



TRAVEL THE UNKNOWN

TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

FLAVOURS OF MEXICO

9 days



Countries visited

Mexico

Tour Highlights

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

Places visited

Oaxaca • El Tule • Tlacolula • Monte Albán • Santiago Apoala • Mitla • Hierve el Agua

What's included

FLAVOURS OF MEXICO



- Internal flights from Mexico city
- Airport transfers
- Transport (VW Transporter or Mercedes Sprinter)
- Guide service in English
- Meals as listed in the program
- All overnight stays
- Excursions and entrance fees

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	Oaxaca	Meals
 <p>Flight</p>	<p>Fly from Mexico City into Oaxaca. You will be met at the airport by a Travel The Unknown representative and brought to your hotel. Rest of the day free.</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

Tlacolula - El Tule

Meals



Tlacolula

Visit the colourful traditional food market at **Tlacolula**. Spend some time learning about Oaxacan ingredients and absorb the buzz of this lively market. Drive to the village of **El Tule**, where you will see the world's widest tree, a marvel that has drawn biologists. The trunk of this Montezuma Cypress has a circumference of 36.2m and is thought to be about 1500 years old. From here we visit **Caldo de Piedra**, a restaurant that specialises in a pre-Hispanic dish of Chinantec origin known as Caldo de Piedra or stone soup made with shrimp, white fish, chilli, coriander (cilantro), shallots and water it is all cooked by adding a hot rock to the bowl. The dish is traditionally prepared by the men, and served to honoured guests. Return to Oaxaca mid-afternoon. Rest of the day free to relax. Overnight in Oaxaca.

B L

***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.*

Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca

Day 3

Monte Alban

Meals



Monte Albán

This morning we take a **cooking class with renowned Oaxacan chef Pilar Cabrera**. Take this opportunity to learn hands on about the complex cuisine of Oaxaca. Learn the secrets of a top quality molé, and when you are finished enjoy a delicious 5-course meal in a quaint secluded outdoor patio. In the afternoon take a short drive to **Monte Albán**, one of Mexico's most ancient and impressive archaeological sites - dating from as far back as 500BC. Overnight in Oaxaca.

B L

***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.*

Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca

Day 4	Santiago Apoala	Meals
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Dona Marina

After breakfast drive to **Santiago Apoala** in the lovely Sierra Mixteca mountain range. Gentle hike through canyon to the village of Apoala, exploring the village (hike is optional). Next we **visit Doña Marina in her house where you will learn to make some local dishes.** Overnight in the comfortable log cabins of Apoala.

B L D

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.

Doña Marina is a good old soul of Santiago Apoala. She was born in this beautiful village but soon after her 12th birthday she was forced to leave for Oaxaca city to help her family to survive. She worked for many years - first in Oaxaca city, later in Mexico city - as a chef for well-to-do families. She is passionate about food and love to cook. Her family say that she is like an old cook book because she knows so many amazing traditional dishes using only simple ingredients. She cooks traditional food using seasonal products that she finds in her surrounding environment including Cactus flowers (a.k.a. Biznaga, February-March), agave flowers (grilled, steamed or pickled, April), watercress (July), a vast array of mushrooms (around September).

Her specialities include:

- "Amarillo" - a molé sauce made with chilli, guajillo capsicum and maize dough.
- "Atole blanco" - maize based drink, cooked, ground by hand, sieved and boiled.
- "Pinole" - a similar process to the "Atole blanco" but using toasted wheat instead of maize and adding chocolate.

Overnight in Santiago Apoala village cabins, Santiago Apoala

Day 5	Santiago Apoala	Meals
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Santiago Apoala

After breakfast **optional hike to waterfall** with possibilities to swim. Or just enjoy the peaceful rural setting. We prepare lunch with Doña Marina before returning to Oaxaca. Rest of the day free. We recommend a visit to the Museum of Oaxacan Cultures. Overnight in Oaxaca.

B L

Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca

Day 6

Teotitlan

Meals



Envia

Morning free. **Visit Teotitlan for micro-finance tour.** This tour with our partners Envia (www.envia.org) 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 which are small interest-free loans to help people to start or expand their businesses. You will visit people's homes and they will explain what they will do with the loan from their own homes or places of business. The benefits these small loans can bring to people is quite incredible and Envia will send you an update on the people who explained their projects once they have received their loans. Return to Oaxaca. Overnight in Oaxaca.

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

Oaxaca

Meals



Oaxaca

Cooking Class with famous chef José Luis Díaz. José is the founder of the prestigious restaurant, experience the Culinary Theatre at the renowned Casa Crespo. the main objective to promote only fresh seasonal products endemic to Oaxaca, making purchases in local markets, thus guaranteeing freshness and total quality in every dish. These are contemporary dishes made with traditional ingredients. The intention is to be playful, have fun and encourage creative cuisine. Late afternoon free in Oaxaca. Overnight in Oaxaca.

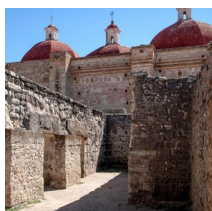
B L

Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca

Day 8

Hierve El Agua - Mitla

Meals



Mitla


After breakfast drive to the bizarre terrains and petrified waterfall of Hierve el Agua. Take a dip in the highly mineralised water admiring the stunning landscape. Next visit the ancient pyramid of Mitla and learn the fate of the other fifty one. **Lunch with Doña Chica in Mitla**, Doña Chica's molés are famous in Oaxaca and considered to be the best in the whole state. After lunch we will visit a mezcal factory, learn about the distillation process and sample a variety of mezcals with a variety of natural flavours across a range of ages. Return to Oaxaca. Overnight in Oaxaca.

B L

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.

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.

Overnight in Azucenas, Oaxaca

Day 9	Departure	Meals
 <p data-bbox="150 1874 225 1906">Flight</p>	<p data-bbox="325 1659 1070 1691">After breakfast drop to airport for return flight to Mexico City.</p>	<p data-bbox="1469 1659 1485 1691">B</p>