



# Day of the Dead

## Country

Mexico

## Region

Oaxaca

## Instructor

Stella Johnson

## Dates

27 Oct > 04 Nov 08

## Price

£950.00

## Overview

Originally brought from Europe the celebration of the Day of the Dead was adopted by the Mexicans and fused with the prehispanic customs and attitudes, resulting in a uniquely Mexican custom especially prevalent in Oaxaca today. Today the Day of the Dead reflect the Mexican belief in the duality of life and death. While they mourn and miss their dead loved ones, they also believe that death is just an extension of life. It's part of a natural progression, not an end. The dead continue to exist and return annually to visit their loved ones. Many of the customs, such as home altars and cemetery vigils, are to help them find their way and to welcome them home.

The principal celebrations take place beginning October 31 and end on November 2. Oaxaca is one of the few places in the world that preserves these customs and traditions, which is why it has become a favorite destination for El Dia de Los Muertos. Oaxaca's historic district has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

## Itinerary

### What is Included

- All tuition & critique sessions
- Unique access to locals & their homes
- Meet and greet at the airport and transfer to your hotel
- Welcome dinner on first night
- Farewell dinner on last night
- Gifts for locals
- Transportation during Masterclass (buses)

### What is Not Included

- Accommodation during Masterclass
- International air travel into Mexico & Oaxaca
- Lunches & dinners except first and last night
- Photographic materials & processing
- Transportation during Masterclass (taxis)

## Calendar

Monday 27 October 2008 - ARRIVAL DAY



Introductions & welcome dinner

Tuesday 28 October 2008 - MASTERCLASS DAY 1

Briefing and introductory talk by Stella Johnson

Lunch

Introduction to Oaxaca city and street shooting

Dinner together

Wednesday 29 October 2008 - MASTERCLASS DAY 2

We will go to the village of Xoxocotlan, scout the cemetery and talk with families who might be willing to host photographers as they prepare for the Day of the Dead

Lunch

Photograph in the city market as people shop for their preparations

Critique work

Dinner

Thursday 30 October 2008 - MASTERCLASS DAY 3

Market Day in Zaachila, about 30 minutes outside of Oaxaca

Lunch

Critique of work

Photograph sand paintings in Oaxaca City

Dinner together

Friday 31 October 2008 - MASTERCLASS DAY 4

Plan for evening's photography & look at the master photographers' work

Lunch

Visit with families in their homes and photograph the final preparations.

Lunch

In Xoxocotlan, we will bring candles and flowers and visit the graves with families whilst shooting

Dinner

Saturday 1 November 2008 - MASTERCLASS DAY 5

The Day of the Dead San Miguel in Oaxaca city all day and evening. This festival is celebrated in each of the village's neighborhood by young people who dress up as doctors, widowers, priests, grandfathers and grandmothers, devils, witches and skeletons. They make their way from the cemetery dancing and playing wood-wind instruments and collecting offerings of chocolate, bread and fruits for the dead from the houses they pass. At a pre-determined spot, the revelers break stride and launch into a brief street-theatre kind of presentation in which Life makes fun of Death. Shoot lasts all night - or until you get tired!

Sunday 2 November 2008 - MASTERCLASS DAY 6

Critique of work

Late afternoon & evening shoot in San Antonio and San Felipe del Agua. Shoot lasts all night - or until you get tired!

Monday 3 November 2008 - MASTERCLASS DAY 7

Review of week's work, wrap up

Farewell dinner & good-byes

Tuesday 4 November 2008 - DEPARTURE DAY

No activities planned

## Accommodation

Our Masterclasses are purely about photography. We want them to be widely available to both hobbyists and professionals, and in order to keep prices competitive, we sometimes leave the choice of hotel to the customer. Comfort and luxury can be quite subjective across a group of people, and so our solution is to let you decide from a selection of hotels in different budgets.

The daily meeting place and location of daily image review sessions will be held in an apartment rented by VSP in the town of Oaxaca. This will also be the place that your instructor, Stella Johnson will be staying. Click on the tab above



called 'Map' to see exactly where it is in Mexico. The accommodation listed below is all within relatively close proximity to our meeting place, and are all very comfortable, clean and run by very kind welcoming people. They are classified as Bed & Breakfasts, and of a high standard.

Recommended B&B Accommodation in Oaxaca

Casa de las Bugambilias. (<http://lasbugambilias.com/oaxaca-bed-breakfast.htm>)

Prices in region of £40-£70 per night

La Casa de los Milagros. (<http://casadelosmilagros.com/>)

Prices in region of £45-£55 per night

Casa de los Sabores. (<http://www.laolla.com.mx/>)

Prices in the region of £35 per night

Casa Los Arquitos. (<http://www.mexonline.com/casalosarquitos.htm>)

Prices in the region of £20 per night

## Travel

Your final destination is the city of Oaxaca in Mexico. International flights into Mexico fly into Mexico City International Airport (also called Benito Juárez International Airport). Upon arriving in Mexico City, the usual route is to take a connecting flight to Oaxaca. The following airlines fly several times a day into Oaxaca:

Mexicana Airlines. (<http://www.mexicana.com/>)

Aero Mexico. (<http://www.aeromexico.com/>)

Upon arriving at Oaxaca airport we recommend taking a taxi into town to your accommodation. The cost will be in the region of £5-10 (\$10-20)

## Companions

Photography is a passion that touches millions of people, but that doesn't always mean that it is shared throughout your family! A great many of our participants choose to travel with their husbands, wives or partners, and we make every effort to make them just as welcome as everybody else. Should you wish to attend with your partner we would welcome them to join us in the evenings during our organised dinners. Alternatively you are both free to spend your evenings away from the group if you wish to make your own plans. As you will make your own accommodation plans, we would simply ask that you inform us if a partner would be attending.

## The Photography

### Photography

The Day of the Dead is celebrated with passion and life. There are three days of rituals that take place in the cemeteries, the houses and streets. In the cemeteries people come to visit the graves of their departed loved ones



bearing flowers, candles, food and playing music; thus the cemetery is converted into a center of pilgrimage. In the houses, altars are constructed and adorned with fruit, bread, chocolate and other offerings in honor of the dead. It is in the streets that "the comparsas" are celebrated. Here, young people dress up in costumes and dance through the streets accompanied by the music provided by live bands.

People buy their pots, flowers and food during the week, to adorn the altars in their homes before moving the flowers and food to the graves of their dead loved ones on Oct 31, Nov 1 and 2. Bands and mariachis serenade the graves of the newly dead and though there is grief, there is also celebration, as one visits with their dead loved ones. During the week, on the plaza in front of the cathedral and in the pedestrian malls, artists and students mold giant three-dimensional sand paintings depicting, skeletons, ghosts and other aspects of death. The City of Oaxaca also arranges events at the San Miguel Cemetery, such as exhibition/competition of altars, music, etc.

## Teaching

Teaching is done through a combination of daily image review sessions, in the field demonstrations, and hands-on practice. As much of the shooting is to be done amongst towns and crowds, we set meeting points, where your instructor will be so that during the day's shooting, you can always find somebody to assist you and answer any questions. In the evening we all head out for dinner together and have a good chat about the day's events. Image review sessions are conducted using a laptop.

## Is this for me?

This course in Mexico is what we call a Masterclass. This means that it is designed for people who are relatively comfortable with the operation of their cameras.

In order for you to get the most out of this Masterclass, we suggest that all participants have the following:

Use an SLR camera with interchangeable lenses

Comfortable with operating a camera's exposure manually

This Masterclass can be a truly inspirational experience, giving you incredible photographic opportunities. The itinerary is all about shooting, the celebrations and getting close to the emotion and people. There will not be tours to major tourist sites, but instead our time will be spent nurturing close relationships with the locals.

Our passion is photography, and we welcome all of you that share this love. One of the great benefits of learning in a group, is the knowledge you also gain from those around you. New ideas, shared critiques and a good sense of camaraderie are ingredients we actively try to encourage in all of our trips.

## Inspiration

### Introduction

Below you will find a collection of photographers, writers and films chosen to awaken your senses. They may inspire you about the location or they may just intrigue you. Either way please use this as an insight into the experiences and impressions of others. International travel is so easy these days. The pace at which one travels and 'sees' the world gets faster and faster. If you feel like it, take a moment to slow the process down.

## Photographers

Alex Webb

Sebastiao Salgado

Constantine Manos



Alex Webb  
Sebastiao Salgado  
Constantine Manos

## Books

"Mexico" Martin Parr  
"Plaza de la Soledad" Maya Goded  
"Crossing - Photographs from the US-Mexico border" Alex Webb  
"Mala Noche" Antoine D'Agata  
"Miguel Rio Branco" Miguel Rio Branco  
"Carnets mexicains 1934-1964" Henri Cartier-Bresson  
"Hot Light/ Half-Made Worlds" Alex Webb  
"Return to Mexico - Journeys Beyond the Mask" Abbas

## Movies

"Like Water for Chocolate" directed by Alfonso Arau with Marco Leonardi, Lumi Cavazos (1992)  
"Desperado" directed by Rooberto Rodriguez with Antonio Banderas, Salma Hayek (1995)  
"The Unforgiven" directed by John Huston with Burt Lancaster, Audrey Hepburn  
"Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid" directed by Sam Peckinpah with James Coburn, Kris Kristofferson, Bob Dylan (1973)  
"El Mariachi" directed by Robert Rodriguez with Carlos Gallardo (1992)  
"Once upon a time in Mexico" directed by Robert Rodriguez with Antonio Banderas, Salma Hayek, Johnny Depp, Mickey Rourke (2003)  
"The Mexican" directed by Gore Verbinski with Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts (2001)  
"Puerto Escondido" directed by Gabriele Salvatores with Diego Abbatantuono, Valeria Golino (1992)  
"Y tu mama tambien" directed by Alfonso Cuaron with Ana Lopez Mercado, Diego Luna (2001)

## Forums

We have our own online forum that over the years has proven to be a very popular and useful way of not just keeping in touch after a workshop, but also before. It can be a fascinating source of information for those considering their first workshop with VSP. You will need to register to join the forum, and we recommend the following two sections

Ask a past VSP Workshops participant (<http://www.vspworkshops.com/cgi-bin/yabb2/YaBB.pl?board=feedback/>)

Discussion board for all participants booked on Day of the Dead Masterclass (<http://www.vspworkshops.com/cgi-bin/yabb2/YaBB.pl?num=1191519800>)

## Testimonials

"What a great week. I have learnt so much about my camera, my photos, my eyes. Thank you for your energy, enthusiasm, careful planning and sense of humour"  
Kirsten, USA, 2006



"I have attended Workshops with Maine, Santa Fe and TPW and founded the organisation by VSP to be the best"  
David, UK, 2007

"I'm a better photographer and I feel I have more courage and greater awareness and sensitivity to what makes a successful photograph. The course has given me even more enthusiasm for photography"  
Ross, USA, 2005

"Very busy schedule, which I enjoyed. VSP take photo critiques very seriously and helps people of all levels and skills. Overall very much enjoyed the Workshop - best so far!"  
Frank, Netherlands, 2007

"If you like to travel and you have the passion for photography, this is the best combination to make your trip a perfect trip! Travel, shoot and enjoy the moment!"  
Beatrice, Italy, 2007

"VSP always exceeds my expectations. As a new photographer VSP encourages, challenges and inspires me to take my images to the next level"  
Rachel, USA, 2007

"You won't find a more friendly and delightful photo experience on the planet"  
Steve, USA, 2007

"Thank you very much for another fantastic workshop. It is so good to be able to spend time thinking about what I love - photography and not having to worry about anything else because you have thought of everything before. I learned a lot, I had a rest, I had a fantastic time with very nice people, I laughed a lot and wasn't thinking about my work - this is priceless! I will check on your web on a regular basis as always and we will definitely meet again - Grazie"  
Bob, USA, 2006