

## The Lake Chapala Society Started as Early as the 11th Century

Written by Judy King

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Today many foreigners love living in the Lake Chapala area, but many don't really understand what makes the area so beautiful and interesting, or even how the lake was actually formed. It really is quite an interesting story. A seismic upheaval 12 million years ago along the San Andrés-Chapala plate formed a gigantic basin surrounded by extinct volcanoes. Water from the Lerma-Santiago River system filled the great fresh-water inland sea, which was seven to ten times the current size of Lake Chapala. The great lake covered much of Jalisco and Michoacán, totally submerging the area now occupied by Guadalajara.

The first people living in Lake Chapala, came to the area in the late 11th or early 12th century from the far north, a place called *Aztlan*, which means whiteness. It is believed these people were part of the Asiatic migration to the Americas across the land bridge across the Bering Sea. Believed to be the ancestors of the Nahuas, some of these indigenous people were living in this area when the Spanish arrived.

In the 1300's, the *Cocas* arrived and founded a community at Cutzalan, now called San Juan Cosalá. They cooked some of their meals in pots suspended in holes in the earth - in the steam of the hot springs. As the area became overpopulated, scouts set out to find other settlements, and they eventually founded several other Lakeside communities, including Ajijic. The early lakeside life wasn't always serene, wandering Tarascans from Michoacán periodically paddled across the lake to invade and attack the shore dwellers.

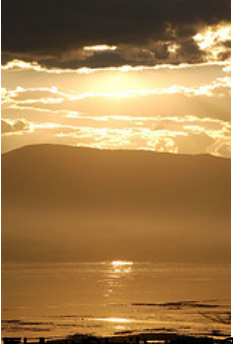
Chapalac, a Tecuexe chief, founded Chapala in 1510 when he was forced out of his settlement by an invading Coca chief. With his warriors and their families, he moved from near today's city of La Barca on the southeastern shore of the lake. Last to be settled, the town of Chapala was also one of the last lakeshore areas to be "discovered" and converted by the Spanish. Nuño de Guzmán came across from the southwest shore to invade Chapala in 1530. Former Chief Chapalac was renamed Martín de Chapalac at his baptism, and received a royal land grant for his settlement after he destroyed his personal god, Ixtlacateotl. Chapala didn't really begin to grow and thrive until 1537 when the new leader, Tepotzin, moved the Tecuexes back to the lake shore from their hillside camp on the mountain near the main intersection of Chapala.

Captain Alonso de Avalos arrived in the Ajijic-San Juan Cosalá area in 1523 and persuaded the *Cocas* to surrender and be baptized peacefully.

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