

# NYP **TEMPO**

CAPTURING THE RHYTHM OF LATIN NEW YORK

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Anthony J. Casu



Seek your fortune at the mystical botánicas of Queens

# Magical mystery tour

By SARAH STANFIELD

SINCE the 1920s, when an enterprising pharmacist named Alberto Rendón founded the first one in East Harlem, Manhattan was the epicenter of botánicas in New York. Now, almost a century later, Queens has become the capital for those looking for baños y despojos (spiritually cleansing baths), multi-color beads, good-luck amulets and talismans.

Most of the stores are located along a strip of Roosevelt Avenue and crisscross Jackson Heights and Corona. Hop on the 7, R, E or F train, get off at the Jackson Heights/Roosevelt Avenue stop and let the magic begin.

## 1 BEST FOR HERBAL REMEDIES

Hidden in the corner of a recessed building between 77th and 78th streets along Roosevelt Avenue, **Botánica Mexicana** specializes in items celebrating La Virgen de Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico.

But it also specializes in Santa Muerte, a Mexican cult figure associated with protection of and against criminals, as well as the remembrance of the dead. Inside, you'll find numerous amulets and talismans with pictures of Santa Muerte (usually depicted as a skeletal version of the Virgin Mary, scythe in hand).

77-04 Roosevelt Ave., between 78th and 79th Sts. (718) 672-3690. Open every day from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

## 2 BEST FOR COOL SHRINES

**Botánica Santa Barbara** is the place to go if you want to see one of the most beautiful and elaborate saint/orisha shrines in Queens. The statue of the store's namesake, also known as Changó in Santería, is the centerpiece here. Give her an offering of rum and she'll reward you with luck, love and money.

Just behind the wall separating Santa Barbara/Changó is an exquisite shrine to Yemayá, the orisha of the ocean, who is also the guardian of women, childbirth and fertility. Write a wish for her, place it in a seashell and put it in her shrine. She also likes offerings of jewelry, perfume and flowers.

40-26 82nd St., between Roosevelt and 41st avenues. (718) 672-3971. Monday through Saturday from 9:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.

## 3 BEST FOR AMULETS

You can't miss the flashy **Botánica de el Indio Amazónico**. Multicolor neon lights spell out T-A-R-O-T on the front window, with four illustrative cards below. A wooden shelf near the window bends under the weight of good-luck and love perfumes, baños y despojos and statues of saints, orishas and Buddhas, as well as a



Mary from Botánica Mexicana performs a cleansing ritual using burning sage and cigar smoke.

life-size photo of the botánica's namesake. An interesting item on the shelves is what looks like a plastic phallus in a mason jar filled with red liquid. It is likely used for sexual potency.

The main draw to the store, of course, is the Amazonian Indian himself, who divines the future through Tarot, palm-reading and other time-honored methods. He also sells a special tonic called "Agua Milagrosa" (miracle water),

which, when you spray it on yourself or around your home, brings good luck.

86-26 Roosevelt Ave., between 87th Street and Britton Avenue. (718) 799-9391. Open every day from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

## 4 BEST FOR CARD READINGS

Named after the saint associated with helping the poor and healing the sick, **Botánica San Lazarito** takes baños and despojos a step further with a special all-in-one bath despojo called "Astral 7X7

Contra Todo."

Packaged in a large, rectangular yellow box, it promises 40 types of benefits, including love, abundance, luck, fortune, mental strength and success in business.

Here's how it works: Pour about a cup of the liquid into a bathtub full of seven liters of water.

Tarot readings and spiritual consultations by appointment, (718) 812-8553 (ask for Gloria).

**Botánica San Lazarito**, 37-63 92nd St. at Roosevelt Avenue. (718) 476-3450. Open every day from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

## 5 BEST FOR CAULDRONS AND OCCULT GEAR

**New Candelaria Discounts** is the supermarket of all botánicas. Here you can find everything: baños y despojos, herbs for every affliction imaginable, an entire wall devoted to saint and good-luck candles, incense, soaps promising good luck, sexual potency, love and money, and special bath salts promoting similar benefits.

Alex, the amiable owner of the botánica, is full of helpful mystical advice. For example, he recommends smearing honey on one's lips before a job interview to "sweeten" the potential employer to the interviewee.

He also has a large array of pendants, swearing numerous benefits, like the bow-and-arrow pendant symbolizing Ochosi, the patron orisha of justice and balance. The pendant is often worn to find someone who did you wrong.

**New Candelaria Discounts**, 92-17 Roosevelt Ave., between 92nd and 93rd streets. (718) 458-0646. Open every day from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

## 6 BEST FOR SPIRITUAL SALVES

**Botánica de los Indios Colorados** stocks numerous herbal remedies, such as adelgazante, said to help with weight loss; higado, purported to help with liver functioning; and uña de gato and pasuchaca, both believed to boost the immune system.

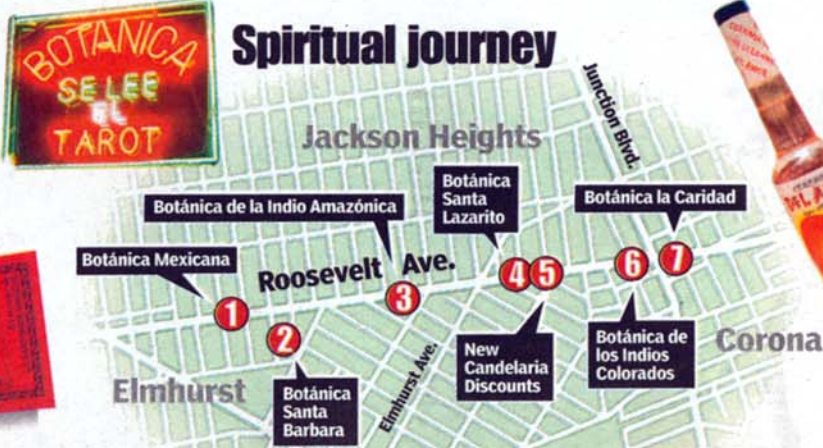
Other unique items on the racks include special honeys promising luck, love and success in business and powders guaranteeing that your straying lover will return, or, if you're a guy feeling slightly less than macho, that your "manliness" will be restored. Hey, who needs Viagra when you've got that?

96-04 Roosevelt Ave., at Junction Boulevard, Second Floor. (718) 396-2769. Open every day except Thursday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

## 7 BEST FOR SAINT CARDS

**Botánica la Caridad** is a narrow store housing a very large collection of saint statues as well as prayer cards for both Catholic saints and Santería orishas. The prayer cards feature the standard saints but also some lesser-known ones, such as Saint Dymphna, the patron saint of the mentally ill.

96-07 Roosevelt Ave., between Junction Boulevard and 97th Street. (718) 639-3570. Open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.



### How to get there:

Take the F train to the Roosevelt Avenue stop, stay to the right and walk north on Roosevelt Avenue. All of the shops are located along Roosevelt Avenue between 78th and 98th streets. If you want to start at Botánica la Caridad, take the 7 train to Junction Boulevard and exit on your right — the shop is toward the right of the station. Then walk south to visit all the remaining stores.

### Queens facts:

■ The borough has the largest Colombian, Ecuadorian, Salvadoran, Cuban and Peruvian communities in the city.

■ Latino population breakdown (documented): 2,229,379 — including Spaniards and "other Hispanic/Latino"

### Nationality breakdown by country:

Puerto Rican	106,322
Dominican	72,315
Colombian	63,462
Ecuadorian	61,067
Peruvian	16,472
Salvadoran	13,785
Cuban	12,987

Source: U.S. Bureau, Census 2000