



# TRAVEL THE UNKNOWN

TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

**CLASSIC MEXICO**

**14 days**



## Countries visited

Mexico

## Tour Highlights

- Be awe-struck by the pre-Columbian, Mesoamerican city of Teotihuacán
- Wander the historic city of Puebla
- Taste the exotic flavours of Oaxaca
- Discover the archaeological site of Mitla
- Visit the indigenous Tzotzil Maya people in Chamula
- Take in Mexico's history in Colonial Campeche
- Explore the Aztec ruins of Chichén Itzá

## Places visited

Mexico City • Teotihuacán • Oaxaca • Puebla • Monte Albán • Mitla • El Tule • Teotitlán del Valle • Tehuantepec • Santiago Matatlán • Sumidero Canyon • San Cristóbal • Chiapa de Corzo • Palenque • Chamula

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- Campeche • Uxmal • Merida • Chichén Itzá

## What's included

- Airport transfers
- Ground transport
- Accommodation
- Sightseeing
- Entrance fees to sites & parks
- Some meals (as per itinerary)
- Drivers and guides

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



## Your Itinerary Map



## 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	Arrival	Meals
 <p>Flight</p>	<p>Arrive in Mexico City, where you will be met at the airport by a Travel The Unknown representative and transferred to your hotel. Rest of the day free. Overnight in Mexico City.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>Overnight in Holiday Inn Zocalo, Mexico City</i></p>	<p>N/A</p>
Day 2	Mexico City	Meals
 <p>Xochimilco</p>	<p>Spend the day exploring Mexico City. Visit Xochimilco and the Museo Nacional de Antropología before discovering the sights of central Mexico City, including the Presidential Palace, the Cathedral and the Templo Mayor. Overnight in Mexico City.</p> <p>---</p>	<p>B L</p>



*When humans arrived in the Mexico valley in 30,000 BC, the valley floor was a chain of lakes. The water has been receding ever since and agriculture became an important way of life. The Aztecs arrived from northwest Mexico and settled in the Chapultepec region. The tribe were forced to flee however and in 1325 arrived on an island on the western shore and built their city there - Tenochtitlán. This was to rule over most of Mexico in the 15th and early 16th centuries before the Spanish conquest in 1519. Tenochtitlán was almost completely destroyed before being rebuilt on Spanish orders as the capital of Nueva España (New Spain), later becoming **Mexico City**. Today it is the third largest city in the World and the country's main hub for the Arts. Since the Mesoamerican classical period, the inhabitants of the settlements around Lake Texcoco have been creating complex works of art. In the 20th Century, many artists immigrated to Mexico City from other regions of the country, resulting in the city becoming the home of the avant-garde movement of muralism.*

***Xochimilco** is best known for its canals, which are left from what was an extensive lake and canal system which connected most of the settlements of the Valley of Mexico. These canals, along with artificial islands called chinampas attract tourists and other city residents to **ride on colorful gondola like boats called "trajineras" around the 170 km of canals.** This canal and chinampa system, as a vestige of the area's pre-Hispanic past, has made Xochimilco a World Heritage Site; however, environmental degradation of both the canals and the chinampas is severe and ongoing, putting that status in question for the future.*

*The **Museo Nacional de Antropología** has 12 exhibition halls, each of which is dedicated to a different pre-Columbian civilisation of Mexico. Among others, discover the cultures of the Toltecs, Aztecs and Maya.*

*The **Museo del Templo Mayor** opened in 1987. It owes its existence to the find, in 1978, of the 8-tonne stone disk with the image of the moon goddess Coyolxauhqui. The museum focuses on the cult of human sacrifices in Tenochtitlán, the cultivation of cereals and corn in the floating gardens, and the history of the old Aztec temple district.*

*Overnight in Holiday Inn Zocalo, Mexico City*

## Day 3

## Teotihuacan

## Meals



Mexico City

Explore more of Mexico City before departing for Teotihuacan. Return to Mexico City for overnight.

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B

The huge pyramid complex of **Teotihuacán** was the first city in the "New World". Built between 250 BC and 700 AD, at the peak of its civilisation the area boasted a population of some 125,000-250,000 people spread over 2,300 apartment complexes. Only walking the mighty "Avenue of the Dead" will you understand the dimensions of the site. This fabulous archaeological zone of Teotihuacan lies in a mountain-ringed offshoot of the Valle de México. For centuries Teotihuacán was the capital of largest pre-Hispanic empire in Mexico. However, unable to sustain its burgeoning population, it fell in the 8th century. The earliest Mexican murals are found at Teotihuacán and depict what awaited those who were killed by Tláloc, the water god. The Teotihuacán buildings were simple but grand in scale. Teotihuacán is known for its two pyramids – the sun and moon pyramids. The Sun Pyramid was completed by 150 AD and the rest of the city between 250 and 600 AD. The Sun Pyramid (Pirámide del Sol) is the world's third-largest pyramid whose base is 222m on each side and is 70m in height. The Moon Pyramid (Pirámide de la Luna), completed in 300 AD, is smaller but built on slightly higher ground.

Overnight in Holiday Inn Zocalo, Mexico City

## Day 4

## Puebla - Oaxaca

## Meals



Oaxaca

Leave Mexico City and travel to Puebla, where you will enjoy a sightseeing tour. Afterwards, continue on to Oaxaca for overnight stay.

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**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.

Nestled in the middle of Mexico, under the imposing view of the Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl volcanoes, **Puebla** opens its doors and boasts its official titles: It was named a "heroic" city for being the site where Mexican troops' defeated the French army in 1862 (Battle of Puebla); and it was also named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987. Legend has it that the bell in its famous Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Cathedral was placed there after engineers had neglected to figure out how to raise it up there. The city's design, also attributed to angels, goes back to 1532, making it one of the oldest Mexican cities. A pleasant climate and a strategic location soon made it the second most important city in Colonial Mexico. If there is a word that defines Puebla, then it is baroque. Complex flavors that seduce our palates, elaborated shapes that capture our sight, an irresistible mix of legends and stories, winding streets, fountains, gardens, craft markets, artistic alley - and a view studded with the churches' domes.

Overnight in Casa Conzatti, Oaxaca



Monte Albán

After breakfast, visit the ruins at Monte Alban. Later, return to Oaxaca to explore the church of Santo Domingo and the Museo Regional. Overnight in Oaxaca.

B

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**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.

**The Church of Santo Domingo**, as its name suggests, was founded by the Dominican Order in the 16th century, initially as a monastery. Taking an astonishing two centuries to build, the church has an extensive courtyard area, cloisters and rooms which belonged to the original monastery.

**The Museo Regional de Oaxaca** is located in the former Dominican monastery of the 16th century. Among the most impressive finds are goldsmiths' works from grave 7 (1250-1480) of Monte Albán - outstanding masterworks of Mixtec artists. But not only were precious metals highly valued, jewellery made of jade, serpentine and turquoise was considered to symbolise life.

**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 Casa Conzatti, Oaxaca



## Day 6

## Mitla - Teotitlan del Valle - El Tule

## Meals



Teotitlán del Valle

Today you will visit the archaeological site of Mitla. Later, continue on to Teotitlan del Valle and Tule. Overnight in Oaxaca.

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**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.

**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.

**Teotitlán del Valle** is a small village and municipality in the Tlacolula District, known for its textiles. Originally named 'Xaquija' (meaning "celestial constellation"), it is considered to be one of the first villages founded by the Zapotecs. The weaving tradition here goes back to pre-Hispanic times - with the village having to pay tributes of cloth to the Aztecs.

Overnight in Casa Conzatti, Oaxaca

B

## Day 7

## Santiago Matatlan - Tehuantepec

## Meals



Travel to Tehuantepec, stopping off at Santiago Matatlan on the way to visit a mescal distillery. Overnight in Tehuantepec.

B

Santiago Matatlán

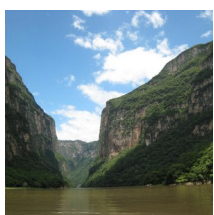
Stopover in the small village of **Santiago Matatlán** and visit a mescal distillery. The famous Mexican liquor from the flesh of agaves always contains more than 40% alcohol. It is produced from the heart of the plant after it has blossomed for the first time. The leaves are cut, and the "piña" is cooked and ground; the mash thus obtained is fermented and distilled several times. A mescal tasting is incomplete, of course, without the famous worm (gusano del maguey) - which, strictly speaking, is a caterpillar!

Overnight in Hotel Calli, Tehuantepec

## Day 8

### Sumidero Canyon - San Cristobal

Meals



Sumidero Canyon

After breakfast take a boat trip through the magnificent Sumidero Canyon. Later, continue to San Cristobal. Overnight in San Cristobal.

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The magnificent **Sumidero Canyon** leads to the deep gorge carved by the Río Grijalva. Its steep cliffs, rising up to 1,000 m (3,280 ft.), are reminiscent of Nordic fjords. The area is composed of high waterfalls and rocks copiously overgrown with fern and moss. Next door is the Sumidero National Park, which boasts tropical vegetation and exotic animals, such as little alligators, toucans, pelicans, and herons.

B

**San Cristóbal** is one of Mexico's best-preserved Spanish colonial towns. Its cobbled streets, colourful buildings, wrought iron balconies bursting with flowers and vibrant markets are laid out in a grid pattern, with the centre of town converging on the central park or zocalo (main plaza). The city is made up of barrios (neighbourhoods) which are known for a particular trade or custom, such as carpentry, iron working and woodcarving. San Cristobal is surrounded by mountains in the Central Highlands region of Chiapas, a state which is home to several indigenous groups descended from the Maya. Many indigenous people come in to the town to sell traditional crafts. The Templo de San Cristóbal (San Cristóbal Church) has outstanding views of the town and mountains.

**Chiapa de Corzo** is a small city perched in the Grijavila valley of the Central Highlands. It is home to a significant archaeological site which dates back to 1400 BC. The site is important because the first inscribed date, hieroglyphic writing and the earliest Mesoamerican burial tomb were all discovered there. Founded in 1528, it was the first Spanish town to be founded in the state of Chiapas, however the Spanish left it to the indigenous population due to the climate. It still retains its colonial layout as well as many examples of colonial rule such as the Santo Domingo church with its Gothic, Neoclassical and Moorish architectural influences. It is the tallest structure in the town and its bell tower houses the largest bells in the country. Chiapa de Corzo is also home to the Fiesta Grande de Enero which takes place from the 4th to the 23rd January to honour local patron saints.

Overnight in Mansion del Valle San Cristobal, San Cristóbal

Day 9	Chamula - Misol-Ha	Meals
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Chamula

Visit the indigenous village of Chamula and the waterfall of Misol-Ha, surrounded by dense jungle. Drive to Palenque. Overnight in Palenque.

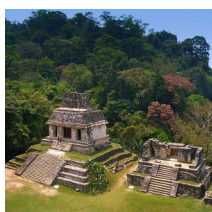
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*Nestled in the Chiapas Highlands, the small town of **Chamula** is home to the indigenous Tzotzil Maya people. The town has its own police force as it has unique autonomous status within Mexico and no outside police or military are allowed. Chamula serves as the main hub of commerce and religion for the indigenous population of the state. It is most famous for the town's fascinating mix of pre-Hispanic and Catholic beliefs and there are no pews or alter inside the church. Instead, worshippers kneel on the floor, chanting and lighting candles. Rituals often include drinking ceremonial cups of Coca Cola, Pepsi or Posh, an alcoholic beverage made from sugarcane - and prayers are chanted in an archaic Tzotzil dialect. Many of the rituals practised involve a Curanderos (medicine man) who diagnoses medical and psychological afflictions and prescribes remedies such as certain coloured candles and specific petals and feathers. The main landmark of the town is the Church of San Jan which is filled with colourful candles and statues of saints in wooden boxes many of whom wear mirrors to deflect evil.*

*Overnight in Ciudad Real Palenque, Palenque*

Day 10	Palenque	Meals
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Palenque

After breakfast set off from Palenque and travel the short distance to the ruins just outside the village. The afternoon is free to enjoy at your leisure. Overnight in Palenque.

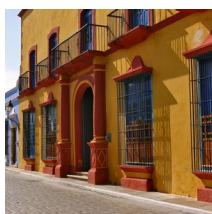
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*Close to the village of **Palenque** are the most beautiful ruins in all of Mexico. Founded around 300 BC, Palenque flourished in the 7th and 8th centuries AD. All buildings that are still visible date from this period. Among them are the "Temple of Inscriptions", with more than 620 hieroglyphs depicting King Pacal's history, the Grand Palace, the Temple of the Sun, and the North Temple with its stucco remains and military scenes.*

*Overnight in Ciudad Real Palenque, Palenque*

Day 11	Campeche	Meals
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Campeche

Drive to Campeche. The rest of the day will be spent exploring Campeche. Overnight in Campeche.

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*The city of **Campeche** is surrounded by a wall originally constructed to defend this prosperous city against pirates. The narrow streets of this major port city are lined with restored colonial buildings, of which the Zócalo and the Cathedral of La Concepción date to the time of the Spanish conquistadores.*

*Overnight in Plaza Campeche, Campeche*

Day 12	Uxmal - Merida	Meals
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Uxmal

After breakfast drive to Uxmal and later Merida, enjoying visits at both. Overnight in Merida.

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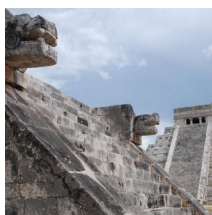
The name **Uxmal** means "built three times," being re-modeled and added to between the years of 600-950 AD and thus showcasing an extraordinary variety of architectural styles as well as testifying to the glory of the Classical Maya Period. The buildings are a myriad of decorated façades, vast terraces, squares, columns, and archways.

**Mérida**, the "city of 5 hills", is one of the oldest towns in Yucatán state. Once the religious centre of the peninsular Mayan population, the city boasts the pyramid temple of Kinich Kakmó, the god of the Sun, while the monastic church San Antonio de Padua in the town centre has one of the largest church forecourts in all of Mexico.

Overnight in Holiday Inn Mérida, Merida

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Day 13	Chichen Itza - Cancun	Meals
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Chichén Itzá

Today you will visit the world famous site at Chichen Itza. Later, continue to Cancun. Overnight in Cancun.

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To date, only about 30 of the many buildings of **Chichén Itzá** buried and overgrown by the jungle have been uncovered and restored. "El Castillo," the most impressive building (30m high), reaches towards the sky, while "El Caracol" resembles a snail shell. The observatory was used by the Maya to observe Venus and her orbit.

Overnight in Westin Resort and Spa, Cancun

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Day 14	Departure	Meals
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Flight

After breakfast transfer to Cancun airport.

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