

The Best Bookshops in Mexico City, Mexico

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Hung-Ya Lien takes us on a tour of the best bookshops in Mexico City, Mexico. If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when they're undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, further information about contributing follows this article.



Image Credit: Mexico City (Blok 70 CC2.0)

I would like to think that even an outsider's point of view can do justice to the essentially good bookshops in any city in the world. I travelled to Mexico City on holiday this May. Based on a little research of my own online as well as a local friend's advice, I was very much looking forward to indulging myself in some of the best bookshops in the city.

It is impossible for a book lover to be disappointed by the fantastic bookshops, whether independent ones or chains, that Mexico City has to offer. For me personally, its chain bookstores own and proudly present their unique characters just as well as the independent ones. And just because one isn't a fluent Spanish speaker (yet!), this does not mean one would ever fail to appreciate the full stacks of Spanish language books on the floor or those neatly arranged in rightful order on the shelves. No book is discriminated against, and no visitor, local or from overseas, is treated differently.

Rosario Castellanos – named after the renowned Mexican poet and author – is located in Condesa and is owned by Mexican publishing company, Fondo de Cultura Económica (FCE). Not only does it have a wide range of Spanish and English books, but it also offers CDs, DVDs and a café for relaxing. After my visit, I came to know that Rosario Castellanos was only established in 2006. Heartwarming is not the first word that popped into my mind when setting foot in it. Instead, the vast white paint-based interior gently forces you to be in awe. Tree branch-shaped decoration on the ceiling makes total sense in an instant for it reminds us of where books come from in the first place. For me personally, an Asian visitor from half the world away, the very concept of Ibero-American literature did not become fully visualised in my head until the moment I stood right in front of this section in the bookshop. I realised once again that the world is so much bigger than you may have thought, yet one can venture into at least

one small aspect of it by reading. My sense of awe transformed back into radiant feelings for books again.

The second bookshop on my list is called **Cafebrería el Péndulo**. There are six branches of them in Mexico City – I visited the one in Roma. It is also a combination of coffee shop and bookstore as its name implies. Apart from decent literature collections, an exquisite assortment of records and films can also be found. What was more surprising for me was to view the wall full of comic books besides the staircase leading to the first floor. I am no comic book nerd, but it was still a sight to see. El Péndulo embodies the décor, which manages to be both spacious and intimate at the same time. Encountering Roberto Bolaño's *2666* in the shop was a moment to remember for I had never seen any other version before. Waiters in the coffee bar who endeavoured to help a foreigner with broken Spanish wanting to order a café to sip in the shop made the visit all the more delightful.

The boroughs (or *colonias*) of Condesa and Roma are literally next to each other. According to my local friend, you get to see the turn of the centuries in these areas; this is precisely true once you see them with your own eyes. Mexico City resembles Paris when it comes to its literary atmosphere – one easily comes across stores or street book vendors in random alleys. In this sense, Mexico City really is a city of bookshops.



Image: Tombstone of Rosario Castellanos.



El Péndulo Bookshop (Condesa).



However, instead of a bookshop, the final recommendation on my list is a library, **Biblioteca Vasconcelos**, which sits in the north of the city. It is dedicated to the Mexican writer, José Vasconcelos. Inside the library, there is a massive white whale skeleton hanging in the air. Transparent walls easily let sunlight into this megalibrary, warm inside on a sunny day in May. Looking up from the ground, I see floors and bookshelves overtopping each one below. A friend said that it looks like being inside the fifth-dimensional tesseract in the movie *Interstellar*. I gladly imagined myself standing in singularity – without being actually caught in the gravitation pull, for sure – in this library, in Mexico City and perhaps even in Mexico as a whole. Standing here in Biblioteca Vasconcelos, one sees the infinite possibilities of Mexico's future.

Hung-Ya Lien is from Taiwan. She graduated with an MSc in Politics and Government in the EU from LSE in 2008. Once a happy Sales Assistant in Zavvi and HMV in London, her current position is Assistant Research Fellow at the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy in Taiwan.

Note: This bookshop guide gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics. Thank you to Hung-Ya Lien for providing the image of Biblioteca Vasconcelos. Image Credits: Image One, The Tombstone of Rosario Castellanos, [Thelmadatter CC 3.0](#); Image Two, El Péndulo Bookshop (Condesa), [Keizers CC 3.0](#).

Do you have a favourite bookshop? If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when they're undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, then this is your chance to tell us all about it.

As part of a [regular feature](#) on *LSE Review of Books*, we're asking academics and students to recommend their favourite two or three bookshops in a particular city, with the aim of building an exciting online series for our book-loving community of readers the world over.

Bookshops could be academic, alternative, foreign language, hobby-based, secret or underground institutions, secondhand outlets or connected to a university. We'd like to cover all world regions too.

If something comes to mind, we're looking for around 150 words per bookshop, detailing why each place is a must-see. Our editorial team can then find suitable photos and links to accompany the piece, though you're welcome to supply these too. We only ask that you focus on just one city or region, and two or three bookshops within it.

Email us now if you'd like to contribute: lsereviewofbooks@lse.ac.uk

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