

This great city of Tenochtitlán [Mexico] is situated in this salt lake.... There are four avenues or entrances to the city, all of which are formed by artificial causeways, two spears' length in width. The city is as large as Seville or Cordova; its streets, I speak of the principal ones, are very wide and straight; some of these, and all the inferior ones, are half land and half water, and are navigated by canoes. All the streets at intervals have openings, through which the water flows, crossing from one street to another; and at these openings, some of which are very wide, there are also very wide bridges, composed of large pieces of timber, of great strength and well put together; on many of these bridges ten horses can go abreast....

This city has many public squares.... There is one square twice as large as that of the city of Salamanca, surrounded by porticoes, where are daily assembled more than sixty thousand souls, engaged in buying and selling; and where are found all kinds of merchandise the world has, including the necessities of life, as for instance articles of food, as well as jewels of gold and silver, lead, brass, copper, tin, precious stones, bones, shells, snails, and feathers... There are apothecaries' shops, where prepared medicines, liquids, ointments, and plasters are sold; barbers' shops, where they wash and shave the head; and restaurants, that furnish food and drink at a certain price.... Different kinds of cotton thread of all colors in skeins are exposed for sale in one quarter of the market.... [There are p]ainters' colors, as numerous as can be found in Spain, and as fine shades....

[E]verything that can be found throughout the whole country is sold in the markets.... Every kind of merchandise is sold in a particular street or quarter assigned to it exclusively, and thus the best order is preserved.... There is a building in the great square that is used as an audience house, where ten or twelve persons, who are magistrates, sit and decide all controversies that arise in the market, and order delinquents to be punished. In the same square there are other persons who go constantly about among the people observing what is sold, and the measures used in selling; and they have been seen to break measures that were not true.

- Hernan Cortés, "Second Letter to Charles V" (1520) excerpt.