



TRAVEL THE UNKNOWN

TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

TREASURES OF OAXACA

10 days



Countries visited

Mexico

Tour Highlights

- The colonial charm of Oaxaca city
- Marvel at the ancient pyramid of Mitla
- Observe the widest tree in the world
- The petrified waterfall of Hierve el Agua
- Discover the stunning Sierra Norte
- The stunning ruins of Monte Albán
- Visit colourful traditional handicrafts markets
- Learn to cook tasty Oaxacan food

Places visited

Oaxaca • Mitla • El Tule • Hierve el Agua • Santiago Apoala • Monte Albán • Llano Grande • Mexico City

What's included

TREASURES OF OAXACA



- Airport pick-up & drop-off
- Ground transport
- Accommodation
- Entrance fees to sites & parks
- Some meals (refer to itinerary for meal plan)
- Drivers and guides
- Day 9 optional activities

All accommodation subject to availability. Final accommodation choices will be confirmed after booking.

Your Itinerary Explained

Date	Place visited	Meals
	<p>The first part of the text in each day is the itinerary schedule and will explain what you will normally see/do during this day of your itinerary.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>The part of the day's text in italics (and comes after the three dashes "---") is background information on the places or sites on that day of your itinerary. It is not part of your itinerary and may mention places that will not be visited on your itinerary. If you have any questions please ask us. Travel times where noted are only meant as a guideline.</i></p>	<p>B: Breakfast</p> <p>L: Lunch</p> <p>D: Dinner</p>

Tour Itinerary

Day 1	Oaxaca	Meals
 <p>Oaxaca</p>	<p>Arrive into Oaxaca airport. You will be met at the airport by a Travel The Unknown representative and brought to your hotel. Rest of the day free. Overnight in Oaxaca.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>Oaxaca is at the heart of all things indigenous in Mexico with more indigenous groups than anywhere else in the country and this is clearly visible on its streets. At the centre of Oaxaca lies the city's famous traffic-free square known as the Zocalo. This is a fantastic place to people watch with cafes lining the edges of the square and a constant flow of people weaving in and out of the square or sitting enjoying its shady benches. A colonial city, Oaxaca oozes character and boasts a vast range of crafts and contemporary art. Surrounded by famous archaeological sites, the city itself also has a fascinating history - with Aztecs, the Spanish invasion and the city's growing importance in the life and trade of southern Mexico. Earthquakes in 1854 and 1931 left much of the city in ruins and effectively uninhabitable. Oaxaca has seen the largest expansion in the last 25 years however, as migration from rural areas has increased.</i></p> <p><i>Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca</i></p>	N/A
Day 2	Mitla - El Tule - Herve Al Agua	Meals
 <p>Herve el Agua</p>	<p>Visit the ancient pyramid of Mitla, the bizarre terrains and petrified waterfall of Herve el Agua and the world's widest tree, El Tule. After lunch, visit the indigenous farmers market of Tlacolula to see the preparations for Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead). Return to Oaxaca for the night.</p> <p>---</p>	N/A

Hierve Al Agua means “the Water Boils”. This is a misnomer as the steaming mineral-rich water, that seeps from fissures in the ground, is in fact cold. The name is a result of this rising steam creating the illusion of a hot spring. Beautiful natural stone ponds make for stunning outdoor swimming pools and the constant run of the mineral-heavy water has created what looks like frozen waterfalls (or “petrified waterfalls”). The beautiful landscape here is totally unique. It is believed that the springs were first used 2,400 years ago. The waters were easy to direct and were used for irrigation through a network of canals over half a square kilometre. Wells were dug and constructed about every 12 feet along the canals by the ancient Zapotecs. Research dates the construction from between 450 B.C. to 1500 A.D. Because of the high mineral content of the water, archaeologists still debate whether this was an irrigation system or a bathing spa. The most impressive site at Hierve el Agua is the two white stone waterfalls. The flow of water has, over the years, left a nearly 100 feet high white deposit that seems to flow as if it were still liquid. The smaller fall, 40 feet tall, is still bathed by water from a warm pool at the top, large enough to swim in. Even now, all these years later, the spring still produces two litres of water a second during the summer months.

El Tule is a Montezuma Cypress and is quite something to behold – 11.6m in diameter with estimates of its age ranging from 1500 to 3000 years old, rivalling even the ancient Monte Alban. Some very famous naturalists such as Alexander von Humboldt made a special visit to Oaxaca to visit this tree. Nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it towers over the 17th Century church in whose courtyard it stands. The volume of the tree is about that of three large planes, and consumes some one thousand gallons of water every day. This has led to a serious drop in the surrounding water table (of up to 6m) casting doubts on the future of El Tule. The entrance fee to visit the church (and tree) is used to combat this issue.

Mitla derives its name from the Nahuatl word “Mictlan”, meaning “Place of the Dead”. Similarly, the Zapotecs call it “Lyobaa” meaning “Burial Place”. This reflects the historic importance of ancient kings and priests tombs within the city structures. Although the city dates back to as early as 200 AD, there is archaeological evidence that it was inhabited from 900 BC. There are structural remains of the city that correspond with the height of Zapotecan rule over the region from Monte Alban (500 BC to 800 AD) although the ruins at Mitla date predominantly from the 13th and 14th Centuries when Mitla would have been the dominant religious centre where human sacrifice would have been a central part of their worship. Of the original fifty two pyramids, only one remains. This ornate pyramid was spared Spanish wrath for one simple reason - it was carved with stone crosses. These crosses had no connection with a Christian crucifixion but the superstitious Spanish were afraid of destroying it. The 52 pyramids were related to a passage of time as were most of their archaeological and mathematical creations here. However, it does not refer to the 52 weeks in a year but rather to do with the alignments of planets where every 52 years, three planets were said to be aligned. Each group of buildings at Mitla was reserved for a specific person. So the high priest stayed in one building, the lesser priests in another, and the king in another.

Day 3**Santiago Apoala****Meals**

Drive into the Sierra Mixteca range, a stunning set of mountains in the indigenous Mixteca region. Hike through a canyon and past waterfalls to the beautiful village of Santiago Apoala, which is perfect for further exploration. Spend the night in the cabins of Santiago

B L D



Apoala.

Santiago Apoala is one the oldest villages of the Sierra Mixteca. According to tradition, the **tree of life** - which gave birth to humanity - can be found here. The village is set in a wonderful and enchanting landscape, - a green hidden valley and impressive waterfalls enclosed by steep cliffs. You don't need much imagination to understand why the Mixtec people believe this place is their paradise.

Santiago Apoala

Overnight in Santiago Apoala village cabins, Santiago Apoala

Day 4

Santiago Apoala - Oaxaca

Meals



Oaxaca

Half day hike to a waterfall with the possibility of a swim. Stop for lunch and afterwards return to Oaxaca. The rest of the afternoon is free for exploring. Overnight in Oaxaca.

B L

Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca

Day 5

Monte Albán

Meals



Monte Albán

After breakfast, take a short drive to Monte Albán, one of Mexico's most ancient and impressive archaeological sites dating from as far back as 500BC. After spending a few hours exploring the extensive site of Monte Albán, you will visit a paper factory in San Agustin Etla and see la CASA (a very interesting art school founded by Francisco Toledo). In the late afternoon, treat yourself to a traditional steam bath ("temazcal"). Return to Oaxaca to spend the night.

B

Monte Albán, one of Mexico's most ancient sites and the first urban complex in Mesoamerica, is an ancient Zapotec capital a few kilometres west of Oaxaca city. Meaning "White Mountain", Monte Albán sits on a flat hill top overlooking the surrounding valley. The location of the site gives rise to spectacular 360 degree views of the valley and across the extensive site of Monte Albán. First built around 500 BC, early hieroglyphs found in Monte Albán suggest the Zapotec elite here may have been the first to use writing as well as a written calendar. The buildings of the site are excavated to various degrees, meaning some are well excavated and their purpose well known, whereas others are at an early stage of excavation and their purpose can only be guessed at. In addition, the buildings are spread over an unusually large period of time lasting up until the early 16th Century, when it mysteriously fell into decline. One of the site's most important and most impressive buildings is the Ball Court. Its prominent position is a clue as to the importance of games to the early Zapotecs, games in which the losing captain is believed to have been ritually slaughtered.

Building L (also known as the Dancers Building) is one of the most shocking with stone carved figures of males with mutilated genitalia. The physical features of these carvings with plump short bodies, round heads, flat noses and slanting eyes suggest those of the Olmecs, enemies of the Zapotecs and may bear witness to the human sacrifice that almost certainly took place here. In addition to this, several buildings are believed to have astronomical functions including building P with its enormous stairway. Various buildings - platforms, palaces, mounds, shrines and tombs - dot the site, none perhaps more important to our understanding of Zapotec history and tradition than tomb 7. **Tomb 7** was discovered in 1932 by Alfonso Caso, one of Mexico's most renowned scientists and was found to contain some 200 ritual objects made from materials as diverse as Gold, silver, jade, turquoise, obsidian, pearl, alabaster, coral, as well as human and feline bones. This also provides clues as to the extent of the sophistication of trade in Zapotec times, many of these items' origins lying in very distant lands. The items are on exhibit in the Museum of Oaxacan cultures in Oaxaca itself.

Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca

Day 6

Teotitlan

Meals



Envia

Morning free. Visit Teotitlan for a micro-finance tour with our partners, Envia (www.envia.org), that will give you a real insight into the lives of local people in this traditional Zapotec village famous for its weaving traditions. This tour will directly fund small micro-finance projects with small interest-free loans to help people start or expand their businesses. You will visit people's homes and hear them explain what they would like to do with their loan, when they receive it. The benefits these small loans can bring to people is quite incredible and Envia will send you an update once the people you met have received their loans. Return to Oaxaca to spend the night.

B L

Envia have used the model of microfinance started in the 1970s in Bangladesh whereby underprivileged people who are unable to obtain credit from banks are given small loans by NGOs, which are used to start or expand businesses, and are paid back as any other loan. When the loans are repaid, they take their own low admin costs from this and reinvest the rest in further microfinance and other projects such as free English lessons for the people of Teotitlan.

Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca

Day 7

Ocotlan - San Bartolo

Meals



Oaxaca

Breakfast, then a visit to the colourful Ocotlan market and the handicraft villages of San Bartolo (black pottery), San Martin Tilcajete (painted wooden animals) and Santo Tomas Jalieza (textiles). Late afternoon free. Overnight in Oaxaca.

B

Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca

Day 8	Llano Grande	Meals
	<p>Day trip to Llano Grande for a walk in a cloud forest. Surrounded by pine forest, the 150 inhabitants live in the cleanest community of Mexico and are happy to show you their beautiful area. Your hike passes through meadows covered with wild flowers and pine forest that lead to some dramatic views. Back in the village, we will enjoy a delicious lunch at Kata's restaurant. Relax for a while before returning to Oaxaca to spend the night.</p> <p>---</p>	<p>B L</p>
<p>Llano Grande</p>		
<p><i>Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca</i></p>		
Day 9	Oaxaca	Meals
	<p>After breakfast, the day will be at leisure. Or you can choose from one of the optional activities.</p> <p>Option 1: Cooking course with one of Oaxaca's best chef's to learn some of the dishes for which Oaxaca is famous.</p>	<p>B</p>
<p>Oaxaca</p>	<p>Option 2: Guided tour of the botanical gardens of Oaxaca. Oaxaca is one of the world's biodiversity hotspots and home to more than 8,400 registered plant species, 738 bird species and 1,431 terrestrial vertebrate species. Although Oaxaca accounts for only 5% of Mexico's size, it hosts over 50% of all its species.</p>	
<p>Have the afternoon free to relax or visit Abastos market, one of the largest and most colourful markets in Oaxaca. Overnight in Oaxaca.</p>		
<p><i>Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca</i></p>		
Day 10	Departure	Meals
	<p>Drop to airport for return flight.</p> <p>---</p>	<p>B</p>
<p>Flight</p>		