Cultural Overview of Mexicali and the Imperial Valley

The Place and Places of Culture in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali Region

Sheila Dollente
Imperial Valley Campus of San Diego State University

Eduardo Quintero
Universidad Autónoma de Baja California

Abstract

Just as the desert teems with an abundance of unique plant and animal life that at first may not be apparent to the eye of someone unfamiliar with the local ecology, so, also, do a rich variety of cultural resources abound in the Imperial Valley-Mexicali region, providing opportunities for participation, enjoyment, and education to those who seek them. A broad range of performing arts, visual arts, literary culture, festivals, and museum exhibits fill venues large and small on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border. In no way is this region a cultural wasteland.

Mexicali is the state capital of the Mexican state of Baja California, and, as such, serves as headquarters for a number of important government-sponsored cultural institutions. The Imperial Valley, California, boasts a much smaller population distributed among several cities throughout the rural agricultural county. Here, private citizens working together in civic organizations, often as volunteers, may provide much of the leadership and funding for cultural events. For both areas, educational institutions take a role in presenting major visual and performing artists, writers, and cultural groups from outside the area as well as showcasing local talent. Although opportunities for education in the arts are somewhat limited here, as compared to coastal metropolitan regions, still there area dozens of lectures, classes, and workshops available, and these border communities consistently produce young artists and writers of the highest caliber who find recognition in state and national competitions.

Performance and exhibit spaces include several large theaters, galleries, and museums for patrons in each community in addition to dozens of smaller sites. Regional exhibits and festivals celebrate the unique history, agriculture, industry, and human resources that exemplify the international vitality of this desert border.