

# *San Miguel de Allende*

## *A Banquet for Creative Souls*

by Photographer and Sometime Poet Nancy Rotenberg



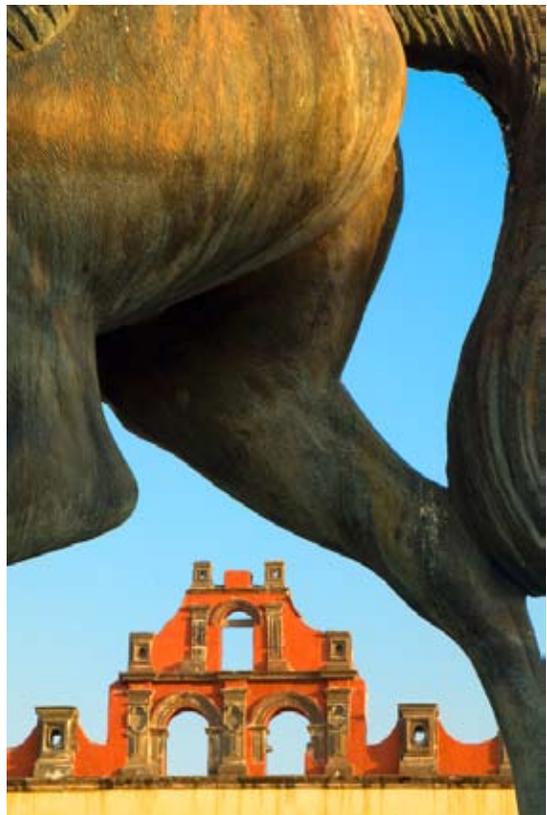
It is winter as I write this and the skies here in Western Pennsylvania are gray and the cold feels rude and uncivilized in my bones. I am longing for color and warmth. As I look outside my office window, I see a monotone of landscape. For me, this translates as sensory deprivation. Wanting to escape, I close my eyes and land in the warmth and color of the charming colonial town of San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

San Miguel is cool and clear in the winter, with sunshine almost every day and temperatures ranging from the 40's to 70's. The light is superbly sharp and thus, artists, worldwide, have flocked to this mecca. It is sense-driven, colorful, and voluptuous. San Miguel is a banquet for creative souls as there are feasts for the eyes and senses everywhere.

There is a lot of foreign influence in San Miguel as there was a huge influx of an expatriate community which began in the 1940's. Several thousand foreigners have retired here permanently, but San Miguel has preserved its lovely old buildings and quaint cobbled streets. There are festivals on a regular basis as Mexicans love to celebrate and it seems that any excuse will do.

Getting oriented in San Miguel is very easy. I would begin at The Plaza Principal, called the Jardin, as this is the focal point of the whole town. Life happens at the Jardin. Even without a camera, the experience in the Jardin, is wonderful. There is an excitement and zest for life that resonates from balloon sellers, folks drinking coffee, vendors, aromas of tasty Mexican food that is seemingly prepared in unlimited combinations, and can be sweet, spicy, or mild. You can hear a mariachi or two playing between the cacophony of bells tolling at undetermined times, handmade tortillas, fruits, nuts, flowers in baskets, various shapes and shades of hats, and animated conversations that fill the air – all providing an amazing energy. Graceful Jacaranda trees and







colorful bougainvillea hanging from pots and rooftops is set off by walls that can only be described as melon, roseate, azure, lemon, watermelon, and avocado.

There are images everywhere in San Miguel. One needs to just walk the streets with a zoom lens and find both big and small landscapes. People photography is wonderful as there are faces with life written all over them and for the most part, Mexicans don't mind being photographed. I found that if I purchase something that they're selling, it feels like a good barter for a picture. I do now own a lot of little, handmade dolls, but everyone of them is attached to a face of a woman who sat in her home and created the doll. I love looking at them in my home and they remind to appreciate my life and the beauty that lives in the world.

A visit to the markets will yield many opportunities for daily life and more color. Vendors are happy for a chat and it is a great opportunity to try out your Spanish and taste buds. The market is not a good place for a tripod and I would merely handhold your camera and use a pop-up flash. It is important to note that I never felt unsafe in San Miguel carrying expensive equipment.

An interesting side trip would be a visit to Guanajuato. This beautiful town is situated in the valley between steep slopes of a ravine, with narrow streets twisting around the hillsides. Guanajuato has some incredible architecture and a lively atmosphere due to its 20,000 or more students enrolled in The University of Guanajuato. Sunset at the overlook should not be missed as you will be gifted with a great overview of colorful homes and buildings and if you're lucky, a great sky.





Nancy and fellow author and photographer Jeremy Woodhouse have just finished a new book about the color, light, and life of the streets of San Miguel de Allende. The new book, entitled, *La Luz del Pueblo: Discovering a Sense of Place in San Miguel de Allende* will be available in December 2008 from Luz Books, [www.luzbooks.com](http://www.luzbooks.com)



San Miguel is fascinating, beautiful and romantic. It is overflowing with intimacy and much *sabor*. There is poetry everywhere – for your senses and your camera. Have a margarita for me, and enjoy the journey.

Getting to San Miguel takes a little bit of time as you fly into Leon, Guanajuato or Mexico City and then it's a drive – about 1 1/2 hours from Leon and about 5 hours from Mexico City. For more on tourist information, you can access, [www.sanmiguelallende.gob.mx](http://www.sanmiguelallende.gob.mx).

