

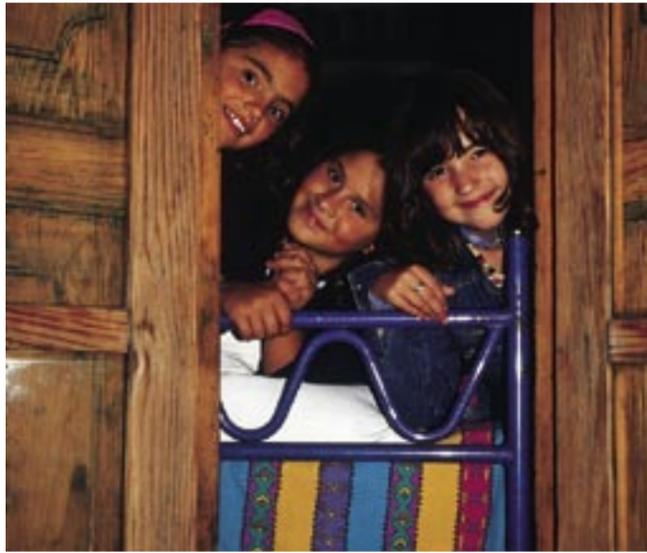
# Los Campamentos en Mexico

In the colorful four-hundred-year history of *Hacienda Santa Maria de Pipioltepec*, few events have generated the level of anticipation — and volume — of the *Keremess*. Each summer, 140 children and their counselors at Camp Pipiol devote one day to the organization of a fair and party for 3,000 rural children who live in the economically depressed Valle de Bravo. When the children descend on the camp, the Pipiol campers organize games, music, dancing, and food — with each visitor taking home a bag of food, household items, and toys at the end of the memorable day. But that's only one chapter in the story of Pipiol . . . .



## The Early History of Pipiol Hacienda

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, *Hacienda Santa Maria de Pipioltepec* was owned by a wealthy Spaniard and encompassed roughly fifty thousand acres located 120 miles south of Mexico City in the mountainous area of Valle de Bravo. At that time, Spanish landowners were also considered the “owners” of the people who farmed the land, harvesting wheat and corn with Pipiol’s aqueduct powering the grain mill. Following the Mexican Revolution in the early 1900s, the huge pieces of land were subdivided by President Lazaro Cardenas and redistributed among those who worked the land. The revolutionary, General Juan Barragán, eventually became the new owner of the hacienda.



During World War II, a German submarine was disabled and forced to land on the coast near Vera Cruz. A group of the captured Germans were taken to *Pipiol Hacienda* by the General Barragán, where they remained as a labor crew in the warm, dry climate with an array of nourishing food and comfortable accommodations until the end of the war — a sentence much preferred over other imprisonment. In 1945, Gustavo Serrano, grandfather of today’s owner/director, Genaro Ortiz Tirado, purchased the Hacienda and approximately 100 acres of land as a weekend retreat for family and friends.

## Camp Pipiol’s Forty Years

In 1964, Genaro’s mother, Margarita Ortiz Tirado, founded the camp to provide an educational program and vacation entertainment for her seven children and their friends. Within one year, the word spread, and the camp was filled during two separate sessions for fifty-six boys and fifty-six girls, staffed by local Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, who served as counselors. The decision was made to establish a family business with the goals of providing high quality, safe, educational, and challenging activities for children. Forty years later, the ideal climate, scenic location, and historical ambiance of a 17<sup>th</sup> century hacienda, has enabled Camp Pipiol to offer an impressive program that includes six weeks of summer camp — offered in three two-week sessions — and programs for school groups throughout the year, as well as corporate ropes course groups, weddings, reunions, and conferences.

The hacienda, of traditional brick and beam construction, has been converted into modern bunk rooms, while retaining its authenticity.



Campers and staff eat outdoors on the veranda and on the meticulously landscaped grounds. The hacienda garden provides lettuce, loganberries, herbs, teas, chilies, spinach, and lemons for use in the camp kitchen.

Camp activities are held in the brick courtyard in the shadows of the original aqueduct. Traditional camp program includes soccer, basketball, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, canoeing, bread baking, ecology, and local crafts, with older campers venturing away from the hacienda. The *Cabalgatas* program features two-night horseback riding trips into the mountains, and *Canoas*, a water sports program on the shores of Valle de Bravo Lake. *Guerrilleros* is housed in a tree house village offering opportunities for rappelling, hiking, and a ropes course.

In addition to the annual *Keremess*, community service has been an important focus for the summer campers and school classes who come mainly from families living in Mexico City. The surrounding land is parceled into tiny tracts where families can barely eke out a living. Visiting students and teachers often visit the local schools where children can share the differences and similarities of their homes, families, and schools. One of the participating schools, the American School Foundation, provided computers, installation, and support for a local school of Mazahua Indians. Pipiol Hacienda contributes to the local economy by employing many residents and purchasing supplies and produce from the farmers when possible. Participants in the 7<sup>th</sup> International Camping Congress will have an opportunity to tour Valle de Bravo and Pipiol and enjoy lunch and entertainment. For more information, see Camp Pipiol’s Web site, [www.pipiol.com](http://www.pipiol.com).

## Centro de Actividades y Servicios Educativos El Molino

Peter Smith is an uncommon name for a director of a Mexican camp, but Peter Smith is definitely an unconventional person. Raised in the United States, Smith graduated from college, spent time in New York and New Mexico, and then drifted to Mexico City in 1972, landing a job as a Montessori teacher. He became interested in alternative teaching methods and developed a field work approach for his students. After several years of taking his students on field experiences, in 1982, he rented an abandoned 16<sup>th</sup> century hacienda located five hours west of Mexico City as a base for his classes. Devoting himself to the extensive repairs needed at the hacienda and to the development of a challenging educational program, Smith has enabled El Molino to evolve into a busy nonprofit organization offering summer camp and educational programs for schools from all over Mexico as well as at least a dozen schools each year from California, Texas, and Oregon.

With a staff of forty-five, including local teachers and artisans,

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 **IMEXICO 2005**  
International Camping Congress

Hotel Sheraton Centro Historico  
Mexico City, 12-16 October, 2005

Supported by the International Camping Fellowship  
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### The 7<sup>th</sup> International Camping Congress

October 12-16, 2005, Mexico City

- Hosted by the Mexican Camping Association, in cooperation with the Venezuelan Camping Association, Colombian Camping Association, and the International Camping Fellowship
- Hotel Sheraton Historico is the main venue for the Congress
- Join 500 camp professionals from 15 countries to experience:
  - Opening Ceremony on Wednesday featuring Ballet Folklorico at the Palace of Fine Arts
  - Commercial Expo Hall on Wednesday and Thursday at the Sheraton Historico
  - Plenary session, educational workshops, and research forum presentations on Thursday
  - Mexican Fiesta in Alameda Park on Thursday evening
  - Friday excursions to Valle de Bravo with choices of a volcano hike, camp tours, Aztec pyramids, and horseback riding
  - Lunch, cultural presentations, and plenary session on Friday at Hacienda Pipiol
  - Saturday at Xochitla, featuring an International Counselor Workshop, educational sessions, a research roundtable, an assembly of association presidents and executives, and an international camp rally and relay
  - Closing banquet on Saturday evening
  - Post-Congress tours to camps, historical sites, or beaches
  - Register online now at [www.iccmexico2005.com](http://www.iccmexico2005.com). For further information, contact Linda Pulliam, [acavirginias@ACAacamps.org](mailto:acavirginias@ACAacamps.org)

children are immersed in field biology, bacteriology, botany, farm animals, indigenous crafts, creative writing, theater, and music. A visitor to El Molino might observe children dissecting a snake, studying the water quality of the camp's lake, or engrossed in a writing workshop. Local teachers and craftsmen share their talents with groups cooking *buñuelos* (cinnamon and sugar fritters) over traditional charcoal fires, learning the dying art of *deshilado* — a technique involving pulling threads through fabric and embroidery — or making cheese and sausage. The music instructor has a group of nonmusicians entranced by their compositions on keyboards, marimbas, and percussion instruments in preparation for a performance. Smith looks forward to sharing El Molino during a Post-Congress trip that will emphasize the local heritage crafts. For additional information on El Molino, see the Web site: [www.elmolinomich.com](http://www.elmolinomich.com).

### Camping in Mexico

Until the late 1980s, thousands of Mexican families sent their children north to the United States for a camp experience unavailable in their country. Although the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and YMCA had previously operated some camps, Camp Pipiol, established in 1964, was probably the first privately owned camp in Mexico. Today, it is estimated that there are 168 organized camps, ranging from those in small country houses to some resembling North American camps. A recent trend is the establishment of camps by adventure outfitters. As a very small industry, camps have been largely unregulated and unrecognized by either the government or the public. The twenty camps of the Asociación Mexicana de Campamentos (AMC) have organized to present a united front and have recently been successful in working with the Ministry of Tourism to achieve recognition of the terminology, "organized camps."

At this time, there are some minimal regulations that are applied to camps by the Ministry of Health. Schools must also have written permission from the Secretary of Education for class trips to a camp, and all swimming and water sports are prohibited during school programs. The AMC requires member camps to sign a statement of compliance with minimum best practices and a code of ethics. They have begun working with the Ministry of Tourism to establish a standards program for organized camps.

With the school summer vacation shrink-

ing to about six weeks, nearly all organized camps in Mexico operate year-round in order to cover operational expenses and overhead. Because many are located at a distance from major cities, obtaining supplies and repair service personnel is difficult. Because the majority of the country's population exists in extreme poverty, it is impossible for most families to even consider the luxury of camp attendance, and camps struggle to seek funding for scholarships. Insurance and potential lawsuits present little challenge for directors, however, as Mexican society has as yet not become litigious, and cost of insurance remains reasonable. The AMC has focused on education and annually sponsors a camp counselor training workshop in the spring, attended by up to five hundred young, energetic counselors. An American Camp Association Basic Camp Directors Course will be offered in October prior to the International Congress.

As the host and organizer of the International Camping Congress, the AMC has assumed an ambitious undertaking for an organization of their size, but the directors believe that one of the lasting values of the Congress will be an enhanced image of camps in Mexico. They have seen the rapid growth of camp in the past twenty years and recognize that the talents of the professionals, the temperate climate, and the rich heritage of their country will set the stage for continued growth in the future. With considerable pride in the recent achievements of camp professionals, AMC members and personnel of other Latin American camps are looking forward to showcasing the best of Mexican culture and the new camp tradition during the 7<sup>th</sup> International Camping Congress. In the words of the Host Committee, "Bienvenidos a Mexico!" ■

*Photos: All photos courtesy of Camp Pipiol, Mexico City, Mexico.*

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*Linda Grier Pulliam is executive of the American Camp Association, Virginia, and was a camp director for twenty-seven years. She holds an M.S. degree in education, has served on the Steering Committee of the International Camping Fellowship for the past ten years, and is the international coordinator for ACA.*

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