

The Guide



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Inside México

THE ENGLISH SPEAKER'S GUIDE TO LIVING IN MEXICO

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THE ECO ISSUE

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GOD OF RAIN, FERTILITY
AND WATER

Museo de Antropología,
Mexico City, April 17, 2008.

Photo by Luz Montero

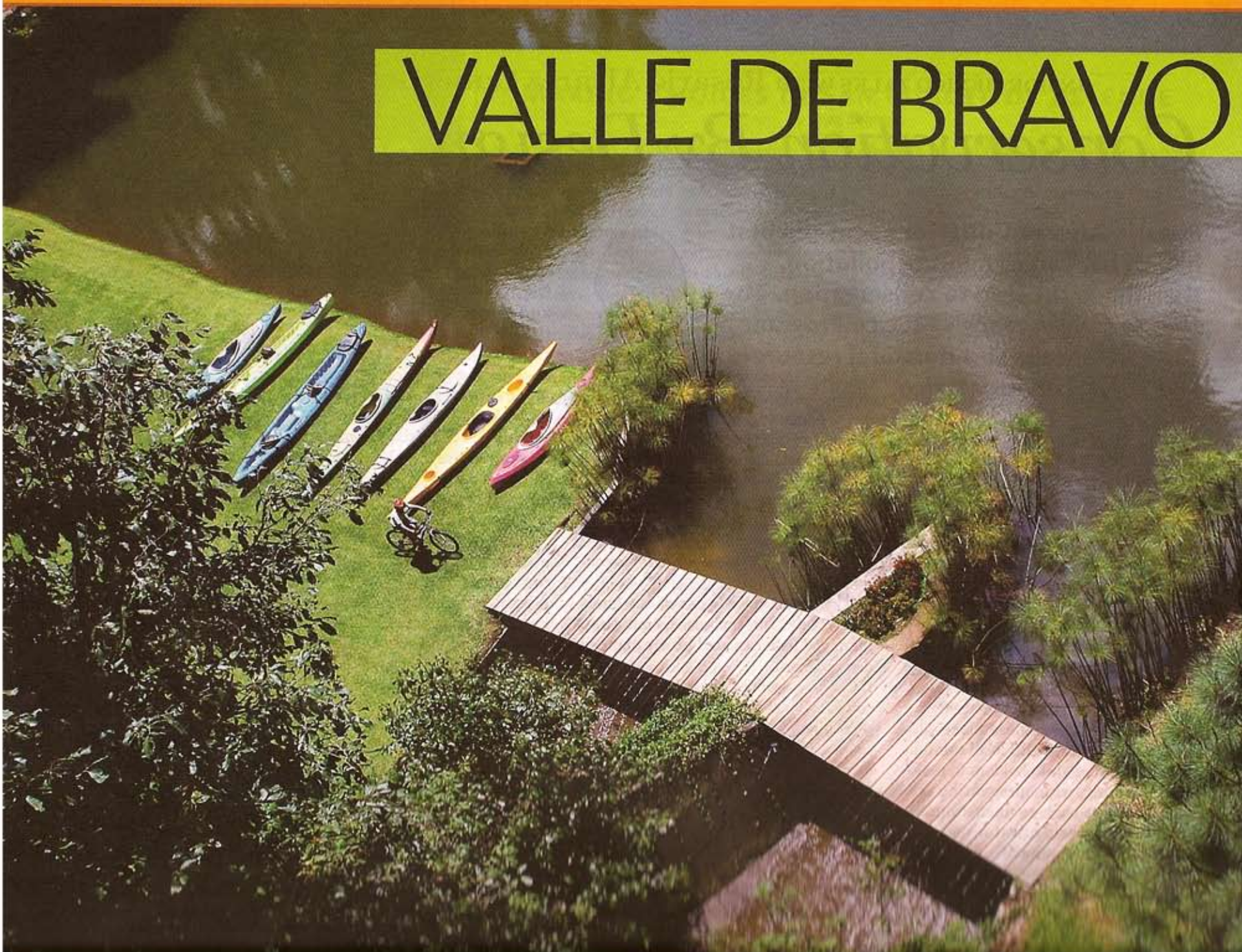
Age of Water

The island city of centuries past > 12

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VALLE DE BRAVO



VALLE'S RICH NATURAL RESOURCES, with hilltops, forests, and lakes, make it an ideal place for an environmentally friendly and sustainable form of tourism.

Nature lovers' paradise

VALLE COURTS ECO-TOURISTS SLOWLY BUT SURELY

BY TARA FITZGERALD

Tiny Valle de Bravo, long known as a weekend playground for wealthy Mexico City dwellers and adventure sports seekers, is starting to turn its penchant for outdoor pursuits into viable eco-tourism projects, which in turn are stimulating interest from visitors.

With Valle's eco-tourism industry still in its nascent stages, the Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP) set up operations in the area a year ago, and sees huge potential for the development of eco-tourism in the region, due to its abundant natural resources.

"We are aiming to convert the 'normal' tourism you see here into ecological, rural, and alternative tourism, as well as working on sustainable development," says Ricardo Vallín León, eco-tourism representative for CONANP in the Valle region.

Designated a *pueblo mágico* by the Mexican government, Valle de Bravo is a charming colonial town of winding, cobbled streets and red-roofed, white-washed houses draped with bougainvillea. It sits on a hilltop above Lago Avándaro, providing ample opportunity for a gamut of water sports, while the pine forests that surround the town are ideal for hiking, mountain biking, and horse riding. Valle is also one of Mexico's top spots for hang-gliding and paragliding: on a sunny weekend day you can see dozens of daring tourists floating across the cloudless sky.

Beyond these outdoor pursuits, another prime factor makes Valle ripe for eco-tourism: outside town in the municipality of Temascaltepec is the Piedra Herrada monarch butterfly sanctuary. The winter migration of millions of monarch butterflies from Canada and the United States to Mexico's warmer climes is one of the

country's most spectacular natural phenomena. Between November and March visitors from all over Mexico and the world come to see these hardy but delicate creatures form shimmering carpets of orange and black over the pine trees.

The forests where the monarchs habitually winter are threatened by illegal logging, prompting the creation of government reserves to protect these well-traveled creatures. "Piedra Herrada, the monarch butterfly sanctuary, is one of our strongest ecotourism investments in the area," says CONANP's Mr. Vallín León. "Apart from the sanctuary itself, we are working with the people who live there [on the *ejidos*—communal lands] to train them as tourist guides and educate them on why the sanctuary is necessary."

Another eco-tourism site is the Monte Alto Reserve, which offers mountain biking and hiking trails, camping areas, and 607 hectares of pine forest. CONANP is also planning, in conjunction with the local community, the construction of a Cultural Center for Conservation, which will include a monarch information center, local training courses on good ecotourism practices, a reforestation project, and a natural water recycling and treatment facility.

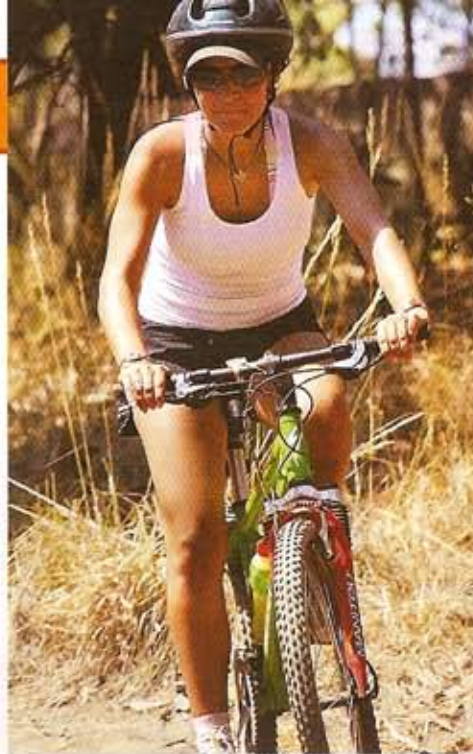
One high-end commercial venture that combines ecological and adventure pursuits is the Rodavento hotel. Operating since 2004, this hotel just outside Valle is made up of rustic-style *cabañas* with wood-fired stoves tucked into the woods around a lake. "The idea is to offer guests the possibility of luxury accommodation while also being exposed to nature," says General Manager Carlos del Rosal.

And what is the hotel doing on the environmental front? "All our water is spring water and we have a natural water treatment plant as well. In the restaurant we focus on buying from local producers and most of the food is organic," he says. Rodavento offers an extensive menu of activities both on and off its grounds, including rappelling, kayaking, and mountain biking.

Antonio del Rosal, executive director of Rodavento's parent company Río y Montaña, says the people now coming to Valle de Bravo are more environmentally conscious than perhaps they were a few years ago. "Having said that, I still think a lot of people don't necessarily come here with ecotourism in mind. However, once they are here they get involved in outdoor activities and that helps to promote eco-consciousness."

Valle is getting there on the environmental front and whatever your budget, eco-friendly lodges, bed and breakfasts, or campsites are available for choosing.

Tara FitzGerald wrote about dentistry on the Mexico-US border in the April issue of *Inside México*.



Photos courtesy Rodavento

THE MONTE ALTO RESERVE offers biking and hiking trails and camping areas for the ecofriendly tourist.

GETTING THERE

Valle de Bravo is in the Estado de México, about two hours by car from Mexico City.

From Toluca, take the carretera that goes to Temascaltepec. Exit at Valle de Bravo (Km. 40). You'll pass the Nevado de Toluca and Los Saucos before reaching Valle.



ECOTOURISM doesn't have to be in the rough. Rodavento brings eco-conscious luxury to nature.

LEARN MORE

Valle de Bravo tourism office
Porfirio Díaz and Zaragoza, three blocks from the main Plaza
Open: Mon-Fri 9am-7pm, Sat 9am-2pm
Tel: 726 269-6200
www.valledebravo.com.mx

Rodavento
The hotel has 28 cabaña-style rooms, starting from \$1,702 pesos per person per night for double occupancy. Cabañas can sleep up to four people. Activities include: mountain biking, kayaking, climbing wall, rappelling, zip-lining, hang gliding, horse riding, and the hotel's spa and temazcal (traditional steam bath).
Tel: 726 251-4182
www.rodavento.com
and www.rioymontana.com

Comision Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP)
Valle de Bravo office: 726 269-6505
www.conanp.gob.mx



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