



## *Love letter from Chiapas*

*Coming back from the open air Mercado, laden with net shopping bags full of flowers and vibrant fruits and vegetables, I frantically hail a taxi to take me to my casita for 20 pesos (\$1.50 U.S.). With salsa music blaring and strung tasseled pictures of saints swaying in rhythm along the dashboard, I make casual conversation with my driver in broken Spanish, and ask, "Were you born here?" Giving me an ear-to-ear smile, he crosses himself and proudly replies, "Yes, thanks be to God!"*

In my restless search for a picturesque colonial village with a Mexican heart and a strong indigenous soul, I have finally found her! Her name is San Cristobal de Las Casas, and she thrives nestled within the protective arms of pine forest mountains and rushing spring-fed rivers, in a perpetually cool and glorious climate. Grassy fields, flowers and stalks of corn endlessly climb her mountain slopes, and her open air Mercado's brim over with colorful hand-made textiles, fresh cut flowers, herbs, and sacks of shiny beans and chilies in every color and variety.

San Cristobal is surrounded by indigenous Mayan villages with pre-conquest traditions, and besides being the ultimate shopping experience; it is the perfect base camp for visiting the interior Selva (Lancondon jungle) or any number of Mayan Ruins, such as Palenque, Yaxchilan or Bonampak. Red-tiled rooftops and cobblestoned streets run through her many barrios (neighborhoods) ...each with their own local crafts and annual fiesta celebrations. There are always firework displays and live music celebrations going on in *some part* of the city! This jewel of Chiapas is a combination of all that has ever held my attention and admiration, and I would love to introduce her to you! *May you walk in Beauty all the Days of Your Life! Cynthia*

