

# arte popular

Chiapas



SECRETARÍA  
DE TURISMO

GOBIERNO DE CHIAPAS



The Chiapanecan handicrafts resemble the joy of life and the pursuit of beauty. Some of this handcrafted products are symbols in Chiapas, such as the lacquer (laca), which is believed by the Chiapanecan people to own the strength of a unifying symbol, or the textiles, which symbolism is beyond the need of wearing clothes.

Our artists are humble people from different indigenous groups that know how to preserve the love that the ancestors uttered to colors, harmony and forms.

The traditional art is one of our most well-known and admired types of art expression.

Amber · Pottery · Basketry · Traditional Toys  
Lacquer · Lapidary · Lutherie · Metalwork  
Saddlery · Woodcarving · Textiles



# amber

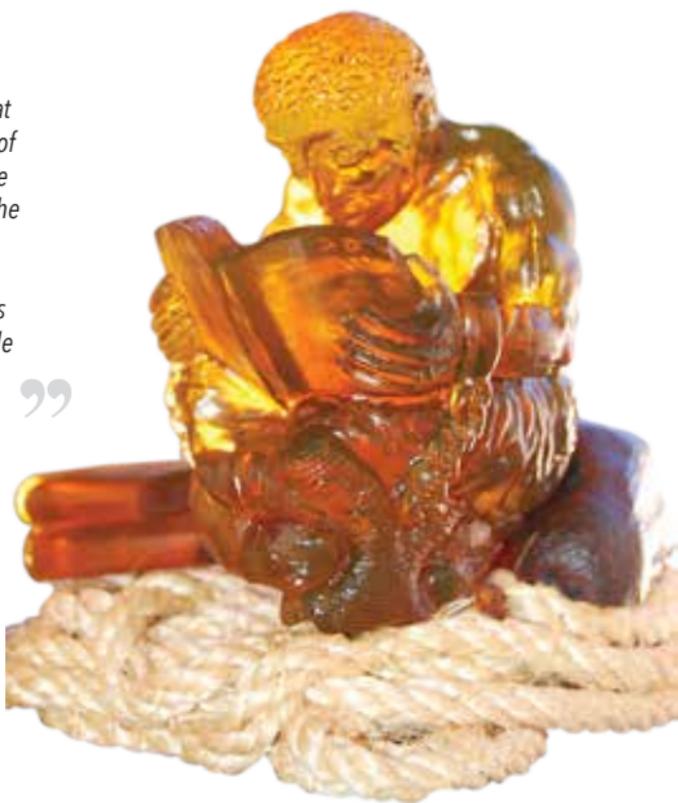
*Ceremonial offerings, protection, medicine, raw material for jewels, and artwork*

Chiapas is the only amber producer in Mexico. Through the years, amber is created by the courbaril tree (guapinol) resin. During the pre-Hispanic period, towns offered as tribute this resin that dates from 40 million years ago approximately, and that has been fossilized since then.

Nowadays, the artisan's hands dig for amber in the lands of Simojovel; then work on it creating a wide range of forms. After being polished, this resin becomes a unique jewel due to its form, texture, and contents. Its market value is more in demand depending on its size, color, or the amount of insects and remains of plants containing inside.

With an appropriate polishing, there are crafted beads, forearings, necklaces, rings, badges, and bracelets. Some pieces of jewelry display the classic color of amber: yellow, while others are noticed by their reddish, green, and blue colors, which are part of magnificent artworks when combining with gold or silver.

“ Chiapas has amber of great hardness in a wide variety of colors, features which have placed the state as one of the most distinguished producers of amber worldwide. In 2000, it was given the Denominación de Origen (DO), Spanish for Designation of Origin. ”



# lacquer

*Chiapa de Corzo es el único lugar del estado donde se trabaja la laca*

Chiapa de Corzo is the only place in the state that works with lacquer of which colors are representative of Chiapas. The Mexican lacquer art is known in Chiapas as a technique that applies a mixture of soil with animal and plant oils on gourds (jícaras, calabazas, and guajes), and softwood. The word lacquer, laca in Spanish, comes from the Persian term "lak", "summac" or "flesh-colored" in Arabic; this was later Hispanicized as "zumaque", the original word of "maque", meaning "hard and shiny varnish".

The production of lacquered pieces is local. Each piece has a different decoration, mainly with flowers, that allows to identify the artisan who produced that piece. Also, those lacquered pieces permit to appreciate the traditional colors that represent Chiapas.

The Chiapanecan lacquer has special features, such as the exclusive use of the aje (animal oil extracted from the insect *Coccus axin*), the axín (a soft warming and yellow ointment) and the tizate or chalk (caliche - white ground); these features are part of the backgrounds. Moreover, the manner to apply the lacquer and its decorations, which is without using polishers or others tools but hands, is exclusively from Chiapas.

“ The origin of lacquer is pre-Hispanic. When the Spaniards arrived, this technique has some changes; and, during the XIX century, its transformation ended into a Mestizo technique, whose features distinguish the lacquer of Chiapa de Corzo. ”



# textile

*Details that are part of the pre-Hispanic conceptual universe*

The textiles are symbols made on backstrap looms representing the founding couples, saints, mediator animals, and the square-shaped universe that are found in each part of Los Altos, a land of the Tsotsil, Tseltal and Tojolabal cultures.

In Los Altos, you can find marvelous artworks made of cotton and wool as clothes adorning saints, even on sale in towns or along the highway. Every detail on the clothes is part of the pre-Hispanic conceptual universe, including anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and floral motifs that, when putting together, create unique pieces with a special meaning. These pieces of cloth coming from Tenejapa, Chenalhó or Larraínzar, are in the most common colors: red, yellow, blue, green, and white, which are tightly related to the main perception of the Mayan cosmos, the universe, and its creation. There are also some other well-known textiles coming from Amatenango del Valle, San Bartolomé de Los Llanos (Venustiano Carranza), Aguacatenango, and Zinacantán, as well as from Bochil, Ocosingo, Chamula, Las Margaritas, and the towns of the Northern mountains

“ Chiapa de Corzo offers to the world the chiapaneca attire. This attire is the handcrafted heritage of the indigenous culture of the Chiapa natives and the inspiration of the contemporary Chiapanecan mestizo.”



# traditional toys

*Playful pieces representing the nature, the fantasies, and the dreams of the Chiapanecans*

The ingenious traditional toy pieces produced in the state are crafted by the artisans from San Cristóbal de Las Casas using wood and rag, while the ones from Amatenango use clay. Whatever the case, any children or adult, from any place, is amazed by a colorful spinning top (trompo), a truck, a tiny zoo, a rag doll, or small pieces of furniture. Those toys, which are prized by collectors, are representations of the entire nature, the world, the imagination, fantasies, hopes, and wishes of the people living in Chiapas



“ Nowadays, these toys are crafted in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapa de Corzo, San Juan Chamula and Ocosingo, which are some of the municipalities with the largest production. ”

# lutherie

*The sound of the peoples of Chiapas*

The lutherie has an important purpose besides crafting musical instruments, it is the representation of the traditional festivities of the Chiapanecan towns

“ Harps, drums, guitars, violins, are some of the instruments crafted in all the Chiapanecan territory ”



# lapidary

*Inspired in the millennial art of the Maya culture*

The art of stone carving is one of the oldest handicraft traditions, and Chiapas has adopted this art as its new handicraft. In Palenque, expert artisans, specialized in the Maya culture, reproduce sculptures, lintels, and reliefs on stucco, as well as other varieties of stone.

“ Currently, artisans restart a tradition that tries to recover and recreate its Maya origin. ”



# woodcarving

*A reinterpretation of nature*

The wood is the raw material used in the production of a great number of tools, decorative figurines, cooking utensils, masks used by dancers or children's toys, among others. Woodworks are very popular in the Latin American countries. The existence of big tree-covered areas makes possible to obtain a wealthy variety of raw materials. When Europeans arrived, they brought along new ideas, such as the use of wood, as well as styles, designs and new uses.

The need for a religious practice created a great demand of saint statues. In the beginning, these figurines were brought from Europe, but as the imports were insufficient, it was started the local production of sculptures and carvings. The master artisans were surrounded by indigenous apprentices, and the imported art was turned into an indigenous interpretation, which was transformed in Mestizo art.

The preferred wood for Chiapanecan carvers is taken from cedar, mahogany, zericote (cupapé), gold tree (primavera), elephantear tree (guanacastle), lignum-vitae (guayacán), cypress, pine, macawood (hormigo), and Guatemalan fir.



“The parachico mask, which is craved on wood, is one of the most appreciated pieces because of its originality, beauty and, above all, the implied meticulous crafting process.”



# pottery

*One of the oldest and most extensive craft industries around the world*

In Chiapas, there are several municipalities producing clay pieces. Currently, these pieces of pottery are not only useful utensils but also some of them are considered artworks, expressing the ideas of their creator.

Moreover, some Tzeltal words are used when molding clay, called "ya sb`al" in Tzeltal, indicating the original meaning of the act of creation that gives soul and life to pots, jugs, and basins, which are placed on three stones of the bonfire, representing the Creator and the Maker, and the breath that gives the life, peace, and clarity to the people of the corn of the Maya culture.

“ Amatenango del Valle stands out among the towns with Maya origin at the region of Los Altos de Chiapas for its ancient pottery tradition representing pre- ”



# basketry

*One of the most ancient crafts.*

In Chiapas, the abundance of vegetable fibers, as the palm and the ixtle, allows developing the basketry, one of the oldest handcrafts.

In San Juan Chamula, there are two types of materials to craft baskets: the reed for knitting, and one stick obtained of a thorny plant called "mecate" used for framing. In Zinacantán and Tenejapa, the sombreros are decorated with ribbons. Also, in the Tzeltal towns of Ocosingo, some basketry goods are offered.



“ In Zinacantan and Tenejapa, there are crafted palm sombreros decorated with ribbons. The Tzeltal towns of the Ocosingo region are also offering basketry products ”

# metalwork

*The forms and colors of iron*

Being a feature of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, the Chiapanecan metalwork has its most representative product in the Arma Christi crosses. Moreover, there are Trees of Life, padlocks, knockers with different forms, and domestic utensils that are part of the tradition of San Cristóbal.

“ Through forging techniques,  
the metalwork transforms  
iron into useful utensils and  
pieces of art. ”



# saddlery

*The leather carving trade is a tradition that was created centuries ago.*

In Chiapas, the saddlery is defined by the crafting of practical objects and pieces, such as purses, backpacks, footwear, saddle, machete sheaths, and saddle cloths, among other things.



 [Sectur Chiapas](#)

 [@Sectur\\_Chiapas](#)

 [turismochiapas.gob.mx](http://turismochiapas.gob.mx)

 01 800 280 3500  
Lada sin costo nacional