

The best bookshops in Latin America and the Caribbean: Mexico City



Which are the best bookshops for academics to visit in Latin America and the Caribbean? As part of their series of [Bookshop Guides](#), our colleagues at [LSE Review of Books](#) have been finding out. Here [Hung-Ya Lien](#) takes us on a tour of the best bookshops in Mexico City.

I would like to think that even an outsider's point of view can do justice to the bookshops in any city of the world. I travelled to Mexico City on holiday in May 2016. Based on a little research of my own, as well as a local friend's advice, I was very much looking forward to indulging myself in some of the city's best bookshops.

It is impossible for a book lover to be disappointed by the fantastic bookshops, whether independents or chains, that Mexico City has to offer. For me personally, its chain bookstores possess 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 doesn't mean one would ever fail to appreciate the full stacks of Spanish language books on the floor or those neatly ordered on the shelves. No book is discriminated against, and no visitor, local or from overseas, is treated differently.



The tombstone of Rosario Castellanos
([Thelmadatter](#), CC BY-SA 3.0)

The [Librería Rosario Castellanos](#) – named after the renowned Mexican poet and author – is located in Condesa and is owned by the Mexican publishing company Fondo de Cultura Económica (FCE). Not only does it have a wide range of Spanish and English books, 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 inside. Instead, the vast sheet-white interior is almost awe-inspiring. Tree branch-shaped decoration on the ceiling instantly makes sense, reminding us of where books come from in the first place.

For me personally, an Asian visitor from half a world away, the very concept of Latin American literature did not become fully real in my head until I found myself surveying this section in the bookshop. I realised once again that the world is so much bigger than you might think, yet one can venture into at least one small aspect of it by reading. My sense of awe was transformed into a radiant feeling for books again.

The second bookshop on my list was [Cafebrería el Péndulo](#). It has six branches in Mexico City – I visited the one in Roma. It is also a combination of coffee shop and bookstore, as the name suggests. 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.



Cafebrería el Péndulo, Polanco branch ([Nan Palmero, CC BY 2.0](#))

El Péndulo's decor manages to be both spacious and intimate at the same time. Encountering Roberto Bolaño's *2666* in the shop was a moment to remember, as I had never seen any other version before. Waiters in the coffee bar were quick to help a foreigner with broken Spanish wanting to order a café, which 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 can see the transition between the centuries in these areas. Mexico City resembles Paris when it comes to its literary atmosphere – one easily comes across stores or street book vendors in random alleys. Mexico City really is a city of bookshops.



Biblioteca Vasconcelos, featuring the sculpture Mátrix Móvil by Gabriel Orozco ([John Menick, CC BY-NC 2.0](#))

However, my final recommendation is in fact a library in the north of the city: [Biblioteca Vasconcelos](#), which is named after the Mexican writer and philosopher José Vasconcelos.

Inside, the first thing you will notice is the massive white whale skeleton hanging in the air. Transparent walls easily let sunlight into this mega-library, which was warm inside on a sunny day in May.

Looking up from the ground, I can see floors and bookshelves interlocking and overlapping in every direction. A friend said that it looks like [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. When standing in Biblioteca Vasconcelos one certainly infinite possibilities for Mexico's future.

Notes:

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