



**FLAVOURS OF OAXACA**  
**- TRIP NOTES -**

## FLAVOURS OF OAXACA (9 DAYS)

### Oaxaca - Santiago Apoala - Teotitlan - Hierve El Agua



### WELCOME

Thank you for booking your holiday with *Travel The Unknown*. We love travel and we are confident that you will go away with fantastic memories of our *Flavours of Oaxaca* tour.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Experience real Oaxacan food
- Visit the unique site of Hierve El Agua
- Prepare your own Oaxacan dishes
- Discover the lovely Mixteca region
- The ancient site of Monte Alban
- The colonial charm of Oaxaca city
- The colourful food market at Tlacolula
- Learn from top Oaxacan chefs

### WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Airport transfers
- Ground transport (VW Transporter or Mercedes Sprinter)
- 8 nights accommodation (colonial hotel, cabins)
- Entrance fees to sites & parks
- Cooking classes with expert chefs
- Most meals - Breakfasts (8), lunches (7), dinners (1)
- Drivers and local guides
- Climate Care contribution

### Itinerary

Please download the detailed itinerary for your tour from our website. We have made it simpler to navigate and there is now one-click access to each tour via the Trip Finder in the main menu, then click on the Itinerary tab to download your itinerary.

### Itinerary Disclaimer

Itineraries are correct at the time of printing. Our itineraries are sometimes updated during the year to incorporate suggestions from past travellers and sometimes our own research too. Please ensure that you print and review a final copy of these **Trip Notes** and itinerary a couple of days prior to travel, in case there have been changes that may affect you.

### Joining & Finishing Points

All travellers will be greeted at Oaxaca airport by a *Travel The Unknown* representative and will be escorted to their accommodation.

All customers will be escorted to the flight departing from Oaxaca airport. You can bolt on additional trips or services. Please contact us for more information.

### Flights from London

We normally use the scheduled services of the airlines (depending on availability). As flight timings and schedules change regularly we recommend you call one of our specialist sales staff or your agent to confirm up-to-date timings. Please note timings may change at a later date and cannot be confirmed until approximately two weeks before departure.

### UK Regional Flights

*Travel The Unknown* is committed to making joining our trips as easy as possible, wherever you may live in the UK. The Flight Inclusive price is based on a London departure, but we are happy to tailor this to your local or regional airport.

## **Accommodation**

*Travel The Unknown* will provide you with the best accommodation available, in keeping with the natural environments of our destinations. In Oaxaca, you will be staying in a very good hotel and in Santiago Apoala, we will be staying at the best accommodation available in modern cabins. Either ourselves or our trusted ground handlers have personally vetted all accommodation.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Accommodation</u>
Oaxaca	Hotel Azuecenas
Santiago Apoala	Santiago Apoala Cabinas

If any of our preferred first choice accommodation is not available, we will organise something of a similar standard.

## **Style of Travel**

This trip combines food and culture. You are expected to join in with cooking classes. There are other activities planned on most days, which you can opt in or out of any activities as you please. These tours are for independent people, so we try to be flexible where we can, and give you time to explore on your own too.

## **Meals**

Breakfast is provided every day, and either lunch and/or dinner is provided on most days. Refer to the itinerary for details of the daily meal plan. You should budget about £10 (\$15) per day for additional meals.

## **Group Size**

To minimise the footprint our tours leave - both on the environment and the local culture - we keep our group sizes limited to 12 people.

## **Tour Guides and Chefs**

We have gone to great length in trying to secure the best guides and chefs available. The group will be designated a fixed driver throughout the tour, and for the sightseeing aspects of the trip, we will use local guides. The use of local guides on this itinerary helps keep the overall tour costs down.

## **Transport**

We use well-maintained vehicles and good drivers wherever road travel is involved. There are only a few long days travelling. The tour is not too demanding, but some days can be busy, where travelling is combined with sightseeing.

## **Physical Demands**

Please note that this is a reasonably demanding overland trip. Some hiking, bumpy roads and the possibility of sudden climate changes means that this is not a trip for the armchair traveller.

A basic level of fitness and decent health is assumed. Accommodation is comfortable however.

## **Optional Activities**

From time to time other activities may be possible to arrange. Costs for such additional activities will not be covered in the standard tour package. Contact us in advance of your trip for more information.

## **Single Travellers**

As experienced solo travellers, there were many times when we wanted to join tour groups, as it is a great way of meeting like-minded travellers, as well as getting to see some places that were otherwise not on our itineraries.

We try to keep our single supplements as low as possible. You will only have to pay a supplement if you want your own room. If you are open to sharing a room with another single same-sex traveller, then you pay no supplement.

### **Fellow Travellers**

Travelling in a group is very rewarding and is a great way to meet new people. There may be large variations in age and nationality. This is most often a good thing, but can occasionally cause some teething problems, so we ask you to be patient with your fellow passengers and realise that everyone likes to travel a little differently. Please consider your fellow passengers too, and try to respect meeting times, especially for game drives.

### **Travel Insurance**

Travel insurance is compulsory for all our trips. As a minimum we require that your insurance covers you for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We also strongly recommend you are covered for personal liability and loss of luggage and personal effects. You will be required to give details of your insurance prior to departure. Please go to [www.traveltheunknown.com/partners](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/partners) for links to excellent deals on travel insurance.

### **Visas and Permits**

Visas are not required by the majority of travellers to Mexico. A list of nationalities that do not need visas can be found at: [http://www.inm.gob.mx/index.php?page/Paises\\_no\\_visa](http://www.inm.gob.mx/index.php?page/Paises_no_visa)

Please contact us if you are not sure or if you need visa assistance.

## **PRACTICALITIES**

## Health

All *Travel The Unknown* travellers need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in the group travel experience. If, in the opinion of our ground handler, any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, *Travel The Unknown* reserves the right to exclude them from all or part of a trip without refund. Please read the itinerary for this tour thoroughly and then realistically self-assess your physical ability to complete the trip as described. Please consult with your doctor if you have any doubts or give us a call with any queries you may have.

An excellent resource for up-to-date travel medicine requirements is: [www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk](http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk). We recommend that you also consult your doctor for up-to-date medical travel information before departure. You should also carry a first aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements. Please be aware that in some remoter areas you could be some distance from medical facilities. For legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drugs including headache tablets, antibiotics, etc.

**NOTE:** Do not leave it to the last minute to see you doctor as you may have to get immunised or start taking tablets some time prior to departure. You should see your doctor or visit a travel clinic at least 45 days before your departure.

When organising your own meals, be selective where you eat. Choose places that seem quite clean and where many locals eat. A high turnover usually means food is not left lying around and has been made fresh. We recommend that you stick to drinking bottled water, even when brushing your teeth.

At the time of writing the following vaccinations were recommended for travel to Mexico but it is advisable to contact a doctor to get the latest available advice.

- Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. In addition Hepatitis B and Rabies may be required.

## Safety

Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest travel information before departure. For the UK, please visit: [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk).

We strongly recommend that you use a neck wallet or money belt while travelling to ensure the safety of your documents and other valuables. It is not advisable to bring valuable jewellery when travelling. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage.

During your trip we have built in some free time. Any optional activities you undertake are not part of your *Travel The Unknown* itinerary, and *Travel The Unknown* makes no guarantees about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgment. *Travel The Unknown* cannot be held responsible for any injuries or losses that may occur for any such optional activity. Please also note that *Travel The Unknown* retains the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns.

## **Dangers**

Despite most people's perceptions most areas of Mexico are generally very safe to travel and Oaxaca is one of the safest parts of the country. However, you are still subject to the same problems that you find the world over – pickpockets can operate in busy places and political strife can cause roadblocks from time to time. Travelling with an experienced group leader will make your trip more protected from such external dangers but do not let your guard down completely. You are still responsible for your own belongings.

Mexico also suffers from various internal problems such as drug gangs. However, though these problems are primarily a problem in the North of the country it is important to keep an eye on the latest security situation. That said there is very rarely any trouble in the areas our tours cover. We closely monitor the safety situation on a continuous basis, using both government sources and our own network of contacts on the ground. Please check [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) for the latest government advice on travel to the region. Please contact us at [info@traveltheunknown.com](mailto:info@traveltheunknown.com) if you have any further questions or concerns about safety issues.

In addition we recommended that you read the Health section for how to mitigate dangers to your health.

## **Electricity**

Electricity in Mexico is 127 Volts, alternating at 60 cycles per second. If you travel to Mexico with a device that does not accept 127 Volts at 60 Hertz, you will need a voltage converter.

There are three main types of voltage converter. Resistor-network converters will usually be advertised as supporting something like 50-1600 Watts. They are light-weight and support high-wattage electrical appliances like hair dryers and irons. However, they can only be used for short periods of time and are not ideal for digital devices.

Transformers will have a much lower maximum Watt rating, usually 50 or 100. Transformers can often be used continuously and provide better electricity for low wattage appliances like battery chargers, radios, laptop computers, cameras, mp3 players and camcorders. However, they are heavy because they contain large iron rods and lots of copper wire.

Some companies sell combination converters that include both a resistor network and a transformer in the same package. This kind of converter will usually come with a switch that switches between the two modes. If you absolutely need both types of converter, then this is the type to buy.

## **Mexico Plug Adapters and Outlet Shapes**

Outlets in Mexico generally accept 1 type of plug:



Flat blade plug

If your appliances plug has a different shape, you may need a plug adapter. Depending on how much you plan to travel in the future, it may be worthwhile to get a combination voltage converter and plug adapter.

Check out [www.traveltheunknown.com/estore](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/estore) for some adapters that will be suitable for Mexico.

## **Communication**

There are many internet cafes and call shops en route, however the service is sometimes slow outside main towns. International calls are reasonably simple. Most foreign mobile phones will work in most parts of Mexico.

**TIP:** If you think you will need to make or receive a lot of calls, then it would be worth investing in a prepaid SIM card on arrival at the airport. You have to make sure your handset is unlocked prior to leaving the UK.

## **Time**

Mexico is 6 hours behind GMT.

Note, the time difference will increase to 7 hours when clocks go forward for summer time.

## **Laundry**

Laundry facilities are available at our hotels for a charge. However, we advise you not to leave laundry to the last minute as sometimes drying times may be required and laundry will not be available at all stops.

## **MONEY**

### **Spending Money**

Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some people spend a lot of money on drinks, whereas others may spend more on souvenir or present shopping. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to allowing for drinks, shopping, participating in optional activities and tipping.

### **Tipping**

Tipping is totally voluntary and often not expected. It is however almost always appreciated. For the duration of your tour you should not need more than £30-40 (\$45-60) for tipping local staff in restaurants and hotels. It is also customary to tip guides and drivers if you have been happy with their services. A guideline would be about 100 Pesos per person per day for guides and 50 Pesos per person per day for drivers where the service has been good. If the service has not been good then no tip should be given.

### **Departure Tax**

Unless otherwise specified departure tax will be included in the cost of your package when you booked your international flight with *Travel The Unknown*. Where you are arranging your own international flights please check with your travel agent or airline.

### **Emergency Funds**

Please also make sure you have access to an additional £200 (\$350), to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (eg. a natural disaster, or political strife) necessitate a change to our intended itinerary. This is not a common occurrence but it's better to be prepared.

## **Money Exchange**

Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For the most up to date rates please refer to the following website: [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

There are many ATM machines (which accept both Visa and Mastercard) throughout Mexico (though they are usually limited to towns) and in Oaxaca City. Although this is now a safe and convenient way to access money during your trip, we do recommend that you carry some money in the form of cash for when these ATMs cannot be accessed. Cash should be in US dollars. Black markets no longer exist in Mexico. Major credit cards are accepted in the larger shops and restaurants but only in the bigger cities. It is always worth informing your bank before travelling overseas to avoid your cards being blocked.

**TIP 1:** Slightly torn, faded or badly marked banknotes may be difficult to exchange. Coins are typically not exchangeable.

**TIP 2:** We recommend you take out the majority of the spending money you require when you arrive in Oaxaca and distribute it and keep it in secure places throughout the rest of the trip.

## **RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **Responsible Travel**

As regular travellers, one thing that never ceases to amaze and inspire us while travelling is the kindness and generosity of people, who often have very little to their name. We firmly believe that the people who make these places special should also benefit from them. Therefore as first preference we use local guides and locally-owned lodges, shops and eateries. We do our best to ensure that the benefits of our tours reach as widely as possible into the communities where they operate and also invest a significant amount of our profits in development projects within those communities.

### **Environment**

The biggest environmental impact of your holiday with *Travel The Unknown* is the CO<sub>2</sub> generated by your flights and land travel. As a responsible tour operator, we have included in our tour prices the costs of offsetting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from all international and domestic flights as well as land travel forming part of the tour.

We have partnered with *Climate Care* for this purpose. If you are making independent flight arrangements, we urge you to take responsibility for your CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by offsetting through *Climate Care*, or another reputable offsetting scheme.

We also ask you to be vigilant about disposing of your waste. Dispose of all rubbish correctly and do not leave litter or cigarette butts in natural environments.

Our brochures and stationery are printed on FSC-accredited or recycled paper. To minimise waste, all of our brochures and trip notes are available for download online.

Visit [www.traveltheunknown.com/responsible](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/responsible) for further information.

## **Culture Shock**

Mexican dress does not significantly differ from that in the West so culturally there are no real taboo issues – although in Oaxaca dress is generally more conservative than in other parts of Mexico. Bring light clothes for places that are hot and for summer time. But also be properly prepared for the colder climates found at higher altitudes, e.g. in the Sierra Norte. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us. Full contact details can be found on our website: [www.traveltheunknown.com/contactus](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/contactus).

## **Climate**

The Oaxacan climate is often referred to an ‘eternal spring’. At 5000 feet above sea level, the Oaxacan plateau experiences mild weather all year round, though it can get cold enough for a jacket in the winter evenings. October to May is the driest time of year with July and August classed as the rainy season. Average temperatures in September are 14 – 26 degrees Celsius, and in April are 15 – 31.

Irrespective of the time of the year travelling, you should take precaution against the sun.

## **WHAT TO BRING**

The list below is not exhaustive:

- Day pack – useful for carrying basic items
- Binoculars
- Torch (check batteries)
- Sunglasses and sun cream (min factor 15)
- Insect repellent
- Small towel
- Basic toiletries (inc. hand sanitiser)
- Tissues
- Drinking bottle
- Watch (strict time-keeping is required at times)
- Money for meals, souvenirs, contingencies
- Notebook, pen
- Book
- Small items from home can make nice personal gifts
- Travel pillow (can come in handy for longer journeys)

## **Electronic Items**

- Digital camera – bring accessories: memory cards, battery, charger
- If film camera – bring film, lenses, batteries, etc.
- Mobile phone and charger
- Plug adaptors (2-round pin – same as European style)
- Music player (MP3, CD player, Ipad and relevant charger)
- Laptop and charger (useful if you want to keep a blog and upload photos)

## **Tour Photos**

We prefer to use photos taken on our tours on our website so we actively encourage you to send us your photos. Happy snapping!

## **Our Newsletter**

If you would like to find out about new tours and all that is happening with *Travel The Unknown* then sign up to our newsletter on our website.

## **Feedback**

We have spent much time and effort to make your trip a memorable experience for all the right reasons. However, we are constantly looking to improve our tours and any feedback you can give us or suggestions you may have would be very much appreciated.

## **Spanish Cheat Sheet**

Gracias	thank you
Hola	Hello
Es deliciosa	it's very tasty
Sucre	Sugar
carne	Meat
Que hora es?	what time is it
Si	Yes
No	No
quiero	I would like...
Quiero carne	I would like some meat
Me llamo (David)	My name is (David)
Soy estudiante	I am a student
Trabajo en un banco	I work in a bank