of our lunches cost around 75 pesos with tip, which comes out to under \$4.00. This evening Martha, Margitta, Mary, Kathleen, Carol, Stacey, and Cynthia gathered outside our room for our evening repast.

### **March 3: Checking Out Our 'Hood**

Sunday was another gaw-jus day. Woke to the usual sounds of birds, a cat meowing, a rooster crowing, dogs barking, and church bells. Another yummy breakfast. Most of the group went back up the hill to the center of town. Mary and I stayed behind. We walked around our 'hood, took a few photos, and stopped at the little store for a few provisions. I decided to treat myself to a Mexican coke. Spent the day painting on the terrace in front of our room. My roomie joined me when she got back from mass.





Martha, Kathleen, Abby, Carol, Florence, Cynthia, Margitta, and I had a lovely dinner at El Rinconcito, which was just a short walk from where we are staying. This was another teeny place, with wonderful food and margaritas.

### **March 4: Our Last Day**

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Monday, our last full day in Mexico, was another beauty. Margitta,



Abby, and I walked to the Mercado de San Juan de Dios, the place where the Mexicans shop, which was lots of fun. We got back around noon, had lunch, and I spent most of the afternoon plying my paintbrushes.

We walked to Casa de la Noches, a former bordello, now a hotel, owned by the same woman who owns Casa Contenta, for our group dinner. We had adult beverages with veggies, guac, and nachos served in the courtyard, followed by an excellent dinner.



### **March 5: Homeward Bound, Part 1**

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Tuesday promised to be another beautiful day, but for us, it was back to the cold and gray north. The van picked us up at 11:30 to take us to the airport, where the computers were down, and they were filling out the boarding passes by hand. I was the only one



in our group who wasn't paying to check a bag, so I was the first one through. While we waited for our flight, most of us lunched on snacks and junk food. Argh! Somehow my aisle seat had morphed onto a middle seat. Fortunately, I was able to stick my long legs under the seat in front of me. When we arrived in DC, we all said our good-byes, and it was hugs all around. Margitta's hubby Ron met us at the airport. I stayed at Martha's house. She has a lovely townhouse, beautifully furnished and decorated. We had English muffins and tea at 1:00 a.m. and went to bed.

### **March 6: Homeward Bound, Part 2**

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It seemed like I no sooner went to sleep, and it was time to get up. Martha made coffee. It was 26 degrees out. We left at 6:30 to go to the airport. Hugs and good-byes, and it was on to the last leg of my journey. A very nice JetBlue employee helped me get my boarding pass. I breakfasted on Dunkin' coffee and a doughnut. My flight on JetBlue was great – more leg room that I have had in years on a Flying Cattle Car. When my bus arrived in Concord, Clare, Maddie, and Willow were waiting. We stopped for lunch at Dos Amigos in Concord and then it was time to go home.