

## A Visit to Madera, Chihuahua, Mexico

When I was growing up, listening to stories of my mother's childhood was one of my favorite things in the world. Her stories were always filled with walks around her small city, staying out until late, and everyone hanging around the main plaza. My parents are from a small city buried between the mountain range of the western sierra in Chihuahua, Mexico. The name Madera translates into “wood”. It is named this because of the green forests that surround it, making it the perfect place for the wood business. The first time I visited Madera I was nine years old. I remember being mesmerized by the natural beauty of this place, considering I had always lived in the city, it was like nothing I had seen before. As soon as you enter the city, the smell of pine and firewood greet you and welcome you to the city where memories are made. Madera is not only a beautiful place, but it also has a rich history.

Las Cuarenta Casas (the 40 houses) is a reminder of the Paquime culture. Sitting at the top of a mountain are 40 caves that were built when the Paquime people first decided to leave their nomad life behind. They are believed to have been built between 1205 and 1260 A.D. Based on artifacts that were found there, it is believed that the 40 houses also served as a meeting and trading spot for the indigenous people of the area.

Another beautiful and historical place in Madera is Huapoca. Huapoca is located in a canyon, and there are many caves in the area. One of the most famous ones is Cueva Grande (The Big Cave). This cave is known because there are two homes near the cave believed to be over 800 years old. This cave also has a big beautiful waterfall that leads into the nearby river. However, if you're not into history, Huapoca also has two nearby pools filled with the natural hot springs found here. These pools make up a huge part of my childhood, and it's also a great camping space by the river.

Despite the rich archeological history of Madera, my favorite memories are those I made in the city. I have never met friendlier people than those I've met there. Every year, the people of the city begin to celebrate the local festivities with a donkey. Yes, a donkey. In the summer, the city fair, the rodeo, and the baseball games all start after El Burrito Sotolero, which roughly translates into The Donkey with the Sotol. Sotol is a Mexican liquor, and it doesn't really exist anywhere else. On this day, a donkey pulls a wagon filled with sotol, and people who live in the city then follow the donkey all through the city center and try to get as drunk on sotol as they can. The donkey ends its journey at the fairgrounds, and the fair officially starts! This is also the day local teenage girls compete to see who will become the queen of that year's fairs. Everyone loves this time of year because it is full of fun. Personally, there has never been a weekend I spent at the fair where it ended before 3 am. My dad is one of the people who participate in the rodeo, so it is always fun to be able to see him and his friends riding around on their horses trying to lasso cows. The friends I've met in Madera have turned into family, and every year I look forward to returning to this city. Every summer welcomes me with daily rain and so much fun. Going to the fair, eating some tacos and homemade potato chips always fills my heart with joy.

Without a doubt, Madera is my favorite place in the world.