



Discovering Las Conceptas

A chaperone's Guide

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This guide is designed to help chaperones bringing children to *El Museo de Las Conceptas* ensure that they have a fun, informative, and interactive visit to the museum. This guide has a companion workbook called “Coloring *Las Conceptas*” to create a complete experience. The authors of the guide and workbook have suggested activities that should be completed before, during, and after the visit to the museum. Although we provide these recommendations, the activities can be completed in any order and may be changed by temporary exhibitions. The guide can be used to provide the children with the most important information in each room of the museum. Use the “Suggested Activities” to reflect and discuss the works of art in each room and the activities in the workbook “Coloring *Las Conceptas*.” Each workbook page corresponds to one of three themes (with a letter shown at the end of each activity): syncretism and religious history (S), the role of women in the monastery (M), and the unique ambiance of the museum (A). Important talking points can be found throughout this guide corresponding to each theme, as well as workbook suggestions to reinforce these points.



Summary of Pages

Pages to be Done Before the Visit

- Museum Location (A)
- Toys (M)
- Daily Routine of the Nuns (M)
- La Virgen Legardiana (M)
- Who Can Enter the Monastery? (S)
- El Buen Pastor (con donante) (S)

Pages to be Done During the Visit

- The Role of the Monastery (M)
- Search and Find in Risco (S)
- Plants (A)

Pages to be Done After the Visit

- Birds (A)
- Encoded Messages (S)
- San Miguel (S)
- La Virgen del Merced (S)
- Word Search (S)
- La Virgen de la Anunciación (S)
- Treats (M)
- Make your Own Nativity Box (S)

Overview of the Three Themes

Syncretism

The city of Cuenca has history dating back to 500 AD with the Cañari settlement of Guapondelig. During the following centuries, the rule of the indigenous peoples fell under Inca control. The Inca culture did not completely eliminate the Cañari culture, but instead absorbed elements of it. Following the Inca, came the Spanish, who arrived in Cuenca in 1577. Cuenca achieved independence from Spain on November 3rd, 1820, a day celebrated each year as Independence Day. Interestingly enough, *Las Conceptas* opened its doors on this same day in 1986, almost 190 years later. From this rich cultural history, Cuenca has developed an identity comprised of a unique combination of three distinct cultures, the Cañari, the Inca, and the Spanish, also known as “*Mestizo*,” a legacy partially preserved in the exhibits at *Las Conceptas*. The “mixing” of the three cultures is the syncretism that can be seen throughout the museum. In several artworks, you can see aspects that represent the Cañari, Inca, and Spanish cultures.

The Role of Women in the Monastery

When a woman wanted to enter the monastery, she had to be at least twelve years old and willing to spend the rest of her life dedicated to silence, prayer and contemplation, and chastity to Lord her God. Women brought their dowries; either in the form of money or property that was meant for their marriage, and this helped the financial flow of the monastery. Often, women would enter the monastery due to lack of masculine protection, which created an almost feminist nature of the monastery because women could take control of their own lives and not be dependent on anyone else. The role of women in the monastery and their daily lives is discussed more throughout this guide.

Ambiance of the Museum

One of the unique aspects of *el Museo de Las Conceptas* is the unique medicinal gardens. These gardens are home to many medicinal plants and flowers as well as several different types of birds. The garden and the architecture of the building creates a peaceful and silent environment that is unique to the busy city center in which it is located.

A Walk through the Rooms

Room 1: History of the Monastery

El Monasterio de Las Conceptas was founded in 1599. It began with a single house and through years of construction in different phases, became the group of buildings it is today! The buildings of *El Monasterio* take up a whole city block! The building the museum is now in was once the infirmary for sick nuns. The museum opened its doors on November 3rd, 1986, the nationally celebrated Independence Day of Cuenca.

Workbook Suggestion

Remind your students about the location of the museum in the city which they learned about in the **Location of the Monastery** activity page. Have them take a moment to be silent and listen, and they will hear the silence that exists within the walls of the museum even though it is in the middle of the city.

Room 2: Story of the Museum

A wealthy Cuencana Woman, Doña Leonor, left her house to the monastery after she died. At the time, her house was considered the most beautiful in the city. The house still stands and is one of the oldest buildings in the city. The three daughters of Doña Leonor were also the first three nuns in the Convent! While in the monastery the nuns helped the monastery make money through baking and selling sweets, breads, and quesadillas.

Room 3: Religious Life

In order to enter the monastery, women had to be at least twelve years old and would have to pass tests about their Christian faith, as well as tests for their physical and spiritual health. Once they had entered, they dedicated their lives to silence, fasting, confession, communion, prayer, and chastity to become consecrated in the Lord her God.

Room 4: The Virgin Mary

This room contains various representations of the Virgin Mary and the different roles she played. It contains art created by nuns in the museum many years ago and serves as an example of how they viewed her as a model Catholic who deserved to be commemorated through art. In *La Virgen de la Anunciación*, she is being told by an angel that she has been chosen to be the mother of God's child. Our Lady of Mount Carmel shows Mary as a nun in the Carmelite order. Although she is an important figure in the Catholic religion, she was once a normal woman who had dedicated herself to God like the nuns of *Las Conceptas*. This room shows other depictions of the Virgin Mary, and her unique role in the Catholic religion is related mainly through the use of subtle symbolism in the art pieces.

Workbook Suggestion

There are a few coloring pages of the statues and paintings of Mary in this room, such as **la Virgen de la Merced**, which represents syncretism. Point out to the children as they view the painting and color the drawing in the book that the hummingbird in the painting represents an element of Inca religion. Also mention to your students that this painting was painted by a nun who lived in the monastery centuries ago. Another example is **La Virgen Legardiana**, a large statue of which is seen in Quito. After your visit, have the students complete the **La Virgen de la Anunciación** and remind the children of these during their coloring after the visit to the museum.

Room 5: The Chapel

This room was used as the chapel of the infirmary of the monastery. Now this room houses a traditional altar. This room is one of the quietest rooms in the museum and is used by the visitors as a place for relaxation and thought.

Workbook Suggestion

Since this is a room usually associated with silence, have the children play the silence game where the person who goes the longest without talking wins! Also point out ***El Buen Pastor (con donante)***.

Room 6: Representations and Invocations of Saints

Before the 1200s, it was uncommon to see art pieces depicting religious figures other than Jesus and the Virgin Mary. This room houses works showing various saints made around the time when this change took place. Saints are considered the perfect examples of Catholics because of their strong faith in the religion. For example, Santa Maria Ana de Jesus de Paredes y Flores, the first Ecuadorian saint, dedicated her life to prayer and gave her own life to save the city of Quito from destruction.

Rooms 8 and 9: The Nativity

Advent, or the weeks leading up to Christmas, was a very important time for the nuns in which they asked for forgiveness for their sins. During Advent, the nuns also decorated nativity scenes with items they had made by hand. On December 24th each year, the Birth of Christ is celebrated throughout the city of Cuenca, often with nativity scenes. “The Cliff,” also known as Risco, is an example of a nativity scene in this room which represents the mountains thought to exist around the area in which Jesus was born.

Workbook Suggestion

While in this room, have the students flip to and complete the **Search & Find in Risco** activity. While they are completing this, you can explain to the students what is happening in this room. Then, after the visit, have the students complete the **Make your own Nativity Scene** activity, and remind them of this room and have

them reflect on how their nativity boxes are both similar and different from the boxes in the museum.

Room 10: The Passion and Death of Christ

The art in this room shows the passion and death of Christ. The importance of these pieces is that there are similarly focused collections found elsewhere in Cuenca. Can you think of a time when you've seen anything similar to these works of art about the life and death of Jesus.

Room 11 and 12: Toys

Any girls who wanted to enter the monastery had to be at least 12 years of age. The girls brought their toys and other personal belongings, but as you can see by the quality of the toys, the girls did not spend much time playing with the toys.

Workbook Suggestion

Remind the children of the **Toys** activity they completed before the visit. You could ask them to explain what toy they decided to bring and why.

Room 13 and 14: The Farewell Arrival and Stay

Often times, women would bring their belongings to the monastery in beautifully and uniquely decorated chests. They also brought with them their dowry, which could take the form of silverware and glassware.

Room 15 and 16: Work

After their morning prayer, the nuns continued with their work. This work included office work, nursing, tailoring, and pottery. The nuns who were new to the convent were responsible for making the *agua de Pitimas*, sweets, and bread. The nuns would also make the Host that is used at communion at local churches.

Workbook Suggestion

Remind your students of the **Daily Routine of the Nuns** activity they completed before the visit, and encourage them to revisit to the page detailing the actual daily lives of the nuns and take a moment to reflect on this different lifestyle and what it means to the nuns of *Las Conceptas*.

Room 19: The Archangel Saint Michael

This room houses the statue of the Archangel Saint Michael, the protector of the nuns of the monastery and the whole city of Cuenca. Every year on September 29th, the Saint Michael is paraded around the block to honor his patronage. At night, the nuns always make sure to keep the door to this room open so that Saint Michael can leave his stand and ride his horse the hallways of the museum and convent. Every year, the nuns change the dress that Saint Michael wears.

Kitchen

This kitchen was used in the infirmary of the convent to prevent the spread of sickness to those who were healthy. To this day, the nuns still work to prepare *agua de pitimas*, which has curative properties. It is said that it can heal the body and the soul. In addition, the nuns maintain the tradition of making quesadillas, cookies, and meringue.

Workbook Suggestion

Encourage the children to remember the names of the different treats made by the nuns, as there is an activity designed to be completed after the visit which tests their knowledge of the names, **Typical Treats in the Monastery.**

Cemetery

The present-day museum auditorium and function room used to be the convent's cemetery where the nuns were buried. This goes to show that once the nuns entered the convent, they did not leave, upon death.

Angels

In the Catholic tradition, there are nine kinds of Angels! The nine kinds of angels are: Angels, Archangels, Cherubims, Dominions, Powers, Principalities, Seraphims, Thrones, and Virtues. These nine kinds of angels are categorized into three spheres; the highest sphere, closest to God, the middle sphere, and the lowest sphere, closest to humans. Many of the angels are depicted as twins!

9 Kinds of angels:

1st sphere

Seraphim: These angels are the closest to God and they make sure all the other angels in heaven follow the rules.

Cherubim: These angels guard God's throne. They are usually depicted as chubby babies with wings.

Thrones: These Angels work to carry out God's decisions. They are often depicted as fiery wheels.

2nd sphere

Dominions: These angels keep all the other angels in check and make sure that everyone is doing their jobs.

Virtues: These angels bring God's blessings to earth in the form of miracles. They also bring courage and good graces to the people on earth.

Powers: These are the angels of birth and death.

3rd Sphere

Principalities: These angels are the guardians of cities and nations. They protect their rulers.

Archangels: These angels bring God's most important messages to humans. They also help in God's army to protect against the fallen angels.

Angels: These act as the intermediate between humans and God.

Thank you for visiting *El Museo de Las Conceptas*.
We hope that your visit was fun and educational
and that you will come back soon.