

# Sierra Gorda

## Biosphere Reserve

Queretaro, Mexico

- Nature Destinations
- Cultural Attractions
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- Tasting Trail
- Lodging Trail
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- The Sierra Gorda Alliance



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Man and  
the Biosphere  
Programme

2016 WINNER



CONSERVING THE NATURAL WORLD



 **Hiking Trail**

- The *Escanela Rivers* sheltered by ancient sycamore forests.
- *Military macaw*, in danger of extinction and an inhabitant of the Sótano del Barro.
- *White-tailed deer* fawn, a species on the rebound in this region.

Entering the **SIERRA GORDA BIOSPHERE RESERVE** from the west, on Federal Highway 120, one is greeted by the arid landscapes of the *Extoraz River* watershed. Dry and imposing, it stretches as far as the eye can see; this is one of the most ancient deserts in Mexico, and it represents the southernmost extension of the great Chihuahua Desert.

The mountains rise up one after another dotted by Querétaro yucca and barrel, bilberry, and organ cactus.

Following the road across the crest of the Sierra, the landscape changes abruptly into one of temperate forests. Pinyon pines, junipers, cedars and firs treat the visitor to a story-book landscape. These high-altitude, temperate forests retain rain water, provide refuge for many of the 339 bird species that inhabit the reserve, and capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Farther down, in valleys formed by swift-running mountain streams, cypresses, sycamores, and willows form pools that provide habitat for frogs and fish. Here, everything comes alive during the rainy season when the rivers and springs are running full. Further east, the succession of landscapes and ecosystems continues, clearly demonstrating why the **SIERRA GORDA** has the highest ecosystem-diversity of reserves in Mexico. The great expanse of mountains and valleys that lies between the *Moctezuma* and *Santa María* Rivers is covered nearly completely by a combination of low scrub, temperate, and cloud forests providing refuge for pumas, jaguars, jaguarundis, margays, bobcats, and ocelots.

Of all the protected natural areas in Mexico, there is only one with more mammal species than the **SIERRA GORDA**. Although cloud forests are the most threatened type of forest in the world, one can find them in this region, comprised of beautiful stands of oaks and sweetgums draped in fog. Both the majestic oaks and sweetgums, with leaves that range from green to yellow, purple, brown, red, and orange depending on the time of year, host a veritable banquet of life on their limbs, including moss, ferns, bromeliads, and orchids, that in certain times of the year transforms these forests into enormous botanical gardens.

Mushrooms, tree frogs and salamanders provide the finishing touches on scenes that could have come straight from a fairytale.

Here, nature does not hold back on details.



# NATURE DESTINATIONS



## Hiking Trail

- An incredible mountain sunset from *Tejamanil*, Pinal de Amoles.
- The “*El Chuveje*” waterfall is one of the best-known attractions of the **SIERRA GORDA**.
- Ancient trails in use since prehispanic times and contemporary hiking trails offer a variety of routes for visitors.

The **SIERRA GORDA** stands out for its impressive biodiversity and for the efforts of **GRUPO ECOLÓGICO SIERRA GORDA** to preserve this natural wonder through sustainable development. From pristine cloud forests to humid jungles and semi-arid deserts, you will find a great diversity of habitats and ecosystems.

The region is also famous for its network of crystalline rivers, limestone caves, and sinkholes.

This Biosphere Reserve, which is a member of **UNESCO’S MAN AND BIOSPHERE PROGRAMME**, provides habitat for:

- ❖ 2,308 species of vascular plants
- ❖ 127 species of fungi
- ❖ 800 species of butterflies
- ❖ 27 species of fish
- ❖ 134 species of reptiles and amphibians
- ❖ 341 species of birds
- ❖ 110 species of mammals

# CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS



- *Tancama* archaeological ruins in the municipality of Jalpan de Serra.
- Community Museum of Landa de Matamoros.
- The *Mission of Bucareli*, located at the bottom of an imposing canyon along Extoraz River.

In the rough terrain of the **SIERRA GORDA**, the inquisitive visitor will find a variety of places that provide clues to the area's past. More than 500 archaeological sites, Franciscan missions designated as *World Heritage Sites* by **UNESCO**, a surrealist sculpture garden and centuries of tradition and history wait here to be explored.

Take a guided tour of the *Missions of Saint Junípero Serra* and the *ex-convent of Bucareli*, or archaeological marvels such as *Tancama*, in **Jalpan de Serra**, and *Ranas and Toluquilla*, in **San Joaquín**.

Make sure not to miss the annual festivals of huapango (traditional music of the region), during which musicians and dancing pairs from across Mexico congregate in **Pinal de Amoles** and **Ahuacatlán**.



# ARTISANS WORKSHOPS



## Artisans Trail

- Healthy foods made by the women of the Concá food processing workshop.
- Natural remedies from *Doña Valen* made in Jalpan de Serra.
- *Embroidery with natural inspirations workshop* in the community of La Colgada.

Ceramics, embroidery inspired by nature, healthy foods, natural remedies...the women of the **SIERRA GORDA** offer visitors exclusive products with all the flavor of the mountains.

For years, **GRUPO ECOLÓGICO SIERRA GORDA** has been working on different income-generating projects to assure that an increasing number of families can make a respectable living without having to emigrate to other places.

Made using traditional techniques and local materials, our products help to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the **SIERRA GORDA'S** communities.

Join a ceramics class, learn to make herbal remedies, oatmeal cookies, or tamarind sweets. These entrepreneurial women will be happy to guide you.



 **Tasting Trail**

Eating has never been more pleasurable than it is here. The **TASTING TRAIL** of the **SIERRA GORDA** is made up of a series of traditional restaurants operated by local entrepreneurial women, each with its own specialties and ambience.

Freshly-made thick tortillas, beef with garbanzo beans, barbecued cecina (thinly sliced, salted meat), cheese fondue with red sauce, and eggs scrambled with chili peppers are some of the dishes that you will encounter.

You should also be sure not to miss the hearty stewed beans that these women serve up to visitors, as if they were serving their own family, and in the rainy season, ask for mushrooms with fava beans.

It won't just be your appetite that is satisfied after eating at these restaurants, you can also feel good about the social and environmental impact of your meal.

- Fonda *La Cabaña*, the perfect place for a meal after visiting the Bucareli ex-convent.
- Fonda *La Encina*, in the community of La Colgada, operated by the women who handcraft quality embroidery designs.
- Fonda *Doña Chole*, in the community of Saldiviña. Their specialty is eggs cooked on a comal.



# LODGING TRAIL



## Lodging Trail

- *La Casita Ecológica*, in Acatitlán, stands out on the merits of its eco-construction techniques, its design, and its organic food.
- If you want to be closer to nature, there are many options for camping.
- In the community of *San Juan de los Durán*, the cabins are nestled in a valley surrounded by conifer forest.

From boutique hotels to wood cabins, the **SIERRA GORDA** region offers a range of lodging options to meet any needs.

Allow yourself to be pampered in *Casa María Antonieta* or *La Casita Ecológica*, get close to nature in the cozy cabins of *Centro Tierra* or *San Juan de los Durán*, or sleep under wide open skies by camping at *Las Adjuntas* or the *Jalpan Reservoir*. To ensure that all of our lodging options meet our standards, we evaluate and verify them with our “Sello Sabino” seal of quality.

Your stay at any of these establishments helps the local economy and bolsters the efforts of the **SIERRA GORDA'S** communities to protect and preserve the **BIOSPHERE RESERVE** for the enjoyment of future generations.





# ECOTOURISM PACKAGES



- We offer courses and workshops focused on many different aspects of the concept of sustainability.
- Our guides, with their expertise in the region and its attractions, are at your service.
- In the **SIERRA GORDA**, you can learn about healthy soils and nutritious food.

Experience the best of this region's nature, culture, and wildlife led by our local expert guides. Watch as swifts take flight at the break of day from the stunning *Sótano de las Golondrinas*, lose yourself in the surrealist sculpture gardens at *Las Pozas de James* in **Xilitla**, discover the Sierra on a bike and take a hike to the incredible limestone natural bridge, *Puente de Dios* (God's Bridge).

If you prefer, you can visit archaeological ruins, learn about healthy soils and the principles of holistic land management, and how to establish a bio-intensive garden. Or, get to know local people by taking part in a workshop on the production of healthy foods, pottery, or natural remedies.

There are so many things to do in the **SIERRA GORDA** that one visit is never enough.



# TRADITIONAL MEXICAN VILLAGES (Pueblos mágicos)



All of the paths to the **SIERRA GORDA** are steeped in culture and tradition. During your stay, you can visit up to six *Pueblos Mágicos* (communities recognized for their beauty and tradition), each one with a unique personality. Thus, while Tequisquiapan is famous for its wine and cheese festival, Peña de Bernal is notable for the enormous monolith that stands guard over its beautiful cobblestone streets, lined with artisanal products and local textiles.

When you arrive in Jalpan de Serra, we recommend that you visit the central plaza, where the *Misión de Santiago Apóstol* is located. The first of five missions in the region built by Saint Junípero Serra, construction began in 1751 and finished in 1758. It, along with his other works, would become among the most notable examples of the Baroque Mestizo-style in the world. In 2003, these missions were recognized by **UNESCO** as World Heritage Sites. In Cadereyta, we invite you to stroll through the *botanical garden*, and after your visit to the mining town of San Joaquín, stop by the Ranas and Toluquilla archaeological sites. Go to Xilitla to close out your trip in fantastic style by visiting the *9 stair-stepping pools* around which Sir Edward James constructed a surrealist sculpture garden that extends over 20 hectares of verdant tropical forest. There are more than 30 concrete Gothic and Oriental style structures standing amongst the trees, waiting to surprise and delight visitors.

- The first mission constructed by Saint Junípero Serra is located in Jalpan de Serra.
- The Peña de Bernal acts as an entrance to the **SIERRA GORDA**.
- The Las Pozas sculpture garden in Xilitla is situated on 20 hectares of tropical forest.



# THE SIERRA GORDA ALLIANCE

**G**RUPO ECOLÓGICO SIERRA GORDA leads a group of social organizations who work for the restoration, preservation and conservation of the amazing biodiversity of Queretaro's **SIERRA GORDA BIOSPHERE RESERVE**. Towards this, we carry out a conservation strategy directly involving local communities, and generate opportunities for the social and economic development of the owners of the land.

**THE ALLIANCE** is made up of the following independent civil organizations:

- **BOSQUE SUSTENTABLE, A.C.**, dedicated to the holistic management of resources and the restoration of soils.
- **JOYA DEL HIELO, A.C.**, which safeguards some of the sanctuaries with the highest biological value in the Sierra through the **NETWORK OF PRIVATE NATURE RESERVES**.
- **PRODUCTOS Y SERVICIOS TURÍSTICOS SIERRA GORDA S.A. DE C.V.**, which promotes a conservation economy through **SIERRA GORDA ECOTOURS** and **PRODUCTOS SIERRA GORDA**, and;
- **VIVA SIERRA GORDA**, an advocate and fundraiser with tax deductibility for donors in the **USA**.

We are pioneers in collaborative strategies for conservation and sustainable development that generate a social return on investment. Annually, we involve 35,000 local people in clean-up, conservation and restoration operations, working to safeguard their land.

Taking care of the environment includes carbon capture, ecotourism, the holistic management of resources and we have built a conservation and sustainability model available for national and international contexts.

On the grounds of **CENTRO TIERRA**, located in Jalpan de Serra, we hold certification courses and workshops that can be shaped according to your needs.

Contact us and we will be at your service.

## We are a natural and cultural destination

Some of the awards received for our community-based model of ecotourism:

**World Legacy Award, de National Geographic 2016**

Winners in the category of Conserving the Natural World.

**Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) 2014**

Launched their Early Adopter program in 2014, recognizing 14 global destinations that operated in accordance with their Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations.

**To Do! Contest for Socially Responsible Tourism 2013**

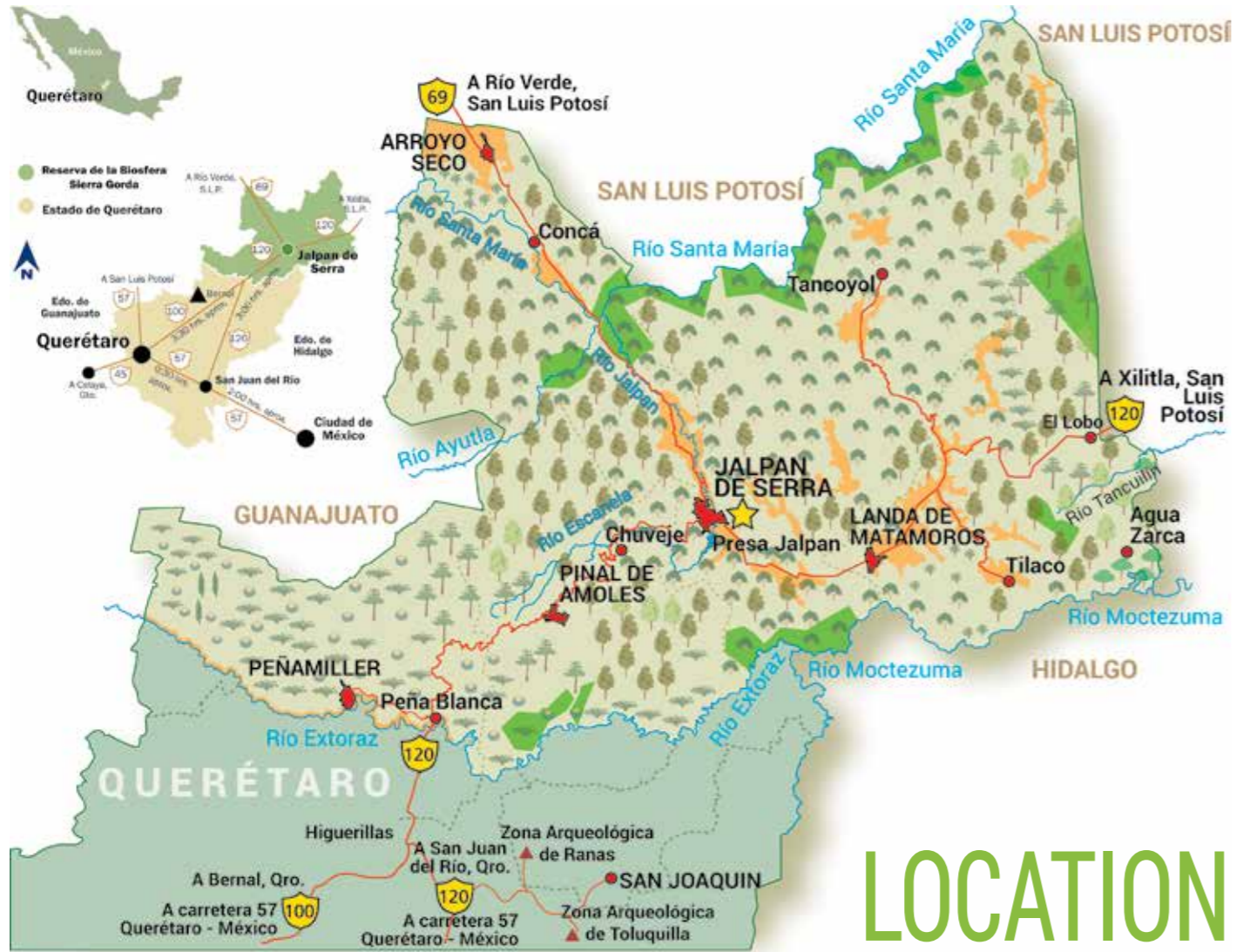
Received at the International Tourism Fair (ITB ) of Berlin.

**Blue Marble Award, from the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) 2011**

ATTA's members represent a community of more than 1,000 businesses and destinations that, through their operations, promote global sustainability and social justice.

**World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) - Tourism for Tomorrow Award 2003**

Recognizes best practices in sustainable tourism at a global level based in environmentally-friendly operations.



## LOCATION

# OFFSET YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT



Compensate your personal and work trips



Calculate your carbon footprint in our web page



Help to conserve forests and restore soils to combat climate change

[www.carbonneutralplanet.org](http://www.carbonneutralplanet.org)



## VISIT

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PODER EJECUTIVO DEL ESTADO DE  
**QUERÉTARO**



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